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Communicating Social Identity: The Sensory Performance of Cattle Branding

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the practice of cattle branding as a cultural performance, the sensory aspects of which contribute to the creation, maintenance, and communication of the social identity among cattle ranchers. This thesis used methods of sensory ethnography to generate sensory data to reveal how sensory knowledge permeates this cultural performance. The analysis is divided between five components of ritual activities used to study cultural performance: formalism, traditionalism, invariance of actions, rule-governance, and sacral symbolism (C. Bell 1997, 138). The main conclusion drawn from the analysis is that by using sensory ethnography in research on performance and identity new conceptual ground can be gained in communications and sociocultural studies by establishing a renewed focus on how sensory relations are social relations (Howes 2003, 55).

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Bird on a Wire

In September 2009, just as I was starting graduate school, my husband Patrick presented me with a wedding gift: a certificate for a cattle brand called “Bird on a Wire” registered in my new married name on our wedding date. Patrick had come up with the idea to give me an originally-designed brand with the image of a bird incorporated into it to represent my maiden name. His plan stalled when he learned that this would be considered a character brand which can no longer be registered in Alberta due to registration regulations. Character-based brands of intricate design – such as the image of a bird - are considered arbitrary because they do not follow the specific brand design regulations of the Alberta Livestock Identification Services (“LIS”).

Brands with arbitrary designs have not been part of the active brand registration system since 1955 (Pallister 2007, 13) and are only registered in special circumstances, typically as honorary brands, but not as working brands to be used on livestock (Livestock Identification Services 2012). Brands are considered real property, and as such they can be bought, sold, and transferred between parties like any commodity. The only way for an arbitrary brand to be registered to a new owner for use on livestock is if it already exists and has not expired. Like regular brands, existing arbitrary brands can be transferred from one owner to another or registered in a new location for use on an animal. The registered brand that a producer uses must be applied to the exact part of the animal specified on their registration certificate; this is because when the characters are applied to a different position on the animal, they legally become a different brand which may potentially be owned by someone else (Livestock Identification Services 2012). Once an arbitrary brand is allowed to expire it is taken out of the system and never reissued again to another person (Pallister 2007, 13). Brands that do fit the design criteria are retained by LIS in an archive and can be reissued even after expiry. Armed with this information, Patrick spent months prior to our wedding working with the LIS and the Stockmen’s Memorial Foundation in Cochrane scouring the archives and brand records for a bird-designed brand still registered but no longer in

use, hoping to find one that he liked and could register in my name. This search was fruitless.

Patrick turned to my father for assistance in locating a suitable brand design. My father suggested that they arrange a transfer of “Bird on a Wire” into my name. This brand was originally registered around 1903 by my great-grandfather R.P. Bird as a horse brand, and re-issued to my father Michael Bird as a cattle brand. After some creative manoeuvring by the legal counsel at LIS, this transfer process was completed without my knowledge which is highly irregular because a legal transfer requires both parties to sign in order to take place. The brand certificate was processed in time for Patrick to give it to me at our wedding rehearsal dinner. I used “Bird on a Wire” for the first time in May 2010 at my family’s annual cattle branding.

In giving me this unique wedding gift my husband and my father paid special tribute to my Bird family history as farmers and ranchers in southern Alberta. Being the owner of “Bird on a Wire” entitles me to use the brand on livestock as a sign of ownership. I can also pass it down as a piece of real property to my children, thereby continuing the act of remembering and honouring their identity as members of a special cultural community. This act of giving and the great importance placed on the history of the gift led me to start asking questions about the nature of cultural identity within the ranching communities of southern Alberta and how this identity is created, recreated, and shared through events such as cattle branding. It seemed clear to me that something more meaningful was happening than just the identification of livestock, and that this meaning-making would be worth closer investigation. This is where my thesis began.

Statement of Purpose

This thesis investigates how the cultural performance of cattle branding communicates shared identity among cattle ranchers as a special social group. Community is centrally important as a site of communication, and the community events of cattle branding present the perfect opportunity to study the process of identity creation and performance as it is happening. Approaching the study of cattle branding

ethnographically highlights some of the major difficulties in researching a cultural performance through traditional ethnographic methodologies. Of particular importance was the participants' reliance on the transmission of culturally-contingent and sensory ways of knowing, which led to some creative methodological choices including elements of sensory ethnography. From early on I realized that I would need to focus my research on the sensory aspects of the cultural performance under study in an attempt to decipher the interactions and identity creation through the culturally-defined sensorium being used at cattle brandings. In the hope of solving the methodological problem that the cattle branding event posed I designed my research using an observational method that would generate data with a distinctly sensory aspect to it. By understanding the practice of cattle branding as a cultural performance from a sensory perspective I was better equipped to provide analysis regarding the social identity of the participants in a way that would ultimately be more meaningful to them, while also making a unique contribution to the fields of communications and performance studies.

This research was also conducted in response to a gap in the existing types of research on the cattle industry. Although there is a considerable amount of popular appeal to the discussion of cowboy culture and the world of cattle ranching, academic studies of the cattle industry in Canada are largely either scientific or legally-based, focused on identifying best practice solutions for optimum animal health and production. When academic studies of the cattle industry venture into the liberal arts they are generally historic accounts, rarely sociocultural in scope, and almost never ethnographic. In his focus on the ranching cultures of Alberta western historian Warren Elofson explains that historians tend to limit their study to the large land owners with great political and economic clout – the cattle barons of this cattle kingdom – and “overlook ordinary people in the early history of western ranching, in part because records of them are sparse” (Elofson 2000, xviii). This focus on the large herd owners has resulted in a “top-down” approach to studying ranching history that neglects the grass-roots of ranching society (Elofson 2000, xvi). It is the legacy of those ordinary people that resonates in the present-day ranching culture and ethos.

There is a space open for detailed research and analysis of the various cultural dimensions of cattle branding. It has been my intention to participate in building up the body of research on the cattle industry by using cattle branding as an example of a sociocultural ritual of a traditional practice in a contemporary setting, and to begin filling in some of the gaps in the current field of research. This necessarily includes bringing cattle branding as subject matter into new fields where it has not been studied before, namely performance, communication, and sensory studies.

What is Cattle Branding?

The branding of cattle is the process by which livestock are marked with the use of branding irons to apply an alphanumeric image on to the animal's hide as an identifying sign of ownership. The most common branding method is hot branding where the irons are heated using wood fires or propane torches, although freeze branding is also acceptable and is done by submerging the irons in methyl hydrate cooled with dry ice (Livestock Identification Services 2012). Brands must be registered with the LIS before it is legal to brand cattle with them in Alberta, and the use of an unregistered brand is against the law (Livestock Identification Services 2012). Livestock in Alberta do not have to be branded to be considered the legal property of their owner; all that is required to prove legal ownership of livestock is a bill of sale (Livestock Identification Services 2012). It is commonly accepted by ranchers that choosing not to brand their cattle means accepting the potential risk of theft and fraud that goes with having unbranded livestock.

There is a set of design specifications established by the LIS that must be adhered to when issuing new brands to ensure that brands conform to established protocols and to minimize the potential for conflicts. These established protocols must be followed in order for a brand to be accepted by the Brand Record and registered for use in Alberta. The design protocols for cattle brands as set by the LIS are as follows: any letter of the alphabet can be used in a brand except "Q" (the letter "Q" will never be used because of its similarity to an "O"); the letter "G" can only be used in the reverse position to avoid confusion with the letter "C" (which is never reversed); any numbers

except the "0" and the "1" can be used; the letter "I" can only be used without a top or bottom line; the letter "J" can only be used with no top line, to avoid confusion with a "T"; only the design characters "anchor", "triangle", "diamond" and "square" can be used; only the letters "B", "D", "R", "E", "F", and "K" can be used in the reverse position; the letters "P", "A", "R", "B", "S", "D", "T", "E", "U", "F", "H", and "M" can be used in the lazy left position; the letters "A", "B", reversed "B", "D", reversed "D", "E", reversed "E", "F", reversed "F", "H", "J", "K", reversed "K", "L", "M", "N", "P", "R", reversed "R", "U", "W" are allowed as monograms; the symbols "half-diamond", "half-circle" and "running bar" can be used in brand design, although half-diamonds must have the ends pointing toward the brand characters, the ends of the half circle must point away from the brand characters, and the running bar can only be used directly in front, behind or between two characters (Livestock Identification Services 2012).

Ranchers brand their calves between May and July depending on when they are born. Calves are branded anywhere between the ages of three to twelve weeks. Brandings take place in an enclosed space, generally described as a branding trap, specifically set off for the purpose of capture so that workers may corral and work with the animals in a safe and manageable area. This can range from a well established corral system made from permanent fences to temporary branding traps set up with lightweight moveable panels. The cows and their calves must be rounded up and brought out of pasture to the location of the branding. How this rounding up is accomplished depends upon the distance they must be brought and the inclination of the producer and other participants. Cattle can easily be moved on foot, horseback, or with all-terrain vehicles. Once the participants in the round up begin to gather the cattle together, the herd instincts of the cattle take over and they will naturally group together and begin to move in the direction they are guided by the movers. When going through their daily lives cattle are generally very quiet, lowing to their calves occasionally but mostly communicating through the dynamics of body movement and herd hierarchies. However, when interacting with humans, cattle constantly reorganize the herd both physically and acoustically, keeping track of each other and their offspring through sounds ranging from low, chesty rumblings to ear-splitting shrieks. With enough movers

rounding up cattle is an easy and enjoyable process. If there are not enough people to help, or if the cattle are handled in a way they are unused to, the process can be much more difficult and result in the cattle getting away from the movers.

Once gathered into the branding trap the cows will either be sorted off from the calves or left in the pen with them for the duration of the branding. Sorting off the cows can take place on foot with one person working the gate or even on horseback with no gates at all. This choice of whether or not to leave some cows in the trap with the calves is completely up to the owner or manager of the cattle, based on considerations of safety for both animals and people. If there is not enough space to allow the animals some distance from the people working in the trap, serious issues of safety for both can arise. As the herders begin to sort the cattle, deliberately separating cows from calves and chasing the cows out of the trap, the sounds the cattle make become more urgent. Some mothers press up against gates and fences, as physically close to their calves as possible, and call unrelentingly in order to stay aurally connected to their offspring. The calves themselves calm down once corralled together, taking solace in the herd once again, even if separated from their mothers.

The human-made sounds begin to take over at this point, the most deafening being the propane torch funneled into a steel drum to heat the branding irons. The roar is incessant and drowns out all attempts at conversation, causing the participants to have to yell at one another. During the processing of the calves, the action of the participants is a bewildering, chaotic organization of team labour; depending on the number of calves being processed there may be upwards of fifty people scattered across the branding trap engaged in the necessary tasks. Processing can involve any combination of the following elements: branding, castration of male animals, vaccinations, delousing, ear tagging, and dehorning. Each member of the ground crew has one designated task to perform, and do so with swift and precise execution, moving expertly around each other in the commotion. Riders on horseback weave in between the collected calves, roping them by the hind feet and dragging them to the ground crew. Roping calves by the hind feet is described as heeling, and therefore the ropers are often referred to as heelers. The ropers set the pace of the work being performed,

and it is expected that they be quick and efficient in their roping, never leaving the ground crew without animals to work on. This job takes longer as the day wears on because as the number of processed animals in the trap grows, it becomes increasingly difficult to find and rope the unprocessed ones.

Once the roper arrives with a calf for processing the first thing that must be accomplished is complete immobilization of the animal. This is where teams of wrestlers are used; working in pairs, wrestlers flip the calf on its side, always being sure to have the side to be branded facing upwards, and remove the rope from the calf's heels so that the roper can get back to heeling. One wrestler grabs the rope close to the calf's heels while the other takes hold of the tail; they quickly pull together to flip the calf horizontally and land it broadside on the ground (Pallister 2007, 193). One of the partners immobilizes the front end by kneeling on the calf's outstretched neck and bending up the top-most front leg. The other partner sits on the ground behind the calf, places one foot firmly against the calf's back leg just above the hock and holds the top-most back leg stretched out (Pallister 2007, 193). This prepares the calf for processing, and the wrestlers hold it through all of the procedures. Some wrestlers avoid getting in the dirt by operating a Nord Fork:

a Nord Fork is a wishbone shaped device whose small end fits behind the head and under the ears of a calf to help hold it while the ground crew works the calf. It is very easy for one person to release. To use a Nord Fork a calf is heeled then dragged past the ground crew. As the calf goes by, one of the ground crew slips the Nord Fork behind the calf's head. As the heeler continues to drag the calf, a rope and inner tube tied to the Nord Fork and staked into the ground tighten. When the rope and inner tube are tight, the heeler quits dragging. The heeler continues to hold the heel rope as the calf is worked, and the Nord Fork holds the front end (Bruguiere 2010).

