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## The Third Space in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

The image of Chief Bromden overpowering the control panel in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* leaves a strong impression. Whether this act symbolises his liberation, or is an extension of his confinement, has not only met critical interest, but arguably, critical misinterpretation. Considering that the text was published at the end of the McCarthy era, this being an era of intensive federal and military vigilance that has received extensive scholarly attention, I suggest that a renewed attempt to critically analyse Bromden's liberation may prove fruitful in view of the cultural space from which the text evolved.

The difficulty faced by most early analyses of Bromden's liberation is the representation of freedom as a literal escape from one place to another, or from the elusive entity that Bromden calls the Combine. To exemplify this point, Peter G. Beidler has described Bromden's liberation as that of becoming an integrated man, or an individual who understands the natural and technological worlds, therefore more capable of social integration. Subsequently, Ruth Brady argues that "He has simply gone outside where the Combine still rules" (43). These critical positions are representative of other interpretations of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and indicate a surrender of Bromden's resistive silent stance rather than suggesting some type of agentive position to a system of cultural domination. If the Combine is not convincingly located, then I suggest that Chief Bromden's action may prove difficult to analyse. Therefore, in this essay I intend to challenge previous analyses of Bromden's liberation. Subsequently, with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* being historically embedded in a counter culture canon, the social issues that it interfaces with may prove useful in a contemporary context.

In part one I will explicate Richard Jenkins theoretical approach to the construction of social identity. This will be followed by an explication of the postcolonial perspective of Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space of cultural hybridity. Part two will consist of an analysis of the narrative in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* where evidence of a Third Space of hybridity will be presented. This will be followed by a conclusion containing a revision of my thesis where central arguments will be revisited.

## Part 1

### A Theory of Social Identity

Richard Jenkins examines the processes by which humans produce and experience identity through practices based on similarity and difference in his book *Social Identity*. He argues that the embodied individual's identity is meaningless in isolation of a social world, in turn, making selfhood into a total social construct, albeit a negotiated one. He argues for an interactionist view of society where social structures can be challenged and negotiated by individuals through the concept of agency.

The self, Jenkins argues, always starts with the body, as this is where we first find ourselves at birth. The embodied individual is not a closed independent system, but one of biological living tissue, whose survival depends on interaction in the world that she finds herself born into. From the onset, the individual participates in an environment of others, through reflexive practices. Reflexivity consists of sign-making practices, where the individual must learn from the onset to interpret her world and communicate within it. Therefore, individuals demonstrate porous qualities, affecting the world in which they are situated and experiencing the world that they are subjected to. It is the interdependency of the two that Jenkins claims closes the gap between the 'I' and the 'self'.

Leaning on post-Piagetian thought, Jenkins describes the socialisation processes of the embodied individual, and the construction of primary identities (those identities that are developed in early life). The primary identities, Jenkins claims, are a template by which all subsequent identities will be grafted onto, and as such are far more robust than secondary identities (those identities developed later in life). These primary identities are listed as being "selfhood, human-ness, gender, and, under some circumstances, kinship and ethnicity" (21). As these categories suggest, labelling is part of early socialisation processes, and as we are labelled, we seek also to label, creating orientation between the internal self and the external other.

Subsequently, public social identity, it is argued, is negotiated in interaction with others. The question of being someone is in negotiation with that of becoming someone, and this transient identity shift can be externally or internally initiated. Through this argument, Jenkins describes the construction of "nominal" and "virtual" identities in a public space. In this process of social adaptation, Jenkins maintains that identities can co-exist depending on the social context and collective identity means that a group of people have something in common, and also that there are boundaries to the shared similarity, however vague it might be. It is through these practices of similarity that we define what constitutes the boundary of difference. It is possible to

deduce from this model that one group exists in relation to other groups, and that internal group identifications implicates external social categorisations.

The organisation of difference, therefore, constructs similarity, which, in turn, is represented by community. Jenkins presents a model where culture and community are constructed through the way that things are done 'here' as opposed to the way that things are done 'there'. The inclusion in community by similarity directly implies exclusion by difference, with behavioural conformity embedded in the communal consensus. Formal institutions, therefore, as points of communal predictability, function as templates for collective points of view that indicate the way that things 'should' be done. The individual, as such, within formal institutions, is defined by primary and secondary social identities. This allocates roles within the social practices of a given institution. As the individual can be allocated various roles, each of their roles maintains a status, and from this model Jenkins states, "institutionalised identifications (statuses) are occupied by embodied individuals yet independent of them" (136).

