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**We are Creatures who are Looking
for the Extraordinary – The Presence of the Dreamtime
in a Shamanic Community in Urban Quebec**

Sarah Orr

A Thesis in the Department of Sociology & Anthropology

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Masters of Arts(Social & Cultural Anthropology) at
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ABSTRACT

We are creatures who are looking for the extraordinary – The Presence of the
Dreamtime in a Shamanic Community in Urban Quebec

Sarah Orr

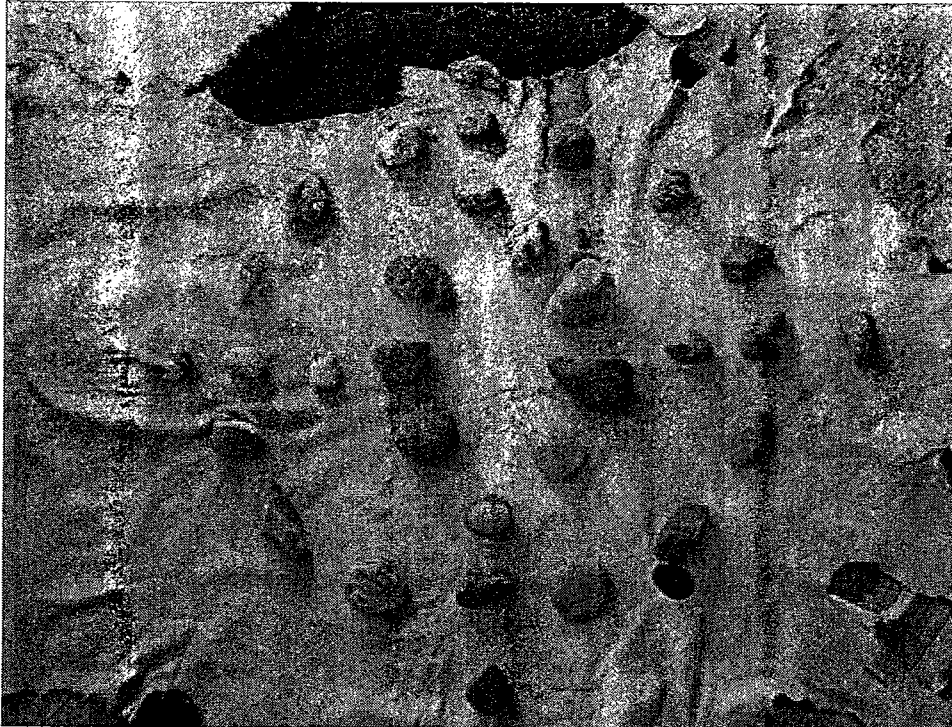
This thesis explores the way in which Shamanism is being lived within a particular community in the outskirts of Montreal. The focus for the members of this collective is on the Dreamtime and finding commonality through story telling techniques. The many collaborators speak of having chosen this family and committing to living according to the teachings of Okwaho, the Shaman of the community. Many of their stories and perspectives have been included in this thesis as it has been a collaborative project. Shamanism in this thesis is concerned with how members of this family are connected to their environment and to each other. This thesis explores how a sense of family can be created around common interests and based in life style choices. One of the tools used to make sense of these relationships is the Medicine Wheel. The thesis will elaborate on ways in which the Medicine Wheel allows for multiple perspectives to co-exist within a family setting. A rich local vocabulary of relevant terms are discussed throughout this thesis related to the Dreamtime and the Medicine Wheel. The way in which language is used by this community is of particular interest. The author of this thesis has chosen to live Shamanically for the past 8 years as a part of this family and as a student of Okwaho.

Dedicated to my family who helped me to make this possible

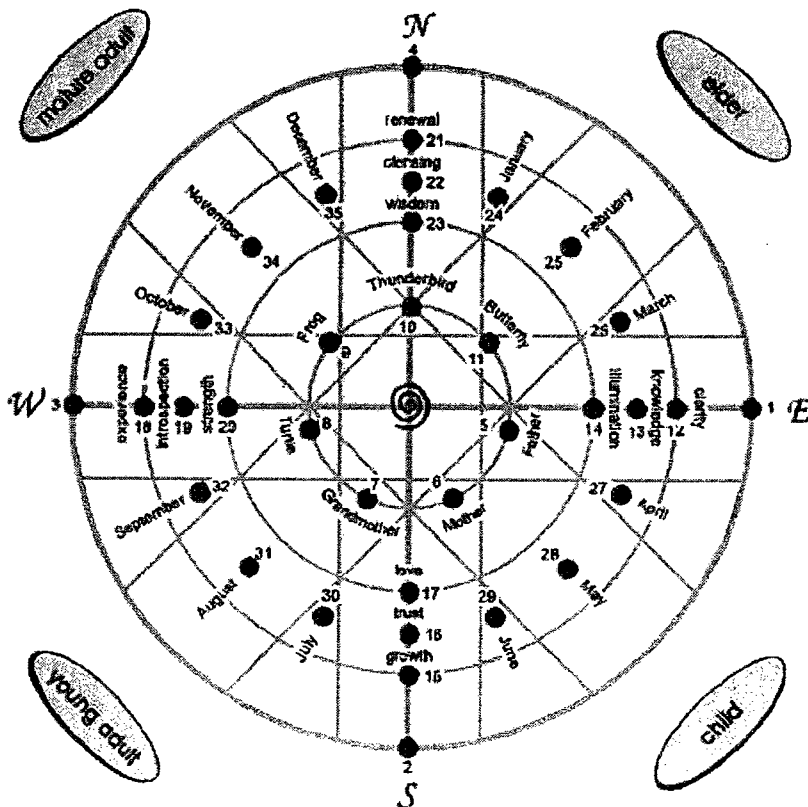
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The Medicine Wheel



Introduction

Okwaho Leblanc is a traditional Shaman of Iroquois and Micmac origin. She has been teaching the Medicine Wheel philosophy and the discipline associated with the Dreamtime for the past 20 years and is the Shaman of the community to which I belong. I have been taking classes with her for the past 8 years. As I embarked upon the process of writing a master's thesis I realized that what I was most interested in understanding was the basis of the relationships among members of the community and the disciplined approach to everyday life that I have learned since I have been attending these classes. Initially I was interested in exploring what had brought the various members together and how they saw this way of living bringing a sense of well-being to their lives. However, during the process of fieldwork it became evident that this question was not considered important to my collaborators. Other discussions explored the language and terms we use within the community and how we seek to explore many perspectives on a topic rather than remaining attached to one viewpoint in particular. One day my collaborators would suggest that "well-being" referred to feeling comfortable and happy and that this was not necessarily a goal within the community. Then, on another day the term well-being would be employed in a different context and its usage did seem to support my initial argument. As I discussed what I perceived as being a contradiction with my collaborators, I came to understand, or remember perhaps that this way of approaching language demonstrated the way in which changing and multiple perspectives co-exist within the community.

In discussing my findings with students and professors in the Anthropology program at Concordia University I came to realize that a lot of the terms I was employing

were in fact local concepts which I, as a member of the community, understood but which were not necessarily accessible to readers who were not part of the community. This has required me to explore and explain these many terms in greater depth, providing examples to support my interpretations and reflecting in general on the use of language from a Shamanic perspective.

Another term that I explored throughout this research was “community.” Ever since I had begun discussing the way that I live in academic settings I had employed this word as I felt that this word best represented my experience. I also hesitated to use the term “family” as I was not referring to biological ties. However, as I turned to my collaborators I discovered that “family” and not “community” was the word they were most comfortable with using as it better expressed the way they feel. They spoke of their relationships with one another in terms of “family.” Throughout the writing process I have replaced the word “community” with “family” as I have found that it is more fitting as a way of describing the way that we live. I will be discussing this in more depth throughout the thesis.

One of the topics that continued to resurface during my fieldwork was related to a quality of attention to details in everyday life that members of the community refer to as “presence.” Specifically, “presence” was seen to be connected to the Dreamtime. Dreamtime refers to an invisible reality which has an impact upon the visible reality we live each day. It is to the manifestations of this invisible reality that members of the Okwaho family seek to be present.

Another key theme is the way in which common ground is established among the members through recognizing interrelationships and the impact we have both on our environment and vice versa. Walter and Friedman explore the connection between ecology and shamanism in Shamanism: An Encyclopaedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture Volume 1. They suggest that:

throughout the varied forms of Shamanism in diverse cultures worldwide, both male and female Shamans cultivate intense, intimate, and transforming relationships with local lands, animals, and life forms...these shared expressions can be seen as simple resulting, at least in some cases, from the intimacy of interaction of small-scale societies with their environments... [which] may cause individuals to relate to local environments in innovative and creative ways (p.107: 2004).

This thesis seeks to demonstrate some of the innovative and creative ways my collaborators and I have chosen to interrelate with the world and with one another through a Shamanic philosophy and Dreamtime perspectives.

Chapter 1-Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Shamanism

Shamanism has been explored by many anthropologists interested in the “archaic traditions of ecstasy,” as it is referred to by Mircea Eliade (1951), as well as interesting those fascinated by its healing rituals(Park:1975, Arrien:1993) and those who seek to adapt these techniques so they can be used in a classroom setting(Conton:1996). In an article by Alice Kehoe discussing some of the common approaches that have been explored when it comes to Shamanism she suggests that:

Shamanism has come to be used to refer to: (1) Its original reference, a religious complex in Siberia centering on the Tungus-Evenki trained practitioner utilizing drum and chant to create an altered state of consciousness believed to enable the practitioner to divine and to negotiate in the spirit world for desired effects(e.g. Shirokogoroff 1935). (2) Religious practice opposed to historical Western religions, featuring ecstatic states (trance, possession) and emphasizing individual’s subjective calling by spirits as contrasted to the literate religions’ formal ordination of practitioners (cf. Liberty 1970). (3) A primordial or primeval religion, or type of religious leader, supposed to have persisted since the Paleolithic among primitive hunter-gatherer/nomadic peoples (cf. Kehoe 1990). (4) Techniques of altering consciousness, in contemporary Western societies no longer necessarily yoked to religious beliefs (Harner 1980). Contemporary Shamanism may be used to heal or for self-expression (Kehoe 1997).

What I am interested in making clear is that across the planet Shamanism is being practiced in many different ways and this diversity of approaches can make it hard to define. While variety exists among the definitions these elements persist within my fieldsite of the Okwaho community. Classes are offered in order to train practitioners in negotiating with the spirit world. The techniques continue to be taught to those interested in following Shamanic ways of being which is considered to be more spiritual than religious. Also, as Kehoe mentions, both my collaborators and myself have experienced “the call” to live as we do. Piers Vitebsky has been studying Shamanic traditions in

Russia for over 20 years and he suggests that Shamanism is in fact "characterized by a chameleon-like elusiveness (1995:278)." This perceived elusiveness is an integral part of how I experience Shamanism in my life. Everything is constantly changing; the seasons change just as my body does according to the time passing. Cycles are in motion and this requires constant adaptation. Whether or not I am present to these changes, they continue to have an impact on my life. Shamanism is a way of looking at and understanding these processes. It is a way of understanding how different elements of my experience are interrelated. I do not define Shamanism according to doctrines and strict traditions to which I must adhere. I live it as a way of understanding my experience and thus it allows for a great deal of flexibility and can be difficult to define.

According to the community I belong to, Shamanism is a tradition based upon the experience that the Shaman lives and his or her interactions with the environment. How the Shaman has been defined in anthropology has also seen a great deal of variety. Robert Wallis (1999) discusses these identity issues, speaking of how Shamans came to be idealized as being closer to nature, and as mystical beings able to express themselves in ways that were often repressed within western society. This has led some (Jones: 2006, Townsend: 2004) to suggest that Shamanism has evolved into being an individualistic sort of spirituality that allows for self realization. While others (Poirier: 2005, Irwin: 1994) suggest that it is tribal in nature and related to the survival of the community members through Dreaming techniques that allow hunters and gatherers to locate their food and water on a regular basis (Poirier, 2005). Dreaming techniques refer to actions taken in the waking reality that are related to what has been observed in the Dreamtime. While Dreamtime refers to a particular place and concept of time, Dreaming

is much larger and is related to mystery and experience. In order to make sense of the Dreaming, the Dreamer needs to live the experience.

Dreamtime

Though I had initially not planned to explore the role of the Dreamtime in everyday community interactions, it came to be evident that this was practically unavoidable. At each meeting I attended the Dreamtime was present and often central. Before delving into the sorts of definitions my collaborators provided for the Dreamtime, I have examined ways in which it has been represented in the anthropological literature. There is a good deal of variety when it comes to how dreams and the Dreamtime have been discussed.

In some cases dreams are used to entertain and are shared as stories. They are informative and are efficient as a means to transmit and produce knowledge. Sharing dreams is a collective endeavour. According to Poirier who has been studying Aborigines in Baggo and Yagga Yagga in Central Australia where she conducted fieldwork during the 1980's and 90's, it is only when aspects of the dream are seen to be repeated in waking life and are observable by the collective (Poirier 2005:156, Irwin 1994:28) that the dream is considered to be something other than a story. The dream offers practical solutions to realities experienced in the waking world and is therefore not purely for entertainment sake. As in Poirier's example of the Dreaming being related to the hunt, a Dreaming tradition was a part of the communities survival strategy. Irwin has also been exploring the Dreamtime according to the traditions of the Plains Indians. Some dreams, he suggests, may not manifest themselves in waking reality for a great deal

of time. It can be an ongoing process and the message of the Dreaming can take years to decipher (1994:164-165). It requires a great deal of presence to recognize the meaning of the repetitions and multiple interpretations. Memory as a dream can be attached to the past, the present and conceivably will repeat itself again in the future.

The first time that the term “Dreamtime” was used and recorded in English was by Carl Strehlow who had translated it from the Aranda term *Altjiringa*. The Aranda live in Central Australia. Strehlow believed that this word referred to a High God, as had the early missionaries. Later on it was revealed that the term did not refer to God but rather to something very old and mysterious that had no known origin. This coincided with notions regarding the Dreamtime as existing somehow outside of ordinary time conceptions. According to Strehlow the Dreamtime is associated with eternity and it has also been related to circular or cyclical time as contrasted with linear time (in Swain, 1993:20). Swain, who discusses these concepts in his book A Place for Strangers makes a distinction between the use of the terms “Dreaming” and “Dreamtime.” He says that “due to this association with time as being outside of time somehow the use of the term Dreamtime has been criticized(1993:21).” Stanner, who also focused on understanding the Aborigenes’ experience of the Dreaming, suggested that the term “Dreaming” be used instead, even though discussions of time continue to exist between the lines when this term is employed. One of the reasons why Swain, in particular hesitates to use the term “Dreamtime” is because “it has blinded us to the realization that the true significance of the concept behind the word is not temporal but spatial (1993:20).” I will be using both of these terms somewhat interchangeably throughout the text as both terms are employed by my collaborators.

Another interesting perspective on the origins of dreams is explained by Jenkins who is an anthropologist particularly interested in studying religion and the ways in which western views on aboriginal religion have changed over time. By incorporating aspects of Indigenous religion, the mainstream, Jenkins suggests, has become aware of how much of daily life can be associated with religious practices. He describes Dreaming as the presence of the supernatural world in daily and mundane human affairs, revealing a universal oracle (2004:53). Indigenous peoples are seen to be close to these supernatural beings through their dreams. Some believe that it was supernatural beings that created the world during what is referred to as Dreamtime. After they completed their work, they left earth, and it is through dreams, specifically during tribal rituals that the people are able to access this space. For the Aborigines in Poirier's account, dreams are said to be the link between the human realm and beyond. While the dreams are the words of the ancestors, the dreamer is the messenger. Many believe that dreams offer the possibility of connecting with the dead. Relationships, even with those who are no longer living are maintained through Dreamtime realities. The Aborigines believe that it is through nourishing the relationships we had with our ancestors that we make it possible to have a relationship with the people of the future. This sort of belief reveals temporal continuity, as though the past and the future are connected in the present through the Dreaming.

There are many different ways in which dreams can be interpreted and I will be describing in the later portions of this thesis, a multitude of perceptions are both valued and sought. Each member of the community is able to share a different perspective based in their own experience. Poirier encountered this among the Aborigines':

Because there are no official dream interpreters and no fixed grid of interpretation, and because the dreamers and their listeners usually prefer not to give a definitive interpretation of a dream, each person's perception and understanding are respected (Poirier, 196).

It is not until repetitions in the waking reality confirm or disprove certain interpretations that some perspectives may come to be considered more probable than others. At different tellings of the dream different interpretations may be considered that had not existed when the dream was told in relation with prior experiences. This reveals the importance of the circumstances of the moment, or the natural and cosmological influences.

Barbara Tedlock who is both an anthropologist and Shamanic practitioner says that according to the Kalapalo of Brazil, dreams reveal possibilities, not facts (1999:90). Following similar rationales, dream interpretations are also possibilities and are not factual. In communities like the ones Tedlock, Irwin and Poirier study, the end goal is not to find the right interpretation, but rather to live the experience that is revealed by the dream in relation with the community. Sally Cole provides an example of a dream being experienced communally in her book Rainy River Lives in which she discusses a dream Maggie Wilson, an Ojibwa woman had in 1918 in which thunderbirds shared with her songs and dances. Though Maggie didn't know how to interpret the dreams at first, she ended up teaching the dances to others in the community. This experience of dreaming the songs and dances together, as others in the community began dreaming similar dreams, united the community and instigated a new tradition(2009:13-14). In this example what had begun as a dream became an important part of the experience of the community.

Irwin notes that advanced dreamers, Shamans and religious specialists are often better able to communicate their dreams and relate them to the lived experience of the listeners (1994:167) because they have the most experience. He states that it is very rare that these dreams are recorded in anthropological texts. It is instead younger dreamers that allow their dreams to be written down. Or in the case of dreams that were related to specific ritual practices or healing ceremonies, the dream is shared only long after the event occurred; when it is considered safe to do so.

When it comes to sharing the dreams with the community, it is often left up to the individual to determine whether or not a particular dream is shared and in what context. Irwin speaks of the importance of not telling all dreams as the dreamer who has accumulated certain powers associated with the Dreaming, can lose these abilities (1994:172). He suggests that there is a dilemma faced by the dreamer related to the way in which keeping silent about visions and dreams could be the best way to protect the abundance and power they believe can be acquired through the dream and sharing the dream as the collective acknowledgment of the power is also important. The telling of the dream is seen to be a part of the process of the manifestation of power and is not simply informative. It is believed that there is literally power in words and that such knowledge is meant to be practical not theoretical (Irwin,1994:175). I will be returning to this topic later on in the ethnographic section of the thesis.

So far, I have been discussing ways in which the waking state and the Dreaming state can be seen to reveal a sort of continuity: what happens in dreams can be related directly to everyday life. This theme of continuity can also be seen to be related to Dreaming as we examine the states of life and death. Kempf & Hermann discuss

dreamscapes in relation to initiation among the Ngaing in Papua New Guinea. They say that, according to the Ngaing, the dreamer- whom they refer to as the spirit-being or asabei yang (2003:64)- is the essential component of the self: it is what exists after death. The asabei yang nourishes the individual during waking state, separates from the individual and journeys on its own during illness and sleeping state and detaches from the individual after death in order to live on. Kempf & Hermann do not explain how this relates to beliefs about reincarnation and yet the adabei yang is said to exist eternally. According to the Ngaing it is this “forever” part of the self that creates the dream scenarios.

Another theme discussed in the literature was continuity and dreaming as part of the relationship with the land. One of Poirier’s articles is entitled “This is Good Country. We are Good Dreamers” which highlights this belief that when the people dream the land, they are nourishing it, helping to maintain its continuity (Lohmann, 2003:221-22, Poirier, 2005:158,). Many of the dreams the Aborigines have are in relation with their everyday survival and they dream of the land often as they are constantly in relation with it. As I mentioned earlier, when the dreamer, the spirit-being of the Ngaing, is in the body, it provides nourishment. This has been confirmed through scientific studies which point to the ways in which REM sleep, during which Dreaming occurs, is associated with growth of the body. Therefore when the body dreams of the land, the land is nourished by the Dreaming much like the body would be. This is understood and explained by the idea that the body is intimately related to the landscape and it is the consciousness of this relationship that helps to nourish that land (Poirier, 2005:159). This connection remains mysterious to a certain degree.

Dreaming is mysterious. To attempt to understand everything about the Dreaming is to go against its nature. In this section, I have attempted to show the similarities of belief across cultures, in the practices related to sharing dreams, some perspectives on interpretation and origins of the dream scenarios. I have examined the notion of continuity between states of being, waking and sleeping, living and dead, and as seen in the interconnectedness of the world around the dreamer.

Chosen Family vs Community

Ideas of “family” and “community” have been important during my fieldwork. I have been incorporating both into my text though each term refers to distinctly different sorts of interpersonal ties. While family conventionally refers to genetic relationships, communities are formed when a group of individuals unite around a common interest or common values. While I began my thesis research with very clear definitions for both of these terms, my perspectives have been transformed. I have come to understand the relationships I have been examining and experiencing as a great deal more like “family” than “community.” The connection are visceral and profound. The connection for my self and my collaborators cannot be severed no matter what life presents. As with the members of my biological family, whether they are far or near, whether or not I stay in contact with them, they are a part of me. However with my biological family I do not feel that there is a constant commitment to working on the relationship and reinventing the ties, in order to renew it in the way my collaborators and I feel is present in the Shamanic family we have chosen. Through the thesis research I have come to understand that it is this sense of profound connection that defines family, more so than DNA connections. During the fieldwork process I found that it is the term family that finally

best represents what we live together and that it is up to me to separate one experience of “family” from another.