If the ground crew are using Nord Forks instead of teams of wrestlers there will be only one member of the crew assigned to run it. There will definitely be more than one Nord Fork in operation though, the number depending upon their availability, the number of ropers, and the size of the trap since the Nord Forks cannot be staked together too closely.

Once the calf is immobilized, the members of the ground crew complete their tasks surrounded constantly by the movement of other participants and the clouds of acrid smoke generated by the branding. Taggers use a spring-loaded metal tagging device to pierce each calf's ear with a small industry regulated radio frequency tag (Canadian Cattle Identification Agency 2009). Vaccinators use twelve inch syringes with ten gauge hypodermic needles to administer subcutaneous injections of vaccines against common bovine diseases. Heavily-gloved people use a measured spray gun filled with potent delousing chemicals to coat the backs of the calves with a fine mist. Male animals are castrated with the use of either a scalpel or very sharp jackknife; the scrotum is cut open, the testicles are removed and the spermatic cords are severed. One of these workers will usually also be responsible for marking the calf down the back with either a brightly coloured oil crayon or spray paint, making it easily identifiable to the ropers as having already been processed.

The definitive moment in the calf's processing is when it is branded. A branding iron heated to the correct temperature takes three to five seconds to apply, done swiftly by pressing firmly and rocking the handle slightly to apply the characters evenly (Livestock Identification Services 2012). A well-maintained and properly heated iron is essential to the process:

if the brand was not burned deep enough it would not peel, and if the iron was too hot it would burn too deep, cook the flesh, blot the brand, and leave a wound that would become infected. If too cold it would leave no brand, only a sore (Adams 1970, xiv).

The calf is generally branded from the top-side which means that the brander uses the irons upside down and backwards, keeping his or her feet out of the way of the calf's legs. When the iron is lifted, the hide is a clean buckskin color and the calf is categorically and undeniably marked for life. The total time a calf is immobilized is generally between forty-five seconds to one and a half minutes, meaning that the ground crew is not only efficient in their tasks but also expected to be very swift in order to minimize the amount of stress placed on the animal. Once released by the wrestlers the calf returns to the herd.

One of the most important parts of the branding event is the social aspect of the gathering, enjoyed by participants both during the performance of work and after the work is done. Family, friends, and neighbors join together to complete the tasks of getting the calves processed, but at the same time engage in practical jokes, eager conversation, and general sociability. It is a cherished opportunity for people to get together and enjoy each other's company and is a happy tradition for most ranching communities. It is also expected that the owner of the calves being branded is to play host to the workers, providing refreshments throughout the day and also usually a full meal afterwards. These meals can become quite elaborate, requiring a crew of their own to prepare, and regularly include the western delicacy of prairie oysters. The social aspect of brandings features largely in the dynamics of the group identity being created and maintained, and is as important a component of the performance taking place as any of the other actions of the event.

Chapter Organization

The organization of the chapters to follow begins with the Literature Review which outlines the three research questions and situates this thesis within the broader fields of communications and performance studies. These are the guiding theoretical frameworks for this research which set the stage for the use of sensory ethnography as a methodology. The concepts of social identity, cultural performance and the relevant aspects of sensory studies are detailed. Also discussed is the use of the components of ritual to explore in greater depth the identity creation taking place during the cultural performance.

The Methods chapter describes the research process and methodological issues surrounding this topic. The use of sensory ethnography is explained in greater depth. This chapter outlines the three methods of participant-observation, interviews and photo elicitation that were used, the reasons for selecting them, the difficulties experienced and how those issues were overcome. Detail regarding the means of collecting data is provided in relation to each of the methods. There are brief sketches of the interview participants presented for background information. The method of thematic analysis of

the collected data is explained through three stages of thematic coding: descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and finally identifying the overarching themes to be analyzed.

A Research Context chapter has been included to give a brief overview of the historical relevance of the cattle industry in southern Alberta, explaining the cultural foundations of the group under study and how the practices of cattle branding came to be established. This chapter also provides detail about the specific ranches whose brandings were attended as case studies: the Bogi Ranch at Cessford visited on June 15, 2010, and the OH Ranch at Longview visited on July 23, 2010.

The Analysis chapter explores and interprets the findings important to unpacking the overarching themes identified in the collected data through thematic coding. Insights that emerged regarding social identity throughout the research process are re-examined within the structure of the five characteristic components of ritual used for studying cultural performance - formalism, traditionalism, invariance of actions, rule-governance, and sacral symbolism (C. Bell 1997, 138) - all viewed through the lens of sensory studies.

Finally, the Conclusion highlights the conceptual importance of the overall thesis by specifically addressing the third research question. The concepts introduced in the Literature Review are revisited in order to describe how this research adds to the overall bodies of knowledge drawn upon. This chapter also outlines the opportunities for future applications of the work started by this thesis.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of this thesis is designed to support the methodology of sensory ethnography and to facilitate the investigation of the following three research questions:

- 1) How do the sensory aspects of the cultural performance of cattle branding contribute to the creation, maintenance, and communication of the shared social identity of participants?
- 2) How can a focus on the senses as a component in the characteristics of ritual be included in a study of cultural performance?
- 3) What conceptual ground can be gained by incorporating sensory ethnography into a study of performance and identity?

This thesis uses sensory ethnography to study cattle branding as a cultural performance which encompasses ritualistic activities shared by participants. Investigation through fieldwork and frameworks for analysis draw upon theories from communication studies, performance studies and sensory studies in order to examine the shared social identity created through all of the ritualistic components of the cultural performance with special attention paid to the sensory aspects of that performance. The intention behind incorporating sensory studies into the theoretical and methodological frameworks is to find a way to access the sensory codes and meanings of the cultural performance as they are being shared by performance participants.

Sensory ethnography is an evolving methodology in terms of form, praxis, and theoretical underpinning. This thesis combines concepts from the more established fields of study on cultural performance and ritual in order to negotiate a way to study the role of the senses in cultural identification. By adding the senses as a characteristic of what makes a cultural activity a ritual, their prominence in the identification process can be better understood. Sensory studies are incorporated into this study of performance by using them as a lens through which all the layers of that performance are viewed. The result is that using sensory ethnography to study cultural performance can breathe new life into questions about social identity.

The following concepts central to the theoretical foundation of this thesis will be covered by this literature review: **social identity** as shared by the community of participants engaging in cattle branding; **cultural performance** and its connection to the study of communication in groups using the various components of **ritual**; and how **sensory scholarship** can be used to permeate all of the layers of a performance to better understand the identification processes therein.

Social Identity

The sociocultural foundation of communication studies sets the stage for discovering the shared social identity created through performance within a cultural community and the common set of qualities with which most of the members of that community would identify (Littlejohn and Foss 2005, 314). In his article “Communication Theory as a Field” Robert Craig makes this assessment:

Communication in these traditions is typically theorized as a *symbolic process that produces and reproduces shared sociocultural patterns*. So conceived, communication explains how social order (a macrolevel phenomenon) is created, realized, sustained, and transformed in microlevel interaction processes. We exist in a sociocultural environment that is constituted and maintained in large part by symbolic codes and media of communication. [...] Our everyday interactions with others depend heavily on pre-existing, shared cultural patterns and social structures. From this point of view, our everyday interactions largely ‘reproduce’ the existing sociocultural order (Craig 1999, 144).

The sociocultural tradition of communications studies described by Craig is the starting point for the theoretical foundation of the study of social identity in this thesis. The sociocultural tradition is particularly useful when studying how definitions of identity are created based upon being a member of a group, one’s place within a community, and one’s role in regard to others, all worked out interactively through various communicative forms (Littlejohn and Foss 2005, 45). The sociocultural model fits this thesis specifically because of its desire to “understand [the] ways in which people

together create the reality of their social groups, organizations, and cultures,” (Littlejohn and Foss 2005, 45).

In the chapter dedicated to identity in the *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* the authors break the definition of identity into three parts: situational identity, social identity, and personal identity (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 369-370). Situational identities are the “socially constructed notions of situationally appropriate roles” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 369) that individuals play during face-to-face interactions, and these “identities are easily changeable from one encounter to another and may shift during a single interaction” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 370). Personal identities are the self-narratives individuals construct “incorporating particular biographies and aspects of personality associated with us, given cultural and historical contexts” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 369) and these identities “tend to be transsituational and endure as we or others continue to identify us with particular biographies and personal narratives” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 370).

All three types of identity are present within the course of an individual’s identification processes in various situations and social scenarios, many times overlapping simultaneously. “Through interaction, we construct a unified, yet flexible sense of self” (Littlejohn and Foss 2005, 82). In this thesis the discussion of identity is centred on social identity for the purpose of focusing in specifically on the shared identity of group members as it is created through performance. The authors describe social identity as “result[ing] from identification of us (by self and others) with socially constructed groups or categories of people, or our positions within social structures” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 369). Rather than being maintainable by the self like a personal identity or constantly shifting throughout interactions like situational identity, social identity is socially constructed and therefore must be shared in the process of interaction to become relevant (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 379).

Social identities are culturally defined within groups. For the most part, social identities are stable and enduring because the “cultural definitions and negotiated meanings attached to social identities and arrangements tend to be stable and self-reinforcing,” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 381). This means that groups together

continually recreate their shared social identities in order to reinforce the meanings important to them as a group, and to keep the group established. This is achieved through “consistent patterns of behavior,” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 381). These patterns of behavior are what are being investigated in this thesis, specifically the role of the senses in the ritualistic activities of a cultural performance where social identity is actually being created, maintained and communicated.

An essential part of the identification process includes differentiating between people who share the same patterns of behavior and those who do not. Both alignment and opposition to a social identity are important factors to consider. Social identities “define us in terms of similarity to some class of others but also define us as distinct from those who do not share them” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 371). In other words, defining one’s social identity means being an insider in one sense and an outsider in another. By embodying a particular social identity groups are committed to “particular lines of action congruent with those identities” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 383), which this thesis argues are demonstrable through the components of ritual activities within cultural performance. For performance participants social identity is related to feelings of authenticity and what makes up the “essential features of our selves” (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 370). Social identity affects the way we relate to other people and how we act towards them, as well as how other people relate to us (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 371). Therefore how our social identity makes us different from others becomes centrally important when considering the actual process of identification.

Cultural Performance

Performance studies is “significant for the field of communication studies because communication itself is easily understood as performance” (Littlejohn and Foss 2005, 316) particularly because of the field’s focus on social interaction and the cultural resources group members draw upon through communication. In *Theories of Performance* Elizabeth Bell discusses the concept of cultural performance as it originated from the work of anthropologist Milton Singer. Singer theorized cultural performance as a concrete experience observable to an outsider and recordable for

study through the detailing of the ritualized acts of daily life (E. Bell 2008, 131). Singer's theory of cultural performance is simple and descriptive, cataloguing the constitutive elements of performance which he lists as: limited time span, organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance (E. Bell 2008, 131).

Anthropologist Victor Turner expanded on Singer's original concept of cultural performance through his work in *The Anthropology of Performance*, building upon what a cultural performance looks like to focus instead on what those performances accomplish. The overall development of studying cultural performance is due to what Turner describes as a:

noticeable shift in theoretical emphasis [...] from structure to process, from competence to performance, from the logics of cultural and social systems to the dialectics of sociocultural processes (Turner 1986, 21).

Turner was speaking specifically about his academic discipline of anthropology but this shift away from structuralism also influenced communication and performance studies. Instead of endless catalogues of detailed descriptions of actions, the study of performance became more fluid and focused on how "ritual is also a way for people to connect to a collective, to remember or construct a mythic past, to build social solidarity, and to form or maintain community" (Schechner 2006, 87).