The individual is therefore embodied in the institution and the institution is embodied in the individual, but both are partly independent of each other. From this, we can deduce that even though individuals are subject to a certain amount of institutionalised pre-destination, they are also in a position to resist it. Consequently, the individual's membership to the collective 'we' does not automatically produce equality, as Jenkins points out:

Membership may be demanded of the patient by a therapeutic regime emphasising inclusion and participation; she, however, may refuse to connive in it, which in turn may have consequences. Nominally she may be a member, but virtually [...] she is an inmate. [...] she cannot enjoy membership of the same kind as that of her psychiatrist. (155)

Institutionalised membership, which, in certain cases, may be considered from the outset to be a rational part of group identity, therefore does not suggest purely conformist roles. In fact, resistance to a given status within the boundaries of an institution may be a rational response to an irrational confinement.

The above analysis identifies two societal models. One of these models is defined as the static structures of state (such as formal institutions), and the other is that of relatively unstable cultural institutions (comprising of sign-making practices). As such, social groups may occupy geographical, cultural or temporal space and, therefore, share boundaries with other social groups in a relationship of similarity and difference. This boundary is theorised by Homi K. Bhabha as being a space of productive agency (being a space of possibilities both internal and external to the

structure, or the liminal margin within a structure [5]), or the boundary that offers the possibility for social change where established subject positions may lose historical stability. Bhabha labels this the “Third Space” (56), and continues by arguing that it is a space of discursive agency, where temporal and spatial distance create a contingent inter-subjectivity that may not be defined by past relationships of objectivity or hierarchy.

Bhabha argues that the Third Space may create the possibility for a hybrid identity to be hashed out in a translational negotiation between the temporal and cultural space that exists between the signifier and the signified. The result, therefore, is a re-negotiated sign that “may confuse the continuity of historical temporalities, confound the ordering of cultural symbols, traumatize tradition” (257). It is in this space of inter-subjectivity that a “(re)ordering of symbols becomes possible in the sphere of the social” (275).

It is from this interpretation of the Third Space of cultural hybridity, that I will present a reading of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in part Two.

## Part 2

### The Asylum

The asylum in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* bears great likenesses to that presented by Erving Goffman in his empirical study of the American asylum in the latter part of the 1950s. The systemic division of power stratifies the hospital into different departments (95). The staff are organised into groups of Black Orderlies (5), Nurses (25), Doctors (145) and the wards are divided into groups of patients and staff. The identification processes practiced by staff stratify patients into groups labelled as Acutes and Chronics, and the group of Chronics are subdivided into Walkers, Wheelers and Vegetables (14). Each of these divisions of identity create cultural spaces of similarity and difference that work to separate and atomise the ward into a system of modules where individuals can be managed effectively in groups (30).

The ward presented in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is run by Nurse Ratched, who is described as being at the centre of a web of control (26). From her position of power, in an office behind a glass window, Nurse Ratched runs the most effective ward in the hospital, being awarded a certificate that describes her ward as one that exemplifies the rationality of modernity, controlling the most amount of patients with the least amount of staff (17). Ratched's modes of power and control are her gaze (31), insinuations (61), and Black Orderlies that perform “her bidding” (29). From

this position of power, she is an embodied signifier maintaining mechanistic control over the patients, who in turn, through their internalisation of the sign, represent the signified in the story. The ward itself, therefore, represents the boundaries of possibility available to the signifier and signified with Nurse Ratched's window symbolising the liminal margin of cultural separation.

It is in the midst of this systemic ordering of individuals that Chief Bromden resists the signifying practices of the staff by hiding behind the disguise of being a deaf mute. He uses the freedoms that are available to him to resist domination by moving between, for example, the broom cupboard (6), the ward at night time (155), the picture on the wall (122), and the fog of dampened perception (123), to maintain a sense of autonomy, (Goffman labels these as "free-places", "group territories" and "personal territories" within the confines of the institution [216]). From Bromden's position of pretending to be a deaf-mute, he exercises control over the signifying practices of Nurse Ratched, therefore, resisting domination.