“Community” however, has also been an important term that I have been exploring alongside this concept of what it means to be a family. There has been a good deal of theoretical debate related to what defines a “community” and what is the relationship between community and the greater society. E. Paul Durrenberger who specializes in Icelandic culture and sustainable agriculture defines community as “the realm of interpersonal ties and egalitarian social networks...characterized by multiple overlapping identities and complex relationships (2000:45).” On the other hand, Brett Williams, who has worked with migrant farmers in Illinois, is less interested in defining the term community and is rather interested in asking questions as to the sorts of feelings and ideas that people attach to community and the role of place in community building (2002). Williams suggests that “no matter what kind of community a community is, it is always a claim, a fiction, inscribed through symbols, ceremony, food, or a set of practices. It is almost always a site of disengagement and struggle as well as attachment and belonging (2008:348).” I will be exploring what community means for my collaborators in the ethnographic section later on.

In Shared Houses, Shared Lives Eric Raimy discusses how many people in contemporary North American society are faced with a growing desire for community life and have turned to creating intentional community houses which he also refers to as middle class communes. These houses are being set up in urban settings throughout the United States. Rather than being formed around religious beliefs or kinship relations, the people who choose to live together in the middle class communes he speaks of do so for

practical reasons. Living communally, Raimy says, fulfills many needs for the members of these communities. The motives include economic benefits and efficiency because tasks such as house cleaning, food preparation and baby-sitting are shared. Another benefit is reduced consumption because purchases can be shared. And personal growth is an important benefit because due to constant interrelation communal life entails learning conflict resolution strategies. Raimy writes: “When a sociologist asked members of Boston households about the satisfaction of communal living, the great majority checked one box on the questionnaire. It read, “companionship, security, and a supportive atmosphere.(1979:15)” In many ways, I find that the Okwaho community is similar to the examples presented by Raimy of the middle class communes as the focus on practical benefits of living communally is central to why members of the Okwaho community have chosen to live together. However with the focus on the Dreaming that is said to exist in the DNA, what many refer to as “community” becomes closely related to “family” as individuals in the Okwaho community who are connected and who work together through the Dreaming are connected at a cellular level, like family. In our DNA we carry the memories of many lives and many realities. From one human being to the next, regardless of age, race, and gender, the DNA makeup is incredibly similar. Not only are we connected to our biological family through our DNA but we are connected to all of humanity.

Vered Amit & Nigel Rapport in The Trouble with Community discuss community in relation to the tendency towards movement and migration in the contemporary world. The processes of movement, Amit suggests, have often created disjunction between individuals in communities. “There are many categories of social actors(migrants,

students, contract workers, tourist workers) who are trying to bridge the dislocating and contradictory outcomes of economic restructuring in similar ways but may not be aware of each other; or, if they are, have either not come to think of themselves as sharing a collective identity or else actively resist the possibility(2002:4).” In this example we see how some choose alternative perspectives. Rather than looking for common ground and recognizing interconnectedness, they chose to remain separate. She also explores how some people “fashion a sense of more collective fellowship through mundane daily activities for consociation...they come to feel, at least for a time,(that) they have something in common(2002, 4-5)” while others do not perceive of their experience in that same way. This illustrates one of the points I feel is central throughout my thesis and that is the importance of presence. Depending on the perspective we choose to take and where we choose to put our focus, our experience is significantly altered. Our experience is related to the stories we choose to tell and how this reflects our everyday experience as well as the way that it works to create ties with those around us. As Amit and Rapport point out, they may “experience cross-border movement without either participating in emergent transnational collectivities or attributing a new social identity to the experience of mobility (2002,4).” Rather than looking for commonalities and wellness, they speak of disjunction and escape. Thus their ability to form connections is connected to the way they speak of their experiences and the perspectives they take. In order to instill a sense of community, it is important that those involved nourish this desire and set this as an intention. Living in a constantly changing society where people are continually faced with the disjunction Amit speaks of, commitment to creating and maintaining connections is required. One of the ways that this is achieved is through communication.

Oral storytelling and the importance of listening to the experiences of others as a means to create such relationships will be themes I will continue to develop throughout this thesis. In the following section I will be considering whether taking these traditions have a place in the written tradition.

Oral vs Written

According to Shamanism: An encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture(Walter & Friedman, 2004) “Shamanic visionary experiences are also narratives that are orally communicated by Shamans to their communities through a variety of conversations(89).” I argue that while these methods of transmission are employed and valuable it is through direct empirical experience that much of the learning takes place and lessons are integrated into the daily life of my collaborators. Before examining what I mean by empirical traditional transmission of knowledge I will explore some of the literature on oral and written traditions.

Oral tradition is based on what you can take with you in the sense of what you can remember, while written teachings can be returned to, and referred to at a later time, which makes written knowledge concrete in ways that oral teachings are not. Also the possibility of applying such teachings to one’s experience allows individuals to integrate the information. Cruikshank in her writing on storytelling practices of Yukon women in the circumpolar north and discusses the way in which stories are interpreted differently by different members of the audience according to their own life experience. Incorporated within the life histories the Yukon women shared with Cruikshank were mythological themes that were culturally relevant, relying on a shared body of knowledge. Cruikshank concluded that the genre “may be more closely associated with

conventions of oral narrative than with positivistic evidence about the past(1990:2).” This realization altered her approach to the interactions. She goes on to suggest that “Oral testimonies are very different from archival documents and are never easily accessible to outsiders. They are cultural documents in which much is implicit, in which metaphor and symbol play a role in how ideas are presented (Cruikshank, 1990:3).” For those who have heard the stories before, the details that change or the details being emphasized during a particular telling can be noticed and reflected upon whereas for those hearing the story the first time, such nuances will not be noted. No interpretation is considered to be more accurate than another, be it that of a native listener, a foreigner or that of the anthropologist.

In Don't Let The Sun Step Over you, Watts, an elder Apache woman, talks about how the stories she tells can be read from a multitude of perspectives and that each perspective is valid and fits with the reader on that day. She chooses to have her words transcribed with the goal of touching the lives of younger generation Apache and people from other cultural backgrounds. She puts together a book of stories with the help of Kevin Basso, an anthropologist, and chooses to express herself in English so as to be able to reach people who no longer speak her native language of Apache. Though the language in which the stories are told can be an important aspect of the story she wants a larger audience and thus opts for a language more people can understand. The very least she can hope for is that people will realize that if she had told the story in Apache the telling would have been different. Basso collaborated with Watts to assure that the text created is acceptable in her eyes. She believes that the stories she shares can be of value

for people from different cultural backgrounds as they are, without interpretation and analysis being a part of the book.

Oral stories are, as Cruikshank suggests, waiting for interpretation, however, there is no limit to the variety of interpretations that could be drawn, similar to the approach to dreams shared in the collective as discussed by Poirier. The transcription of oral narratives to written text transforms the experience and the interaction with the story. “The writing down of oral literature, no matter how well intentioned or how well carried out, petrifies it. It is like a molecule by molecule replacement of an organic plant by stone. A petrified log may look like wood, but it is actually stone (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, “Oral Literature,” 102).” A part of my journey with this thesis has been related to a fear of taking what I consider to be sacred and which has been thus far transmitted through oral tradition and petrifying it by recording it in text. I have struggled with the possibility that I would produce a text that failed to show the ways in which the experience of the Okwaho community is constantly in movement. I also worried that including too much analysis would result in my perspectives as being considered authoritative and that this would prevent the readers from exploring the many other possible interpretations based in their own experience. Watts and Basso present us with an example of literature seeking to avoid doing just this thus suggesting that alternative possibilities exist.

The story is seen to be alive when the reader has free reign to interpret as he or she pleases and when this is the case Watts says that the story is eternal. There are similarities than can be drawn between the approach to the dreaming as eternal and interpretive and storytelling techniques. I will be exploring later on these two aspects

related to my fieldwork. The experience of the reader, dreamer or listener is what will determine the way in which it is interpreted. The focus, Watts says, is to learn and to see the interconnectedness of the stories over time, and to notice the repetition of certain themes.

Cruikshank looks at how “Stories, like good scholarly monographs, explore connections underlying surface diversity. If anthropology’s project has centered on detecting subsurface relationships, this book shows how narratives are used to establish such connections-between past and future, between people and place, among people whose opinions diverge(1998:1-2).” This theme of interconnections has been very present during my fieldwork. I will be exploring this from the angle of attachment to place in a section in which I discuss totemic relations. Several of my collaborators will share their stories related to how they adapted to changing habitats in chapter 4. And interrelations my collaborators experience outside of the community where they encounter alternative ways of being offer an example of how stories can be used to reveal connections where divergent opinions can seem predominant. Rather than teaching explicitly an alternative way of being, people are shown examples of these divergent approaches. This can apply to practical teachings as it can apply to attitude adjustments.

Jean-Guy Goulet in Ways of Knowing discusses the concept of “true knowledge” in his study of the ways of the Dene Tha in northern Alberta: “Among Native North Americans generally, and among the Dene specifically, knowledge is not a commodity to be objectified in instruction; it is an expertise personally absorbed through observation and imitation (1998:30)” This is the perspective on acquisition and transmission of knowledge held by the Okwaho community. I explore in this thesis ways in which this

applies to the way in which they observe animal behaviour as well. Goulet writes, that, for Dene: “To know is to perceive directly with one’s senses or with one’s mind. What one has not experienced or perceived directly, one does not know. Much of what is said and repeated in conversations is, therefore, not knowledge, in the strict Dene Tha sense of the term. It follows that the credibility of individuals identified as links in the chain of transmission of information is crucial in evaluating the truth of whatever is said (1998:34).” Rather than seeking truth, each perspective is considered to be reflective of the experience of that individual. What one person considers truth may not be in accordance with another member of the community. Each individual accumulates knowledge that is relevant to their experience and role in the community. Such a perspective on knowledge has profound implications for teaching strategies because, as Goulet explains, “to explain too much is to steal a person’s opportunity to learn (1998:29).” Rather than explaining how to do a certain task, among the Dene, those who are interested in learning observe those who have mastered the skill.

Finally, while I will be speaking about the Medicine Wheel as being a tool that is commonly referred to by my collaborators, I was unable to find literature written on this topic within anthropology. So in the place of referring to how this topic has been explored within the field of anthropology I will be presenting how I encountered it in my fieldwork. The Medicine Wheel is a configuration of stones arranged in a particular pattern according to the location in which it is built. During my fieldwork, Medicine Wheels were constantly built when people met together and were present in the rooms of each person in the house where I live. The Medicine Wheel that is built in eastern Canada has 36 stones and each stone represents a different perspective. We build

Medicine Wheels with specific intentions depending on what we want to learn, or based in a perspective or tool we want to focus on. We speak of the Wheel in many ways. For the 8 years I have been with the Okwaho community I have been learning about the Medicine Wheel and I have yet to fully understand. I don't think that it is possible in fact to complete these sorts of teaching. The Medicine Wheel helps me to understand my experiences and to move more easily from one perspective to another.

Chapter 2-Methods, Collaboration and Co-creation

In this Chapter I will discuss how I came to approach my thesis as a collaborative project as well as introducing some of the methods I used. I will also present some of the situations I encountered in which I found it necessary to adjust the direction of my project in order to incorporate the perspectives of the members of the community. I consider that this project has been co-created by myself and my collaborators. While the situations I have chosen to recount and the parts of the interviews and discussions I have focused upon were chosen by me, and thus, are influenced by my perspective of the reality I live, I have often spoken to my collaborators during the writing process to find out if they thought my analysis was sound and effective in conveying the way in which we live. The fact that I continue to live with my collaborators and friends has allowed for constant and continued dialogue on these matters.

Collaboration

I find that it is important to mention that the narratives that make up my thesis are not uniquely transmitted “by the Shamans themselves but also by other narratives”(Encyclopaedia of Shamanism, 2004:89) shared by members of the collective. In one of my discussions with Lisa, the Shaman of the community she mentioned that the energy of the Shaman can only exist when it is in relation with a collective. The Okwaho community would not exist if there was not a shaman at its center, nor as Lisa points out, would the Shaman exist if there was no community around it. This declared interdependency is one of the reasons I have chosen to include the various other members in my research rather than focussing entirely on the teachings and life history of the Shaman.

I have been part of this family for the past 8 years and I believe that each person has something valuable to contribute. Another reason why I was interested in incorporating the stories of each of the members is because I find that this approach better represents the collective experience that is present in the Okwaho community. Luke Eric Lassiter discovered through his attempts at collaboration that a commitment to the process by all parties involved was necessary and that the ethnographic experience was ultimately a process of interrelation. This is also an important theme in my research as a member of the Okwaho community.

Lassiter, in The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography speaks of a shift that has been occurring in ethnographic fieldwork. Rather than “reading over the shoulders” of natives, as Geertz (1973) would have it, ethnographers are now attempting to read “alongside” them which has meant that the writing style has shifted from being authoritative to that of involving dialogue. In discussing this shift he explores the implications of collaborative and reciprocal ethnography. In The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography, Lassiter relates perspectives held by his interlocutors through frequent references to his own experience. Lassiter relates to the reader many of the experiences he went through during the fieldwork on which the book The Power of Kiowa Song, his collaborative ethnography, is based. One of these experiences dates from when he first mentioned his decision to pursue anthropology. In the following quote he is speaking to his friend Billy Evans Horse, a Kiowa elder. Billy responded by becoming quite angry, taking a book from the shelf and throwing it across the table. The elder said that Lassiter would become an expert like other anthropologists who published books that were more relevant to other anthropologists, whom he refers to as “white

people,” than they were to the people they were writing about. The Kiowa elder questioned the goals of anthropology and its success in attaining them. As Lassiter writes,

My decision to be an anthropologist challenged the friendship between Billy Evans and me, one established before anthropology became the third party of our relationship. Billy Evans knew anthropology and anthropologists well and contended that our friendship could become something quite different if recited in an anthropological frame. While I already knew that the encounter between an ethnographer and his or her interlocutors is at the heart of most ethnographic practice, I had not really thought about how these kinds of relationships formed the base upon which anthropologists built their arguments for and between each other, and how this encounter ultimately served anthropology and its own discussions about culture and meaning. Billy Evans Horse thus forced me to ask “When does anthropology serve the very relationships created and maintained by anthropological practice? How can anthropology become relevant for our consultants? (2005:18-19)

One way in which anthropology can become relevant to the consultants is to take such criticism to heart and to allow their reflections and responses to help shape the resulting texts and the development of new methodologies. The process that Lassiter lived in response to these accusations has been formative in his approach to anthropology and his preference for collaboration. It has also informed my approach to my thesis as a collaborative endeavor.

Fieldsite

The site I chose for my fieldwork is a self-identified Shamanic community based on the outskirts of Montreal. My site was principally composed of two houses in which students of the Shaman of the Okwaho community live. I live with 5 other students in one of the houses, which is referred to as the Blue House. The Shaman, her family and 4

students live in what is referred to as the House of the Shaman. The residents of the two houses meet regularly for various classes and community meetings. I undertook most of my participant research at the House of the Shaman in "The Butterfly Lodge" where many of the classes are held. This lodge is located above the garage in a separate apartment type-setting, a large 3 1/2, with two bedrooms occupied by students of the Shaman and a bathroom. There are three couches in the space and several folding chairs which are positioned in the room to form a circle. In the center of the room there is often a Medicine Wheel which is the focus of the teachings, whether they be on the Dreamtime on the Shamanic lifestyle, attitudes and values. The Medicine Wheel is built on the floor and the stones are placed on either a large piece of fabric or leather.

The Blue House is about a ten minute drive from the house of the Shaman. It is a 2-storey house occupied by four women living on the second floor and a woman and a man living in the basement. As communal spaces we have a living room, a kitchen, dining room, three bathrooms and a double garage which is organized as a workplace for two of the artists in the house, a painter and seamstress. As all the people living in this house learn from the Shaman, we have come together to put into practice the teachings on functional relationships. This is a term used often in the community to refer to the sorts of attitudes that are considered to be acceptable in relationships. Maria, one of my collaborators defined functional relationships as follows:

It's about recognizing that different people have their own story and their own dreams and that it is theirs to live. Within that there is the idea of common ground and certain things have to be understood, like respect and listening to each other, being reliable, trustworthy, and sharing your story. Sometimes, for example, I want to spend time with someone in particular and I listen to them share their story. If I realize that it is not compatible with the dreams and stories I am living at the time, it would be dysfunctional for me to force the issue as we both have

our own things to live and learn from. When we have learned from this part of our experience, we could find that our stories are once again compatible. It is about being present to this every day.

I will be exploring some of the topics she brings up in more detail later on, such as storytelling, the Dreaming and presence. As students of Okwaho, we attempt to bring consciousness to our experience. We do this by employing the teachings of the Medicine Wheel learned in the weekly classes.

There are two Dreaming classes that take place in the evening during the week and two meetings that take place two weekends each month. One of the Dreaming classes is offered by Mathieu, a member of the community and is focussed on practice and experience. The other Dreaming class offered by the Shaman teaches basic Dreaming techniques and consciousness related to the roles and particular talents of the students themselves while incorporating the Medicine Wheel philosophy in order to better interpret the Dreaming reality. As the students share experiences that they have been living, Okwaho, the Shaman, narrates the difference between the dream within their story and what parts of their story are not considered to be a part of the dream that is “in movement” at the time. The Dreaming reality is seen to be a part of the waking reality and Okwaho helps the students recognize the differences between the two. I believe that this will become easier to understand as I provide examples recorded during the fieldwork process.

I regularly attended the weekday evening classes and one of the weekend monthly meetings each month and have conducted 12 interviews with fellow members of the community. I also organized two focus group discussions. These meetings took place between August and December of 2008. In one of the focus groups I also asked that the

participants record some of their responses in journal form. My second focus group proved to be quite interesting as it ended up being a collaborative experience. The community members provided me with feedback on the questions I had asked as well as on my approach to the topics in general during the interview sessions. Interestingly, there were comments they would not have made had we not had the original interview and they had not had time to reflect on their experience. The dynamic of the focus group setting brought up new perspectives related to what I had been considering to be one of my central themes- well-being- led me to rethink my use of language.

My collaborators for the most part were those members of the community who live in the Okwaho community houses. However, I did include two individuals who are considered members of the core community but who live in Montreal and not in either of the community houses. These two individuals have been attending the classes on a regular basis and have voiced their commitment to community building.

My collaborators are, for the most part, female. I was able to interview 2 out of the 5 males in the community. There are 12 females in total. I did not conduct interviews with all of them, due to personal choice and unforeseen situations that arose. The age range is from 18 to 65. The majority of the community is bilingual, the French language being that most commonly spoken. Due to this fact, the majority of the excerpts from the interviews I conducted have been translated from French to English. Living communally enables members to live at a higher standard of living than they would otherwise have been able to. The majority of my collaborators have at least a few years of post secondary education. While I would consider that the members of the community belong to the middle class I did not ask questions related to their average

incomes. Many members of the community are Caucasian and Canadian, while some members are from France, the Ukraine, and Mexico. One of the men is Huron and the Shaman herself is Iroquois and Micmac. The occupations of the participants include university professors, engineers, psychologists and students. In their leisure time, many are involved in creative pastimes such as needlework and beading. Most are active, with regular visits to the gym or local swimming pool. Going to the gym together is common. For example, on Sunday mornings four of my collaborators and I regularly go to the gym to work out together. In the community we speak of there being 6 bodies: the physical, mental, emotional, energetic, collective and spiritual. We consider it to be important to take care of each of our bodies through different sorts of activities and we refer to these bodies in order to make sense of our experiences. For example, Sylvie, a few years ago, was trying to quit drinking coffee as she found that the physical consequences of the addiction were too strong on mornings when she was unable to have a cup of coffee. She realized that her mental body appreciated the experience as it made her more attentive, while her emotional body felt imbalanced and her physical body became addicted and had reactions related to her consumption. Understanding this allowed her to seek alternative ways to stimulate her mental body while not creating negative results with her emotional and physical bodies. It is considered important to balance these 6 bodies in order to be able to dream effectively.

The way in which I have come to take into consideration the impact that I have upon others in my environment has changed dramatically over the years I have spent with the Okwaho community. I have often found myself to be quite focussed on my own wellness and individuality while lacking presence at a collective level and unaware of the

impact my choices have on others to whom I am connected. I have found other members of the Okwaho community describe similar experiences. Overtime, living in the community, individualism becomes moderated through the realization that my actions have an impact on the wellness of those around me. This lack of awareness, I believe, was one reason I have often had trouble developing and maintaining relationships in my life. Though my own birth family spoke of the importance of responsibility and consideration for others, I do not find that this was actively practiced, largely due to drug and alcohol addictions. The correlation between what you say, or teach and what you do is very important and I find that this requires a great deal of presence and discipline. These are some of the attitudes I have needed to re-examine since becoming a member of the Okwaho community.

There are many roles within the Okwaho community. According to the version of the Medicine Wheel with which I am most familiar, there are 8 roles that need to be present in order for a Shaman to take on their role within the community. These roles are: fire-keeper, visionary, peacekeeper, warrior, nomad, dreamer, initiator, and healer. Each individual has five of the eight roles in their personal wheel and yet all eight of the roles are important in order to reach resolution in any sort of situation, according to the teachings of Okwaho. For example, I do not have a visionary on my personal wheel and so I will often work with someone who does have a visionary when I am interested in manifesting something in particular. I will ask a lot of questions related to the sorts of possibilities that could occur and try to become as clear as possible when it comes to what I would like to manifest. When we were shopping for a house a few years ago, we sat down together to discuss what we were looking for. First of all, the fire-keepers bring

the passion and desire to the project so that everyone is excited about it. Then the visionaries provide a multitude of possibilities they see could occur and we discuss which possibilities are of interest. For the Okwaho community, the role of the dreamer is the role that unites the members. It is the dreamer that takes the possibilities provided by the visionary and manifests a reality. In this case, a house which matched the criteria sought. It is the role of the dreamer that the majority of the teachings focus on.