In considering performance as a form of communication and process of identification Turner theorized that:

if man is a sapient animal, a toolmaking animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans* [...] in the sense that man is a self-performing animal – his performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself to himself (Turner 1986, 81).

Turner claims that the performance does not simply reflect the social or cultural system, but that it actually helps communities work through the various dynamics of their social lives. For Turner cultural performances are occasions and agents of change; they provide opportunities to evaluate the norms and values of the community (E. Bell 2008,

137), what he describes as the “eye by which culture sees itself” (Turner 1986, 24). Turner goes on to explain that a major part of the “ongoing social process” is:

the part where those people become conscious, through witnessing and often participating in such performances, of the nature, texture, style, and given meanings of their own lives as members of a sociocultural community (Turner 1986, 22).

This is where social identity is negotiated and where community is maintained through ritualistic activities; the consistent patterns of behavior that are an integral component of social identity. Folklore scholar Dorothy Noyes explains that “the identification with a community is effected in performance” (Noyes 1995, 467). She describes the community as a “product of the social imaginary” meaning that it is imagined by the collective and builds up over time in a group’s social memory (Noyes 1995, 466), which can also encompass shared sensory experiences.

Noyes points out that the community as created by performance is part of a reciprocal process: “[i]f individual acts of identification create the reality of social categories, the reality of a community with which to identify comes from collective acts” (Noyes 1995, 468). Choosing to act in common binds the community together through those consistent patterns of behavior that define their social identity. Contributing to the idea of creating social identity through cultural performance is Bell’s explanation that “performances make implicit and explicit claims about what is valued in and by the group and how members ought to act” (E. Bell 2008, 19). Therefore the repetition of performances is important because it allows the community to reinforce its shared past and origins while also reinforcing the unity of its members (Noyes 1995, 469). The performance itself becomes a tradition the community shares, and fosters the renewal of all the important elements of their social identity, such as sensory perception. Bell claims that after accepting the idea that performance constitutes identity the next step is to start asking questions about the actual process of identification (E. Bell 2008, 20), and in this thesis it is being argued that those processes are observable in the ritualistic components of the cultural performance.

Using Ritual to Study Cultural Performance

The components of ritual are being used in this thesis as a way of studying cultural performance and the identification processes therein. The best starting point for defining ritual is provided by folklorists Peter Narvaez and Anne-Marie Desdouits:

Rituals are the repetitive symbolic behaviours with which we punctuate our individual and social lives. They expressively affirm and reify our concerns, values and ideals, [and] all involve symbolic cultural performances that validate our personal and group identities and generate rhythms that are regulated and lived, consciously or not, with a profound respect for that dynamic process of creative reenactment we call 'tradition' (Narvaez and Desdouits 1992, 9).

Folklore studies are an important foundation for performance theories regarding ritual because of their focus on how cultural groups set aside portions of time to mark special significance to the community (Smith 1972, 158). Celebrations, festivals, and communal work are all community rituals where identity is created and re-created. These shared rituals are important for

promoting social cohesion, for integrating individuals into a society or group and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performance (Smith 1972, 158).

In *The Anthropology of Performance* Victor Turner describes ritual very practically as "the performance of a complex sequence of symbolic acts" (Turner 1986, 75). He explains that when focusing the attention and intention of study on a "particular performance of ritual", what is being sought out are "expressions of shared cultural understandings in behavior, as well as for manifestations of personal uniqueness" (Turner 1986, 139).

In terms of the foundation for the process of a ritual – what it actually looks like and how it can be studied - the structure used in this thesis comes from the work of religious studies scholar Catherine Bell in *Rituals: Perspectives and Dimensions* where she explains the five characteristics of ritual activities (C. Bell 1997). These are the components of ritual which are being used in the study of the cultural performance of cattle branding. These are also the components that are being altered by this thesis to

incorporate the senses as an integral aspect of studying social identity. These characteristics are: 1) formalism – of clothing, language, gestures and movement which mark an activity as being a ritual; 2) traditionalism – rituals appeal to cultural precedents and consistent patterns of behavior enacted through performance to perpetuate the community's social identity; 3) invariance – the actions associated with particular rituals are repeated the same way every time the ritual is performed; 4) rule-governance – there are unwritten communal rules that determine what is/is not allowed or acceptable during the ritual; and 5) sacral symbolism – the ritual appeals to the supernatural, making the actions associated with the ritual itself sacred (C. Bell 1997, 139-159). Bell explains that

Many ritual-like activities evoke more than one of these features, and such activities span various continuums of action from the religious to the secular, the public to the private, the routine to the improvised, the formal to the casual, and the periodic to the irregular. Nonetheless, these attributes do provide an initial lexicon for analyzing how cultures ritualize [...] social activities (C. Bell 1997, 138).

Each of these characteristics and the related aspects of the cultural performance are viewed through the lens of sensory ethnography in order to pinpoint the sensory experiences fundamental to each component.

Using the components of ritual activities to study the sensory aspects of performance helps to sort out what Catherine Bell describes as the “overlapping features” of performance (C. Bell 1997, 160). She explains that

performances communicate on multiple sensory levels, usually involving highly visual imagery, dramatic sounds, and sometimes even tactile, olfactory, and gustatory stimulation. [...] [T]he power of the performance lies in great part in the effect of the heightened multisensory experience it affords: one is not being told or shown something so much as one is led to experience something (C. Bell 1997, 160).

These “multiple sensory levels” (C. Bell 1997, 160) are what are being investigated by this thesis, as the cattle branding event makes use of the entire collection of sensory knowledge cultural members share.

Sensory Scholarship

Embodiment

Cultural knowledge is embodied through sight, taste, sound, touch, smell, and enacted through bodily movement through the environment. Sensory knowledge is used by cultural members to understand, anticipate and respond to emerging tasks and activities. Embodiment is a term used in sensory studies to explain a way of understanding the body not simply as a source of experience but as a source of knowledge (Pink 2009, 24). This is often described as embodied knowledge or the embodiment of experience, and implies that there is knowledge beyond language that cultures use both to mediate the way they experience their world and to communicate their shared values. In *Empire of the Senses* David Howes provides his explanation of the concept of embodiment:

This system of sensory values is never entirely articulated through language, but it is practised and experienced (and sometimes challenged), by humans as culture bearers. The sensory order, in fact, is not just something one sees or hears about; it is something one *lives* (Howes 2005, 3).

Howes expands the concept to add the “emergent paradigm of emplacement [...] the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment” (Howes 2005, 7). Emplacement accounts “for the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment” (Pink 2009, 25). Emplacement can also be articulated as what Dorothy Noyes describes as the “bodily basis of community”, meaning that the consensus of the group is dependent upon co-presence (Noyes 1995, 469). Sharing in the cultural performance by actually being physically present together strengthens the social identity of community members, and this physicality incorporates the embodied sensory knowledge and emplacement that the participants share. The emplacement of performers in a ritual space is a reciprocal process, as explained by Catherine Bell:

examples of ritual-like behavior demonstrate the importance of the body and its way of moving in space and time. The body acts within an environment that appears to require it to respond in certain ways, but this environment is actually created and organized precisely by means of how people move around it (C. Bell 1997, 139).

This is certainly the case with cattle branding events; the activities associated with the event itself demand that performers respond to the environment in which the performance takes place, but at the same time the place of performance is created specifically by the cultural members taking part.

Transmission of Cultural Knowledge

The transmission of cultural knowledge through sensory means is important to communications studies because of its focus on multiple social dimensions in different contexts. Communication is pervasive in society whether highly technological or, as in the case of this research, highly sensorial, and therefore stands to gain theoretical ground by being open to new means of understanding. Sarah Pink describes the transmission of knowledge as “a social, participatory and embodied process” (Pink 2009, 34). Understanding how knowledge is transmitted is important to sociocultural research because it raises questions about how the people who participate in our research have learned what they know (Pink 2009, 34), and how they communicate their cultural knowledge to other community members.

In exploring theories of learning and knowing, Pink discusses the work of Etienne Wenger regarding the concepts of knowing in practice and the experience of knowing (Pink 2009, 34). Pink explains that these concepts of knowing are “defined only in the context of specific practices”, such as a cultural performance, and arise “out of a regime of competence and an experience of meaning” (Pink 2009, 34). Pink describes the experience of knowing as one of participation, contingent on connectedness with history and a community, and therefore individuals themselves cannot be the source of knowing (Pink 2009, 34). Such knowing can be difficult to express in words, and this is a common challenge faced by researchers using a framework of sensory studies to access and represent other people’s emplacement and their sensory experiences (Pink 2009, 35).

One of the aspects of sensory perception shared between cultural members during performance that is the most difficult to access is kinaesthesia, or the sense of the body’s movement, often referred to as a kind of sixth sense (Foster 2008, 47). The

explanation of kinaesthesia being used in this thesis comes from performance scholar Susan Leigh Foster. She explains that in the nineteenth century kinaesthetic studies focused on muscle sense and the connection of specialized connectors to the cerebral cortex, and in the early twentieth century kinaesthesia was replaced by the term “proprioception”, functioning for the maintenance of posture and balance, but also contributing to the learning and remembering of physical activities at the unconscious level (Foster 2008, 48). This is the foundation for understanding why and how people learn to perform an action by first watching others perform it. Foster explains how in the 1960s the predominant viewpoint of the separation between perception and action was replaced with theorist James Gibson’s argument that perception is the act of extracting information from the environment, and that there is “an ongoing duet between the perceiver and their surroundings in which they are both equally active” (Foster 2008, 50). This is a focus on the experience of sensing the real world around us. However, Gibson’s theory also presupposed that all humans have equal access to the conditions necessary for perception, and that social differences have no affect on those perceptions (Foster 2008, 52).

In the 1990s the definition of kinaesthesia changed yet again, as theorist Alain Berthoz approached the external senses as systems that are interrelated, causing kinaesthesia to play a central role in orienting and organizing all of the senses (Foster 2008, 53). Foster explains that the significance in the difference between Gibson and Berthoz’s theories is that Berthoz holds that there are cultural implications that affect how individuals perceive the world (Foster 2008, 53). This is the influence of social relations on the cultural sensorium as described by David Howes. Foster explains that

the ability to sense the physical actions of those around us forms the basis on which socialization and the experiences of the social takes place [...] action becomes the a priori principles that enables social bonding (Foster 2008, 55).

This means that community members are experiencing the environment of the branding event based upon the cultural knowledge they share. This aspect of shared knowledge is often difficult even for community members to perceive, and as Howes states: “the importance of these kinaesthetic experiences cannot be captured by the ethnographic

eye” (Howes 2003, 51). This poses a serious challenge in attempting to access the embodied knowledge of community members and their emplacement in the cultural performance being studied.

Sensory Ethnography

The focus in this thesis on the sensory aspects of studying cultural performance and the transmission of culturally-contingent ways of knowing using sensory ethnography is based on the conceptual foundations of sensory studies. Sensory studies are part of a branch of anthropology that focuses on the structuring of social relations and interactions through culturally-defined sensoriums. One of the main theorists that this thesis draws upon is David Howes, who explains the emphasis on the senses in sociocultural research in his article “Charting the Sensorial Revolution”:

This revolution in the study of the senses is based on the premise that the sensorium is a social construction, which is in turn supported by the growing body of research showing that the senses are lived and understood differently in different cultures and historical periods (Howes 2006, 114).

In *Empire of the Senses* Howes further explains that “humans are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of culture, so is the human sensorium” (Howes 2005, 3). Howes clarifies this theory of the social construction of the sensory models cultures use to engage with their world in *Sensual Relations* where he states that “sensory models not only affect how people perceive the world, they affect how they relate to each other: sensory relations are social relations” (Howes 2003, 55). The definitions above are the ones most relevant for the purposes of using sensory ethnography as a means of accessing and deciphering the interactions of research participants based on their shared sensory perceptions during the performance of cattle branding.