Chief Bromden's main fear originates from the existence of a system of control that he labels the Combine and, which, he claims, Nurse Ratched is a member of (26). He states that "it is a huge organisation that aims to adjust the Outside as well as she has the Inside" (26) and that these adjustments are enacted through a control panel. Bromden states that:

I've watched her get more and more skilful over the years. Practice has steadied and strengthened her until now she wields a power that extends in all directions on hairlike wires too small for anybody's eye but mine, I see her sit in the centre of this web of wires like a watchful robot, tend her network with mechanical insect skill, know every second which wire runs where and just what current to send up to get the results she wants. (26-7)

Chief Bromden indicates that the Acutes are responsive to adjustments in "the control panel" (17) and that McMurphy makes the dials in the control panel "twitch" (17) with the sound of his laughter. The narrative contains many references to the Combine describing it as a web that both joins and controls people in society. Bromden describes it as existing in industry (39), and reaching out of television programmes (76), and defines the Combine in the following terms:

The Combine. [...] It wanted us to live in inspected houses. It wanted to take the falls. It was even in the tribe [...] They put things in! They *install* things. They start as quick as they see you're gonna be big and go to working and installing their filthy machinery when you're little, and keep on and on and on till you're *fixed*! And if you fight they lock you someplace and make you stop. (208-09)

From this description, an argument can be made that there is no difference between

the Combine as a unified system that occupies space by the use of the pronoun "It" and the Combine as a collective by the use of the pronoun "they". The Combine exists in the dominant Euro-American culture and even permeates the cultural space of the Native-Americans. It contains an expansionist ideology by wanting to take the falls from the tribe and tries to control them through hegemonic practices by supplying them with standardised housing.

As has been discussed previously, human culture consists of a group of embodied individuals interacting in an environment of others. This interaction is communicated through a system of signs, comprising of, amongst other things, linguistic strategies which Bromden rejects in the early part of the story. Consequently, if we are to look for a system that defines cultural space, then it is reasonable to argue that culture can be described as being a system of signs. This system of signs had managed to permeate the tribal cultural space, and therefore, in all probability, consists of the signifying practices of the dominant Euro-American culture.

Bromden's negation of the linguistic sign can be seen to be reflexive experience that he has inherited from his father. Bromden's father demonstrated that the signifying practices of the coloniser can be resisted by a refusal to enter the liminal margin into a space of negotiation. Bromden's father used linguistic difference as a tool of resistance when government officials tried to buy the falls from the tribe:

Papa didn't seem to take any notice of the way they talked. He kept looking at the sky. 'Geese up there white man. You know it. Geese this year. And last year. And the year before and the year before.' The men looked at each other and cleared their throats. 'yes. Maybe true, Chief Bromden. Now. Forget geese. Pay attention to contract'. [...] Papa said '...and the year before and the year before and the year before...' (91-2)

The binary position that Chief Bromden's father creates leads to a situation where the government uses other means than negotiation to acquire the tribe's waterfall. As Bromden states, "the government would have got it anyhow, sooner or later" (163). His father's traditional stance of being a strong patriarch, in this case, hampered the tribe's opportunity of entering a negotiation that might have helped to maintain the cultural integrity of the tribe. In the absence of a hybrid variant of signifying practices, the government officials negotiated with what could be considered the most valuable symbol that they had within their cultural arsenal, that of money. After this act, an attempt at cultural hybridity can be seen to be meaningless, as Joey Fish in a Barrel discovered when he used his compensation from the government to purchase three Cadillacs that he could not drive (273). His attempt at cultural integration ended at him owning three symbols of a Euro-American culture that were of no direct value to him. This illustrates that the transferral of signs across cultural boundaries does not

automatically lead to a direct transfer of meaning.

At the beginning of the narrative the Combine is viewed by Bromden as being an elusive entity that has the power to permeate and control everyone, but he starts to understand the limitations of the Combine by listening intently to the Chronic patient Colonel Matterson's ramblings (129). Bromden realises that Colonel Matterson is describing the labelling practices in society as a system of symbols, where objects are assigned qualities which define their meaning in human culture. It is at this point in the narrative that Chief Bromden realises that by being able to "read all the signs" (131) that he can empower himself by asserting control over the Combine instead of vice versa. This change of position is demonstrated when Chief Bromden lifts his hand in a vote to change ward policy:

Just by the way the nurse is staring at me with her mouth empty of words I can see I'm in for trouble, but I can't stop it. McMurphy's got hidden wires hooked to it [...] He's doing it. No. That's not the truth. I lifted it myself.(136)

This act of agentic resistance is the point at which Bromden starts to both exercise power over the Combine, and understands that the Combine is a social process. During the narrative, Bromden develops, moving from a position of paralysed fear of the Combine (7), to one of understanding its limitations by stating, "[it's] the nationwide Combine that's the really big force, and the nurse is just a high-ranking official for them" (181). This leads to a position of autonomy, where he simultaneously exists both on the inside and on the outside of cultural processes:

I watched, part of them, laughing with them – and somehow not with them. I was off the boat, blown up off the water and skating the wind [...] I could look down and see myself and the rest of the guys [...] see McMurphy surrounded by his dozen people, and watch them, us, swinging a laughter that rang out on the water in ever-widening circles. (238)

Bromden's transition, from a position of 'fear of' the Combine, to one of 'power over' the Combine, is presented symbolically by Bromden's overpowering of the control panel in the shower room. Bromden's action transforms it from a tool of domination (175) to one of liberation (310), and this is central to my argument of Bromden's agentic metamorphosis.

### **Chief Bromden and R. P. McMurphy as an Agentic Pair**

The relationship that develops between McMurphy and Chief Bromden during the course of the narrative has led to some confusion as to the identification of the protagonist, as can be studied in Lawrence Kappel. It has been presumed by some critics that McMurphy is the protagonist, as Bromden has the role of being first person narrator, while other critics have assigned Bromden the role of being both the

narrator and the protagonist. My reading suggests another solution that places both Chief Bromden and McMurphy at the margins of the sign, or the liminal margin of difference. I suggest, therefore, that Bromden and McMurphy interrupt the synchronous flow across the sign, and, therefore, represent a new cultural space.

As such, Bromden and McMurphy are capable of resisting Nurse Ratched's signifying practices by moving across the liminal margin and they successively invade the staff's cultural space. Bromden succeeds in this, through his feigned deafness, by gaining access to the staff meetings, and McMurphy invades the nurse's and doctor's office spaces renegotiating his social situation on a number of occasions. It is from this analysis that I argue that there are two protagonists in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, conjoined through agency. Therefore, by examining McMurphy's agentic strategies, I argue that a clearer understanding can be reached of the transition and transformation of Bromden during the course of the story.

Bromden juxtaposes his father's agentic position of a 'resistance from' to McMurphy's agentic position of a 'resistance for'. This is demonstrated in the narrative with Bromden identifying with McMurphy. Examples of this are when McMurphy enlarges Bromden's hand (24), when McMurphy encourages Bromden to vote (136), when McMurphy breaks through Bromden's wall of silence (81), and when Bromden compares McMurphy's face to his (153). Bromden clearly indicates the importance of their relationship when he states, "McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I'd remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kid's poetry to me" (243). The identification processes move from one of a re-birth at the start of the narrative, to one of independence for Bromden at the end of the narrative, with each part of the narrative moving Bromden closer to a position where he can take control of the labelling processes of others.

In the second half of the narrative Bromden starts to develop an interdependent position, seeing McMurphy less as 'the big other', as a child might experience a parent, and more as a partner with a shared purpose. This is evident in Bromden's intervention in the fight that McMurphy has with the black attendants in the shower room of the ward (259-63). Interdependency, therefore, eventually turns into independence when Bromden releases McMurphy from being a symbol of Nurse Ratched's power by smothering him (309) after his labotomization. This act of compassion re-immerses Bromden into the social world of others, indicating a re-assembly of his self-confidence and social identity. Bromden "reached into McMurphy's night stand and got his cap and tried it on. It was too small. I dropped it on Scanlon's bed as I walked out of the dorm" (310). This marks the completion of



juxtaposed positions of action and inaction between Bromden and McMurphy. Consequently, a closer analysis of McMurphy's resistance will support my assertion that Chief Bromden's liberation as one of adding negotiation, contingency and indeterminacy to the system that orders Native-American and Euro-American cultural spaces in the story.

### **McMurphy as Agent**

The narrative of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is divided into four parts, each ending with McMurphy challenging Nurse Ratched's authority over the patients. In part one, McMurphy enters immediately into a process of negotiation of identity on his admittance, with both the patients and the staff. He negotiates not just his own identity, which is primarily defined by the symbols on and around his body, but also moves from patient to patient, renegotiating their identities (21). From the outset, he interferes with the labelling processes as defined by the staff in the institution. The result of this process is that McMurphy receives two sets of identities; one from the patients that consists of him being a hustler, drifter, logger, cowboy, soldier, prospector, gambler and prison bird (20); and one from the staff, that defines him as being an unmarried 35-year-old who was dishonourably discharged from the army, accused of rape, assault and battery, disturbing the peace and drunkenness (42). In the space that existed between the labelling practices of the staff and the patients, McMurphy keeps his felt identity a secret and therefore maintains control over the signifying practices of others. Bromden states:

I'd see him do things that don't fit with his face and hands, things like painting a picture at OT with real paints on a blank paper with no lines or numbers [...] or like writing letters to somebody in a beautiful flowing hand. How could a man who looked like him paint pictures or write letters to people, or be upset or worried like I saw him once when he got a letter back? [...] He hadn't let what he looked like run his life one way or the other, any more than he'd let the Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to fit. (153)

From this description, Bromden presents a McMurphy that is capable of expelling the labels placed on him by the staff and the patients, therefore maintaining a sense of self.