Beyond the example I have provided, dreamers also have knowledge of trance states. This is not considered to be uniquely accessible by the Shaman alone. According to the practice of Shamanism I am familiar with, many of the techniques related to the Dreamtime and healing rituals can be learnt by anyone but the role they would have within the community when performing these roles would not necessarily be that of Shaman. I will be discussing both the Medicine Wheel and the role of the Shaman and dreamer in more detail later on. As my thesis has been a collaborative project I feel that it is important that I familiarize my readers with the many dreamers who have made this thesis possible. In the following section I will be including a brief introduction to each of my collaborators.

Introducing the Dreamers

I will begin with a quote from the first focus group in which Okwaho, the Shaman (Lisa), suggests that any one of my collaborator's experiences can be used to illustrate the sorts of experiences the others share. I have, however, chosen to include a short introduction to each individual collaborator, following this quote. Some of the names have been changed based upon the respect I have for my collaborators choice on this matter.

In Shamanism it is difficult and there is a certain amount of adaptation but I'm extremely proud of everyone in my community...I love the people that are around me more than probably anybody really understands or knows because to be able to, to watch them go through the processes and watch them come out on top is really incredible. I find myself incredibly blessed to have found 12 or 13 people who can do the work every day and who are passionate about keeping this work alive. I'm in love with these people. It's stupid to call that community. They are my family, my flesh and blood from the point of view of spirit. They do the same thing as me every day and they are as courageous as I am, and as strong as I am and it doesn't matter if they started doing it yesterday or 15 years ago. I still find it incredible. They show each different kind of strength and if you talk about Trish, who just started, I've never seen someone so willing and strong and it's like she's always been there. Or you have someone like Isabelle, and she left and chose a totally different life. She got married, she had kids and her husband just didn't agree with it. She ended up living hell, getting a divorce and ended up coming back and saying, "Fuck, I made a mistake" and to start out at zero and say I left and now I'm coming back and it's a new start. And I can go around the Wheel. Like Guillaume is aboriginal and knows a lot of elders and it's not that he hasn't been around tradition, but to be able to leave the reserve, to be able to leave his family and come here, that too is impressive. No matter who I talk to, I find everybody's got an impressive story and we've all made the same choices, the same decisions. It's not like we are different from each other, everyone has had problems with their families. Everyone has noticed certain attitudes and behaviours they just don't find to be acceptable anymore. So really if you were to write a paper on what is a Shamanic community, you could take any one of us and you've described all of us.

In the above quote Lisa talks about how each member of the community share common ground through their personal stories. She expresses the sameness among the members which I feel is important to highlight in this section where introducing each member separately may appear to overstate the differences. We often talk about 4 different levels of reality, the personal, the collective, the universal and the infinite.

While the above quote is an example of Lisa speaking of the community members from a collective perspective, my intention in this section was to present each of my collaborators at the personal level. Lisa provides examples of the personal within the collective, which I find illustrates that these two levels are closely interrelated.

Maria

For me, it actually started with an intention because where I was at in my life, it was a transition point. What did I want? Something had to change. I was looking for something, and was investing my time in figuring out what that was. I knew I had a spiritual path, and I wanted community. I made a list of things I wanted and on that list was community. It started with an intention. Several months later I started looking into different groups, interested in a vision quest, and I connected with someone doing Medicine Wheel circles. I really feel like the Dreaming brought me here.

Maria has been with the community for about 6 years and originally met Lisa at a workshop she gave in Western Canada. Maria was a member of the community in Alberta for several years and two and a half years ago finally made the move to Montreal to live in the Blue House, where I live. She is in her mid 30's and has a degree in psychology.

Guillaume

I am from a native community-Huron, and in my village, ever since I was little, 6-7 years old I am conscious of being native, I lived in different places, not always in the village, lived in the city, in an urban center, which was totally different, then back to the village, and I worked in tourism, travelled to Europe and when I came back it was like an explosion in my life, native culture. And I started exploring Shamanism, I was curious to know what it was and started talking about experience and Dreaming, which are different aspects of Shamanism. I think I always looked for a community but I wasn't able to find it. In the village, there were two things, in the village I could feel the spirits, I swam in [the spirit world] constantly, and this was related to the history. And the other thing is the culture. Since the 90's, the culture has taken on a new level. Because it was illegal and

now there is pride related to the culture.¹ Within this, I did some exploring but I never really found what I was looking for. And then in Cegep, there was a conference and it was at this conference that I met Lisa...I arrived late and was in the back. I took notes because I always did this. I was used to criticizing people

¹In 1884, several amendments were made to the Indian Act which were aimed at the repression of Indian ceremonies, specifically the potlatch and Hamat'sa rituals. "While the attack on tribal culture through outlawing traditional ceremonies has received most attention because of its ethnocentrism and legal absurdity, it was compulsory residential schooling that represented the major thrust of the government's assimilationist policy. It wasn't until almost one hundred years later that the Native communities began to openly practice their cultural ways again.(Harring: 1998, 268-272)

who spoke about native culture. I was always criticizing. But after 2 minutes I put down my pencil because I felt that there was something...that I was there and it was the right place for me. At a specific moment there was a contact and right away I was ready to move, instantaneous...well, that is the first part, and since then lots of things have happened. For me to be a part of a Shamanic community means that I am in relationship with people who try to be aware of where they should be and where I should be...what is essential in their bodies at each moment. For me that is what is important because I don't want to live my life wasting my time.

Guillaume finally moved to the Blue House two years ago and he is the only person of those I interviewed who plans to move back to his village. He is in his late twenties and plans to be a history professor.

Gabrielle

A friend of mine was in a class with Mathieu and Lisa. She invited me to go there with her and I went. And it was my first time with them, in 2000. Right away I was in love with Mathieu. I felt that I had found what I was looking for. It was clear to me that these people could help me deal with my difficulties that were causing me trouble when it came to getting a real job at the time. So for 2 months I met with Mathieu but I wasn't able to stay in the country. So I went back to France and they came and did an atelier in France. And then 6 months after I'd met Lisa I had a real job as an engineer, a job I liked. And after 3 years I was still interested. I was more in relation with the internet friends in Canada, than with the people around me in France. And so I immigrated and my life is better now.

Gabrielle also lives in the Blue House and is in her mid thirties. She continues to work in engineering.

Aurelie

I met Mathieu at a workshop in France. I met him because of a friend who spoke to me about the workshop. I didn't even think about it. I was called and so I went. I knew right away. After the first workshop, it was crazy, everything I lived. I didn't really understand it. I just knew I had to see Mathieu again and continue that. At the time I was immersed in drugs and I saw everything that had been woken up by the workshop and how the drugs broke all of this. At that moment, it was like a path opened for me: either I continued to smoke or I continued on this new path that had presented itself. It was clear. One day to the next I stopped smoking because of what I wanted to do. After I met Lisa, with time, connections were developed with Lisa and Mathieu, things I didn't expect:

that we'd known each other in other lives; that we shared ancestral stories. For me it was clear that I was called here: this was my family. That was my experience.

Though Aurelie met Mathieu initially 9 years ago, she finally immigrated to Canada in 2008 to live in the house of the Shaman. She is 26 and is interested in finding work similar to that which she had in France, which was in stables and with horses.

Isabelle

Though I don't live with people from the community- I don't live at the blue house- I have always been called by the idea of having a big farm with lots of people, the sort of collective living. Why I don't live that way now is in part due to the fact that the period of my life recently where I wasn't with the community was while this shift to community houses occurred. Now that I am back I have started to think about it. When it will arrive it will be difficult for me. I see that there is a lot in every little thing every day. Right now, I don't have to think about other people with every action. I think that will be a big challenge as I am used to being all alone with my children, not having to take others into consideration all the time, every day....but there is also this frustration related to living far, even if earlier I brought up that it would be difficult, there is a part I miss. I'd like to have that experience...I want to be present to every second that passes, to share it, be it easy or not, so from the outside there is frustration, because I am outside of some of it. I'm also working on the kids slowly to prepare them for the move.

Isabelle had been a part of the community about 8 years ago and had left because her husband did not agree with her involvement. When they got divorced 6 years later, she sought out Mathieu and Lisa again. It has been about a year since she has returned to the classes. She has two children and lives in the outskirts of Montreal. She is in her mid thirties and works in customer service.

Rebecca

It is about anchoring these new experiences inside of you. It enters into your DNA: my behaviour changes and becomes something new. I see it at work. The way I teach is totally different ever since I am in relation with the Wheel and the Shaman. The way I teach, I see magic in front of me. The little man who is 90 years old, he shares his dreams. It's fabulous! He asks if I'll come back; they share their discoveries. And even if I don't talk about the Wheel, I see that the Wheel speaks through me and I see that it brings wellness to me and to the

students and for me it is tangible and that is fantastic. I feel useful. It's a strength for me that I draw on and I get to share it with others and feel my purpose.

Rebecca has been with the community for 8 years and is in her late fifties. Of all the people in the community, Rebecca is considered to be one of the most religious, before being with the Okwaho community, she explored Hinduism, the Baha'i and she followed the teachings of another Shaman for several years. She is currently exploring her Jewish heritage. She lives in the Blue House and teaches at the University.

Trish

When I came to the community I knew that I needed to change because I didn't want to deal with this stuff in my next life and not only me but everyone around me, anyone I touch, be it family, friends and so on, part of me is always conscious of that even though I may not always know how to deal with it. I sat too long in a dark hole, in a well, feeling depressed. Wherever it is there is always a little light that says it isn't working. If you just get up, and climb up. And it just starts getting a little better, it's always more than just us, more than just us now.

Trish has been with the community now for a year and a half. She is the only member of the community who sought out Shamanism in particular and her initial connection with the community came through an online Facebook group I had started on the subject. She is in her late 20's and works as a costume designer. She lives with her husband in Montreal and would like to live closer to the community in the near future.

Katya

How I realized I was a dreamer? I didn't have Shamanic teachings as a child but I followed the Dreaming with the community in the Dreamtime. It had always been something that spoke to me. I always had dreams. It was always a part of my life and it was logical for me to find myself with others like myself... I especially like how we live: the way that the circular and linear realities come to exist together. In the Community, we are interested in ourselves but we also realize that we are interrelated. Because of this we take care of others and are taken care of in return. It is an exchange.

Katya moved from Mexico to study here in Canada. She has been a member of the community for 9 years. She is in her mid thirties and lives in the house of the Shaman. She works in real estate.

Sylvie

At the beginning I knew someone who spoke of Lisa's teachings on the Medicine Wheel and as soon as I heard of it I knew inside of me I had to be there. I had to meet that person but the person I knew said, "You can't just come like that. You have to have an invite, not just anyone can go." But a little while later she told me that Lisa was having open classes so I went. I went with openness. It was something I had been looking for since I was very small. It was something I'd looked for.

Sylvie is one of the oldest members of the community. She has been taking classes with Lisa for almost 20 years and has been living in the house of the Shaman for 3 years. She is in her early forties and works as a specialized educator for people with developmental disabilities.

Mathieu

Life didn't make sense to me. Something was missing: it was incomplete. I felt incomplete. I didn't feel accomplished. Finally, I met someone Shamanic and it interested me right away: love at first sight. Everything in that way of life spoke to me. It corresponded with what I felt, who I was, who I am now. I found myself being functional in that way of life; in circular life.

It is actually Mathieu who introduced the idea of a community and wanted community houses. Prior to this, over 12 years ago, people would attend workshops but go home to different lives, different communities. Mathieu lives in the house of the Shaman and is in his mid forties.

Lisa

Why I bring [the Shaman] up is because at this point in my life it is all I am and it wasn't always the case. A big part of my life was being a dreamer, and then being in relation with the Medicine Wheel, and then being an initiate Shaman and where I'm at right now is being a Shaman. And it's a very different experience. And it does have that aspect that Lisa [as a person] doesn't exist because I don't want to cheat anyone of their experience and I do it on purpose not to have a personal relationship with anybody. So that it is the Shaman.

Lisa is the Shaman in the community and is also known as Okwaho which can be translated as wolf. She is Iroquois and Micmac of origin. She was born Shamanic she says which meant that she followed traditional teachings with her grandparents at the same time as she attended school at a convent. She has been teaching the Medicine Wheel for over 20 years.

Methods

I conducted structured interviews with all of these people as well as spending a lot of my time in informal meetings and discussions with them. I also conducted two focus groups. At the first focus group Guillaume, Trish, Sylvie, Aurelie, Isabelle, Rebecca, Lisa and I attended. The second focus group was somewhat smaller with Guillaume, Lisa, Sylvie, Rebecca and me. As I began to put my data together and observe the sorts of patterns I saw emerging, I have often returned to my collaborators to discuss my thesis.

While I set out with a particular research question, my fieldwork process has revealed a rich vocabulary of native concepts; a language unique, I believe, to myself and my collaborators. When I initially met with the community almost 8 years ago, I was struck by the way in which familiar terms seemed to hold unique significance for this group. I was told to pay attention to the impression that was awoken in my body in relation to the words they were using, many of which I had previously encountered.

Rather than asking for explanations, though I did at first, like Jean-Guy Goulet (1998) describes his learning process among the Dene Tha, I came to rely on my experiences to make sense of the words. In response to my enquiries within the collective I was often met with stories and experiences to illustrate what was being touched upon. This process of learning a “new” language was an important part of becoming able to see my life through new perspectives. Any one word could be used in many different contexts and exploring a term from 36 perspectives has become an aspect of my self-discipline as a dreamer. I mention 36 perspectives because this is the number of stones that we use in the Medicine Wheels that we build which I will be discussing later on in this Chapter. Many more perspectives are possible. A dreamer manifests his/her reality and one tool can be through his/her use of language. In order to manifest a particular dream, it is important to use words that carry impressions compatible with what the dreamer wishes to manifest. A simple example would be related to how I could present myself at a job interview. If I am interested in having a job in which I will have increased responsibility, my language and the stories I choose to share need to emulate this aspect of who I am. It has to do with how we will present ourselves in particular environments based upon the result we are interested in attaining. A dreamer is a shape shifter and this malleability can be used in very practical ways in everyday situations. Even the ability to shift perceptions related to language use is important when it comes to a dreamer’s ability to shift spaces. The term “language” implies much more than the words that we use when we speak. For a dreamer, “language” refers to all that we use to communicate. This includes among other things, body language, style of dress, and tone of voice. A part of the initiation of a dreamer includes understanding the importance of language.

One way that I have explored the language of the community over the years has been through committing to focus on a particular word for a period of 30 days. For example, during my fieldwork one of the words I was interested in exploring was “hole”. My experience of having a hole in my dress during these 30 days taught me to appreciate Rebecca who meticulously and expertly repaired what I had managed to rip. This caused me to reflect on “holes in the collective”, which had originally been the phrase that had sparked my interest. I began to be more aware of all that is required when people lack attention, don’t take their responsibilities and don’t do what they said they would. I became more aware of the work that went into repairing or replacing things that had been misplaced or misused or the work that went into resolving situations that arose when someone wasn’t doing their part. I have seen this in my studies when I let myself fall behind. All of a sudden the hour a day that it would have taken me to keep on top of my assignments becomes a stressful and difficult to manage situation. Guillaume discusses this later on, in a section on adjustment to community living. If everyone is letting things in their life slide this becomes heavy for the collective. It is important that each member become autonomous in the sense that they are able to make decisions in their lives while being aware of the impact these choices can have at the collective level. If an individual is not able to manage their every day experience, energy can be lost through these sorts of holes. The work of repairing the hole in the collective is often more labour intensive than what it would have been to take the care to do the work or be present in the first place. After having spent 30 days recognizing holes, in the wall, in my clothes, and in the road and living a variety of experiences with these holes I have an accumulation of stories related to this term and impressions related to my experience. In the future my body

recognizes these impressions and they are attached to a prior learning. The words in this way become rich in meaning. Many of the words, including “hole”, that may strike the reader as strange or as having a particular significance will be repeated by different collaborators in different contexts throughout my thesis. I will provide my perspective of what the term refers to and this analysis can then be compared with the ways in which it is presented in the text.

This is also related to the Medicine Wheel: although there are particular terms on the Wheel that represent the various perspectives, there is also a great deal of fluidity from one situation to the next. In this sense there is a need for contextualization. Sylvie discusses this briefly here and I will be returning to this topic later on.

Sylvie- it is never the same, you can never say that a certain phrase explains something in particular when it comes to the wheel because, for example [the stone on the Medicine Wheel that represents] love also takes 36 perspectives so whenever you will talk about a certain element it will be in relation to a particular perspective. It will be related to what is in the place, and to what each person has brought with them. And the Wheel is something else, with its own influence. Yes, there is a part that will be similar in essence but there is something else that constantly moves according to what is around. It is a breath.

Breath is a term that is often repeated within the community and relates to an energy that is natural and cannot be controlled or manipulated by individuals according to personal intentions. In this case, Sylvie is speaking of the breath that is considered to be related to the Medicine Wheel. It is a term which is associated with sacred communication. The breath is invisible and is made visible through its manifestations and through speech. At the same time, as Sylvie states, the perspective we will have of the breath is influenced by the intentions of the people in the space.

Dreamers in the field

In my approach to the fieldwork and the interactions I had with my collaborators I needed to make sense of various aspects of my identity. On one hand I was an anthropologist coming in to interview and observe, participate and analyze, and on the other I was a dreamer who had for years been learning with these people about Shamanism and collective attitudes. I have intimate relationships with my collaborators and the role that I have with the community as a fellow student and participant was very different from that of an anthropologist who enters the community from outside. There were moments when I recognized that I was not behaving in the same way with the members of the community as I normally would have. Some of these moments I have chosen to share in this section in order to demonstrate the different perspectives I encountered based upon the role I took in relationship with my collaborators.

When I began organizing the interviews I emphasized the scheduling aspect so as to accommodate my collaborators as best I could. I was uncomfortable with the idea that I was taking time out of their day. I felt as though I was trapping them, fitting them in and/or trying to get it out of the way. Depending on the person, the experience varied and I began to pay attention to these differences. Many of the interviews took place in one of the two houses but when it came to interviewing the members of the community who do not live in one of these sites, I wondered about the location I should choose for the interview. Not wanting to inconvenience them I asked them where they considered would make most sense.

Trish offered to search for a good place for me to interview her. I was happy with this and waited to see what she would suggest. She contacted me a few days before the interview to let me know that she had narrowed it down to 3 different tea shops she had researched online. I was surprised by the amount of effort she had put into it and realized at once that I was dealing with a dreamer and that my initial position had been one of a polite individual/academic. But, I was also a dreamer interacting with another dreamer, both having learnt discipline related to territory and the impressions of dreams within certain spaces. She clearly preferred one location to the others, the tea shop that happened to be the farthest distance for me and thus, I could sense that she hesitated to impose her decision. Trish shared with me the experiences she had lived as she had attempted to find the location for our meeting and the sorts of impressions she had about each place and how this was related to her original intention. I told her that clearly she was following a dream and was seeking a certain impression in this space. She had a vision of how she wanted the meeting to take place and her dreamer was working towards manifesting this vision. She agreed with me that this was how she saw the situation. I explained, as she is the newest member of the community that it would be disrespectful of me to have asked her to take on the search and then ignore or deny her the opportunity to explore what I had put in motion. It would be, from my perspective, taking away her power, and the role I had put her in if I didn't allow her to do it. It turned out that we both appreciated the tea salon she had chosen and the green tea cheesecake they offered, in particular.

Another moment when I realized that I was a dreamer dealing with individual dreamers who live according to a very particular worldview and discipline came up when

I was interviewing Mathieu. At one point we were talking about spirit and I asked a question about Dreaming which I understood to be along the same lines of what he was explaining only to discover that he found I had introduced a totally different perspective. As an anthropologist I had not intended to side track him and rather had expected to further his discussion rather than changing the topic. But, when I attempted to back track and return to the topic he had been discussing, he explained to me that this would not work because I had awoken a new dream space and he was now present to this one. As dreamers, our discussion was occurring in a particular place in the matrix of the Dreaming. We were exploring a certain territory, in a sense. Each role is situated in the Wheel. When he was talking about spirit, he was speaking from the healer perspective which is in the North of the Wheel and when I asked him about the Dreaming, which is in the West of the Wheel, it was as though I was suggesting we travel elsewhere to see a different reality. If I had been present to the matrix at the time, I would have recognized the shift, as I have been learning about this for years but as I was thinking as an anthropologist, it took Mathieu pointing this out to me for me to realize what I had done.

During the fieldwork I constantly had to remind myself of the discipline I had learned over the years which is related to being anchored in the body and being present to one's impressions. When we speak of being present to one's impressions we are referring to that which is lived by all of the six bodies I mentioned earlier. What are the emotions that are present? What sorts of thoughts come to mind? Are there reactions of a physical nature? Is there a spiritual aspect to the situation? How is the collective implicated? At times, when I was in what I will refer to as "anthropologist" mode, I was

more present to the mental body and not paying as much attention to the other impressions I was living at the time.