In her book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* Sarah Pink explains the ethnographic praxis of incorporating the sensory aspects of culture into research. Building upon Howes’ descriptions of the sensorial revolution, she describes how the increased focus on the senses in social theory has been taken up in the anthropological work of Paul

Stoller. Through descriptions of his sensory experiences while in the field he demonstrates

how anthropological practice is a corporeal process that involves the researcher engaging not only with the ideas of others, but in learning about their understandings through their own physical and sensorial experiences (Pink 2009, 14).

Without this focus on the sensory aspects of culture Stoller claims that ethnographers run the risk of representing the people they study in “generally turgid discourse which often bears little resemblance to the world we are attempting to describe” (Stoller 1989, 39). He argues that the established epistemological foundation of the Western academy is that researchers can (and likely should) separate thought from feeling and action by sharpening their intellectualized vision which involves narrowing our overall sensual horizons (Stoller 1989, 4). In reaction to this predominant viewpoint, he argues that taking a deliberate turn towards the sensual allows researchers to “open up” and emerge from under the “sediment of centuries of cultural empiricism” (Stoller 1989, 38) in order to engage with research subjects through the entire body. Therefore, engaging the senses more fully in research includes increasing awareness of the sensory orientation to the world that the researcher brings with them into the ethnographic situation (Stoller 1989, 9). The result is a methodology that is more conceptually grounded in sensory experiences but far less objective, and theorists such as Howes and Stoller would conclude that this is a step in the right direction for ethnographic fieldworkers.

The ultimate goal of incorporating the senses into the study of cultural performance is to explore what the senses contribute to the expression of social relations. The cultural performance of cattle branding is an ideal site to conduct this investigation because

the expressive forms of a culture [...] offer an especially productive vantage point on culture, society and communication. [...] [W]hatever else they may be about, these forms are especially reflexive instruments, social forms about society, cultural forms about culture, communicative forms about communication (Bauman 1992, xiv).

By combining sensory studies with performance studies in the context of studying social identity this thesis contributes a small piece of new conceptual ground to the fields drawn upon for accessing the “expressions of shared cultural understandings of behavior” (Turner 1986, 139).

CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

This thesis is a sensory ethnography of the cultural performance of cattle branding. Ethnography and its key method of participant-observation are hallmarks of the field of anthropology, but due to the shift towards more multidisciplinary methodologies in sociocultural research this method is being adapted for use in communication and performance studies research. The classic anthropological style of in-depth observation in the field is being adjusted in creative ways to suit unique research situations, such as the one explored in this thesis. Classic participant-observation entails researchers spending long periods of time in the community under study to produce detailed descriptions of people's daily lives. However this type of extensive fieldwork is often not viable in many research contexts due to limitations with the types of practice the researcher seeks to understand, temporal limitations, or other practical issues impacting the working lives both of the researcher and research participants (Pink 2009, 9). My research is subject to such limitations because the cultural performances I investigated are temporally limited. Although the events are predictable in terms of the yearly rhythms and routines of agricultural life, cattle brandings are not part of the observable actions of the daily lives of participants because they take place between May and July and typically only last for one day. Cattle brandings are also always subject to change; these are occasions of communal work so they depend on the availability of people to come and help, and like all outdoor activities they are entirely dependent upon the weather. These factors had to be taken into account when creating the research plan for this thesis. The result of these limitations, and the key focus on the sensory experiences of the event, meant that an innovative variation on ethnography was developed to "provide routes into understanding other people's lives, experiences, values, social worlds and more that go beyond the classic observational approach" (Pink 2009, 9).

Approaching the study of cattle branding ethnographically highlights some of the major difficulties in researching the sensory aspects of a cultural performance. Due to the intensity of the experience, attending a cattle branding is an assault on the senses even for participants that are accustomed to the sights, sounds, smells and feeling of

working with livestock. The cultivation of a shared cultural sensorium, using the senses in a culturally-approved manner, and body awareness are the components of cultural performance studied using sensory ethnography. David Howes describes this methodology as focusing “not on the measurement of the senses, but rather on their meanings and uses as understood and enacted in specific cultural contexts” (Howes 2006, 121). Sensory ethnography provides a means for addressing and accessing the way that the cultural members being studied communicate using their bodies. The work of Sarah Pink in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* is important to the overall research model in this thesis. Pink describes sensory ethnography as:

a critical methodology which departs from the classic observational approach (emphasis on holism, context and similar ideas) to insist that ethnography is a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge is produced (Pink 2009, 8).

All of the sensory aspects of the cattle branding event are important components of the ritual of the performance, and therefore a methodology had to be created that would provide access to them. Perceptions, experiences and knowledge based on culturally-contingent sensory understanding are difficult to access and analyze as research data through the linguistic foundations of sociocultural and anthropological study. Participants do not discuss these perceptions, experiences or knowledge unless prompted, nor do they verbalize their sensory experiences during the performance. Therefore, from early on I realized that I would need to use methods that have investigation of the cultural sensorium clearly in mind in the hope of solving this methodological problem. It was my intention that understanding the practice of cattle branding as a cultural performance from this perspective would provide access to the data that would enhance both the exploration of the event itself but also the analysis of its meanings.

This research necessarily involved interaction with human subjects and approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) was required. Application for approval was submitted on May 21, 2010 and was approved on June 11, 2010. Following some revision and research subject feedback, changes were made to the participant consent form and those changes were approved the same day that they

were submitted to the CFREB, on June 28, 2010. The application for ethics approval included the CFREB's application form, a sample of the letter used for soliciting participants (via regular mail and email), a sample of a script used for soliciting participants via phone, a participant consent form, and an image release form for photographs.

In this ethnography of a cultural performance three methods were used, which will each be discussed in more detail in the sections to follow. The first method is **participant-observation** during the actual events of cattle branding, this being the hallmark method of ethnographic field-work as described earlier. As part of this method I used several means of collecting data, each requiring a structured approach planned out in advance of entering the field site, and each used to provide an additional layer of detail to the overall description and documentation of the events. These include field notes, photographs, audio and video recordings and each will be explained in its own sub-section. The second method is the use of **interviews** which were conducted with research participants after the events. An interview guide, which is explained in its own sub-section, was designed as a means of organizing the interview structure to aid in the collecting of data. The final method is **photo elicitation**, incorporated into the interview process as a slideshow of photographs.

Participant-Observation

Observation is the cornerstone method of all ethnographies and entails being physically present and interacting with the research participants. This is based on the premise that in its multiple forms "communication is a material process in the sense that it is something that can be observed, recorded, documented, analyzed and written about" (Nightingale 2008, 105). The method of observation requires watching, listening and recording as much detail as possible during field work. This requires the researcher being able to reliably perceive the activities and interrelationships of people in the field setting (Angrosino 2007, 38). The researcher acts as Observer-as-Participant, meaning that the researcher observes the participants for brief periods of time, and is known and recognized by the participants but relates to the subjects solely

as a researcher (Angrosino 2007, 53). In my research this involved attending the cattle branding events I had been invited to by research participants, and at which most of the other participants were aware that I was conducting research. The owners/managers of the cattle ranches I visited were used as gate-keepers into the cultural performance, clearly marking me out as a guest of theirs so that other participants would know that I was welcome. This impression of inclusion is important when accessing a cultural performance or ritual, and even though I am from an agricultural background it cannot be assumed that this would result in an immediate rapport with the research participants. In fact often the more alike one is to the group you are studying the more intolerant that group can be of your behavioural oddities such as taking notes and asking a lot of questions; if a total stranger to the community acted in the same way community members may be more forgiving (Angrosino 2007, 32).

Participation while observing is important because it gives researchers insight into things that the research participants may forget to mention later in an interview, or may not consider important enough to be worthy of discussion (O'Reilly 2009, 155). There are many small details encompassed in any cultural performance, but at a cattle branding in particular because of the number of people and activities involved. Participants may consider these details too mundane to take notice of, but to a researcher every detail is considered important. I found that many branding participants were somewhat wary and stand-offish towards my attention to detail until I started actually participating. I would observe the work and record detail for approximately the first half of the processing of the calves, after which I would be given a processing task to do by the owner/manager organizing the event. I have previous experience with the processing activities I was tasked with and by being invited to demonstrate that knowledge while joining in the work I was more easily accepted as a participant in the event. This gave me access to participants at a new level by sharing in the communal work that brought them together and that is the foundation of the cultural performance.

There is always an issue of validity in observational fieldwork because as a researcher it is easy to miss details or misinterpret the activities going on around you. This issue can be addressed by working with multiple observers in order to achieve a

greater breadth of experience in the field (Angrosino 2007, 58). In an attempt to proactively deal with this issue I made the choice to use research assistants, taking my husband to the Bogi branding at Cessford and my father to the OH branding at Longview. I recognized that I would be pressed for time at the brandings and would possibly miss a lot of detail which could prove important later on. At many times throughout the branding events I was physically separated from several participants which resulted in missing the actions and conversations I could not see or hear due to being too far away or simply missing the moment. Having my research assistants along enabled me to collect data at the events more effectively by having them move around and make sure that they were physically located in different areas than I was. I also recognized that being female could possibly hinder my access to and acceptance by some of the male participants. The brandings used as case studies were largely attended by male participants, and the participants' engagement with me as a female was very different than their engagement with my male assistants. There was a large degree of social separation involved in the events, and I was not privy to many of the conversations and viewpoints shared by the male participants because of my social location of being female (Warren and Karner 2010, 110). Having male research assistants allowed me some access to those conversations and interactions that I otherwise would have missed, making the data collection in the field more thorough. I was able to incorporate the assistants' perspectives of being male participants and observers into the data collected.

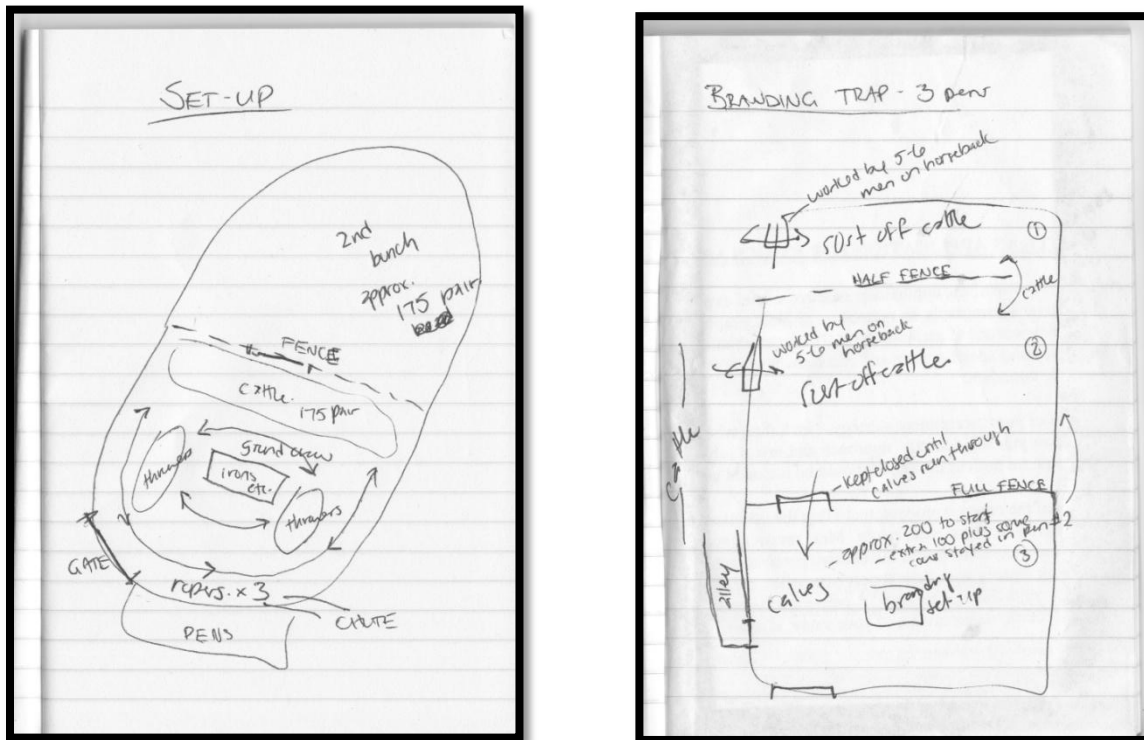
Field Notes

Field notes were the most important of all the data collection tools used during observational research. I wrote extensive field notes before, during and after each cattle branding event. Prior to the event I made general notes about how I came to be invited to the event, any background information I had on the owner/manager of the ranch, how I was preparing for it, and what expectations I had for the experience and the type of data that would be collected. The process of making field notes during observation began by attempting to quickly record all of the aspects of the event in as

much detail and with as little interpretation as possible (Angrosino 2007, 38). This required making an effort to overcome my own built-in screening process in order to take in all of the many small details of each new situation (Angrosino 2007, 38). This was difficult because I have attended many cattle brandings in my life and did not want to take for granted any detail that I may otherwise consider quotidian or common place, but it was also awkward being in the situation of questioning the obvious (Angrosino 2007, 57).