The introduction of McMurphy to the ward destabilises the established relationships of power between the patients and staff. This interference to established ward procedures creates tensions between these two established cultural groups. Therefore, a new configuration of power relationships is enabled between the signifier and signified. It is on perceiving this new configuration that Bromden starts to return to the social world of others (24). McMurphy adjusts his tactics of resistance to institutional domination progressively throughout the narrative, and this is noted by

Bromden perceptively noticing McMurphy thinking his way out of confinement on a number of occasions (54, 120 and 162). He uses tactics such as ambiguity to destabilise the linguistic sign. One example of this is when Nurse Ratched inspects McMurphy's cleaning of the toilets, and she exasperates, "Why, this is an outrage... an outrage...' at every bowl. McMurphy sidled right along beside her, winking down his nose and saying in answer, 'No; that's a toilet bowl... a *toilet* bowl'" (151).

From the onset McMurphy works to introduce removal activities to the ward, indicating his autonomy from the role created for him by the courts and by the hospital (72). He takes part in ward activities, such as therapy sessions and working duties, but always does it on the terms that he negotiates during his admission to the ward. He maintains the heroic role of free hustler with the patients, of social equal with the African-American staff and of manipulator with Nurse Ratched. After the first group therapy session, McMurphy tries to assign Nurse Ratched a new identity in an attempt to release the patients from the relationship of binary power that exists up until his internment. He states:

If you're up against a guy who wants to win by making you weaker instead of making himself stronger, then watch for his knee, he's gonna go for your vitals [...] she's a bitch and a buzzard and a ballcutter. (58)

Prior to this re-identifying process, the Acutes had been unable to view themselves as being separate entities from the environment that they had subjected themselves to. The social environment that they been part of in society had labelled them as being different, and therefore, they were unable to meet the conditions of normality that were imposed upon them in a wider social setting (41, 97). To escape this social rejection, they voluntarily subject themselves to the care of Nurse Ratched, and grant her absolute power in the process of reconstructing their social identities. The re-labelling of staff by McMurphy changes the relationship between the patients and staff from one of dependency to one of interdependency, whereby the patients become empowered, allowing them to reject the normalising procedures of Nurse Ratched. This becomes progressively evident in part two of the narrative as the patients become more independent from Nurse Ratched.

All of the negotiation processes that McMurphy initiates in the first half of the narrative are acts of personal survival, designed to ensure that he is as undamaged by the system of the asylum as possible on his date of release. His strategies are based on a "total institutional" model (Goffman 11) that he has previous experience of, namely the army and prison (20). Both of these total institutions involve a set period of internment, supported by a structure of confinement based on obedience and established hierarchal power structures. McMurphy is forced to reconsider his

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strategies of survival when he finds out, firstly, that most of the patients in the ward are hospitalised voluntarily (183), and secondly, that he faces no definitive period of internment once he is committed in an asylum (161). At this point McMurphy becomes cagey:

McMurphy was doing the smart thing [...] He was giving in because it was the smartest thing to do. I told myself that over and over: It's safe. Like hiding [...] the only way he's going to get the Big Nurse to lift his commitment is by acting like she wants. (165)

McMurphy, at this point, is trying to convince Nurse Ratched to re-label him, seeking for her to redefine his public social identity. He acts in a way that signifies his subordinate status in the face of a dominant adversary. He uses this strategy as a way of avoiding a longer term of internment, but he still manages to resist internalising the labels denoted him by members of the staff at the hospital. The distance that exists between the staff and the patients protects McMurphy's position. He can resist domination as long as the patients are allowed to indulge in removal activities on their own terms, and McMurphy does not attempt to tinker with established power relationships as long as this cultural distance is permitted. The situation is disrupted, however, when Nurse Ratched takes control of the patient's space by banning them from using the tub room for gambling. McMurphy's reaction is instantaneous:

He shrugged his shoulders and with a loud sigh slapped both hands down on his knees and pushed himself standing out of the chair. He [...] started strolling across the day room to where she sat by the Nurse's Station [...] He walked with long steps, too long, and he had his thumbs hooked in his pockets again. [...] The Big Nurse's eyes swelled out white as he got close. [...] He stopped in front of her window [...] then ran his hand through the glass. (189-90)

McMurphy's reaction marks a reversal of his strategies, whereby Nurse Ratched's attempt to dominate the patients space is met by McMurphy smashing his way into hers. The window represents a cultural boundary and by breaking it, McMurphy destroys the liminal boundary that maintains the system of order that separates the staff and patients.