Another example occurred at the second focus group. At the beginning of the meeting we discussed the interview experience in general and several people mentioned that it had been too many questions to answer in a short period of time. They felt that given these circumstances their responses lacked depth. They also pointed out that my questions were loaded with words that carried a significant amount of meaning, and that many perspectives could be taken in formulating a response. As I listened to their experiences I realized that the structure I had planned on following for the focus group was no longer applicable. Instead I chose this moment to collaborate with the group I had asked to attend in order to discover an alternative approach. I was interested in following their initiative. While I had prepared a list of questions I wanted to discuss, the group decided that exploring one more profoundly during the time that had been set aside for the focus group would be a better strategy. The question that I had prepared that we chose to explore was: “How has the membership in this community impacted your wellbeing?” The group pointed out that the wording of this question was very heavy; meaning that it was full of words that brought up reactions in my collaborators. The words they highlighted were “membership”, “community”, “impacted” and “wellbeing”. In chapter 4 I discuss the views this focus group offered on wellbeing and community. This is just one example of ways in which I altered my methodology in order to incorporate my collaborator’s perspectives both on the direction and the means by which we could together present, with as much clarity as possible, how we in the community live and speak about our way of being together. Another technique I adapted at this focus

group was to bring the questions in written form and I proposed that my collaborators take the time to reflect and record their responses. Several of the people I interviewed had spoken about preferring writing to speaking during an interview setting where they felt that they were put on the spot. In some of the classes offered by Mathieu in the community, time is allocated to journaling, or Dreaming through writing, and I adapted this activity in my fieldwork practice with my research collaborators and fellow community members.

Chapter 3- General concepts- “The structures within which we play”

Before presenting and analyzing particular themes that I found to repeat themselves during my fieldwork, I would like to spend some time trying to clarify some of the meta-concepts that are important when trying to convey the way in which we understand our world. I found that it was necessary to do a great deal of prompting in order to get my collaborators to express themselves on these concepts as it is language that is so commonly used and understood among us that we do not think of defining it as we speak. For the purpose of this thesis, it was important to me that I incorporate the language of my friends and “family” as much as possible and I made a point of asking for definitions, and clarification of concepts that I have also been studying and the philosophy by which I live my life.

Shamanic attitudes and “Basic Nature”

If we are talking about Shamanism, we are talking about your capacity to change your perception and to change the perception of others around you (Mathieu).

Atkinson who has studied Shamanism in Indonesia suggests that "shifts in consciousness are a key part of Shamanic practice (1992:311)." Shifts in consciousness, according to Atkinson refer to shifts in trance states. Mathieu is speaking about both about the Dreamtime and the way in which dreamers within this community can shape shift when exploring dream realities. In order to enter into the Dreamtime, we often drum together in order to attain different levels of trance. Mathieu is also referring to the ways in which we learn how to shift perspectives using the Medicine Wheel as a sort of map. I will be exploring both the Dreamtime and the Medicine Wheel in this chapter.

The basic definition of Shamanism that is employed within the community is “surviving according to natural and cosmological laws.” While this definition was not mentioned during the formal interviews, it was mentioned at the weekly classes I attended. My collaborators, during the interviews and informal conversations, tended to speak more about ways in which they were “trying to be more Shamanic” in their lives. Sylvie, for example, had brought up several times during her interview that she is constantly trying to be more Shamanic and so I ask her to clarify what it is she means by this. In her response, she introduced the notion of a period of adaptation that she feels was required by the members of the community who grew up within different cultural settings. As I began talking about this topic, I discovered that different people felt that they had been faced with different sorts of adjustments. Here I present some of the commentary I collected on the topic of “being Shamanic.”

Sarah- When you say you try to “be more Shamanic” what do you mean exactly?

Sylvie- It’s about asking myself how could I do differently, so that I could respect people more, listen more, be less egotistical, see everyday what I could do to make the difference.

As we continued to discuss this it came to be evident that what we were talking about was how we seek to reposition ourselves in order to “put people in power.” We spoke about how, in Shamanism and in our collective way of living, we believe that it is important that each person be empowered according to who they are and what they are capable of bringing to the collective. As I will be discussing in the next chapter, this often came about through listening and engaging with people which is also connected to a concept of “availability” often referred to by my collaborators as a question: Are you

able to be present in a given situation or are you wrapped up in your own perspective?

Are you available to listen?

Shamanism as it is practiced in the Okwaho community relates to exploring interrelations at a profound level, be it relationships with one another, with spirits, with ancestral stories, totemic relations or in relation with one's environment. The way in which the Medicine Wheel is used in everyday interactions is meant to facilitate such movement and flexibility of perceptions with this multiplicity of relationships. At times it is important to stay within a certain perspective for a period of time in order to achieve a level of profoundness as I explained earlier with my exploration of the term "hole." While a multiplicity of perspectives exist, I have found it helpful to choose a theme I wish to explore and then observe what my experience reveals to me about this theme.

Lisa defines Shamanism as surviving according to natural and cosmological laws, she says that everything around us evolves, and that everything is in movement. The experiences that people have in Shamanic settings have changed over time in relation to the context in which they are living. This extends as well to the configuration of the Medicine Wheel. Lisa says that, in Native American traditional Medicine Wheels, the circle of Moons were flush with the Anchors, lying on the Circle of Consciousness and that in recent times they are now found on the Circle of the Subconscious, which is aligned with the second element. She says that this shift has occurred due to an increased interest in psychology, the focus on the mental body and the process of memory suppression. In the past, everything was seen to be a part of a functional reality, meaning everything found its place as part of the whole. Guilt and suppression were not a big part of indigenous reality prior to their interaction with the missionaries. When the

subconscious came to be more present in the lives of the people the moons changed their location on the Medicine Wheel in order to reflect the reality of the environment. She says that it is based upon the logic of functional interrelations and is a representation of the invisible realm at the time at which it is made, in connection with the intention of the collective. It has been used in recent years similar to a twelve-step program (Krestan, 2000) and Lisa, herself has taught this philosophy at Concordia University as a guest speaker in several Applied Human Science classes on counselling techniques.

In the past, the role of the Shaman has often been associated with the survival strategies of the population and was related to hunting strategies. Graburn who has studied Shamanism among the Tungus in Siberia at the turn of the century talks about these issues. He suggests that in the past, Shamans would locate the animals for the hunters through visions and dreams. Without such aid, many communities may not have survived (Graburn: 1973). The community of my informants is not faced with the same sort of struggles and yet many of the members believe that it is Shamanism that has helped them to survive. Many of the people who come to the groups and who incorporate the teachings of the Medicine Wheel into their lives as a self help technique have found help with drug and alcohol abuse and have found that this community has provided different perspectives and methods of dealing with such issues. I will be delving further into the ways in which the Medicine Wheel is understood and used by my collaborators later in Chapter 3.

The importance of the interrelationships developed and maintained is a central theme within the community. Lisa points out in the first focus group discussion that it

takes being true to yourself before you can be in a position to listen. Being true to who you are, she says, does not have to do with living according to what is seen to be acceptable in society. In fact, my collaborators challenge just what it means to listen to someone, what it means to be respectful of another and what makes for a functional relationship. Being wrapped up in what society dictates as being right or wrong, can be another example of a way in which certain perspectives come to be seen as too rigid. In this case, rather than the predominant perspective being based upon personal experience, it can be related to perspectives we have learned in our family or in our culture. Sometimes there is a certain layering to the perspectives that guide the way in which we behave in any situation. Knowing who you are beyond these sorts of learned perspectives is referred to as being aware of one's "basic nature." Sylvie provides us with a definition of the term basic nature in the following quote which is part of a discussion taken from the first focus group.

Sylvie: For me it's more the aspect related to not doing what people expect me to do, to not act how they expect, but to act in the way I am in my nature. If you feel you have to intervene, or give a lesson and they say "That's not very nice" and you respond, "I'm not nice", they're in shock cause it's not something you say. And they look at you like you're an alien because you can say that and you're fine with that. And people don't know how to understand that. And they ask questions. They realize you don't fit in their boxes and it's interesting to see how things change, starting with that. (Something falls from the table beside Sylvie, banging, and people in the room start laughing, "It really does create movement", Rebecca says)

This is a good example of what Mathieu suggests is the experience and direction in Shamanism, to shift perceptions at the beginning of this section. In the interview I conducted with Sylvie, we explored this topic further:

Sarah: So in Shamanism you don't have to be nice? Because that brings up for me the idea of good and bad and being nice is good. And where does being respectful fit in? Are you saying that it depends on who you are?

Sylvie: You really have to think about it. If you don't take the time to tell someone what you really think, to say where you see the imbalances in someone, you don't have very much respect for the other. If you take the time to explain what you see like "I see this, this and this that is not acceptable" and then there is a discussion about this, your perspective and theirs. Then you are considering that the other is worthy of your time and able to make a change. When you take the time to do this it is because you believe that there can be movement- change- and you believe that there can be something better. So even if you don't necessarily have to be nice...sometimes it passes well but nothing happens and sometimes when you are more direct, when you aren't nice it gives the energy necessary that brings about a change.

Sarah: And when you are having these sorts of discussions, you aren't telling the other what to do, you're pointing out instead that something isn't working here. That is how I see it, at least.

Sylvie: Yes, that's it.

This way of interacting with people around us is similar to that which Jean-Guy Goulet discusses in relation with the Dene Tha. The Dene believe that interactions are to consider the following: "The right to one's autonomy, and the obligation to respect the autonomy of others-specifically, the obligation not to diminish other people's ability to realize their goals on their own, including the acquisition of personal knowledge...(1998:37)" By sharing my story or my perspective I am not imposing it on another but rather seeking to be in authentic relation with them, meaning that I am true to who I am in my basic nature, and willing to be present to who they are according to their story and experience.

As I have been describing, Shamanism has to do with interrelations and the words that you choose will have an impact in your environment. If you are not choosing words that are compatible with your basic nature, the impact that will be created will exist

regardless and will create a chain of events that may take you further and further from what is true and essential to you. By trying to be as close to one's basic nature at all times, that which is manifested should remain compatible with what you are choosing to have in your life or on the sorts of relationships you are interested in having with those around you. In my experience the more that I use the word family when I refer to my relationships with the members of the community the more I feel connected to them, the more I trust and the more I love. According to my basic nature I am interested in having people in my life upon whom I can depend. My language daily when speaking of this "family" I have chosen needs to reflect this reality I wish to nourish in my life.

Being true to one's basic nature was often brought up by the people I interviewed as being an important part of the Shamanic experience in the community. It was often followed up by the idea that while they believe it is possible that this sort of experience is found by other people in different sorts of settings, they have not encountered it elsewhere to the degree that they have in the Okwaho community. Several people described their happiness to have found this sort of community. Rebecca, in particular, often expresses her appreciation on this matter as she is one of the oldest members of the community. She told me that when she finally met Lisa she had no more time to waste looking for where she belonged. She says that she wishes she had known about this way of living earlier in her life.

According to Lyon in Shamanism throughout North America the Shamanic experience is centered around disease and death (in Kroeber, p.331:1907). A relation to death and the life cycle was often mentioned by my collaborators in relation to the feeling of being connected to something greater than one's self. In the following quote I have

chosen from Mathieu's interview, we will encounter the perspective of how we as individuals are related to the cycle of life. This connection reveals our place within the cycle of birth, growth, death and regeneration. He suggests that everyone and everything is somehow related to this, though many chose not to focus on this fact. Mathieu suggests that those who do choose to observe their lives from this perspective are Shamanic. When community members speak about defining Shamanism it often comes down to seeing how we are a part of our environment, and being aware of the impact we have and the ways our environment and circumstances affect our perspectives. This is related to circular perspectives.

Mathieu: Some are focussed on living, others are focussed on death, when you see people who are focused on life and death there is a good chance that they are in connection with the Shaman.

Sarah: With one or the other?

Mathieu: I am currently focused on the time that is left

Sarah: To live?

Mathieu: Yes

Sarah: So you are focussed on death

Mathieu: Yes

Sarah: So someone who isn't Shamanic is focused on what?

Mathieu: Anything else. Someone who is Shamanic is focused on the circles, tangible reality. Everyday there are people born and people die and you aren't detached from that: you are a part of renewal and degeneration. I am a part of that, I am part of the cycles. There is a beginning, an end, a start, a finality. When you start to get away from that you are no longer in a space of survival.

From Mathieu's description of Shamanism it appears that anyone can be Shamanic and that this can be true at one moment and not so at the next. He also illustrates the sorts of themes that can be present in our lives depending upon the perspective we choose to take.

When we are living our lives from the perspective of life and death we are in relation with our own survival both at a personal level and in relation with a collective and universal level. If we chose to examine our life in another way this theme of survival may not be present at all in the way we think about our experience. While Mathieu's approach seems to be quite fluid depending upon the perspective that we take at any given time, Lisa presented me with a perspective that seems much more definitive. Rather than suggesting that everyone can be Shamanic depending upon the perspective that they choose to take on their experience, Lisa speaks of being called, being committed and belonging in this way of being. In a sense, she says it is a part of your basic nature. It is a part of who you are, you have been chosen to live these experiences in relation to the Dreaming. It is your destiny.

Lisa: I don't believe the Dreamtime is a space for everyone. I believe you are chosen to do that, and you have to say yes. It's a path, a journey, there are stages. You were chosen and you walk that path and at some point you can't do anything else. You become that. I remember at the beginning I didn't call myself a dreamer, but an ambassador of the Dreaming. Say you live in Spain and you are an ambassador, you live in Canada but you represent Spain. I live on this planet but I represent that space. If you don't understand me, then you aren't Spanish; you aren't in connection with the dream. It's not everyone who will visit the Spanish embassy. It's not everyone who needs that.

For sure I would like everyone to be Shamanic, that everyone would follow the Dreaming. I would love everyone to share the pleasure. I think it's normal for people to want to share what they find brings them happiness with everyone. But at the same time I don't want too many to put their nose in that because it will contaminate it, only those who are supposed to be there, who are called. You have to be alert, to understand the value of what we preserve. Sometimes you even have to keep those out we love in order to preserve that which we love in its pure state. We all think the same way here, to preserve the paradise, to preserve the dream time and you have to be in a very specific state and I think an important question would be what that state is. For one, you need to be real, to be present, you can't be in the Dreaming if you aren't real with yourself. As soon as you fall in shit, the dream kicks you out. It has its own rules, its own way of preserving itself. Mathieu said that if you stop working on yourself, if you stop learning, you don't deserve to be a Prof. If you look at me and say "I'm perfect I don't have to

learn anymore"... you can't stop learning and keep teaching, they go together. No one is better than another. I see on internet that people have expectations towards the Shaman, they are expecting perfection. But that isn't it. Not allowed emotions, not allowed desires, not allowed, not allowed, and that doesn't make any sense, Shamanism is in relation with the basic nature. The best Shamans have made the greatest errors and lived profoundly and learnt from it. You can be a Shaman without making all the terrible errors. No one said you have to fit in a certain box. I think there are important states of being: you're allowed to have a life, touch people. I remember one of my first guides said, "Keep your faults because it is your faults that keep you anchored here. Swear sometimes, Drink sometimes." And I found it interesting. You need to be anchored and you can't learn if you don't have faults. And the spirit that was talking was an alcoholic. And later I met Oceana, and other traditionalists who were alcoholics. They kept their faults, something that worked with them, so that it provided an attachment here to the planet. We are very naive individuals here. (Focus Group 1)

Lisa speaks here about the need to be constantly learning, constantly evolving in order to remain in connection with the Dreaming. She speaks about a part of this journey being related to being real which means recognizing that we are imperfect, that we are flawed and have desires. It was pointed out at one of the classes that people have a tendency to see themselves as being either at the right place or at the wrong place. We tend to see ourselves as being imbalanced or balanced, good or bad. Lisa was explaining that in Shamanism such a dichotomous approach isn't useful. Dichotomies limit the amount of information that can be gathered on the relationship that is occurring at the time and the sort of role the different actors in the scenario are taking on. When it comes to the Dreaming it is important to be able to see as many perspectives as possible and being a part of a collective and working with other dreamers who are also seeking to change forms can be very useful in this regard. Some of the most powerful Shamans, Lisa said were those who were able to work with their flaws and remain authentic. A Shaman is not someone who is perfect in the sense that they never make mistakes, but that when they do make mistakes they learn from it and explore their experience from many

different perspectives. They have a quality of presence that I will be discussing further in the next section that is compatible with a profound approach to experience.

Shaman

The Shaman is the breath of creation (Lisa).

The Shaman of the community, Lisa, or Okwaho was chosen and initiated by First Nations elders over 20 years ago. The initiation took 8 years to complete and Okwaho is the name for the Shaman who is contained in Lisa's body. Shaman is the term used to refer to what Lisa calls "the breath of creation" which exists in the environment and has the ability to be contained in the body of certain individuals for certain periods of time. The longer the person has lived in relation with this energy the longer they are able to contain it in their body. I will be exploring this in more depth and from different perspectives in Chapter 4 when I incorporate ways it was described during my fieldwork. The name "Okwaho" was the name given to this carrier and is translated as "wolf" in the Iroquois language. Wolf is one of Lisa's totems. The Okwaho community does not believe that there are many different Shaman spirits or breaths but rather that there is one breath of creation and that it passes through chosen carriers, and exists in the environment. The Shaman, according to the teachings of the Medicine Wheel in the Okwaho community, is found in the center, while the community members occupy various roles around the Wheel. The Shaman learns how to work with the breath of creation and disperses it throughout the community and those she touches in her life. Through her stories and attitude, those who come into contact with the Shaman are "touched" or changed somehow. If the community were the body, the Shaman is the

heart assuring that the blood is being pumped throughout the body. This analogy was used by Gabrielle, one of my collaborators during an informal discussion.

“The “breath” is a channel to the animation of the heart (Walter & Friedman, p.332:2004).” Or, in other words, the Shaman is able to awaken the life in those around her through her attitude and presence. The “breath” in this example is related to the Shaman’s reality, where in a previous section it was connected to the Medicine Wheel, it remains a term which refers to the sacred.

Over the years, in scholarly writing, the understanding of the Shaman has been seen to shift dramatically from one “who can manipulate the weather; who is considered both malevolent and benevolent; who is both feared and respected within their culture; who must experience a radical form of a calling; who can manipulate their appearance(that is, shape-shift); who at any moment may lose their special abilities if particular physical and metaphysical precautions are not taken; who helps with the subsistence regime of the culture; and who partakes in many other activities to the present understanding consisting of techniques that are explicitly focused on healing and that almost any individual can perform.(Jones, 2006:11)” It is difficult for me to understand what happened to all of the various, majestic abilities the Shaman of the past was believed to possess and why Shamanic experience has come to be diminished in this manner. I believe that the Shaman continues to possess all of these qualities mentioned here by Jones.

I find that the shift in understanding of what it means to be a Shaman has been confusing and misinformed. I would suggest that while the techniques used by

practitioners of Shamanism could be considered Shamanic, one's ability to become disciplined in the utilization of these abilities does not automatically give that individual the role of Shaman within a community. There are individuals, like Lisa, who undergo extensive initiation processes in order to be able to contain this energy for certain periods of time and for purposes related to the collective in which they are in service. The role of the Shaman, as I understand it, is a role of service and teaching and has little, if anything, to do with personal advancement or gain. Others who are in relation with the Shaman in the community can live in a Shamanic way and use Shamanic techniques.

I found in my interviews that very few people ventured near the topic of the Shaman on their own. When it came to interviewing Lisa, the Shaman of the community, she said that this actually made a lot of sense because very few people understand the term through their own experience. It is too big and too vast to be defined very easily.

Lisa: Not everyone is walking the path but it is in the word, Shamanism, you can't go away from it, the ism, is something that is constructed around a particular role. Shaman is the Buddha of whatever we call it- not a religion- but our spirituality if you want to call it that. But then we're not allowed to talk about it, and it brings you back to the oral and the written word. It's so big that you can't talk about it. The written word is rigid and the oral allows you a bigger space but when it comes to Shaman even the oral isn't big enough, there are 3 types of language, the written, oral and empirical and the Shaman fits with the empirical, and it has to be said.

It came to be important during the time I was analyzing my data that I needed to return to Lisa in order to have a clearer idea of what she had meant here by the term "empirical." She said that the Shaman's experience has to do with what is observable- with evidence- and that while being in relation with an invisible reality of spirits the Shaman is also aware of how the invisible realm exists within the visible reality. She says that we live it through our experience everyday and that it can be hard to express in language. It needs

to be lived in the body. Part of what she teaches has to do with teaching individuals to become more present to their experience in each moment. This means being more present to thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. By communicating these experiences with others, common ground is established.

Having a Shaman in your environment changes the way that you look at things in your life, and changes one's experience of one's body, according to several of my collaborators. Guillaume described how he experiences a change in his body when he arrives at the house of the Shaman, which is not something, he says, he has experienced with other people in his life. It is as though the house itself has a certain magnetism about it and that the experience lived within it is somehow more profound. Several of my collaborators have suggested that the house itself carries the energy of the Shaman. This reveals another perspective on Shamanism, on what it means to be a Shaman and is a broader way of approaching it, not just about the individual body, but extended to the house itself.

Guillaume: Sometimes it's things I thought in my week but when I arrive [at the Shaman's house] it sets it off, which can be difficult because you are often faced with your difficulties. But it shows you your strengths and weaknesses in an exaggerated form and it can be easier to work on them because you see them. What can be difficult is not being resistant, which means you have to work even harder. There are tools you gain, and sometimes there are other forces. There is your will but sometimes it blocks and, at a certain point, you have to let go and come back to it a few months later.

This was also quite present for Aurelie who has recently moved to live with the Shaman and has been faced with the necessary adjustment to her lifestyle.

Aurelie: Before, I lived alone with the horses and my dog. I had no idea of all the work I would have to do to be able to live with others. I still have a lot of work to do. It's even more particular to live in the house of the Shaman. There is a lot to think about. Like recently, when it's cold I don't wear enough. In France I was

used to that. I worked outside all the time. But now I need to be aware of the Shaman, because if I get sick it's dangerous for the Shaman. Now I do it for the Shaman, for her survival, and it's about being aware of the way we impact one another. When I arrived here I realized how individual I am in my way of being...in the Shaman's house there is really an anchored collective energy, a spirit of family which demands a constant presence, a commitment to family.