I created a structure for the field notes prior to the actual events so that I would avoid making those mistakes. The structure of field notes included the following elements, as described in Michael Angrosino's book *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*: "setting" (location, weather); "enumeration of participants"; objective descriptions of participants (names, ages, genders, clothing) used to aid in identification in the photographs taken; "chronology of events" (including specific times); "description of physical setting and all material objects involved"; "descriptions of behaviours and interactions"; "records of conversations and other verbal exchanges" (Angrosino 2007, 40). After each event I typed up my field notes, including photographs to act as reference tools for clear descriptions, and scanned in the diagrams I had made of the branding traps at each event to include in my write up. I wrote additional general notes about what my research assistants and I had experienced, anything in particular that struck me as unique or particularly interesting, and what I learned to do differently or keep the same for the next event. This writing up acted as a type of research journal, detailing my thought process while also causing me to continually re-evaluate the methodological choices I was making.

Figures 1a and 1b: Diagrams from field notes of the branding traps at the Bogi Ranch (left) and OH Ranch (right)



Source: Jennifer Bird Rondeau

The use of field notes in the research settings of the branding events ended up being very challenging due to a lack of time to record the multitude of minute details present and almost a complete lack of narrative by the participants. Additionally, the focus on the senses involved witnessing communication that was unspoken and nearly impossible to capture in writing (Seale 2004, 460). Even though the few words participants used could be recorded, attempting to record the subtle, nuanced communication styles of the research subjects was much more complicated. Although some of these communication styles were addressed in more depth in the interviews, I had hoped to record more conversations and verbal exchanges between participants during the events themselves.

Photographs

To aid in both my recall of the events and in reproducing my gaze as researcher I took photographs and videos at each branding event. I captured images of the surroundings, the participants, the tasks being performed, and the various material elements being used. Although writing is still the main form of academic communication, visual images are also important in ethnographic texts both as data and as tools in dissemination (Pink 2009, 97). The use of photographs was important in this study because it facilitated accelerated data collection which was required due to the temporal limitations of documenting a performance. Using the camera for assistance in recording visual observations bolstered the short time spent in the field; it was impossible to generate extensive field notes from the limited time spent observing, so the photographs help to add depth to the data collected. Photographs also aid in memory recall and were very useful to me while doing field study for the first time, recording information about people, locations and events of interest; documenting what environments look like, how they provide a context in which groups interact, and who is present (Warren and Karner 2010, 189). Using the photographs as data therefore serves me in drawing out my recollections of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations I experienced in that moment behind the lens, like tapping into a subconscious book of field notes.

Video and Audio Recordings

Possibly the most distinguishing features of a cattle branding are the incessant sounds of cattle bawling and the roar of propane torches. A digital recorder was used to collect audio recordings in order to recreate my aural experience in the branding sites. I knew that I wanted to capture this aspect of the event, although at the time I was unsure how the recordings could be used as data. Since collection, I have returned to these recordings many times in the process of writing about and interpreting the various characteristics of the event. Much like the photographs the sound recordings are used in recall, tapping into my aural memory of the event to evoke the sensory experiences of the field site.

I also took a few short videos on my camera during the events, although to a much lesser extent than with the photographs or audio recordings. This partly had to do with the practical consideration of lacking camera equipment that would generate videos of good quality, but mostly with the fact that I was so limited in time. I chose to spend that time moving around, observing, and recording data in several forms. If I could have had the ability to record the branding events on video in their entirety I think these would have been very useful for the review, analysis and possible dissemination of data.

In the process of planning the ways I would collect data during observation I soon realized that I would be unable to capture some of the data that could prove vital to the overall focus on the sensory experiences of participants, these being the olfactory and kinaesthetic aspects of the event. I could not capture or reproduce (except for in writing) the smells encountered in the field, nor the feeling and presence of moving bodies (both human and animal). While the audiovisual experience can be reproduced, there is no technology available to fully recreate the experiences of smell, taste, and the feeling of movement. This is problematic when focusing on the sensory engagement of participants within the event because there are major aspects of the sensory experience that cannot be recreated or captured as data.

Interviews

The use of interviews as a research method “is a bid on the part of the researcher to get an interviewee to converse openly about a set of issues of concern to the researcher” (Warren and Karner 2010, 28). Interviews are “intended to probe for meaning, to explore nuances, to capture the gray areas that might be missed in either/or questions that merely suggest the surface of an issue” (Angrosino 2007, 42). Access to my own thoughts, feelings and sensory perceptions based on my experiences in the field is readily available to me for interpretation, but it is only through the ethnographic interview that I was able to draw out the thoughts, feelings and sensory perceptions of the research participants.

The kind of data generated through an interview is the type that cannot always be accessed through observation alone because embodied activities involve doing

rather than saying, and these experiences, practices and ways of knowing are rarely thought about or discussed at any length in daily life. This is one of the major advantages I found using the interview as a method because it allowed research participants to

discuss their lives, beliefs, values, opinions, experiences and practices in a focused way in collaboration with [me as] a researcher within a circumscribed time [...] creat[ing] a creative place in which to reflect, define and communicate about experiences (Pink 2009, 86).

Being new to conducting interviews, I sought out strategies that would aid in bolstering my interview technique. I focused on developing good listening strategies and utilizing these during the interviews. I learned that three levels of listening can be consciously used to support the interview, as detailed by Irving Seidman in *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*: the first level is listening to the substance, making sure that I fully understood what the interviewee was saying, and that their answers to my questions were as detailed and complete as possible; the second level is the most difficult, listening for the interviewee's "inner voice, as opposed to the outer/public voice" which may be guarded against fully truthful answers; the third level entails being "aware of the process as well as the substance" of the interview, meaning that as a researcher I had to remain "aware of how much has been covered and how much there is yet to go" (Seidman 2006, 78-79). Limiting my interaction in the interview process was an issue because the interviews generally had a conversational quality and the interviewees would ask for my opinion or thoughts on the same topics that I was asking them to discuss. I tried to strike a balance between sharing enough personal information and stories to make the interviewees feel comfortable with me but still maintain some objective distance so that my position as researcher remained intact.

In order to facilitate the interview process and prepare myself for conducting the interviews, an interview guide was developed by utilizing three main sources: first, my personal experience of the research data was reviewed, including both in my first-hand experiences and the experiences of the research assistants; second, research literature on the subject of semi-structured qualitative interviews was consulted and reviewed (King and Horrocks 2010, Kumar 2005, Kvale 1996, O'Reilly 2009, Patton 1990, Seale

2004, Seidman 2006, Van Maanen 1984, Warren and Karner 2010); and third, at the suggestion of my supervisor a practice interview was conducted to help structure the guide and hone my interview skills. This practice interview was with my family friend and neighbor Gary Meadows who fits the characteristics of the research participants.

The interview guide was developed in order to build upon the main concepts addressed in the research questions, but still be flexible regarding the phrasing of questions and the order in which they were asked. Interviewees were allowed to lead the interaction in unanticipated directions, although interestingly they often led to the same themes unguided. At the opening of each section a brief explanation was drafted to share with the research interviewees in order to prepare them for the type of questions that would follow. Each interview included a combination of six different types of questions: “background/demographic” questions used to gain basic descriptive information; “experience” questions often focused on actions observed; “opinion” questions, asking interviewees to relate their opinions to their values; “feeling” questions which delve into the interviewees’ emotional experiences; “knowledge” questions, used to ascertain the factual information the interviewees possess; and “sensory experience” questions (King and Horrocks 2010, 37).

Prior to conducting the interviews, feeling questions were anticipated to be the most difficult to elicit responses for because they are designed to focus on interviewees’ emotional experiences. This type of question can get confused with opinion questions because “feel” can denote “opinion” (King and Horrocks 2010, 37), and even once the distinction is made clear I was unsure if interviewees would be comfortable with sharing their emotions with me. However, when asked how certain aspects of the actions or experiences being discussed made them feel, most interviewees were open to articulating those feelings in an emotive way. This was especially the case when discussing their children, their communities, or their passion for their lifestyle.

Knowledge questions were perhaps the easiest questions to elicit responses for, and led to some of the most rewarding discussions in the interviews. The interviewees are all highly skilled individuals and talk freely about what they know in regards to cattle branding and other agricultural work. When questioned further on their knowledge they

provided some highly detailed explanations of various techniques and practices. These explanations often led to some very entertaining stories and anecdotes as well.

When formulating questions both prior to and during the interview process, I recognized and stayed focused on Steinar Kvale's observation that "a good interview question should contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting good interview interaction" (Kvale 1996, 129). I attempted to layer the types of interview questions used in order to aid in an easy flow of conversation. During the interview I tried to quickly decipher which types of questions the interviewee was the most comfortable with, and if the interview stalled over more difficult or awkward questioning I would return to the style of question that the interviewee was comfortable with in order to keep the interview moving. A few basic background/demographic questions that were straightforward descriptive questions about details such as name, age, address, marital and parental status were collected by interviewees filling out a "face sheet" (King and Horrocks 2010, 37) I developed for that purpose.

Interview Guide

The four sections of the interview guide are: Cultural Identity, Cultural Performance, Transmission of Cultural Knowledge, and Sensory Knowledge. These were developed to provide a richer depth of data that would relate directly back to the main concepts being investigated: social identity, cultural performance and ritual, and the sensory aspects of the interviewees' experiences. The sections were also intended to add detail and more fully flesh out many of the brief actions and interactions I had observed in the field settings. The sections of the interview guide and the types of questions utilized within each section will be discussed below.

Cultural Identity

I began the interviews by explaining the basis of my thesis that the cultural function of cattle branding is just as important to the community performing it as is the business practice of it. Some background questions were asked in the beginning of this section mainly regarding the interviewee's family history. This was done to help break

the ice and ease the interviewee into being comfortable talking about themselves. I asked interviewees if they thought of cattle ranchers as a cultural group and to explain why or why not. I asked them to describe what identifies them as a group, particularly what kinds of characteristics, values, and experiences they share. Opinion/value types of questions were used to ask what the interviewees thought about the concept of shared identity and how their thoughts relate to their values, goals and intentions. This was a very fruitful line of questioning with all of the interviewees, as many of them held strong opinions and used value-laden language to describe those opinions. At times I would use follow-up questions to further define their opinions.

Cultural Performance

To begin this section I asked the interviewees about cattle branding using experience/behaviour type questions focused on actions that were observed while in the field. I asked questions about the interviewee's experiences with cattle branding in general, such as: how many brandings do they attend in a year, descriptions of the brandings they attend including some of the earliest events they could recall, the group dynamics of those events (including the proportion of male to female participants), and how they see the event of branding changing as livestock identification technologies change.

I then moved on to more specific questions by returning to the five characteristics of ritual activities as described in the Literature Review. I asked questions about how the event was formalized through the participants' clothing, type of language used in communicating, and specific movements of participants (C. Bell 1997, 139-144). Questions about the traditionalism of the event were asked to explore how the events performed appeal to cultural precedents (C. Bell 1997, 145-150). These questions often led to interviewees moving on to tangents about how things used to be done, and why what they described as the "old ways" were important to them. These tangents often provided me with a clear segue into asking about the importance of invariance; how and why the actions associated with cattle brandings should be repeated the same way every time they are performed (C. Bell 1997, 150-153). One of the most intriguing lines

of questioning was about rule-governance; that there are unwritten communal rules that determine what is/is not allowed or acceptable during the ritual (C. Bell 1997, 153-155). The interviewees all expressed firm opinions on this subject, and their reasons were very interesting. Finally, I moved on to how the actions associated with the ritual are sacred (C. Bell 1997, 155-159). Initially I was unsure of how to broach this last topic with interviewees, thinking that the concept may be too obscure for them to take seriously, but it often came up naturally with many interviewees as they described their relationships with livestock and the other participants.