From this point on, the nurses and the patients share the same physical space and Nurse Ratched's gaze is hindered by cardboard covering the window (193). Nurse Ratched tries to maintain her position of power by both refusing to release or transfer McMurphy, and McMurphy realises that the Nurse's power depends on the physical existence of the patients in her ward when he finds out that they are mostly voluntarily committed (181-86). McMurphy changes his strategy of resistance to one of building the confidence of the patients at this time. If McMurphy can convince the patients to free themselves and therefore releasing the patients from their dependency on Nurse Ratched, then the existence of power on the ward becomes meaningless

(293). Nurse Ratched's efforts to re-establish the boundary of power that is represented by the office window are futile, as the window is repeatedly broken by McMurphy and Martini as soon as a new pane of glass is installed.

It is at this point in the narrative that McMurphy organises a fishing trip in an attempt to re-immense the patients into the world of others. The two cars that they occupy become free-places whereby identities are re-negotiated and established roles are abolished (226-27). Bromden astutely recognises that the freedom that they share in their new space is quickly threatened by the labelling processes of a wider society. This is evident at the onset when the group pull into a petrol station. The staff at the petrol station refuse to treat the group seriously as they label them as being patients of the asylum. McMurphy intervenes and renegotiates their identities and statuses with the bigger of the station attendants:

He put his hands up in the guy's face, real close, turning them over slowly, palm and knuckle. "you ever see a man get his poor old meat hooks so pitifully chewed up just throwin' the *bull*" [...] The guy looked at the hands, and at me, and back at the hands. When it was clear he didn't have anything else real pressing to say, McMurphy walked away. (225)

It is at this point of the narrative that Bromden starts to release himself from the process of reflexivity that has defined his relationship with McMurphy. The patient party that follows, in part four, also entails the identification of another free-place, that of night time. McMurphy shows the patients that they can also renegotiate their identities within the confines of the ward, under the nose of Nurse Ratched. They move from free-place to free-place within the confinement of the ward (285-88), until the ward belongs to the patients and Nurse Ratched's fury is met by laughter (297).

The party is marked by McMurphy refusing to leave the ward when the opportunity arises and Bromden states that:

McMurphy would have [to] come back. Would have *had* to come back, because he could have no more sat around outside the hospital [...] and let the Big Nurse have the last play, than he could have let her get by with it right under his nose. It was like he'd signed on for the whole game and there wasn't any way of him breaking his contract. (296)

The tragedy that follows with Billy's suicide and McMurphy's attack on Nurse Ratched sets the scene for McMurphy's lobotomy. The attack on Nurse Ratched is to be Bromden's last lesson from McMurphy:

[o]nly at the last, after the officials realised that the three black boys weren't going to do anything but stand and watch and they would have to beat him off without their help, [...] only then did he show any sign that he might be anything other than a sane, wilful, dogged man

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performing a hard duty that finally just had to be done, like it or not [...] He gave a cry. At the last, falling backward [...] A sound of a cornered animal, fear and hate and surrender and defiance. (305)

Bromden realises that the difference between the label of sanity and insanity is related to the processes of civilisation and colonisation. McMurphy's unwillingness to be colonised by a force representing a rational process of civilisation has in turn pushed him into a position from where he can be labelled as being insane. Bromden understands that this defiance to domination from an established order is an instinctive universal human reaction, which is confirmed when he releases McMurphy from being a symbol of Nurse Ratched's power by suffocating him. A lobotomised and incapacitated McMurphy fights back, showing that fighting for survival is not just a conscious human action, but also an unconscious action of human resistance to domination from the world of others (309).