In order to explore the way in which the Shaman is considered to nourish this family energy, I will now turn to Gabrielle's definition of what it is to be in relation with someone who carries the breath of the Shaman and the ways in which this person teaches members of the community to be balanced. I asked Gabrielle "What is a Shaman?" Gabrielle answers this question by describing how she perceives the Shaman playing her role when in relation with someone experiencing "a process."

Gabrielle: It's someone who loves, who listens. It's really like a perfect being. Anything that we do she always has the right attitude to tell us what we should do. And even when we make an error, right away afterwards she's focused on solutions. One example I have was with Rebecca at home. She was hard on Rebecca. And a minute later, when Rebecca had understood the process, Lisa spent an hour with her opening her artwork. It's like sometimes people like so much blaming someone else. And what Lisa does is different. She says "You made a mistake" and then she moves on. Why do we make mistakes? I believe, because we don't nourish our dreams enough. So she helps us to nourish a dream so that we won't be caught up with mistakes. I had never met anyone like that before. It's really cool to be in relation with the Shaman.

A "process" was explained by Mathieu as being caused "by a surplus of unused vitality." I find myself in process when I have trouble being clear about what I am living and what my role is in a given situation. It is often related to a lack of presence which has led to several separate experiences becoming superimposed to the point where I have difficulty making sense of my experience. In order to work through my process I need to return to the last moment when I felt clear and find out in what moment did I stop feeling clear and why. In the example above Gabrielle is explaining how Lisa helps Rebecca to redirect her vitality. Rebecca's artwork is something that she fed over the years, pouring vitality

into it, pouring desire and passion into it and then at some point abandoning it. All that vitality was at one point created and nourished and the fact that she has turned her back on it now doesn't mean that what she created doesn't exist anymore. It is as though she "started a Wheel" that she never completed and to have an accumulation of Wheels that are in movement can be draining. We use the phrase "start a Wheel" to indicate that energy has been directed in a new direction. For example we have started a new project or we have begun questioning an aspect of our lives in a particular and new way. In the example of asking new questions, we believe that the universe will respond and that there will be a continuation or answers provided related to the questions whether or not we are present to the response or to the opportunities created by this new Wheel. By becoming aware of the Wheels that she has set in motion, she is then in a position to choose to put an end to certain Wheels or to nourish them again and complete them. This is an example of a process. The more dreams that are brought to resolution, the clearer we are able to be. And it is this relationship with resolution that can bring about what people may term well-being, which is a topic I will be exploring in Chapter 4. The Medicine Wheel is a tool that we use in the community to help us see the distance between the different perspectives which is helpful when we are working through processes. I will be explaining this further in the next section.

The Medicine Wheel

When we build a Medicine Wheel we begin by placing the 4 anchors, one in each direction. The numbers next to the stones indicate which stones are to be placed first when building a Wheel. After placing the 4 anchors, we go nearer to the center in order to place the circle of the 7 clans, then to the east in order to place the 12 stones for the

elements which form the cross and then finally to the northeast to begin placing the circle of the 12 moons. This version of the Medicine Wheel is the one that is used in Central and Eastern Canada, made up of 36 stones. In a calendar year there are twelve to thirteen moons, a full moon every 29 and a half days. Some common ways to look at the Medicine Wheel are from a cosmological or a natural perspective. According to a natural perspective the first moon of the year is in January and according to the Okwaho community, is referred to as the moon of welcoming. Each moon has a particular theme. From a cosmological perspective, the moon cycles are determined by the blue moon cycle which occurs every 2.7 years. After a blue moon the Wheel begins again with welcoming regardless of which month of the year we are in. Atkinson has spoken about the difficulty when exploring Shamanism of finding any way to perceive of it as existing "in a unitary and homogeneous form(1992:308)" I believe that it is related to this tendency I am describing. To assume that that which was relevant one night would be relevant the next would be a rigid approach to the understanding of phenomenon. The context at the time needs to be taken into consideration and according to the Okwaho community context includes natural and cosmological realities, such as the weather, the wind and the stars.

According to the Encyclopaedia of Native American Shamanism (Lyon: 1998) the Medicine Wheel refers to a particular stone arrangement in Wyoming that dates back to ancient times. No time period is specified and according to the Encyclopedia, its original purpose is no longer understood. Within the Okwaho community, the Medicine Wheel is viewed as a map that explains how everything is interrelated in the environment, both on the micro and macro level. We refer to it as a map because each stone is positioned in

relation with the cardinal directions. The Medicine Wheel is said to exist within everything and reflects that which exists in the invisible realm in a material sense. At each gathering of the community, a Medicine Wheel is constructed in the center of the room. Each Medicine Wheel is unique and imparts a unique story to those who are sensitive to the magnetism created by the configuration of stones. At the Thursday night class taught by Lisa, she explains ways in which the Medicine Wheel can be seen to be present in everyday life. Lisa's grandfather, when she was young, taught her how to make a Medicine Wheel and she has been teaching and exploring this tradition for over 20 years.

During the interviews, I found some people were more able than others to provide definitions for the Medicine Wheel. Though everyone learns about the Medicine Wheel and talks about it as being an important tool in their lives, three of my collaborators are considered "guardians of the Wheel" and are better positioned to discuss this in depth because they have followed intensive instruction specifically related to this role. These guardians are Gabrielle, Sylvie and Lisa. Here are the descriptions they provided:

Gabrielle: The Medicine Wheel is a tool for daily living that is made from the 4 directions. We make it with the stones. It exists in everything and everything that exists is based upon the Medicine Wheel. Take the planets going around the sun, it is a Medicine Wheel. We do a lot in circles together, our planet follows a direction and we are interconnected with the other planets. We make Medicine Wheels with the stones, one in the east, south, west and north and that creates a sort of vortex of energy and that energy can be used to create something. I'm interested in understanding how to work with that energy. Making a Wheel often helps me have answers, to create things. When we make a Wheel and we put an intention in it we use the energy created towards something in particular and we see what is created. We want to understand how matter works. Also, in daily life we can see the Wheel a little bit all around us, like a map, we are walking in different roles, different elements. I have a peace keeper, for instance, and it's in a certain direction, and it helps me to know where I am, and not get carried away

by my emotions, I have distance from what I am living. It's a way to always have distance while knowing where we are in our day.

Sylvie offered another perspective on the Medicine Wheel, speaking more specifically about how she sees it in her life every day. The photograph I have included is that of a Wheel that was made by Lisa's daughter and one of her daughter's friends. The 4 anchors are not present in the picture and are placed outside of the Wheel in the 4 cardinal directions. Each stone inside the Wheel represents a particular perspective. Sylvie refers to several of these perspectives in her explanation of how she approaches the Wheel below. In the classes that Lisa teaches, a great deal of information is provided as to the sorts of attitudes and perspectives that can be found in each direction. For example, if a certain element is present in daily life, such as introspection, we know that we are standing in the west of the Wheel, and we pay attention to the impression that comes from this perspective. This way we can look clearly at what we are living aware that we are in introspection which has a very different impression than would clarity, which is in the east, or wisdom, in the north. Sylvie talks about ways in which she has learnt to apply the teachings on the Medicine Wheel to her everyday life.

Sylvie: At the beginning when we learn about the Wheel we learn about it being 36 stones that speak about everything that exists. It is connected to the 4 directions...Trust, for example, is a stone in the south and knowing this, I will have an idea that it is related to having tools and being in action [associated with the Southern anchor]. This way I have an idea how I can best work on trust as I refer to the Medicine Wheel. When I work on trust it has nothing to do with things being clear which is in the east, or finding myself attractive [related to the 3rd moon in the NE quadrant], but I will know that it has to do with how I am with my truth, and with my tools, which are in the south and I have an idea of how to work on it. Sometimes the Wheel appears at work, for example, with a girl that always gets reactions from everyone. All of a sudden I understand that she has a role, that she is an initiator [not a stone on the Wheel, referred to as a wind or role and found in the NW] and it's someone who looks for the difficulties in people and puts her finger on it. When she does this she gets a reaction, brings it to the surface. She has a tendency to joke around. But she pushes her jokes too far until

everyone is reacting. When I observe the results from the point of view of the Medicine Wheel I realize that there is power in that, whether or not it is balanced (the machine in the back of the café where this interview took place starts making a lot of noise at this moment and as we are no longer able to hear each other speak, we start laughing) Synchronically the blender is telling us that there is something strong.

Sarah: So, all that noise is the Dreaming?

Sylvie: Yes, a synchronicity like that will come from the Dreaming. I speak and provide a movement but I don't know how it will manifest itself. But it will manifest itself. There is definitely a connection between the dream and this reality of the blender.

This passage illustrates how the concept of the Medicine Wheel and the role of the dreamer are put to use every day by the members of the community. It is quite natural for us, when amongst members of the community, to point out to each other the synchronicities present in our environment that are related to collective themes or dreams in movement. In this case the blender making a lot of noise as Sylvie talks about her experience with her colleague at work is considered to be a synchronicity which supports her story. It is one way that we work together and bring consciousness to our stories as each individual may not be present to all the details they are living, but when working together we gather a great deal more details and therefore have access to a greater degree of consciousness. At times synchronicities seem to be quite magical. For example, during the process of writing this thesis I went out one night with a friend of mine who has a dog. We spent a lot of time during the walk talking about the benefits of having a dog and I expressed that it had been years since I had lived with a dog and that I missed this. The next morning I met up with one of my roommates and started talking about my walk the night before, specifically mentioning this discussion about having a dog and she started to laugh. She said "but Sarah, we have a dog!" I gave her a strange look and replied "I don't get it." Then she started explaining that Mathieu had been watching a

dog that had been hanging around the neighbourhood for awhile. That morning the dog had followed Lisa home and they planned to send it to the SPCA. Instead, Mathieu decided to call the members of the Blue House to see if we felt we could take on the responsibility of having a dog. My phone had been on silence and I was the only one who hadn't heard about the story yet. I called Mathieu immediately to tell him that "Yes, I am ready! I have been in the dream since yesterday!" For the past 3 weeks now we have been happily adjusting to being new dog owners. This is what we refer to as a synchronicity.

Anthropologists Caroline Humphrey and Urgunge Onon who have been involved in collaboration on anthropological projects related to Shamanism in Mongolia and Inner Asia speak in their book, Urgunge's Way of how the same reality repeats itself in various forms. In my example above, the dream of the dog repeated itself in my walk the night before and in the experience of the Shaman the next morning. Urgunge states that "In Shamanism there is no such thing as past, because everything continues to be, only in different forms.(2003:232)" This is related to how we approach synchronicities and the ways in which elements which are repeated in the visible reality are seen to be related to the invisible or Dreaming realm. Though my example is of two visible realities, many synchronicities are in relationship with night dreams.

The Medicine Wheel that we work with, as I have mentioned, is made up of 36 stones arranged in a particular configuration and each stone represents a different perspective that can be taken on any situation. Each individual, through experience, attaches different sorts of significance to the various stones or perspectives and it is this

experience that informs the interpretations they will have of their dreams both in the waking and sleeping realities. Urgunge Onon speaks of Shamanism as being related to “an intelligence in ourselves and also out among the things in the world and merged with them....`shamanism` is unified for each individual by their choices and empathies, which establish their actions as path-making events in their various landscapes (in Harvey, 2003:233).” According to this Shamanism allows for a certain flexibility to personalize the teachings in relation with each individuals experience of the wheel in their life. Through the classes, Okwaho shares her perspectives of the significance of the perspectives and interrelations represented in the Medicine Wheel, and each student is encouraged to share how their life experience has revealed alternative perspectives to them. Sometimes alternative perspectives come about through everyday experiences in the waking reality, but quite often it is through our relationship with the Dreamtime that we learn to see our reality through new and inspiring ways.

Dreamtime

The dream is something that happens in my body, it is corporal, dense, geologic, your capacity to manifest, to create events, to manifest so that things will happen, participating in creation (Mathieu).

We often refer to ourselves, in the Okwaho community as a group of dreamers. It is one of the major uniting factors. According to the Medicine Wheel there are 8 roles and the dreamer is one of these. As I have mentioned, each individual has several roles and can explore these various roles in their lives and within the community but there are not classes devoted specifically to the roles apart from those offered related to the dreamer. At these classes we learn about discipline related to this role, we share our experiences that we believe to be connected to the Dreaming and we plan collective dreams together.

When we decided several years ago to buy what is now referred to as the Blue House, this is an example of the realization of a collective dream.

In the following quote Katya speaks about ways in which life is related to the Dreaming through stories that are located in the cells of the body. I had asked her how she would define the Dreamtime.

Katya: I define it as it is in each living cell, we could say it is in everything that is alive everything we touch and in everything around us. The objects and each being dreams. Life is a part of life. It's something I can define as information at a cellular level. In each cell there is a dream. Depending upon that with which you are in contact, a different dream can be awoken. We could say that we are made of dreams and a part of it. I talk of animals, objects, all of it. There are living cells if it's organic. Each cell has a different story and a different teaching.

Katya introduces here the idea that the Dreaming takes place at a cellular level. It is an experience common to everything that is part of life, she says, every living organism dreams, not just humans. From this perspective, interrelations in Dreamtime can be seen to exist on another level than interrelations in the visible world. The Dreamtime, according to the Okwaho community, refers to a reality or realities that coexist with our waking experience in everyday life. We believe that the dream exists in the silences, in between heart beats, or in the invisible realm. In order to understand the dreams that are "in movement" we need to pay attention to repetitions in our daily life as the visible world provides us with an echo of these realities. In the waking reality we can recognize synchronicities which reveal the Dreaming which I discussed earlier as being visible evidence of what is taking place in the Dreamtime.

In the following quotation Mathieu presents us with another corporal perspective of the dreamer. He also speaks of time as being related to the dreamer's experience, which has often been connected to discussions of the Dreamtime.

Mathieu: We all have a biological clock and if you are attentive to this biological clock you are in connection with your heart beat. This means that you are automatically in connection with the Dreaming. The dream is the time that passes in your physical body, you are in connection with that. If you are in connection with your biological clock, for example you know you wake up at 6am every morning and you add your heart beat. Your biological clock plus your heart beat brings you to the Dreaming and you are able to travel in the space. How is this useful? In my everyday life, it gives me indications as to what I have to do. It warns me when something isn't working. It gives me all sorts of information on my environment. It permits me to act from a distance in situations that preoccupy me, and allows me to travel without moving and live things I couldn't live otherwise. It's a question of intention. The time that passes in your body, your heart beat, your intention, gives you your path. My motivation when it comes to Dreaming is adventure, it's a way to renew myself constantly. Through this I find the paths of evolution, I am always in connection with evolution, it gives me access to this, to a sensation of eternity, to new openings. It permits me to explore realities that I wouldn't be able to explore otherwise. It creates a connection, which means that I am intimate with myself and with everything around me, with the invisible, between me and the center of the earth and what is outside of the earth and what is happening on the planet. Depends on your intention but sometimes it is to be in connection with intentions that are greater than you and be attentive of where you belong in relation to those intentions, or when you aren't a part of it. Our world, I find, is often lacking sense and the Dreaming allows me to make sense of the empty spaces, the blockages, what isn't clear. It permits you to understand what you're dealing with, what's happening, to make your intuition functional.

Mathieu explains how the Dreaming helps him to make sense of his life. In my experience, the perspective we take on the Dreaming allows for a particular kind of intimacy and collective approach to how we experience our daily reality. We base ourselves in impressions, so that, in a night dream there could be a character who leaves us with the same impression as someone existing in our life, who in turn reminds us of someone from our past. In the Dreaming there are links connecting these individuals, they are a part of the same constellation, if we consider each one of them a star in the solar system. I can approach this from the perspective of holes which I explored earlier on. There have been times in my life when I have lost contact with certain people for various reasons and this has created "empty spaces" in my life. Based in this approach to the dreaming, when I meet someone who wakes up the same impression in my body, this

hole is filled. I consider that this new person is, at a dream level, the same as the person I miss, and that by making a connection with this person, I am once again connected to the other. Rather than the focus being the other person, I focus instead on the part of myself that is awakened when in relation with that impression and it is this part of me that I miss when I feel there is a hole. It is very much based upon my own experience. At the same time this creates a feeling of continuity rather than disjunction over time, a notion introduced in the literature section when Amit discusses community and migration. Amit refers to how constant migration of people's across borders can lead to a sense of isolation and individuality. In order to find community within such a constantly changing world, I find that this approach, from a Dreaming perspective, of the ways in which individuals can be interconnected allows for a sense of community and continuity.

Another example of the way in which people outside of me come to be seen as reflections of parts of myself is when I am inspired by an actor or a singer. I have a tendency to idolize people who inspire me and create a persona around the little I know or have read about the individual in question. I have a tendency of putting a lot of emphasis on what I love in this other person that I would like to have more of in my own life. Mathieu explained to me that for as long as I see it as existing outside of myself I can never experience it. He said that if I was able to recognize the particular strength of the other that inspired me it was because it existed within me. The relationship with the singer existed in that case in order to awaken the impression inside of me. It was then up to me to nourish this part of me until it became more predominant and visible as I projected it as being in my idol. Rather than the relationship with the idol being limited

as they would change and embody some other impression in the future, by awakening it within myself I would always have access to it, eternally.

In the following passage, Lisa speaks about how she experiences the Dreamtime as being related to eternity and time:

Lisa: I think it is related to time, a space, where everything lived in that time touches the present and the eternity, that's what it means and I think we all had an experience like that, you live something and it's like you have 100 years in one week. I think when we speak of Dreamtime it's different than Dreaming, you live something, an event, a moment in a relationship, an experience and that moment isn't explainable, it makes everything vibrate, all your cells, for that moment everything is perfect, some people I met, the profoundness of intimacy, for one hour, all I learnt about them, it is as though we spent a life together, and to this day to have that person on my mind because that moment touched me so deeply. (Focus group1)

This is an example of what members of the community speak of when they suggest that Okwaho experiences her life in a profound way. As Mathieu states, it is the Shaman's quality of presence that is inspiring, or as Gabrielle mentions, her ability to listen and her capacity to love. Due to the presence the Shaman has towards a single moment, profoundness can be achieved, similar in certain ways to the way in which remaining present to a single theme can allow for a profoundness of experience related to a multitude of perspectives. In this example her ability to listen seems to be connected to her capacity to love. In my discussions with both of them, which I will be returning to in Chapter 4, they spoke of how they saw Lisa nourishing people's dreams and how the Shaman's attitude had an impact upon both the individual and the collective as each person could be inspired to nourish their own dreams and become autonomous in their life through being present. Here Lisa continues to talk about the way in which one action in the Dreamtime can have an impact on future situations.

Lisa: When we talk about impact we often see the negative, but the Dreamtime is like a constructive nuclear bomb, it touches like a wave and continues to touch. It's an enormous wave of something and touches until it has finished the wave. It can be a lifetime, an hour, a week, a minute. I see that image of an enormous wave that touches everything and impacts everything and in that moment there is past present and future and a moment of immortality or eternity. And it is unexplainable even though I've just explained it. For those who have lived it it's understood and for those who haven't lived it they will understand it when they live it (Focus Group2).

It is impossible to know the implications of our actions today. As Lisa mentions here each action in the Dreaming can continue to have an impact for years to come. In the community we often speak about taking responsibility for our actions on a daily basis because even the smallest actions can leave an imprint for the future generations. We need to be aware of the sort of heritage we are leaving behind. In the next section I will be exploring some of the themes that came up during my research that I feel communicate the experience of the members of the Okwaho community.

Chapter 4- Common Ground

As I began my thesis research I sought to examine how the practices and worldview of the Okwaho community allow the participants to reconceptualise their roles with one another and in the broader society as part of everyday life. Before beginning my field work I argued that they did so in an attempt to attain well being. I am passionate about the way we live, the way we approach situations and the ways my involvement in this community has changed my life.

This thesis research has very much been about my interest to bridge my many interests, the part of me that wants to be a scholar with the part of me that lives as a Shamanic dreamer. Within the text I move back and forth from being a part of the community and speaking as “we”, as a dreamer, to being an anthropologist studying this phenomenon and referring to “them”, the dreamers, as being separate from myself. I find there to be such a refreshing simplicity to the way that we live in the community, to the way we interact with each other and with our environment. It inspires me every day and for the last 8 years of my life, since having moved to Montreal. Based in my own experience I began asking my collaborators questions in order to determine how their perspective and experience differed from my own.

In this chapter I describe the common themes that I discovered. These common themes I will be exploring I feel are interrelated as well-being as defined by my collaborators is achieved through resolution, healing and listening to each other’s stories. Another important aspect of attaining wellness is to discover the roles of each member or the community in relation to the roles of others. Language and perspective are important

themes that come up regularly when learning the discipline of a dreamer. These are topics that will be discussed throughout this chapter.

Well-being

Life didn't make sense to me, something was missing, it was incomplete. I felt incomplete. I didn't find my accomplishment. Finally, I met someone Shamanic and it interested me right away. Love at first sight. Everything in that way of life spoke to me. It corresponded with what I felt, who I was, who I am now. I found myself being functional in that way of life; circular life(Mathieu)

One of the themes that came to be central as I was preparing for my fieldwork was related to different ways of defining well being. I asked each of my collaborators how being a member of this community had impacted their well-being and I was met with a myriad of responses that fit with the sorts of expectations I had. By well-being I meant happiness and a sense of security related to belonging to a group. However, at the second focus group I organized, questions were raised related to the language I was employing and the sorts of words that they did not feel represented their collective experience adequately. Well-being was one of the terms the focus group discussed and it became obvious that the word needed to be either defined in a particular way or replaced if I were to use this as a concept to explain why the members had come together in this Shamanic way of life. I have decided to explore the term in more depth rather than removing it from my analysis as I have found this discussion to provide more clarity as to why the members of this family have chosen to come together, as well as providing an example of the ways in which we choose to interact with language in very precise ways.