In this section of the interview I also made use of the photo elicitation slideshow, which will be discussed in its own section.

Transmission of Cultural Knowledge

In this section I began by explaining that I was interested in discussing how they see the cultural knowledge required to perform the tasks associated with cattle branding being passed on. I asked questions about who taught them the skills they possess now, how they were taught, and specifically what skills they were taught. Experience and knowledge types of questions were the most useful for these topics. I would then branch out into discussing the types of skills that they feel it is necessary to acquire in order to be a rancher, how they can tell when someone has those skills, and why it is important to pass that knowledge on to others. If the interviewee had children we talked about how they got their children involved in ranch work, and in cattle branding specifically. We also discussed how they had been involved in teaching other young people various skills.

Sensory Knowledge

The questions based on sensory knowledge, perception and experiences were particularly important because of the unique design of this inquiry. In this section I followed the guidelines described by Sara Pink and paid close attention to the specific words that the interviewees used and the way that they described their experiences because they were “placing verbal definitions on sensory embodied experiences” (Pink

2009, 86) that I was attempting to access as a researcher. These questions are distinctive in form from experience questions because they include “asking the participant to recollect a very specific sensory impression in a specific setting” (King and Horrocks 2010, 37). In order to accomplish this I would ask interviewees to imagine themselves at a cattle branding, and as I would name a particular sense I would ask them to tell me the first thing that came into their mind. I would then ask follow-up questions based on their responses, dealing with the sensory aspects of experience; what the interviewee saw, heard, touched, tasted and smelled in any given situation during the branding event observed but also within their general experiences. Asking them to verbalize their sensory experiences allowed me to start accessing the individuals’ particular experiences while also drawing comparisons between cultural members.

This line of questioning was very effective with some of the interviewees, leading to wonderfully rich stories and recollections from their pasts, and evocative descriptions of their sensory experiences within branding events. Other interviewees became noticeably uncomfortable and guarded when presented with these questions, avoiding answering them by choosing that moment to take a break or by being dismissive in their answers. In those circumstances I simply moved on to the next section, or returned to talking about something that the interviewee was comfortable with.

Photo Elicitation

This is a method that uses photographs as visual prompts during interviews in order to see what the images elicit from interviewees (Warren and Karner 2010, 189). Photographs are shown to the interviewee to aid in exploring their “values, beliefs, attitudes and meanings, and in order to trigger memories” (Warren and Karner 2010, 189). There are three types of photo elicitation available for use in ethnographic interviews: the conventional method entails showing the interviewee images of other people or objects and asking them to discuss aspects of those images; showing the interviewee images of themselves engaged in particular activities and then exploring

their experience of these activities; and finally inviting the interviewee to share images of their own with the researcher for discussion (Pink 2009, 110).

Photo elicitation is well-suited to research attempting to access intangible cultural knowledge and modes of sensory perception because the images invite engagement with sensory memories and provide visual gateways through which the interviewer and interviewee may imagine themselves performing an embodied practice or emplaced in an actual environment (Pink 2009, 112). There is a potential pitfall for researchers to make misperceptions and misinterpretations when they “rely solely on their own senses for an understanding of the sensory world of another people” (Howes 2003, 49). In order to avoid this pitfall David Howes suggests that researchers must attempt to elicit the most complete sensory models possible directly from the research subjects, and not just “rely on their own bodily experiences” (Howes 2003, 49). This is what guided my decision to include an attempt at such elicitation in my interview process through the use of the photograph slideshow. As described earlier, simply asking interviewees to describe their sensory perceptions was not always effective, and the photo elicitation slideshow offered another avenue for inviting interviewees to share those perceptions in a way that was indirect and perhaps less intimidating. The intention behind incorporating photo elicitation into the interview process was to find a creative way to collect more complete data about the interviewee’s skills, experiences, opinions, values and sensory knowledge.

The research plan for this thesis included the first two types of photo elicitation, making use of my own images from the brandings I attended as well as incorporating images from the Glenbow Archive. I chose forty-two photographs to use in the elicitation slideshow: twelve photographs from the Glenbow Archive, fifteen photographs that I took at the Bogi branding, and fifteen photographs that I took at the OH branding. Within each group I selected photographs depicting the three stages of the branding event (see Appendix A). The photographs were coded with a scheme of identification which I could easily insert into my notes when transcribing in order to cross-reference the interview transcription with the slideshow. First the photographs were separated into date ranges: 1880-1900 (I), 1900-1920 (II), and 1920-present (III). Next the

photographs were separated to correspond with the three stages of the branding event: stage one – round-up and sorting (i), stage two – processing (ii), stage three – social (iii). The photographs were then further divided depending upon their origin: Archive (A), Bogi Ranch (B), OH Ranch (OH). Finally, the photographs in each section were numbered sequentially. This coding scheme worked well for organizing the photographs, was invaluable during transcription of the interviews, and made the specific photographs discussed easy to return to during the descriptive coding stage of the analysis. The digital slideshow was showed to interviewees on my lap top computer during the interview section on cultural performance, and organized to follow the three stages of the branding event with each section arranged in order of the date range.

For comparison purposes I chose photographs that had elements that were both similar to each other and that were also completely different; this was done to elicit responses from interviewees based on their opinions and experiences, getting them to agree or disagree with what they saw. As we worked our way through the slideshow interviewees were prompted into talking about why they perform certain tasks a specific way, and what they thought about the people in the photographs performing that task in a slightly different way. Interviewees enjoyed seeing themselves in the slideshow and were encouraged to describe and explain what they saw themselves doing. They also enjoyed seeing the archival photographs, but generally had more opinions about the photographs of the other contemporary brandings.

The interviewees' reactions to and opinions regarding these photographs were very rewarding, and in many cases prompted them to spontaneously reflect upon their past experiences and share stories about the same. This also indirectly led to the interviewees providing subtle sensory descriptions, particularly their extrasensory connections with animals and the environment. Some interviewees were able to provide more information about some of the archival photographs which was exciting because I had not anticipated that result. Unfortunately much of what the interviewees shared with me during the slideshow became unusable as data in this thesis, but their recollections and descriptions have immense value as life narratives, oral history and cultural heritage. Incorporating the elicitation slideshow into the interview process was

well worth the effort because it opened the interviewees up into talking about their experiences and ways of knowing in a way that I could not have achieved as thoroughly by just directly questioning them. Creating and sharing the slideshow was a method that helped me, as a new researcher, find a way to connect with the interviewees that they all appreciated, that made the interview process more enjoyable, and that ultimately resulted in more thorough data collection.

The Interview Participants

Approximately six weeks after observing the brandings, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with eleven people, all of whom are involved in cattle production and have cattle branding experience. There were four women and seven men interviewed; this number was chosen to represent the average proportion of women to men at the branding events that I attended. Five out of the eleven interviewees were also participants at the brandings used as case studies; three participants from the Bogi branding, and two participants from the OH branding.

The first interview was on September 26, 2010 with Gary Meadows (47), at his home near Blackie. He is a neighbor and close friend of my family, and I have attended many brandings with him in the past. While his interview is used as data, as described earlier it was also an opportunity to test my interview skills and interview guide in order to refine the process for the interviews to follow. Gary names his occupation as a rancher, is married, and has four children. His ranch is near Blackie and he runs approximately two hundred fifty cow/calf pair annually.

The next interview was on September 27, 2010 with Peter C. Wambeke (62) at the Highwood Auction Market where he works as a field man. I have known Peter since I was ten years old when he sold me a horse. We reconnected at the OH branding in July; he was very interested in my research and consented to an interview. Peter names his occupation as a cattle buyer and farmer, is married and has two children. His ranch is near High River, and from 1976 to 1983 he co-owned the Bar U Ranch with his father and brother where they ran up to one thousand head of cattle.

The next interview was on October 4, 2010 with Joe Bews (62) and his wife Margaret (Linder) Bews at their home west of Longview. They are both from families that have long histories of ranching in the Longview area. They name their occupations as ranchers, have two children, and currently run one hundred cow/calf pair annually and also purchase an additional two hundred fifty head of cattle to feed out on grass pasture. Joe is a regular participant at the annual brandings at the OH Ranch, being their neighbor, but had to miss the branding in 2010 due to a hand injury.

A few days later on October 8, 2010 I interviewed Gaile Gallup (60) at his home near Longview. I met Gaile for the first time at the OH branding in July although my parents have known him for many years and own several pieces of his artwork. Gaile names his occupation as an artist, is married and has two children. He is the fourth generation in a ranching family and has worked on many ranches as a ranch hand in his life, including the OH Ranch.

The next interview was on October 13, 2010 with Erik Butters (58) at his home northwest of Cochrane. I know Erik through our past involvement with the Alberta Beef Producers. Erik names his occupation as a rancher, is married and has two children. He ranches along with one of his daughters and her husband, and they run approximately two hundred fifty cow/calf pairs annually.

On November 5, 2010 I conducted two interviews over the telephone, the first with John Bogi (53) whose branding I attended in June. John names his occupation as a rancher, is married and has three children. He runs approximately four hundred cow/calf pair annually at his ranch near Cessford and previously ran a small-scale commercial feedlot in the same location.

The second telephone interview was with Clayton Bunney (27), also of Cessford. I met Clayton at the Bogis' branding in June. He is married, does not have any children, and names his occupation as a rancher and oil patch worker. He ranches with his older brother, and between the two of them they run approximately two hundred cow/calf pair annually as well as raising purebred bulls.

I made the decision to conduct these interviews over the telephone after an unsuccessful trip to Cessford in which I had organized several interviews, all of which

fell through at the last minute. I was unable to reschedule these intended interviews, and so I arranged for the telephone interviews instead. I had to orient myself with the basics of telephone interviewing, specifically on how to avoid the potential for my interviewees to misunderstand the nature of the interview (King and Horrocks 2010). Although the telephone interviews worked well overall, the style of interviewing established in the previous interviews had to be radically altered to suit the type of conversation capable of being had over the telephone. The photo elicitation slideshow could not be used at all, which in effect made these two interviews much shorter than the others. In addition, the gender of the interviewees played a role because men can tend to be more task-focused in their use of the telephone than women (King and Horrocks 2010) and therefore I had to take the lead in directing the conversation in order to achieve the type of interaction I wanted from them.

On November 6, 2010 I returned to my original interview format with Stacey Kading (19), another Cessford resident that I met at the Bogis' branding in June. The interview with Stacey was in my home in Calgary, making her the only interviewee that was outside of their home at the time of the interview (other than Peter Wambeke who was in his place of business). Stacey names her occupation as a registries clerk, is not married and does not have any children. She is very involved in her family's ranching operation near Cessford.

The final interview I conducted was on November 12, 2010 with Lesley Meadows (47) and Rebecca Meadows (17) at their home near Blackie. Being members of Gary Meadows' family, I have known and worked with both of them many times, even having been involved in teaching Rebecca different jobs at brandings. Lesley names her occupation as housewife and rancher, is originally from England and not from an agricultural background. I interviewed Lesley on her own for the first half of the total interview and Rebecca joined us for the second half, at which point I simply carried on with the questions rather than starting over with her.

Method of Thematic Analysis

The ethnography of performance is inductive, conducted in such a way as to use an accumulation of descriptive detail to build toward general patterns rather than structured to test a hypothesis. Just as there were distinct methodological choices made in the means used to collect the research data, there were also specific choices to be made about what data to include in the analysis and how to interpret that data. Pulling out the common themes present in the full set of data required that there be some degree of repetition and that themes are distinct from one another, although still connected to the overall structure of the research design. The themes that became identified as important for analysis are those that were recurrent and distinctive features of the five components of ritual, and that are relevant to the main concepts within the research questions.