**Chief Bromden and the Third Space of Hybridity**

Chief Bromden is of mixed race, part Columbian-Indian and part Euro-American, and grows up between two polarised cultural spaces. The attempts he makes to meet the expectations of these two cultural groups are met by essentialist arguments from the two cultural representatives in his family, his mother and his father. Bromden's felt identity exists between these two cultural systems and is expressed by him explicitly when he states:

[...] your mama kicked the living tar out of me when she heard: Teaching a kid to eat *bugs!* Good injun boy should know how to survive on anything he can eat that won't eat him first. We ain't Indians. We're civilised and you remember it. (272)

From this quotation it can be argued that the narrative exhibits a tense liminal margin existing between the systems of signs that Bromden's parents use to transfer historical cultural identity. This polemic tension can be seen in the spelling, and therefore pronunciation, of the word "Indian" by the mother and the word "injun" by the father, indicating two lexical registers. The ellipsis of Bromden's voice indicates that Bromden exists within these two systems of signs. Bromden, being both internal and external to this structure, is confused by the lack of cultural translation and tries to discuss these prejudices with the government officials that come to his house to negotiate with his father; one of the government officials comments that:

[It] would be very simple to go in and talk with him. "Inside in that squalor? Why, I'll just bet you anything that place is acrawl with black widows. [...] and hot, Lord-a-mercy [...] I'll wager it's a regular oven in there." [...] I let them say another thing or two about the heat and the house, then I stand up and tell the fat man, in my very best schoolbook language, that our sod house is likely to be cooler than any one of the houses in town, *lots cooler!* I know for a

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fact that it's cooler'n that school I go to and even cooler'n that movie house in the Dalles that advertises with that sign drawn with icicle letters that it's cool inside. (200)

Bromden's comments are ignored and the officials pretend that they do not even see him. He is perceived to be a Native-American child and the officials do not acknowledge that he is a subject, which denies him space to comment or negotiate.

This is a theme that continues throughout Bromden's career prior to his internment in the asylum. He states that

[it] wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all [...] I can remember people saying that they didn't think I was listening, so they quit listening to the things I was saying. (198)

From this statement it can be argued that Bromden's feigned deafness is an internalisation of the expectations of a wider society. Therefore, he behaves in a reflexive manner, existing in a cultural liminal space, resisting the signifying practices of both Nurse Ratched and the patients by maintaining a sense of self as negotiated prior to his internment.

It can be also argued that this develops into a reflexive position of a 'resistance from' the signifying practices of Nurse Ratched. Bromden resists by using methods that are similar to those of his father when he is confronted by an overwhelming force. Bromden's mother convinces the late Chief Bromden to negotiate with the state department (202), but the exchange of symbols, the tribe's falls exchanged for money, leaves the tribe with financial compensation, but a radically changed life style. This is an example of a polemic cultural negotiation that leads to a process of assimilation of "the tribe who'd left the village in the last days to do work on the gravel crusher for the dam. The frenzied pattern, the faces hypnotised by routine" (36). Bromden's experience of the assimilation of the tribe by hegemonic practices is translated into a loss of cultural identity, and this implies that his strategy of feigning deafness in the asylum is an act of survival, maintaining a sense of the self, resisting one and all.

McMurphy manages to break through Bromden's wall of silence, awakening him to a world of resistance, where action replaces inaction. This process of relearning enables Bromden to take control of the signifying practices of others:

[I] walked to our day room [...] everybody's face turned up to me with a different look than they'd ever given me before. Their faces lighted up as if they were looking into the glare of a sideshow platform. 'here in front of your very eyes [...] is the wildman' [...] I grinned back at them, realizing how McMurphy must've felt these months with these faces screaming up at

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him. [...] I told them everything that they heard was true, and tossed in a few stories of my own. They laughed [...] just like they understood. (277)

From this agentive position, Bromden's clear perception allows him to maintain control of his liminal identity laying the foundation from where his cultural hybridity can become an opportunity rather than a burden for the tribe. Evidence of this can be seen when Bromden exists in a liminal state between the unconscious world and the conscious world after ECT treatment:

[Joey] Fish-in-a-Barrel has twenty thousand dollars and three Cadillacs since the contract. And he can't drive none of 'em. I see a dice. I see it from the inside, me at the bottom. I'm the weight, loading the dice. [...] They're shooting with crookies against him, and I'm the load. (273)

Bromden argues that his role as tribal leader, and the position taken by him and his father of a 'resistance from', therefore blocking a re-negotiation of cultural signs, has made it impossible for Joey Fish-in-a-Barrel to compete fairly in a wider society. This realisation marks the turning point in the narrative, releasing Bromden from a reflexive 'resistance from' to a reflexive 'resistance for'. Bromden demonstrates this by stating:

If you don't have a reason to wake up you can loaf around in that grey zone for a long, fuzzy time, or if you want it bad enough I found you can come fighting right out of it. This time I came fighting out of it in less than a day, less time than ever [...] It was the last treatment they gave me. (276)

Bromden clearly states that he has a new reason to fight his way back out of the fog that is caused by the ECT treatment. Considering that he is rumoured to have undergone hundreds of such treatments during a period of internment stretching back twenty years, this marks a new sense of purpose in the career of Bromden as a leader.