Prior to this focus group, I had been reflecting on my use of the term “well-being” after an interview I had conducted with Maria, one of the members of the community. At the time of the interview she was living what we refer to as “a process.” The process in

this case was related to her not feeling as though she was able to find her role in society or within the collective. During the interview, when I would ask questions about well being, she was talking about how happy she is to be a member of the community and how practical she finds it to be in her life. This seemed to contradict what I saw of what we refer to as “her experience” during the rest of the day I spent with her as she was often in tears related to her unsure future, and a lack of clarity and confidence related to her talents and strengths. She was not what I consider to be “well” during this time as she was often emotional and unclear and I began to wonder how she would define this term.

I have since spoken to several of my collaborators on this topic. They pointed out that regardless of whether or not they feel that they are well within the community and where they feel they belong, they continue to be faced with difficulties in their lives outside the community. It is an ongoing process and cannot be expected to be perfect. They continue to have days when they feel down, or when they doubt themselves, and they continue to experience conflict in their lives. Several people spoke of what they considered to be a sense of improvement to their life since living with the community due to a sense of increased resolution. When faced with a conflict or difficulty, they felt that there was a commitment to resolving the issue rather than using other techniques like avoidance or denial. Based in the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the Dreamtime, we take the perspective that if we don't do the work required to resolve the situation this time around, it will repeat itself, and we don't have control over the form it may take. Doing the work means exploring the issues that come to the surface and being present to these experiences. The more presence we have towards our everyday life, as Maria was attempting to do by staying in the feeling of loss and lack of direction long enough to

explore the experience from several different perspectives, the stronger we are and the better we understand ourselves and our relationship with others in our environment.

Another perspective that my collaborators shared with me on this issue is in relation to healing. According to the Medicine Wheel both resolution and healing exist in the North of the Wheel, so while they are considered to be two distinctly different experiences, it is also considered natural that there are similarities between the two impressions. In the interview I conducted with Rebecca, she defined healing as follows:

Rebecca: Is it to no longer be attached to something that hurts, to see it as an experience and a potential and to use it as a tool. Like with an inner strength it has to do with seeing it as part of a whole. For me, that is what it is, on all levels, physical, spiritual, emotional, all the levels. That is really what I feel when I am in my healer. It is how I act with others, and how the healer works with me when I am in a process of healing, and am faced with my difficulties and weaknesses.

I find that this describes very well how processes can be approached within the community from the healer perspective. Gabrielle talks about how this process can work from a slightly different perspective. She talks about how our experiences are important in this process of resolution and healing. Her perspective is that of a dreamer, and relates to how we work through our processes by approaching them as stories in our lives.

When a scenario presents itself which we consider to be a repetition of a story from our past that may have been difficult or traumatic, the presence we have towards how we will live the story this time around can both alter our memory and change the way in which such an event will be experienced in the future.

Gabrielle: The memory that she had is now replaced with a story that heals, it replaces the hurt, and our body stops bringing up the memory of pain, instead bringing up a new memory. It's hard to explain, it's really about experience, you can't understand it by reading about it, you have to jump in.

If a new experience to which we are present shares enough similarities to memories we have and brings up the same impression in our body, we have the opportunity to make some adjustments so that the memory can be changed, revised or resolved. We consider that we live according to a circular reality and that the sorts of experiences that we have in our lives repeat themselves in different forms. It is inevitable that we will be faced once again with a situation if we have not succeeded in resolving the issue. In a case where healing is required the situation has not been resolved. In order to approach the next version of the same story from a different perspective often takes the input of someone who did not have a role in the scenario in previous times. This way a new perspective is introduced and as dreamers our intention is to manifest an alternative reality, in this case, one in which we would not experience the hurt we had lived in previous scenarios. And as Gabrielle says, this is understood best through direct experience.

Another topic which we discussed during this focus group was related to how each of my collaborators perceived of well-being differently. This was true whether we were talking of our experience within the community or of our experience as Shamanic people in relation to the greater society. “Abundance” and “beauty” were important terms that people used in the following passage taken from this focus group. Another commonly shared desire was a commitment to having profound experiences with everything that surrounds us. According to Lisa, part of our experience of being in relation with our environment stems from our perspective of ourselves as being other than human and not ultimately defined by our human culture and belief systems. For

example, we will often speak of ourselves in relation with our totems which I will be exploring in more depth later in this chapter.

Lisa: From the point of view of what I'm seeing I find that [being a member of the community] has impacted my wellbeing in the sense that I wasn't happy before and now I am, so in that sense it has impacted my wellbeing. But from another way of perceiving it, it has made it more difficult for me to be a part of society in all that society is, in the sense that I don't feel well like I used to in all the things that I used to do. Everyone goes to the bar and drinks after work and everyone wants to go home and doesn't want to eat alone and wants to have a mate and it's all these programs... and it's a little strange if we live like 8 people together. If you have a family you have to see them every Sunday and so you have all these conditionings so if you don't do all of these things you're not going to be well in a society where it says all these things are important. You have to have a job and so on, so being Shamanic takes away a part of the well being because you are going away from this mainstream but it gives you a sense of well being on the other hand because you don't feel alone anymore. You don't feel isolated, stupid, or intimidated. There are a lot of things that westerners feel that you don't feel as a Shamanic person. And yet I don't enjoy shopping at a mall because it's Christmas and I have to get something for my mother. I don't have that in my mind anymore. I feel better making my own gifts or choosing to give gifts that have to do with initiating people. My mind is completely different; the way that I think. I feel better about it on one hand. I feel worse about it on the other hand so I can't really tell you how it impacts my wellbeing. Me, with myself, I feel fantastic. Me, with society, I would come back to what you were saying before, I think humans are absurd, ridiculous, stupid and oh my god! (laughter). And as a Shamanic person I don't consider myself as a human being.

Sarah: when I wrote my proposal, underneath it all seemed to be this theme of wellbeing, and I realize now that no one would have mentioned it if I didn't, even if people are looking...

Lisa: for abundance and beauty

Sarah: yes, we want to learn and heal and in the north is the goal, in a sense, abundance and beauty

Lisa: I don't like the word well being. I don't think we feel well when we are in process. I don't think we feel well when we are hypersensitive. I don't think that we feel well when we are caught up in a dream and are freaking out, so I don't think I would use the word wellbeing. But I think that we look for interrelations. We look for good attitudes, and gratitude, because in our society there isn't enough of that, we look to learn and heal and we are looking for beauty and abundance. Does that define wellbeing? Perhaps for some, but not necessarily for me. Wellbeing, for me, means health; physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, collective and energetic. If we are talking about happiness, it isn't really a focus

in Shamanism, material goods isn't really a focus in Shamanism, helping others/healing others isn't really a focus in Shamanism, so I don't know if wellbeing...I don't think it's a word for us.

Sarah: I find that I do my processes faster now and it brings more resolution in my life than I would have had otherwise. And I find a certain well being but it really has a wider scope to it, something greater than my own well being.

Rebecca: The word resolution is interesting, I find, but I would put it, the question I mean, "If I wasn't in a Shamanic community..." I think the moments of confrontations, difficulty, repetitive times when I would feel alone and I wouldn't know why I am living this and how long it would stay. Questions like "will I be alone for the rest of my life?"

Lisa: I like how she puts that. If I wasn't in a Shamanic community. I would change that in the question. What would happen, how would I live if I wasn't...

Rebecca: And it is what gives the value and the appreciation, because when I think of when I was on the other side, if I can say that, each process here is difficult and we're not well in it, but there is a resolution, there is consciousness. We build something and we move to another level and yes it is worth it to live the processes just to be able to master it, and gain consciousness and grow together.

Lisa: And to believe, I think for me. To live the processes permits you to see that it is different from what there was before. We wouldn't see it otherwise, in Shamanism we say often "I don't care about you being nice, I just want you to be clear with me." It takes doing it, being a bitch and seeing that the other is still there after and you see that it's true, that it's true in Shamanism. Because in another space you could have someone who tells you the same thing but then you tell them the truth and they don't want to talk to you anymore. And then you're like "shit, but you asked for that!" While in Shamanism you see that it's true and the person is still there after and you say it's possible to be clear, to be myself and to feel well with it.

Rebecca: I know there were big parts of my life that I didn't understand why everything was happening to me and the consciousness I now have lets me understand and I don't feel alone anymore (Focus Group2)

The fact that there is this feeling of being together, and specifically for Rebecca, "not being alone" is useful in being able to live through the processes that come up in our lives. Rebecca also suggests that whether or not she is in a process at a given time she finds there to be a certain amount of "well-being" in her life as she reflects upon her experiences in the past as compared to her experience since she has been a member of

this family. It is important to clarify that not everyone is in process at any one time. Within the collective, when some need support, others are able to give it. This is referred to as “the wisdom of the wolf.” The wolf gate, in the Medicine Wheel, is related to the pathfinder and turn-taking. It is related to an awareness that each member of the community needs to take turns and find their role. This is sometimes difficult for certain people who like to receive a lot of attention, for example. “Presence” is required of each individual in order to be aware of who’s turn it is and what is most useful at the collective level. Being able to support the people who are in process at a given time ends up strengthening the collective. Mathieu talks about his perspective on the wolf pack:

Mathieu: When I talk about the wolf pack, it has to do with each person taking a turn, and it has to do with knowing when it is your turn and when it is someone else’s turn. I make more references with spirit, others make more connections with the wolf pack and it has to do with, in this community, knowing when it is your turn and when it is someone else’s turn. When you have integrated that aspect of being collective, you have dealt with a good deal of difficulty in society. I think that the community has to do with passing the gate of the wolf. Everyone has the right to have something, everyone has the right to have a turn, but not all at the same time.

It was this adjustment, moving from seeing myself as the center of my universe, to understanding that others around me were a part of my experience and couldn’t always be relegated to the sidelines, that I found to be a struggle at first. Well-being thus came to be associated with recognizing that we are a part of our environment rather than seeing well-being as being related to a purely individual experience. It is important to take the experience and wellness of the others with whom we are interrelated into consideration. This shift from individual to collective is something that many of my collaborators have adjusted to over the years they have been living with the community. The next section elaborates this topic.

Before and now...

I had to learn it for sure, I was used to individualism, it takes a good deal of adaptation, a period of 4 years, I'd say (Katya).

I wanted to get a sense of how members of the community saw the difference between what they experienced before and what they were now experiencing as a member of this family. A good deal of the experience of asking questions for self development purposes remained similar. What had changed, according to my collaborators was related to the fact that they now had tools and consciousness they did not feel had been accessible previously. This was intricately related to the feeling that they were a part of something greater than themselves. They also spoke of feeling more connected to others through their experience which ties into what Rebecca was highlighting earlier about no longer feeling alone. The following excerpt expresses this issue. It also repeats once again the theme of resolution and brings up a new important aspect we speak of: the need for discipline.

Sarah: What has changed in your life since you moved here?

Guillaume: One thing that I notice has changed has to do with how I question things. There is more focus and I see resolution. There are Wheels that are completed. Before I kept asking questions but I didn't find it went anywhere. Now I find I have a lot of Wheels open but I see resolution. And the second thing is discipline. Before I could spend days not doing much, and now that just isn't possible anymore. It's changed quite drastically, and for me it's a good thing. For one, I'm never bored and I have to work on a lot. Before, there was more stagnancy. The more you have discipline the more abundance you have because you finish your Wheels. I'll try to be more complete in my answer... Before...well... now I'm studying, but it's my 4th university, I did 4 programs and those 4 programs I did over five to six years. And I worked and I did lots of things here and there. And I wanted to finish my things but no one pushed me and I didn't finish them. Now, at the beginning, with the community, I was pushed and pushed and pushed because I wasn't doing anything. But, these days I don't have to be pushed anymore. I see it myself when there is a hole and I'm not doing my stuff. Sometimes people point it out to me, but it's rare these days and I think of a pack of wolves and they know pretty fast what they have to do. Everyone

sees the hole. Everyone sees what you have to do. They see it from their own perspective. We learn how to fill these holes in our lives and for me this has produced results.

“Hole” according to this quote refers to times when he isn’t fulfilling his responsibilities and being active in his life. He illustrates how others in the community encouraged him to do the work and fill these “holes.” Many people mentioned the need to be able to all of a sudden manage more activities in their lives. They were asked to take on roles, for example, in the Blue House that they had not needed to invest in prior to living here. This new living situation required a commitment to cleanliness and general upkeep of the house, and being available to help others with projects they were undertaking. This meant that while each person was working on nourishing more of their own dreams, they also had roles in the dreams of others around them. In these ways more of their vitality is being put to use.

In the classes Mathieu explains that each member has a possibility of having access to a certain amount of vitality in their body but that it is rare that people use this vitality. My trainer at the gym tells me, the more you use the energy in your body, the more you have. Mathieu suggests similar ideas but in relation to the Dreamtime. Your body gets accustomed to a certain level of activity and will begin to expect it to be constant. By asking each member of the community to maintain a higher level of activity, a greater amount of vitality is being created. How this vitality is used depends on each individual’s dreams, interests and strengths. Gabrielle also spoke about this phenomenon and speaks of how the Medicine Wheel has helped her manage aspects of her life that she finds more difficult.

Gabrielle: You know, it's not the Medicine Wheel that is hard. It's life that's made like that. With highs and low, we always have things to work on. For me, it's the part of me that's a tyrant and working with the Medicine Wheel exaggerates things so a challenge like that becomes more visible. Everyone has their stuff to work on.

This idea that things are exaggerated by the Medicine Wheel is also applied to ways in which certain experiences are exaggerated by being in relation to the energy of the Shaman. I began to wonder whether the way in which the Okwaho community approaches dealing with processes was perceived as being more difficult due to this exaggeration. Following is another related quote from my interview with Rebecca:

Rebecca: I think that life isn't easy to begin with. Living is a challenge. We are often confronted, but the type of difficulty we can choose. We can choose to really suffer, to be in situations of loss and isolation that I find really terrible. Or I can choose to deal with situations that are difficult but that take me further, that teach me things. Makes us evolve, I prefer that, frankly, if I have to choose, I don't see myself in a little room all alone, when I'm approaching retirement, that's terrible.

Rebecca offers a particular position on life in the community seeing as she is the oldest of all the members I interviewed and has examined her experience from the perspective that she will be retiring and will be looking back on the way in which she has lived her life. While she says that sometimes the adjustment to community living has been difficult at times she believes that it is the best solution for her in her life. It has been important for Rebecca that the people she has chosen to surround herself with will be there for her as she ages as she is no longer in contact with her biological family who live overseas.

Chosen Family

We don't want to pass beside our life. With Shamanism, we are aware that we chose this life, this family, and our ancestral stories. We are working with this consciousness and without this [experience of Shamanic community] they don't ask, "did we choose to live this and this challenge to learn this and that." (Rebecca)

There are comparisons being made between what community members here have chosen and what the possible alternatives could have been. It is a matter of choice, and is driven by a motivation to have more consciousness when it comes to experiences lived each day and the possibility of finding meaning in the mundane. My collaborators feel that they are similar to other people who are not Shamanic in the sense that everyone lives difficult things in their lives and that this is relative and individual. The way in which we choose to live these things shows agency. And as Rebecca has stated, it is not only choosing the acts and the attitudes in relation to one's experience but it is also about choosing to be a part of this family. She does not use the word community, but rather family, as many of my collaborators do. I believe that she does so in order to nourish the spirit of family and is paying attention to the language she uses in order to manifest the reality she is interested in living. While I also seek this experience of family through my connections with my collaborators, I often have difficulty putting aside my own processes with my biological family. The word family, for me, is rich in connotations and memories. Most of the time I feel as though I was born into a family where I simply don't belong. I feel blessed to have found people in my chosen Okwaho family who share similar interests and dreams and ideas about what it means to be a family and the sorts of exchanges and attitudes that are acceptable when among family.

Becoming a part of a Shamanic family requires certain sorts of adjustments towards being collective versus being individual. This means that each member needs to be aware of the possible repercussions their choices and actions can have on others in the family. Living together as a group of dreamers takes this discussion to yet another level.

Lisa speaks about this here as being related to letting go of individualism and the learning it takes to be more collective:

Lisa: I think that the more individualistic you are the less you'll dream and the less you'll get what the Dreaming means. This is because you will only see it from one perspective and that's your own. The more collective you are the better you will understand and that takes work. That's why it takes 8 years to let go of programming, 8 years to let go of identity, 8 years to let go of ego, 8 years to let go of "I want, I want" or "I expect, I expect."

Once again, the need to be able to change perspectives and see our experience from a different angle is pointed to as being important. In this quote the shift from personal to collective is shown to be an important step in the teachings associated with the Dreaming. Being collective is associated with being able to see a situation from many perspectives, while being individualist is not. The individual who is a dreamer however is able to see a multitude of perspectives due to the fact that dreamers shape shift. The fact that an individual is able to shape shift in the Dreamtime means that they have access to a collective perspective. This is sought after in the community in order to develop functional relationships with all that surrounds us. In order to be able to shift into a different shape the individual needs to be able to be detached from their perspective, and this is the process Lisa is talking about here, the years it takes to be able to let go of one's identity and ego.

Though I have persisted in employing the term community during my fieldwork it was often mentioned that my use of the term community seemed inadequate to my collaborators. We tend to think in terms of being a family. The fact that I used the term community repeatedly stimulated many discussions on the matter and on the aspect of commitment. Following is one of the discussions that we had on this topic which I find

illustrates how the term is commonly used and what it means to myself and my collaborators:

Sarah: The word community is used a lot- at school, at the gym, related to sharing any sort of common ground. So how does this community compare to those communities in which people are also finding a sense of belonging?

Lisa: I agree, but again it's another confusion, it's easy to say that I belong to an internet community. It's to have an interest in common, it's what the word means. I think it is very important to understand. So if I discuss...I like SPCA, I like dogs, I have diabetes, so I'm part of that community. I'm part of the community of those who take the bus in the morning...and so on...but the problem is that we don't go far enough in the understanding of community. It isn't because we have an interest in common that we are a community. It isn't because we are all Jewish that we necessarily belong. I am also Native, but I don't have a story of belonging, I didn't stay on a reserve. My grandparents took a different decision; immigration, with the border situation and lots of things meant that they took a different decision. Yes, I am Native but I don't necessarily feel like I am a part of the community of Native people. Yes, I feel more of a connection with the Iroquois, but when I go to Kanewake I can't say that I feel as though I am one of them, they aren't my neighbours...they aren't my parents, my grandparents. For me, community goes farther than saying we have something in common, it means that those people, I know them. I know them on an intimate level...I'm committed to them and them to me. Belonging isn't...I'm a member of the SPCA community because I like dogs, it's because I talk to those people, I know them, I'm part of the gang...for me community is like, I'm a part of that gang...I think Guillaume said it well when he was telling his story, the elders know lots of things but it's not necessarily community because I am taught certain things and people talk to me, it becomes community when people show an interest in your wellbeing and you show an interest in their well being and you will do everything you can so that those people grow and feel well and they do the same in return. The sense of community arrives when you are part of the lives of people and that those people want you to be a part of their lives. I'm not too sure that there are a lot of communities in this sense. When we talk about communities on the internet, I'm not too sure that people really understand what that means.

Guillaume: lacking commitment

Sarah: the idea of private and public also.

Sylvie: just being there...and having someone else who is there for you...present

Lisa: to know that the other will be there. That's what I find most difficult in the world today is the lack of listening and the lack of commitment to the other. It's really easy for people, we were brought up like that. When the other does something we don't like, poof, we leave, relationship is finished. There is no... "I

commit to the relationship.” When I was younger I admired the Italians and the Greeks, they had this...“the family” you could try to get away, but no, you were attached to the bed, “we will stay together until we die”. (laughter) There was something in that that I found interesting and I went to the convent and there was the idea of the nuns. For me that was a community. They ate together, cleaned together, slept together, prayed together, they were there for one another. There was something in that I found fantastic I wanted to be a part of that...to be together (Focus Group1).

In this passage, the notion of community is compared with that of a family, when talking about the Italian and Greek traditions it seems that it is the commitment to the relationship that is key. Rather than separating the sorts of relationships we have in our lives into biological and non-biological, meaning “for life” and “in passing”, as the common phrase goes, “friends may come and go, but family is forever”, by forming these sorts of “forever” bonds, family is created. Commitment to others is chosen as a way to live experiences and to interrelate with others. In the following quote from Aurelie, she speaks of how having this family helps her to attain self-realization. With the community she is able to focus on the talents she has and benefit from living with others who have talents that are different from her own. She describes having been raised in a family that had not supported her in this way and feeling lucky to have found people who believe in her. She suggests that there are likely others like her who aren't aware that having this sort of experience outside of the biological family, this level of commitment, is possible and she hopes that my writing about it could lead others to look for something that could benefit them in their lives.

Aurelie: I'm happy to be here. In life it's important to do what you love and to realise your potential. It's important to make use of your talents, and to be who we are for real. I think that with the rest of you, in this setting, I have that opportunity. I have help to undo my programs. All humans want something. They have a goal that they would like to actualize, but their behaviour will always break their dreams because a part of them is afraid of success or abundance or whatever. When you are alone you won't succeed or it can be difficult. But when

you are with others, you have people to tell you “try this”, or “when you do this it creates this”. And it gets to be easier. Perhaps it isn’t only in Shamanism. Perhaps some are lucky to live this with their family in a functional way but I didn’t have that opportunity and I didn’t know this way of life before Shamanism. I believe that it could exist for others in different ways, but for those that may profit from this, it could be something to blow to the wind so they could touch it also.