Although there were eleven individuals interviewed each with their own unique personal histories, life experiences, opinions and stories to share, it is important to recognize that against the backdrop of those particular accounts a thematic analysis was only concerned with saying something about the group of participants as a whole, including cultural members not interviewed. This is especially the case in this thesis where the goal is to investigate how the cultural performance of cattle branding communicates the social identity of a group. That cultural community is much larger than the selection of people who are research participants in this thesis. To address this issue I paid close attention to how the participants' accounts and experiences differed. Making note of the differences instead of only searching for the similarities is important analytically because there is a balance to be struck between avoiding turning the common themes into positivist generalizations about the group as a whole, and also avoiding providing a disjointed set of accounts that are not developed to properly address the concepts being investigated.

Identifying the common themes in the data was only the first step; it was also imperative to organize those themes in such a way to demonstrate how they relate to one another and to the five components of ritual: formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, and sacral symbolism (C. Bell 1997, 138). The process of thematic

analysis is how, as a researcher, my particular interpretations of the data are being communicated, and therefore the structure of the themes must be well defined and distinct, clear and comprehensible. I developed my thematic analysis in three stages: the first stage was descriptive coding, the second stage was interpretive coding, and the third stage was identifying the overarching themes.

Once completed, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and highlighted the material I found the most striking or relevant in helping me to understand the participants' views, experiences and perceptions as they related to the purposes of the interview sections and the overall concepts being studied. I attached brief descriptors to those highlighted passages and kept a detailed master list of these descriptors as I worked through the interviews, reusing and building upon it as I went. This list became the descriptive codes in the first stage of developing analytical themes. These codes are simple and self-explanatory, and overlap each other frequently within particular passages from the interviews.

With the list of descriptive codes in place within the interview transcriptions I began to cluster together in the master list descriptive codes that seemed to share common meanings and created interpretive codes that would adequately capture those meanings. At this stage I made some preliminary interpretations about the meanings behind the clusters in relation to the main concepts of the thesis. I did not go back through the interview transcriptions to reapply these new codes but simply maintained the master list for easy reference. I did go back through the rest of the research data collected to find examples where these interpretive codes would apply, and made note of those examples as well.

Finally, in order to develop the overarching themes to be used as the key concepts in the final analysis I began to look at the interpretive codes with a greater sense of abstraction, drawing directly on the theoretical basis established through the literature review. It is important that these overarching themes be present and relevant throughout the data. Discussing and interpreting each of these overarching themes within the framework of the five components of ritual, referring to examples from the data and using direct quotes from participants is how the analysis is organized.

CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH CONTEXT

A Brief History of Ranching in Alberta

There is an important historical dimension to this thesis because the ranchers who make up the research participants in the case studies are part of the larger social history of cattle ranching in the province. The two ranches chosen for case studies represent two typical styles of ranching operations that have endured in Alberta; the OH Ranch represents the large-scale corporate-based ranches begun in the height of the ranching industry in the nineteenth century, and the Bogi Ranch represents the innumerable family-run ranches founded by homesteaders and immigrant settlers that are still in operation as several generations continue to work together. Acknowledging the heritage of both the overall ranching industry and the different styles of contemporary ranches helps set the context for the performance of cattle branding under investigation.

Cattle ranching has been a significant part of the economic and physical landscapes of western Canada since the nineteenth century. The ranching industry helped shape the settlement of the prairie region and develop the overall business climate as well. The cattle industry is arguably “one of western Canada’s earliest agrarian-based commercial enterprises” (Foran 2004, 311). The area of western Canada being referred to is:

the region that stretches from the Bow River near Calgary on the northern extremity to the American border on the south and from the foothills of the Rockies on the western side, to the Cypress Hills and Wood Mountain districts on the east [...] The ranching industry was serviced principally by the four urban centres of Calgary, Fort Macleod, Lethbridge, and Maple Creek (Elofson 2000, xiii).

Ranching in this region originally relied on ranchers having access to large tracts of land in order to use the open-range method of raising cattle reminiscent of the American “Cattle Kingdom” (Wolfenstine 1970, 6, 12-13). Canadian ranchers mostly left their herds to fend for themselves with only a few hired hands to manage them as best they could (Evans 2004, 91). Since the bulls were left to run with the cows year-round, calving was drawn out over several months with minimal intervention, and “weaning was

not generally practiced and winter losses were high among cows still suckling big calves through the cold weather” (Evans 2004, 91). Unlike their American counterparts who would continually move their cattle long distances to find forage in the vast free ranges of grassland available to them (Wolfenstine 1970, 7), Canadian ranchers were limited by the lack of free grassland and harsh winters, and could not move their herds as easily to find forage. In order to survive, the Canadian ranchers were forced into greater agricultural diversification for survival: from early on they began to practice herd management in order to reduce losses by not putting the bulls out until the summer so that calving season would take place in the spring when the weather was more conducive (Evans 2004, 92). Ranchers also began raising cereal crops to help supplement the lack of adequate forage in the winter months (Foran 2004, 315). Due to these factors the ranching industry “in western Canada could never approximate its purer essence in the desolate, drier, and more southerly areas of the United States” (Foran 2004, 312).

Ranchers in the area that is now the present-day province of Alberta were successful largely due to the leasehold system introduced in 1881 by the federal government which gave them access to more open grazing range for their herds (Foran 2004, 315). Historian Max Foran claims that a conservative estimate regarding the amount of land set aside for this leasehold system would be fifty million acres stretching across the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia (Foran 2004, 315). This also included community pastures, made available for “stock owners to place their animals on a government-supervised range during a time-specific grazing season” (Foran 2004, 319). These “leasehold policies allowed ranchers and farmers affordable access to sub-marginal land parcels for grazing purposes” (Foran 2004, 317). This land was made available to ranchers because it was mostly unsuitable for intensive cereal crop agriculture; hence its designation by the federal government specifically for grazing purposes (Foran 2004, 317). Both the OH Ranch in the foothills west of Longview and the Bogi Ranch in the arid grassland of Cessford represent this type of sub-marginal agricultural land that becomes productive when used for cattle ranching.

Figure 2: Ranching scene, cattle in Pine Coulee during round-up, Willow Creek range, Alberta [ca.1890-1895]

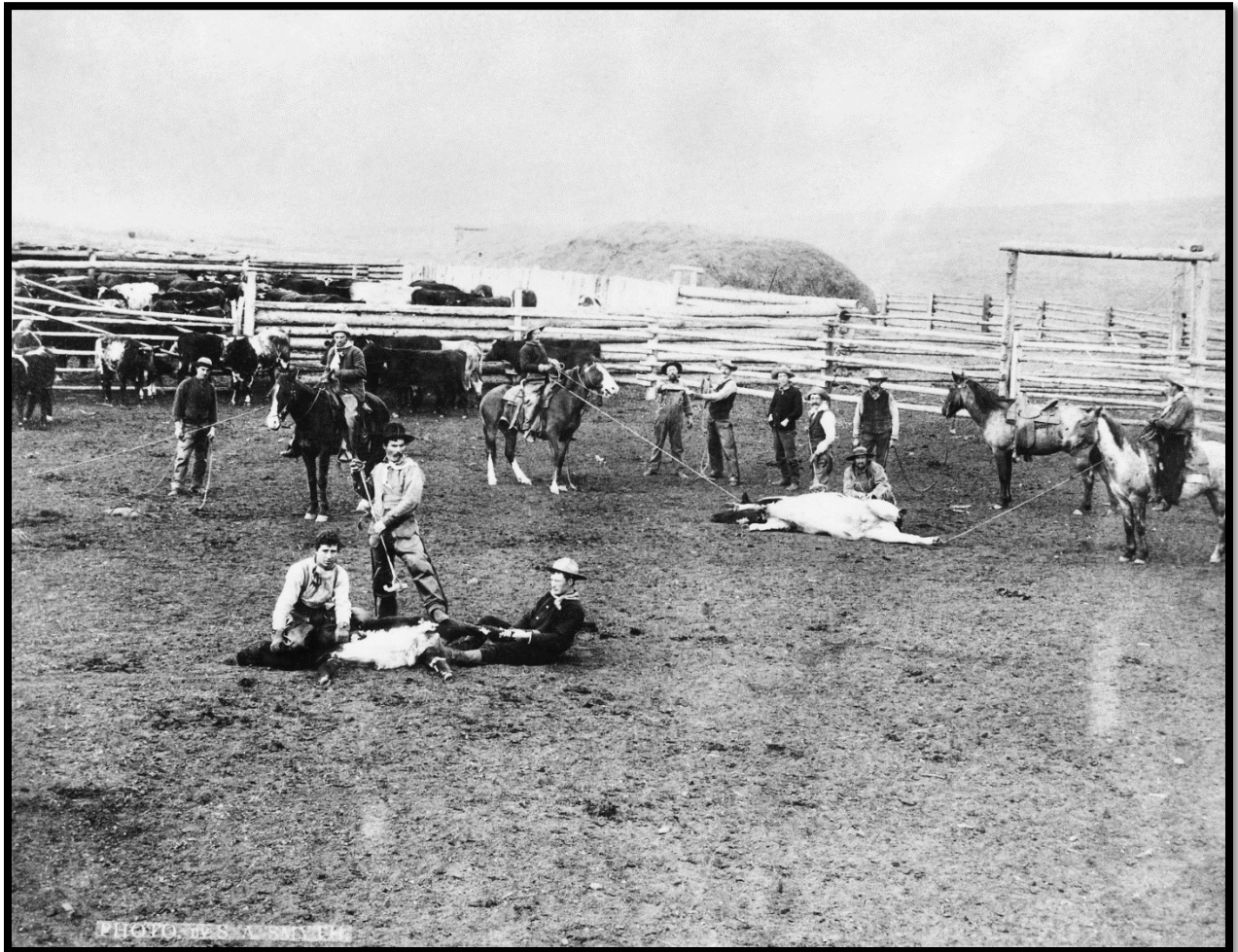


Source: Glenbow Archive, Call No. NA-118-2

One aspect of ranching that did not differ between the American and Canadian experiences was that branding was considered the “universally adopted method of demonstrating legal ownership of horses and cattle throughout the west” (Evans 2004, 97). In open range conditions it was necessary to have cattle marked in a way that was easily identifiable and (for the most part) tamper-proof. Branding would begin with rounding the cattle up in the spring from where they had been allowed to drift during the winter in search of forage. The whole round up process incorporated hundreds of hired hands from several ranches, covered several hundred kilometres and could take two to three months to complete (Evans 2004, 94). “The objective of the spring roundup was

to gather cattle and move them back to their own range. Branding would usually be attended to on the individual ranches” (Evans 2004, 96).

Figure 3: Branding cattle in corral, Jumping Pound Ranch, Jumping Pound, Alberta [ca.1885-1894]



Source: Glenbow Archive, Call No. NA-1939-3

The spring round up and process of branding was very important to ranchers because it gave them the opportunity to “count their herds, evaluate the increase and establish ownership” (Evans 2004, 93). Establishing ownership of the unbranded calves relied upon whether or not it would follow its mother; if it became apparent that a mother cow had died during the winter the calf would be considered ownerless and known as a “maverick”, becoming the property of the rancher who owned the range the

calf was found on (Wolfenstine 1970, 16). The issue with mavericks was that it was possible for ranchers to create them by forcibly separating cow/calf pairs on their home range during the winter and then claiming the calves in the spring, thereby effectively rustling the calves from their rightful owners (Wolfenstine 1970, 16). The cooperative efforts of the ranchers and their hired hands during the spring round up relied heavily upon the honour system and a commitment to working together.

Figure 4: Branding on MacKay ranch, Millarville district, Alberta [1916]



Source: Glenbow Archive, Call No. NA-3309-11

Keeping track of the brands was an ongoing process, and different stock districts across the Northwest Territories were allowed to register brands (Pallister 2007, 12), which was very confusing because there was not a unified registration system in place and many small ranches were using brands that had not been approved at all (Evans 2004, 101). Prior to the centralization of brand registration by the Department of

Agriculture of the Territorial Government in 1898 there were over three thousand cattle and horse brands registered in these various stock districts across the three territories (Pallister 2007, 12).