I have presented evidence of the control panel as being a symbol of the controlling processes of discourse in society, and of Bromden's transition as being a development from 'fear of' the Combine, to one of 'power over' the Combine by his overpowering of the control panel. I have also presented evidence of Bromden having a new and invigorated purpose that adds dimension to his symbolic use of the control panel as a tool of liberation. To show that Bromden's liberation can be read as a Third Space of hybridity between the Native-American and Euro-American cultural spaces, an analysis of Bromden's actions and dialogue following his act of liberation is necessary.

On leaving the asylum, Bromden makes his way to the highway and "caught a ride

with a guy, a Mexican guy” (311) and immediately:

[gave] him a good story about me being a professional Indian wrestler the syndicate tried to lock up in a nut house and he stopped real quick and gave me a leather jacket to cover my greens and loaned me ten bucks to eat on while I hitchhiked to Canada. (311)

Bromden negotiates by taking control of the labels of identification that exist on and around his body, just as McMurphy did on his admittance to the asylum. This allows the meaning of the symbols to be re-negotiated, changing their meaning from one of difference to one of sameness. The re-labeling of symbols creates a meeting governed by tolerance rather than of suspicion, and as such, power relationships are balanced.

Furthermore, when the truck driver drops him off, Bromden states that “I might go to Canada eventually, but I think I’ll stop along the Columbia on the way” (311). This indicates that he is both going to maintain his autonomy and is willing to cross cultural boundaries unhindered. He continues by saying “I’d like to check around [...] to see if there’s any of the guys I used to know back in the village who haven’t drunk themselves goofy. I’d like to see what they’ve been doing since the government tried to buy their right to be Indians” (311). It is in this statement that the liminal space of hybridity becomes evident. He fulfils his obligations as Chief by gathering the tribe through his symbolic return, simultaneously identifying them in the linguistic register of his mother, by using her identifying label “Indian”. He also states that they have to some extent, survived the assimilation practices of the government by saying “tried to buy”, in turn indicating an existence of cultural sovereignty. Bromden extends this argument indicating a continuing polemic relationship between the tribe and the government: “I’ve heard that some of the tribe have took to building their old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over that big million dollar hydroelectric dam, and are spearing salmon in the spillway” (311). Bromden presents evidence of a continued strategy of a ‘resistance from’ that Bromden and his father represented.

Considering the evidence of Chief Bromden’s new agentive purpose as examined earlier, and his reflexive process of re-learning from McMurphy, where autonomy, inconsistency and liminal agency are the tools of resistance, survival and release, his final statement is conclusive. By stating “I’d like to look over the country around the gorge again, just to bring some of it clear in my mind again. I been away a long time” (311). He states that he wants to revive “some” of the memories, which indicates a conscious autonomy over the processes of memory and therefore over temporal cultural identity. By stating that he has been away a long time, he is also inferring that he is going back, just like McMurphy would have, to release the tribe from their dependency. Bromden returns with an added purpose, in control and in-between,



ready to negotiate within the sign. This liminal third space becomes one of a new opportunity, allowing a "Vanishing American" (67) to take control in the processes that construct social identity.

### **Conclusion**

In this essay I have presented evidence that chief Bromden's liberation in Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* can be usefully interpreted through Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space of hybridity. This counters previous critical analyses that have interpreted Bromden's escape as a futile act destined to domination from an established cultural hegemony. In previous critical analyses, Nurse Ratched still rules within and beyond the confines of the asylum, and efforts to struggle for social change are therefore futile.

If the decade that followed the publication of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is to be offered as evidence to the contrary, Bennett Huffman's allegoric theory of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as being a political reaction to the power of the American military complex at that time, becomes far more dynamic when Bromden's liberation becomes a symbol of action. In a contemporary context, further investigations of the story may prove fruitful in a time of intensifying cultural friction. Subsequently, I argue that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* should be dusted off and reappraised. When considering the political climate from which it evolved, a student of contemporary American culture would possibly not feel estranged by the story's concerns.

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