One thing that I find important from this quote is the fact that each person has very different talents to explore and dreams to work towards. Aurelie focuses on the support she receives and the multiplicity of perspectives to which she has access within the community. In the next section Katya draws attention to this diversity among the members, and to how people from very different backgrounds and with very different sorts of interests have chosen to live together and learn together. She speaks about how the fact that we are not connected biologically means that this is a constant choice, everyday, to continue to nourish these relationships.

Katya: We choose our family here. Yes, we are all born into a family but here we are all totally different and yet we are chosen and we choose to live together...it is a choice to do the work each day.

Many of my collaborators spoke of feeling that they were called to be a part of this family and in this sense that they were chosen, as Katya mentions here. At the same time it is a choice to maintain these connections. The fact that people in the community have diverse interests and ways of being has meant learning ways to share territory in such a way that each person can have a role, make use of their particular talents and express their unique personality so that it can benefit everyone. Each individual contributes in some way to the group and this is an important part of finding meaning in being together, and feeling valued.

Having a role, finding your place and sharing the territory

It gave me a territory to be able to explore everything that called me inside (Mathieu).

In order to feel well within the community, knowing one's place and having a defined role is important. When I asked what brought each member to the community, I was often told that they knew it was "their place", that they "felt called." In my own experience, I was in a class in the woman's studies program at Concordia when someone handed around a pamphlet advertising a full moon celebration for women only which was starting in a few months. The first moon being celebrated according to the pamphlet was the moon of welcome, which is the theme which corresponds with the moon of January according to the diagram I have provided in Chapter 3. I took down the phone number and planned to call for more information. I was surprised when no one else in the class seemed interested in the pamphlet. For me it was a calling, it felt clear that there was something for me at these meetings. The names of the moons spoke to me. Welcome, Affirmation, Drama, Protection, Omnipotence, Territorial, Interrelation, Surrender, Breaking the Masks, Reason, Humility and Metamorphosis. After I attended the first meeting, I felt that this was my place, and that these were my people. After a few months I attended a spring Equinox celebration where I met Mathieu for the first time. Mathieu had never been at the Moonlodges as they were only for women. At the Equinox, he was performing a ritual, I don't remember exactly what it was related to but I remember how he was moving and the raven feathers he had in his hands. I was sure he was magical and I wanted him in my life.

I was so thrilled to have discovered Shamanism that I have often tried to explain, entice and stimulate interest in the way I live. This is not however, something that others in the community experience in the same way that I do, or to the same degree. When I talked to my collaborators about wanting to have new people in the community they said that they didn't particularly like the idea of convincing people to come and try a class. So many people seem afraid of what they don't know about, they told me. And for those who are there, those who are a part of this family, apart from Isabelle, who admits having required some initial persuasion to attend a class, everyone was "called". Sylvie speaks about having dreamed about Lisa before coming to a class. Maria speaks about setting a clear intention or objective and waiting to see what the universe would present her with and being amazed how compatible this community was with her initial request.

It doesn't mean, however, that knowing it is your place to be here will make it easy to adjust as I have mentioned. Once I started taking classes on the Dreamtime and learning about different levels of trances and ways to see reality in alternative ways, through slight changes in perception or shape shifting, I realized that this is what I was seeking through the drugs I was taking at the time. In the community, there is no drug use or alcohol consumption and a part of my initial adjustment meant putting an end to my drug intake. However, this was not something brought up by my collaborators. This was my experience. The sort of adjustment brought up by my collaborators was often related to the territory for those who had moved and related to sharing their space with others. From a Shamanic perspective it is important to be present to the relationship we have with our environment and be able to negotiate exchanges within a certain territory. Prior to having encountered Shamanic philosophy I had not been so present to this aspect

of my experience. In the following excerpt Maria explains her experience of finding her place within the collective.

Maria: It starts with the connection with the land but it also has to do with getting to know and feeling the community. Same as I had to get used to the land here, the community is part of that habitat. We talk about rules. Like with animals and how they interact with one another. In order to work together we need to understand our strengths and weaknesses and how that works together. It's not something you can prepare for, or write down on paper, like a resumé. It's something you need to live out which is something that is really present for me with Shamanism, it's lived. It's not just something you live on Tuesdays and Thursdays. For me it was really important to feel it out and see where my place was. And you don't sit back and wait, you try things and they don't always work and you take the time to learn things and what comes to the surface is being connected to gardening and the plants. I do the recycling and the garbage and perhaps it's strange but I really like it. When I take out the garbage I'm really happy and I think that it's nice that in the community, things that are simple when you take it on as a role you feel that you are doing your part and because of this it changes the feeling of it. It's a good feeling. Like when someone asks me "is this recyclable?" I feel "ahh this is mine, this belongs to me and it feels good."

By trying out different sorts of behaviours and roles, Maria says that she was able to find her place within this new environment. This quote also reflects the attention to detail and the way in which mundane activities come to be meaningful when approached from a collective perspective. Rather than being a simple task, it is perceived as having value and taking a certain skill or discipline and this is appreciated by others in the community. Just the fact that we can count on Maria to take the garbage out on time and to let us know when the city will accept our old paint cans means that others are free to focus on their responsibilities and interests.

There were many other issues that came to be related to this idea of investing in the space and relationship to place during my fieldwork which was related to well being. One thing I would like to talk about is the experience of several community members who migrated to Montreal, one who moved specifically to live with the community and

the other who moved to Montreal and ended up meeting some of the community members after having arrived in the area. This ties into what Lisa was saying in an earlier section related to the need to have other than human perspectives. This is also a process that has been present in my life and that came to be more important during the end of my fieldwork. Though a part of me reasons it out as being related to Christmas and connections to family, when I became more aware of how I would talk about what I miss about Nova Scotia I found that this was not reflected in my words. When I would address the feeling of a hole, like something missing in my life in relation to my birthplace, I would focus on specific places, rather than people. I would talk about rivers I liked to sit by, woods I remember walking through, and the animals in the area. This, as Maria points out above, is explored within the community as being related to the fact that we are animals first rather than exploring the psychology behind shifting human relations. I will continue this discussion in the next section on totemic relations.

Humans vs Creatures...

The fact of living in a Shamanic community is that we want to live out of the ordinary, we are CREATURES that are looking for the extraordinary (Lisa).

While anthropology is focused upon human reality and human created culture, Shamanism takes the environment into consideration and seeks to examine our experience from perspectives that are different from the human way of perceiving reality. One way that this is explored within the community is through totemic discussions. Totems can refer to animals, plants and minerals that are considered to be related to the individual within the Okwaho community. Totem means “all our relations.” One of my totems is the ant and this means that I am an ant and that the knowledge ants have access

to, I also have access to, as it exists in my DNA. Our DNA from one human to the next is incredibly similar and even across species shares a great deal of commonality. We believe that this commonality allows us to be in relation with all that surrounds us not simply through observation but because our bodies are connected to our environment on multiple levels. I exhibit many characteristics that are similar to ants and this is my central totem. Ants are considered to be collective creatures, each one holding a very clear role in relation to the other ants. They are constantly working. This is very similar to the way in which I am in my life. And having this totemic understanding helps me to understand why I am how I am, and that it is not entirely based in my culture or upbringing. It offers a perspective that this exists within me and is a part of my basic nature, in this case, to be like an ant in some ways. Though we could technically learn from everything that exists around us as each being represents a unique perspective, we consider it to be impractical to attempt this. Instead we choose to explore 5 totems, one in each direction and one in the center of the Wheel. If we are able to develop profound relationships with these 5 totems in our lifetime, we believe that we will be able to learn a great deal.

Ryser, an anthropologist interested in claims related to ways of knowing, explains the way in which interrelation with animals, humans and other aspects of our environment can take place which I find corresponds well with the philosophy of the Medicine Wheel. By exploring our realities from many perspectives, including totemic perspectives, our intention is to arrive at balance as Ryser explains. He also illustrates how it is necessary to be able to change perception and see ourselves as being a part of something greater in order to attain balance as human beings. It is the dreamer role,

according to the Okwaho family that allows for this sort of approach. Ryser explains it as follows:

In such a short time given to live, each human being seeks to find a proper place in relation to all things. Achieving such a place ensures balance, alignment, and happiness. When one balances relations with the river, the mountains, the flying people, the four-legged people, and with the cosmos one becomes properly aligned in relation to the living universe. Such alignment produces balance when one gives respect to the nature and character of all things encountered. When one fails to comprehend the nature and character of things, it is necessary to make an effort to learn from other people... The ultimate goal appears to be that humans will live as a part of the universe as do all living things. Humans will come to comprehend their part in the consciousness of the living universe and its eternal changeability (Ryser, 1998:28).

It is this eternal changeability that especially interests me as a dreamer. To be able to constantly change my perspective, by shape shifting and taking the form of all that exists in the universe. There is such a variety of possible perspectives and each are constantly being affected by the environment as well as having an impact on the environment with which they are in interrelation. The ability to change perspectives and then to start to see a greater picture containing all of these different perspectives can create an impression of balance, as Ryser explains above.

In another of my interviews, Katya discussed the way in which totemic relations are intrinsic to her understanding of Shamanism. She discusses how this allows us to see something other than the human perspective of our reality.

Katya: There is a good deal of Shamanic life that is based on animal life interactions. In the community we follow the pack of wolves how they live, how they are intimate with one another. Yes, we are creatures like animals, which is different from western perspectives and we work on this day after day. We watch what is around us from the perspectives of being of that which is around us and not just human beings, rarely human perspectives actually (laughing).

The wolf is an important totem within the community. Many of my collaborators have wolf as a totem and Okwaho, as I have mentioned, means “Wolf.” While the human perspective is valued as well, we believe that the majority of our life has been focussed on this human dimension and that this has not necessarily brought about a sense of completeness or balance in our lives. By exploring alternative perspectives, there is a desire to experience something new that could bring us more vitality, teach us something and bring us closer to an experience of feeling complete.

Another perspective on this issue came up in my interview with Trish. She stated quite bluntly that she simply doesn't like human relationships and behaviour. She told me that she had spent a good deal of her life isolated and alone. She considers that the totemic approach to interrelations has provided her with tools for dealing with other humans in her environment. She has found it helpful to recognize relationships of predator and prey which are present when we explore totemic relationships in nature. She suggested, in our discussion, that observing interactions from a perspective of predator and prey where the prey is seen as sacrificing their life as a part of the life cycle she found to be more useful than how she had previously observed interrelations from the perspective of victim and abuser, which is more of a human learned perspective. Trish and I discussed the perspective on interrelations she encountered since having met the community. In the next passage she mentions how this new approach to relationships has also had an impact on her connections with non-Shamanic people in her life.

Sarah: Shamanism doesn't put humans in the center of anything and when we are dealing with each other we aren't humans dealing with other humans. Instead we are dreamers dealing with other dreamers. But I wonder if it would seem that you must like humans more, if now from an outsider's perspective it would appear that you are spending more time with humans?

Trish: (Laughing) I think that it has helped that I am able to interact with different parts of people, like the spiritual, or a totem, anything but the direct human contact, oddly enough. But even dealing with a woman at work, having territory as the topic makes it a lot easier; exploring it from the moon. Normally I would have handled it by getting really upset and getting her upset...but now it is about the Medicine Wheel.

During my 3 months of fieldwork, we experienced the influence of the moons of omnipotence, territory and interrelation, the 5th, 6th and 7th moons. At the time of this discussion we were under the influence of the moon of territory and it was thus a theme that many were exploring at this time, which explains in part why discussions of territory and place are so present, as well as why Trish brings it up here, as she was examining her experiences from this perspective.

In the Shamanic encyclopedia, Walter and Friedman talk about how “Shamanic rituals are distinctive occasions in which communities talk with the more-than-human persons in the cosmos(p.107:2004)” I would suggest that this desire to talk with more-than-human persons is a part of the everyday reality of myself and my collaborators and is not relegated to ritual moments uniquely. It is a part of the discipline of the dreamer and as Trish points out can be useful even outside of the community itself.

It is important to note that human perspectives are considered neither better nor worse than any other perspective a dreamer can take in any given environment. The goal of the dreamer and the environment needs to be taken into consideration along with a perspective that is compatible with the desired outcome of the situation at the time is chosen. Sometimes, other than actively choosing to take a certain perspective, we seek to figure out what perspective we are taking based upon what we know about the Medicine Wheel. Sometimes others can help us to determine where we are on the Wheel.

Mathieu explains how perception is constantly moving from one place to the next as it follows the movement of spirit and that it can require presence to be able to follow this movement. During my interview with him I was reminded of this very point. Though I assumed at one point that I knew which perspective he was taking and that he was speaking of the dreamer's experience, he pointed out to me that his role of healer was more present at this point in the interview. As I have mentioned, each of my collaborators, in addition to being dreamers, occupies various other roles in their lives and in the community.

Mathieu: I don't put a greater attention on an animal, a tree or a human, for me it comes back to spirit. It is there, it moves, it goes from one person to another, from a tree to an object, from a group of people to a group of birds. You follow your perception. I try to follow my perception which changes, it's the connection with the invisible and I find I am limited. Focused not on the perceptions of needs and desires but on the perception of spirit in movement and in that sense you have a path to follow. You follow where there is life.

This idea of following life, or what I would term "vitality" is a part of the Shamanic philosophy I live by. It is about being aware of the sorts of activities and perspectives that bring up or maintain my vitality and engaging in these activities as often as I can. Mathieu's comment suggests to me that following one's needs and desires does not necessarily bring about an increase in vitality. In this quote Mathieu uses the terms spirit and vitality in the same way that the word "breath" was used earlier on. He speaks of how this spirit can be found in an animal, a tree or a human and rather than being present simply to one's expectations, to allow one's self to follow the movement in relation with one's impressions at the time. This is a lived experience of following the impression of magic around one's self every day.

As I have mentioned, the totemic aspect came to be especially relevant during my fieldwork when discussing the immigration process of several of my collaborators. In the following passage Maria discusses her attachment to the land of her origins as compared to how she experienced place upon arriving in Montreal:

Maria: I didn't really realize how important roots are, and where you're from. And for me that's a part of Shamanism. We aren't just humans that live according to rules of society. We are creatures and animals affected by the natural laws and cycles. We are affected by the tides and for me it became really apparent how much I was affected by the land of Alberta. How much I was a part of the hills and the wind and how all of those things were a part of who I was and I didn't have any idea that this was a part of my space. I just didn't get that until I got a feel of Quebec. For my body to get used to that and to shift as well as integrating into the community and finding my role, it took a while. Now it's a really rich experience and I'm really thankful for that, cause I feel my roots from Alberta and I feel myself developing roots here.

Sarah: this reminds me of the way animals would react when being moved from one habitat to another.

Maria: That is exactly what I experienced and it kind of surprised me. And for me that's a confirmation that Shamanism works. And the more that we can be aware of that, the healthier we are and the more connected we are with each other and with the world.

Katya also discussed the ways in which she had to adjust after having migrated from Mexico. She points out, as Maria has, that this is an experience lived in the body and is related to the topography itself.

Katya: I feel when I first moved here there was this missing in the body of the land and we often associate it with emotions because of the relationships we have but I found that it was more a connection with the body that needed that topography. The work it takes to switch from one topography to another can take years.

Though I have remained within the same country, I find that my own experience is similar in many ways to what Katya and Maria express above. Recently I have realized that I miss my place of origin: Nova Scotia. I miss the water and the trees, the

rivers and the ocean. I also miss the rocks. When I make my own Medicine Wheel it tends to be out of stones I collected on beaches in Nova Scotia. Upon arriving in Montreal years ago, I set out to find green spaces that resembled those I was familiar with from where I grew up. Somehow, these places, however similar they can be at times, fail to fill this hole I feel inside me when it comes to feeling as though I belong in this place. A part of that has to do with the ways in which an attachment to place is not only about the topography and myself, but also about the other relationships that exist in the space, with animals, with people, and with stories. Each of the places I remember and miss are rich with the history of my experiences. Consciousness around these issues, I feel, creates clarity when it comes to doing the work that Katya refers to and assists in the process of transition. Discovering that it is a shared experience, and that it is a relation with the natural world makes it easier for me to live with and understand.

As Trish has already expressed, Maria too, speaks of how animals are a part of her everyday understanding of her reality. She compares the totemic approach to her studies in the psychology of human behaviour and says that Shamanism has introduced her to the idea of storytelling which makes sense to her.

Maria: For me it's about being human, about human relationship that I'm kinda fed up with. Even though it's something I've studied and something I understand. Working in psychology, it's more than just that it's not just about human games that we play and human relations. It's greater than that, it's about animals interacting and characters in a story. Those things make a lot of sense to me, and I think it explains things better somehow. I think that it can get pretty convoluted when you're talking just about human interaction, you can take so many perspectives, there are so many books written with different perspectives, different underlying, complicated reasons for human interaction. I find the Dreaming is somehow simplified. On one hand, it's very practical and down to earth. It's about cycles. The dream has its beginning and end and it has characters. And what they do together and how they interact, that's based on natural laws.

This idea that story telling and totemic relations simplify one's reality is a common thread throughout my fieldwork. One aspect of human reality which can create more complicated exchanges is related to emotions which totems don't experience in the same way. Being more focused on survival and instincts allows for more clarity according to my collaborators.

Story telling

I think that what makes for a great story is when you have really strong powerful emotions, insights that trigger in the other person a sort of "I've seen that before. That makes sense to me." A good story is one that is going to impact the audience. A really good story teller will know which story to tell that is going to have the most impact because of what he's seen in the audience (Lisa).

Predominantly in the Okwaho community, stories are told from a dreamer or from a healer perspective. A dreamer seeks the manifestation of the story, while the healer tells the story with the belief that sharing his/her experience can spare others from living a similar experience. The relation to the language we use is one that many of the members of the community are able to articulate. This is one of the aspects of Shamanism that is very important to my collaborators. It is the incorporation of stories and meaningful words in our language that speaks to us as Maria points out in the following quote I extracted from her interview:

Maria: I understood I had difficulties in certain areas in my life but not described in this way. I didn't have these words. For me it comes back to, hmm, it's like it carries a story even though there is a part of me that is very mental, psychoanalytic, but part of me likes stories, they inspire me. But what I like about this approach is the way in which the word carries a story. When I read Clan of the Cave Bear [by Jean Auel] they talked about the fire-keeper as being the one who sustains the spark from one camp to the next and this inspired me; the idea of maintaining the vitality for a collective, for survival. And this stayed with me, it gave me a story, a context, it sort of put it in a frame, all those things, and I was

able to somehow hold that easier. It clicked in me and I think that's another thing about Shamanism and the Dreaming, it's about stories, and not just about any stories, it's about the roles, practical roles. The fire-keeper exists and existed and was an important job, for survival. It was for survival then and it still applies today. I see how important it is that I learn this.

It is this awareness of ways in which words are full of meaning and full of stories themselves that I find fascinating as I write this thesis. I wonder whether my thesis is like telling a story, knowing my audience and manipulating the words and language in order to have an impact through using what is alive. By "alive," I mean words that incorporate "spirit" and "vitality", as Maria points out above when she speaks of the fire-keeper. I don't necessarily need to include a great deal of living material, a little bit here and there to touch and awaken mystery in the audience so that they will have something to journey with. This is how I perceive it. The Shaman has often said that asking the right questions allows us to learn a great deal more than having the right answers can. The right answers are those related to what will spark new processes in each individual that will allow them to develop their talents, and build relationships with those around them. So, for me, allowing readers to "journey" based upon what speaks to them in this thesis is more aligned with the ways of the community than trying to explain and analyze every possible meaning or interpretation of the way of the life of the Okwaho Shamanic community.

In the following quote, Guillaume talks about ways in which stories can be seen to be of value for both Shamanic and non-Shamanic peoples. From a Shamanic perspective, he explores ways in which shape shifting can be a way to explore the unknown and then uses a similar explanation when applying it to the sorts of stories people explore in the cinema. By viewing different movies or being in connection with different stories,

characters that are present within the Dreaming space of an individual that are compatible with characters in the films can be explored.

Guillaume: The focus is more on living different sorts of things from different sorts of perspectives where you can meet different sorts of creatures. The goal is to live a certain adventure, for something unknown and I think everyone wants that. Why would there be so much frenzy about new films otherwise? People, kids, need to dream and today we cut out the dream in the way we teach, in history. And the adults, when they see something that is fantastical they will have the reaction, it's cute, funny or it'll be ridiculed but they need a James Bond...James Bond isn't just anyone. People need those models because there is something inside of them that is compatible with that. And it's the need to enter into relation with something we hide, something we don't see.

What Guillaume is pointing out here is that it isn't only Shamanic people who thrive on stories. He says that it's a central aspect of life: more than a lot of things we think we need, we need stories. In the Okwaho community there is an incredible amount of attention to details in the stories we tell as well as a good deal of repetition in the way we speak. We are present to the ways in which stories repeat themselves in our lives, in our environment, and how this is related to the Dreaming.

The way in which the Shaman, in particular, emphasizes her points through repetitive speech patterns became even more evident as I transcribed my interviews. When translated to the written tradition these speaking patterns can jump out as being redundant, and yet the impression as she speaks can be almost hypnotic. Walter and Friedman suggest that "among the storytelling techniques employed to bring the stories alive are the judicious and skilled use of voice fluctuation and intonation, pauses, and hand gesturing and body language (2004:332)." In some of the classes we are told to pay attention to the sorts of impressions we have in our body when different people tell stories in the group. Words and stories are considered to be a form of touch and it is

important to pay attention to whether the reactions evoked by our stories are compatible with the objectives we had set when we chose to share the story. We are circular people and one of the techniques that are used in story telling is repetition. The ways in which words can be used reflect this circular perspective. Following is Lisa's explanation of how things can be seen to repeat themselves in our environment. Note the repetitive speech patterns.

Lisa: I think everything is a Wheel in movement and it's just a question of looking at time. Everything is a Wheel, like I get up in the morning I go to bed at night. It is a Wheel. Every 20 minutes we repeat the same thing. Like, if you're on the phone...I remember when I was 19-20 years old I did the crisis phone lines and one of the things they teach you is that when you have someone on the line, 20 minutes is enough for them to say everything they have to say. After that, they come back and say the same thing in another form, they come back. 20 minutes is enough to say anything. 20 minutes is actually the amount of time that we dream. Our body dreams 20 minutes and then it will repeat it over and over again. So it seems that 20 minutes is the cycle for the human being and after we come back and repeat the same thing. And it's just a question of being present and coming back and asking "what am I repeating?" "Am I repeating a bad attitude, a good attitude?" "Am I repeating a good or bad choice?" And the idea is to be present to what you are doing on a daily basis or breath by breath which takes a good deal more discipline than the average person. But it's to be able to say "what am I repeating right now?" Could be physiological, spiritual, it could be something that nature is repeating also. Like I noticed this morning it was wet, it was really cold and it was wet. It lasted about a half an hour, 20 minutes, and then it turned into something else. And during that time there was so much activity in the house and it was like nature made us repeat a pattern just because it was living something. So the idea is to be present, "what am I repeating?" There are Wheels playing themselves all the time it just depends what do I want to focus on. I was telling someone just this week, you can't be present to every single Wheel that is in movement in your life, cause that would be maddening. There are so many Wheels, you'd go insane. You have to pick one or two and then explore them the whole way through. And the next day you pick one or two and explore them the whole way through. And by the end of the month you will have explored them all anyways because it's a repetition of things anyways. The idea is to be present and the problem with people is that they're bored, stressed, lonely, everything and anything but being present to the abundance that the universe gives to you. Because a Wheel is abundance. It is something that is given to you, it's an adventure, an experience. But if you are there waiting for something to fall on your lap rather than looking at the Wheels that are present in your life, then you've missed everything.

This quote speaks of there being a question of agency, and of choice. It is up to the individual to choose to see value and meaning in the smallest details in the everyday. And the belief that it is not simply the attention that obscures one's interpretations in a symbolic way but that rather it is an act of nourishing a dream, which is related, as I have mentioned earlier to a quest for vitality. Whether or not we choose to bring consciousness to our everyday world, everyone is repeating certain stories in their lives. We choose to see this in the smallest moments as even the seemingly insignificant repetitions are interrelated with larger patterns which structure our lives. We seek consciousness related to this, in order to learn and to heal. Making this possible is our ability to be present to the moment, to what is being experienced in relation with your environment and in your body. By paying attention to that which is being repeated at any time, brings meaning to the ordinary and enriches the experience. One of the things that I find repeated in my observations and in the community is the attention to the simplest details. Lisa shares an example of this:

Lisa: But yeah it's simple things like just last night, Eric left for BC and the dog is sleeping beside the bed. And the dog never sleeps with me because Eric doesn't want the dog in the bed. But I'm alone and I want the dog with me. So I get off the bed and pick her up and bring her on the bed with me. She's sleeping, right. And she's like, "what the heck am I doing here?" She's like "I'm used to sleeping on the ground!" And it created a Wheel all night. She kept getting up and getting off the bed but then she'd look up and "I was on the bed and I was actually comfortable there" and trying to get back on the bed. And I noticed that I created a cycle and I confused her and she couldn't lie down on the floor and couldn't lie down on the bed and it was like "what is more abundant? Being on the floor where I'm safe and it's a known fact and I'm always on the floor or being on the bed with my master and I never get that treat?" She seemed confused between two abundances and for me it said a lot. First of all, I asked myself maybe I shouldn't have started this Wheel because it seemed that I disturbed some sort of peace inside of her. But I also found it pretty amazing that she basically taught me a lesson. Whether it's the known or the unknown it's a matter of abundance and it's a matter of choice. It's a matter of deciding what you want and she ended up sleeping on the ground. And I found that interesting. And, see, there is

nothing complicated about that. It's just a question of taking the dog and putting her on the bed and it's nothing, it's simple, and it gave me so much.

Lisa speaks about how being present to the stories in our daily living can teach us and nourish us.

In the following discussion I had with Katya, we cover quite a few topics related to stories and their place within Shamanism. She also shares some of her experience with this in her life. One important part of the discussion is related to how stories are considered to be matter and therefore have the possibility of affecting matter. This is a basic detail when it comes to learning to be a dreamer. A dream, something that would be considered immaterial by many, can manifest a reality in the waking reality, in material form. Therefore, the belief held by the Okwaho community is that the dream itself was material, that everything in fact is material, including our thoughts and feelings. In the following discussion I ask Katya to explain some of the other words we employ in the community when speaking about the vitality we gain through story telling.

Sarah: We often talk about being awoken. We speak of vitality and being fed by stories. This is our language. When you speak of stories, you speak of being awoken. What do you mean by this?

Katya: I believe stories feed everyone in general, and for me, it wakes me up. It's a basic tool I love. Ever since I was young I was considered different. I saw that society penalizes people who live the stories, and who have a stronger imagination. I lived a form of depression due to this. Nowadays it is great for me to be with people who are able to hear, be nourished and find the learning in these approaches. Now we tell the stories and it's not just the community that gets nourished by these stories, others are also touched and they also feel alive. The stories come from the cells, and they wake up cells. When they feel the vitality go up, that's what it means to be nourished. When we share a story it is matter and when this makes someone feel alive it means that this matter is compatible with them. This is what I am talking about when I talk about being awoken and this has always spoken to me. This wakes me up.

Sarah: People are telling stories all the time. But not all stories are nourishing. What makes one story nourishing and not another?

Katya: For me, it takes finding a story that is true and a story that isn't manipulated by our thoughts, our judgments and perspectives. When we are in a relationship with someone, we can be drawn to tell a story because we want to create a certain effect, we want to manipulate. In this case, the focus isn't the story but rather the focus is the effect we want to create. In order to nourish, it needs to be alive. For this, there needs to be detachment when we tell the story. We let the story live and touch the people as it is made to do, manifest what it has to manifest. It is up to the person who receives it to do what they want with it. Sometimes when we tell it is we tell it as though it belongs to us, as though it is our possession. But stories are made to be shared.

Sarah: Even the stories of our everyday life?

Katya: This has been a big adjustment. While in society we have a private life in Shamanism that doesn't exist. It's all stories and what you live can be just like what another lives and this means that there is no private life. We live the same things and if we live something different it is up to us to bring it to the center as a story and allow it to have its life. It can touch people. It doesn't belong to you even though it can have an impact on you, and on someone else. It can even touch a community or the whole world and that is the great difference between the two worlds. In the western world there exists a private life, not in Shamanism. Everyone knows my life and we can know what another lives because we are all connected, even without asking the other.

Katya talks here about the ways in which we consider ourselves as being collective in the way that we perceive of our personal stories. When she states that in Shamanism we do not have a private life she is referring to the way in which we share what we experience from the perspective that we are all interconnected and that my experience does not only reflect who I am but also what is happening in the environment at the time and in society around us. Our stories reflect our interconnections and thus are never about something private, but rather are constantly in relation with everything else.

In order to know the life of another without asking the other, one of the tools we learn to become disciplined in is hypersensitivity. Through hypersensitivity and through dreams that are present in the environment that impact each person in different ways, the general themes are shared. What sorts of general themes are present at any given time are discovered by being present to your experience and referring to the Medicine Wheel.

Next, Mathieu will be talking about the way in which the presence of the Shaman has an impact on how he experiences the stories in his life. It is specifically her quality of presence and the facility with which she is able to present alternative perspectives that he finds to be inspiring.

Sarah: Clarity and presence to the details that exist in your experience exists in Shamanism. Was that present before you began working with a Shaman?

Mathieu: Frankly, I was already someone who was clear when it came to me and what I lived. I'm not necessarily clear about the path to take, but I don't lie very much to myself. I also always had the ability to see the details of what surrounds me. The difference with the Shaman is that it allowed me to see different perceptions. There can be difficulty when it comes to going beyond. We are used to seeing things in a certain way and we don't realize that there are other perspectives that can be taken. The relationship with the Shaman allowed me to see the non-ordinary. The Shaman is very important for survival and for changing perception. I feel very limited in my answer. The Shaman is the breath in the community. She is the breath, I don't know how to explain. There is the breath and that person carries the breath and you get inspired by that person, by the breath. It's an inspiration, she has her breath and she gives you a part of it and you find the same breath inside of you.

Sarah: To create something?

Mathieu: I find that limited, you have spirit inside of you and sometimes it's sleeping and sometimes it's awake. And when you are in the presence of the Shaman, it wakes up quicker because hers is awake. It is the presence of the person who carries the breath, their quality of presence. It's more in relation with spirit, that is what interests me more.

Mathieu uses the word "breath" to speak of the Shaman and her impact on the community. In this occurrence of the term the breath is something that the Shaman is able to share with those around her so that they, too, have access to the sacred energy that flows inside of her. It is a word that has a certain connotation of movement to it, related to the way that breath moves in and out. It is connected to the wind moving in nature, and the oxygen that we need in our bodies. The use of the term is not meant to be symbolic, but rather we believe that the Shaman is an energy that moves in and out. It

has no definable shape and is common to all people and creatures and it touches all that is in nature. This same breath can move through people who are Shaman and those who are not. Having a Shaman in a community means that she or he is able to disperse this energy through the bodies of those in her community so that everyone can be impacted by this breath of creator. One of the reasons why certain people are chosen to walk the path of the Shaman is because they are constantly looking to be in contact with spirit, to have consciousness about the details that are present in their life and this sort of wondering is compatible with the breath. There is a good deal of distance however between those who have the potential and those who complete the initiation. In the Okwaho community there is only one Shaman. As I have mentioned earlier some of the elements that characterize the Shaman are her quality of presence, her ability to listen and her capacity for love. I will be discussing several of these elements in the next section.

Listening and Presence

In the community we are always in the present, what is happening right now, what do you need? There is more listening to each other (Guillaume).

While Guillaume mentions in this quote that we are always in the present and I agree, I believe that it is also true that we live in relation to both the past and the future. We speak often about the sorts of stories that repeat themselves in our lives. Sometimes what we are living in the present is related to something we lived at an earlier age in this life and sometimes we will refer to ancestral stories we have lived in other times and places. And in relation to the future, Lisa and Mathieu also often speak of being devoted to the next seven generations. I agree with Guillaume to the degree that we have a tendency to be extremely practical in our approach to day-to-day scenarios. At the same

time, we take this to another level to see what is being repeated from the past in relation with a story and what sort of impact it could have on future generations. This is another way in which we are present. And this awareness of multigenerational relationships ties in with definitions of the Dreamtime as being timeless or acting according to a different approach towards time, where all is blended and present at any given time.

Another topic that came to be important when discussing the ways in which we listen and are present to each other in the community is in regards to the way we differentiate between what is Shamanic and what isn't. One of my collaborators spoke of her experience during a period when she was not living among the community and had taken a contract with her job that took her to northern Quebec for a year. Gabrielle reflects below on the quality of presence, the ability to listen and the act of being collective:

Gabrielle: When I was far away and did not have the contact with others I realized that what I really like in the community is the way that people listen to each other when sharing stories. They are present to what it brings up for them, and each person brings a different angle depending on what the story makes them live. Elsewhere I haven't found that talent for listening. I told a story at work recently and I had the impression that the person I told it to was just waiting to tell his story. He hadn't actually listened to me at all.

The quality of presence in the discussions I had with community members has been a recurring theme. Walters and Friedman speak of the way in which storytelling traditions can teach people the skills necessary to be successful in their environment: "The oral traditions provide a central means of gaining knowledge of their culture, as well as the skills it will take to be successful in it(Walters & Friedman, p.332:2004)." These ways are taught through the storytelling, both in the stories themselves and through the way in which we approach these stories. The approach taken by the members of the Okwaho

community is that stories are sacred and reveal common ground. We are able to connect with others if we pay attention to the common ground that unites us.

One way in which we can come to be aware of the common ground in our environment is through becoming more tuned to our hypersensitivity, and what we are picking up in our environment. Guillaume explains below how he understands hypersensitivity in his experience.

Guillaume: Hypersensitivity is a tool that helps you to recognize what is present. It is like you have antennas. So, you are in the bus and there is a guy who has his back to you and you feel super stressed and he turns towards you and his face looks strange and he's shaking his handbag and it's evident that you are picking him up.

This is related to the importance of sharing one's story with those whose lives you touch. It helps to bring consciousness, because sometimes what we are living is very closely tied to what people around us are living and if they keep it secret we can be confused as to why we are feeling the things that we are. The more that we share our stories and realize that we are interconnected and that what we live has an impact on those around us whether or not we chose or not, the more consciousness we can have and the clearer we are in our lives.

Jean Guy Goulet has done extensive work with the Dene Tha in northern Alberta and is interested in visions and dreams as ways of knowing. While he suggests that we cannot magically intrude in one another's consciousness he speaks of the importance of direct personal experience. Rather than simply observing, direct personal experience involves a re-evaluation of the senses which make up a part of the lived experience (1998:256). Hypersensitivity is the term we use to explain the way in which our

experience is related to other people's realities and in order to be able to use the Dreaming as a way of knowing we need to be disciplined in differentiating what we perceive sensorially from our environment and what is related to our own story. Rebecca told me in one of our conversations that as a general rule she considers only 5% of what she is living to be hers, and the rest of it is her in relation with her environment. She says that it is important to keep this in mind when interacting with others in your environment as well, that they too are influenced by their environment and situation. She says that she feels so lucky to have been given the tools that she has so that she is able to observe her experiences and find learning and abundance in the details in her life.

Conclusion

Jean Guy Goulet suggests that it is through coactivity that we can come to understand “a little bit” about a culture. He suggests that “an experiential approach to understanding social realities differs considerably from an interpretivist approach and yields qualitatively different results (1998:253).” Through such participation, the experiences of the anthropologist “become an integral part of the ethnographic description (Goulet, 1998:253).” I have attempted to incorporate such an approach in this thesis. The process of doing the fieldwork, working with my data and writing this thesis has been related to feeding my own dreams. My perspectives, and my experiences have been central throughout the process of doing the fieldwork and writing this thesis. As I am a Shamanic person I did not begin my participation in this culture when I began the fieldwork, I have been immersed in this way of being for nearly a decade. My experiences and my understanding of the language used by my chosen family have allowed me to delve further into an interpretation of my data. My understanding of the way we live has allowed me to highlight what I feel is most important and reflective of this culture.

Along the way I met with what I originally saw as obstacles that required a readjustment of how I defined terms like “well-being” and how I saw myself as holding several roles, that of the anthropologist alongside that of myself as a member of the “family” I had chosen to study. As would any anthropologist I began to pay attention to the repetitive themes that came up in the interviews, such as presence, and storytelling. And as a dreamer I realized that these themes were also important when it came to how I would come to structure this thesis in order to remain true to the story I had chosen to

convey, the interpretations I had chosen to take in relation to my material. I have tried to show how these concepts can be practically applied both in my life and in the lives of my collaborators. Practicality, though it is not a theme I have chosen to discuss throughout the thesis remains an important theme in my life. Stories have practical value because they contain vitality. A story that is shared with a collective needs to have practical usage. Mathieu speaks of the purpose of living Shamanically as being related to “The capacity to wake up the life inside of you and to do something with it. Regardless of the direction you take, or what you do, it is about doing something with it. You can explore, create, discover, heal...” I consider this to be very practical as vitality is the energy that we need in order to be able to take on the challenges that we face in our lives.

As I wrote this thesis, I often turned towards my collaborators, my schoolmates in the Masters program and my supervisor in order to get a push, in order to see clearly the “holes” I had left in my Wheel, in this case, my thesis. At times, once I saw where the holes were I was able to fill them myself. While at other times, I asked that others share their perspectives with me and through these exchanges I found vitality. I woke up the life within myself. For me, Shamanism wakes up the vitality in me, everything about it, be it the challenges or the family life. It allows me to balance my six bodies in a way I have not encountered elsewhere in my life. It is once these six bodies are balanced that we are able to dream in the way Okwaho teaches. And it is in the Dreamtime that I feel as though I am in relationship with my “basic nature.” Through our relationship with the Dreamtime we have access to the extraordinary and as dreamers we take the necessary steps so that this reality becomes visible in our daily lives.

My contribution to the discipline lies in my transmission of a rich vocabulary of terminology that I have contextualized throughout this thesis. As it has been a collaborative project from the perspective of an insider of this particular family I also find that this is a unique approach to the experience of a Shamanic dreaming family. The ways of this family extend beyond observable human experience to incorporate totemic perspectives which offer another perspective on ways in which we can be interrelated with our environment and thus make sense of our lives. We also make sense of our life by listening to each other's stories and finding the common ground in the everyday experiences. We work on the processes that come up in our lives, issues that we need to look at more closely, perspectives that we may need to let go of in order to learn something new and create new connections with people around us. The goal behind all of these strategies I have been examining throughout the thesis is to wake up the vitality in each one of us.

In the Okwaho family, after someone has shared a story in order to mark the end of their period of sharing they say "Hau" which means a multitude of things. Some possible translations are; "thank you for listening," "that is all I have to say," or "I am ready to listen to you now." It is a sign that what has been said is sacred and has been shared with the best intentions of the family in mind. Those who are present will then respond "Hau" which means in this case "thank you for sharing," "I have heard what you said," "I recognize this talk as being sacred and of value." It is a word that encompasses a great deal and I would like to end my thesis with it here.

Hau.

Glossary of Terms

Abundance: An attitude that places one's self as deserving to have beauty in one's life. To live in such a way so as to be able to share what we have with others around us. Related to generosity and appreciation.

Anchor: the 4 largest stones in the Medicine Wheel, placed in each of the cardinal directions.

Breath: A term used when speaking about the energy that moves through the Medicine Wheel and through the carrier of the energy of the Shaman. It is related to the sacred.

Clan: the 7 faces of creation, often spoken about as meeting around the sacred fire.

Clarity: Seeing clearly the path that is ahead of one's self when beginning to embark upon a journey or begin a project of some kind.

Community: A group of people who have common interests and who are implicated in each other's everyday lives interested in the wellbeing of each member of the community. This involves a level of commitment.

Cosmological laws: that which affects you indirectly.

Details: paying attention to moments in each day that are related to what is occurring in the Dreaming. In order to have a clear image of the dream in movement, these moments and details must be observed attentively.

Dreaming: While dreamtime refers to an undetermined space, dreaming is much more broad as a term, dealing with mystery.

Dreamtime: A matrix of interconnections in another or in several realms, associated with another time and space.

Element: to help you to do your processes you need to have elements in your Wheel

Experience: In order to have consciousness regarding a situation, one must first live the experience, which requires being present to the details.

Family: related to DNA, and can also be created over time through profound interrelationships and commitment at an eternal level.

Healing: Awakening a new impression than that which had previously been present in relation to a scenario associated with hurt or imbalance.

Hypersensitivity: related to the degree to which we pick up emotions, thoughts etc from our environment.

Impressions: Experience based in the six bodies, spiritual, emotional, collective, energetic, physical, and mental. These impressions are based in a presence to details seen, or otherwise sensed according to the perspective of each of the bodies.

Medicine Wheel: a pattern of stones representative of cycles existing in the invisible realm and related to time and place.

Moon: also referred to as inner children or ego, tend to be related to emotions also

Movement: Once a process or project is underway it is said to be in movement and is seen to take on a life of its own. Matter is created through thought processes and intentions and the dreamer works with the movement of the dream in order to manifest the reality he/she is interested in living.

Natural laws: that which affects you directly

Perspective: each stone in the Medicine Wheel represents a perspective and is seen to be positioned in a certain direction. The perspectives taken are in regards to whatever is the focus or theme at the time.

Presence: being present to the details in each moment.

Process: a surplus of unused vitality created by a lack of resolution.

Programs: engrained ways of understanding our experiences that may no longer be applicable today

Resolution: arriving at the completion of projects or conflicts so that we can pass on to something new

Shaman: the breath of creation.

Shamanism: how to survive according to natural and cosmological laws

Shape-shifting: In visible reality this means fitting in to a territory through altering language and dress, for example, while in the Dreamtime this can imply taking on different forms, such as totemic and ancestral roles.

Spirit: In this thesis this term is used to refer to the way in which spirit, breath or energy can be seen to displace itself in the environment. It requires a presence to impressions in order to be able to follow the movement of spirit around us.

Story: Any situation that has elements of the dreaming or provides examples of synchronicities can be shared as stories. The stories that are shared are those that are considered to be alive and able to teach something. We give more space to stories that we consider to be abundant.

Totem: According to the Okwaho community, each individual has five main totems, one in the east that represents the way we present ourselves to the world. In the south our totem reflects our work and our tools. In the west our totem teaches us about how we teach and how we learn. And in the north our totem is related to our destiny. In the center of our personal wheel the totem that is found there has an impact on all the other directions in our wheel.

Vitality: Vitality refers to our life force and is seen to be a spark that we are to keep alive at all times. If our vitality is low we need to seek out activities, perspectives, stories or people that wake up the life within us.

Wheel: Once a process or project has been put into motion we often will refer to it as a wheel as we believe that it will follow the circular reality described by the Medicine Wheel.

Wolf Gate/Pack: Pathfinder, also related to the role of the teacher and knowing when it is your turn

Work: To face the obstacles in our lives and fill the holes that we encounter and be true to ourselves and those around us. In any process we encounter, challenges are present and by finding solutions to these challenges and engaging with the situation we are considered to be doing the work.

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