When the province of Alberta was founded in 1905 a new government office for recording and issuing brands was established at Medicine Hat; the same office was moved to Edmonton in 1923, and once again in 1975 to Stettler (Pallister 2007, 12, Livestock Identification Services 2012). In 1992 the Government of Alberta created the Livestock Advisory Committee made up of representatives from the Alberta Auction Markets Association, the Feeders Association of Alberta, the Western Stock Growers, the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association, the Alberta Cattle Commission and the Alberta Livestock Dealers and Order Buyers Association; these representatives recommended to the provincial government that livestock inspection be privatized (Livestock Identification Services 2012). This resulted in the passing of Bill 41 in the spring of 1998 which “allowed for a contract between a private company (LIS) and the Crown to unfold” (Livestock Identification Services 2012). After considerable consultation with various stakeholders on how to consolidate existing legislation, which was divided in three separate Acts - the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, and the Livestock and Livestock Products Act - “in order to develop a highly effective and efficient legislative framework for the benefit of the livestock industry” (Livestock Identification Services 2012), the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act received Royal Assent on May 24, 2006. The Act was proclaimed on January 1, 2009 and is now being enforced (Livestock Identification Services 2012).

The Bogi Ranch

The Bogi Ranch is located in the rolling grassland about ten kilometres east of the hamlet of Cessford. This family owned and operated ranch is representative of the farms and ranches established by settlers that immigrated to western Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Characterized by desolate landscapes, harsh living and working conditions, and a spirit of resilience these settler legacies created tight-knit communities centred on a frontier mentality. Founded in 1910 by Swedish

settlers and originally known as Cess Fiord, the town benefitted from close proximity to a railway line and had the usual types of businesses common of prairie settler towns established to service nearby farms and ranches, although the town itself peaked at one hundred residents (Local and Alberta Histories Collection n.d.). In the 1967 local history book written by community members from Cessford and the surrounding communities of Big Stone, Finnegan, Pollockville, Sunnybrook, and Wardlow, James E. Blumell describes the area using references to local commerce, landscape, and history that unite these prairie-based settler communities:

This land is bounded on the south and west by a vast arc of the Red Deer River, and on the north and east by a line from Dorothy to Big Stone to the Vee Bar Vee. This is the land of the dinosaurs. This is the land of the ancient Indian, and also the land of the Blackfoot and Cree. This is the land of the vast buffalo herds and the prairie wolves. This is the land of the early horse and cattle empires [...] This is the land of the homesteaders, who thronged in vast numbers for a few long years. And again this is the land of the rancher, and the Herefords, Angus, Shorthorn and Charolais. [...] This is also the land of the oil derrick, the pipeline, the tank cars and the gas flares and a different breed of men. [...] This is a land of staunch men who struggled and stayed and succeeded in a stern environment (Local and Alberta Histories Collection n.d.).

The hamlet of Cessford and its surrounding rural community has endured because of the close community ties and spirit of camaraderie that exists there. It is a vibrant community filled with young people who grew up in the area and who have stayed on to work in agriculture alongside their parents and grandparents. It is a place where every opportunity is seized to spend time with fellow community members, including local brandings.

The Bogi Ranch is owned and operated by John Bogi and his wife Diane. The ranch was originally founded by John's grandparents who immigrated to western Canada from Yugoslavia in 1938 in order to escape the escalating political tension in Europe. John claims that his grandmother had always wanted to come to Canada, and never expressed any desire to return to her former home. They had been farmers there and chose to homestead in Alberta, and John credits his grandmother with being the

driving force behind the farming operation, while later it was his father who got the family started in the cattle business. John Bogi also owned and operated a commercial feedlot near the ranch, starting it when he was in his early twenties, incorporated in 1980 and sold in 2006 in order to focus on his cow/calf operation, and he currently runs about four hundred head of cattle.

Branding Cattle at the Bogi Ranch on June 15, 2010

On the day of the branding at John Bogi's ranch my husband Patrick accompanied me to help as a research assistant. We arrived in Cessford around 10:00 a.m. and met up with Lila Bird, a relative of mine and the Bogis' neighbor and close friend. She directed us to where the branding trap was set up in a pasture close to the ranch. The branding trap was a large oval wooden corral with a fence dividing it across the middle with a gate, and another gate in the corner of the outside fence. There were a lot of vehicles parked around the corrals, many with horse trailers attached. As we arrived the cattle were just being herded into the trap by about a dozen people on horseback and one on a quad. Lila told us that they had started rounding up the cattle two hours earlier. There were three hundred fifty cow/calf pair in total of mostly purebred black Angus cattle, but there were a few mixed breed cattle as well. The calves ranged in age from ten days to two months old, and therefore their sizes varied greatly. By 10:30 a.m. about fifty cows had been sorted off out of the trap, and a truck with the branding equipment loaded in the back was driven in and unloaded.

There were thirty-five people in total working throughout the day, although some of them did not arrive until after the work had started. The participants were almost all men; of the total crew only three (including myself) were women, and the only job women did was vaccinating. The participants ranged in age from early twenties to mid-sixties. Most of them were either related to or neighbors with the Bogi family.

Processing of the calves started around 11:00 a.m. when the three ropers began dragging calves to the ten teams of wrestlers. The teams of wrestlers were roughly organized into two groups, one on either side of the equipment set up in the middle of the trap. The rest of the ground crew moved back and forth as needed to process the

calves, although there were multiple people doing each job so some chose to stay to one side. The processing of the calves involved each calf being roped and drug to the wrestlers where they were branded, vaccinated and tagged. The male animals were castrated and the testicles were saved in buckets of distilled water to be cooked at another time. The male calves were also given a shot of antibiotics. I questioned John about the choice to medicate the male calves at the time of castration; he said that because their cattle were kept in large pastures and left mostly to fend for themselves during the summer he chose to proactively medicate the male calves as a risk management practice to stave off possible infections.

Figure 5: Three teams of wrestlers holding calves and ground crew working - Bogi Ranch



Source: Jennifer Bird Rondeau

The calves were branded with John's "J Bar 4" brand on the left rib; branders used one iron at a time and tried to get to two or three calves before going back to either get the next iron or re-heat the one they had. There were three sets of irons being used. The calves were each given two different subcutaneous vaccinations, each vaccinator being responsible for only one of the two vaccines. Each vaccinator also had a can of spray paint, with different colors assigned to the different vaccines; after vaccinating the calf the vaccinator would mark the calf so that the wrestlers and ropers would know it had received both shots. This was the job John tasked me with and I gave the same vaccine all day. Finally the calves were tagged in the ear with a CCIA radio frequency identification tag.

Figure 6: Calf branded with John Bogi's "J Bar 4" brand



Source: Jennifer Bird Rondeau

By 12:00 p.m. all of the calves in the front end of the branding trap had been processed, and all of the animals in that section were turned out into the pasture to rejoin the cows out there. There was a half-hour break and then the remaining cattle in the trap were moved into the front section of corrals by the ropers on horseback and a few men on foot. Again they sorted off about fifty cows and locked them out into the pasture, and the work started up again immediately. The second group of calves was processed by 1:30 p.m. Once the cattle were let out everyone helped to clean up the branding supplies. They then stood around socializing for about an hour and a half.

Figure 7: Branding crew socializing after turning out the calves – Bogi Ranch



Source: Jennifer Bird Rondeau

At this point I left with the other women who had been working at the branding and drove to the Bogis' home where the rest of the women in the Bogi family were preparing dinner. We spent about half an hour chatting as they organized a large meal for all of the participants; soon the rest of the branding participants arrived, along with many of their family members who had not been working that day but simply came to share the meal, and dinner was served immediately.

The OH Ranch

The OH Ranch is located in the Highwood River valley west of Longview in the foothills that border the Highwood/Cataract area of Kananaskis Country. The OH Ranch is representative of the types of ranches that were common in Alberta during the nineteenth century, being primarily large cattle companies owned and operated by businessmen and run day-to-day by hired ranch hands; this is a corporate ranch with a strong presence in the local community. The history of the OH is well known and well documented, the ranch and the brand changing ownership several times in a dizzying succession of names and dates.

The OH brand was originally registered by business partners O.H. Smith and Lafayette French in 1881, and the two men famously established the OH Ranch in its present location by squatting in the area with their herd of cattle after having their trading company on the Blackfoot reservation near Gleichen shut down by the federal government (Pallister 2007, 55). Over the following hundred years the ranch and the OH brand changed hands some five times, the multiple owners including the Ings brothers, the legendary Pat Burns, the Mayer and Lage steamship company out of New York City, prominent Calgary businessmen Kink Roenisch and Bill Arden, and former ranch manager Bert Sheppard (Pallister 2007, 55-57). With the exception of Sheppard none of these owners were responsible for the day-to-day management of the ranch; this was left in the capable hands of a series of ranch foremen, more than half a dozen of them over the same time period, and countless ranch hands to help with the work. These were the men that became particularly well known in the surrounding community.

In 1985 the OH Ranch was up for sale again and the federal government started showing interest in purchasing the ranch to establish a military training base there (Pallister 2007, 58). This caused great concern for area residents and neighboring ranchers who feared the toll this would take on the surrounding rangeland which had been used almost exclusively for ranching for the past hundred years. Their fears were allayed when prominent Calgary businessman D.K. (Doc) Seaman purchased the ranch in 1987 (Pallister 2007, 58). Seaman put into place an easement agreement with the Nature Conservancy of Canada for the purposes of the protection and conservation of the area; as a historic rangeland the ranch cannot be used for recreation purposes and the area is under grazing lease with hunting and access restrictions (Stampede Foundation Receives Historic Gift 2012).

The ranch was owned by Seaman, and later by his estate, until late in 2011 when it was purchased by yet another well-known local businessman Bill Siebens. Siebens immediately donated the ranch to the Calgary Stampede Foundation with the intention that the Calgary Stampede would safeguard the future of the ranch as a piece of living ranch history and western heritage, while also maintaining the responsibility of environmental stewardship set in place by Seaman (Stampede Foundation Receives Historic Gift 2012). With the influence of the Calgary Stampede the ranch's history as a corporate-owned enterprise continues on into the foreseeable future. However at the time of my visit in the summer of 2010 the ranch had just gone up for sale and both its future and the future of the current foreman Todd Snodgrass were uncertain. The sale of the ranch was again a cause for concern in the tight-knit ranching community, considering the unease and tension that had been caused the last time the OH was up for sale in the 1980s.

Branding Cattle at the OH Ranch on July 23, 2010

On the day of the branding at the OH Ranch my father Michael accompanied me to help as a research assistant. We loaded up two of our horses and reached the OH Ranch around 6:45 a.m. We walked over to the cookhouse where we found Todd Snodgrass (manager of the OH Ranch at Longview), Robert Hoff (foreman of the OH Ranch at Dorothy), and Cody Veilleux (foreman of the OH Ranch at Bassano) sitting

around the table drinking coffee and chatting while Todd's wife Tricia was clearing away their breakfast things. Todd introduced me quickly to the others, explaining that I was there doing research, bridging that gap for me immediately although it was difficult for me to join the group's conversation. We spent about half an hour in the cookhouse and then headed back to where the trucks and trailers were parked as more men started arriving. I was the only woman present, as well as the only person under the age of thirty-five. We stood outside the barn chatting with a couple of men that my father knew. Todd got in his truck and drove out of the yard and everyone followed with their own trucks and trailers. It was approximately 7:45 a.m. at this time.

We arrived at a large branding trap made up of page wire corrals with metal gates. We all parked in one spot and everyone started getting out and mounting up. Todd sat at the gate on his horse and directed people where to go; my father and I stuck together and swept out to the left which would put us at the back of the herd as they gathered. Other riders stayed back a bit and ended up on the right side of the herd, while others rode far up on the hills looking for strays. There were approximately three hundred cow/calf pair of mostly red Angus with some Hereford mix cattle, and the calves were between six and eight weeks old.

As the cattle gathered we funneled them into the far end of the branding trap which was split down the middle by a barbed wire fence with gates on either end, and a third section where the calves were eventually run into after the cows were sorted off. It took about an hour to sort off all of the cows back into the pasture.

Figure 8: Cattle being sorted through two open gates by riders on horseback – OH Ranch



Source: Jennifer Bird Rondeau

Once the sorting was done the men started riding around to talk to the other men that had shown up later than them to greet them, shaking hands and chatting while still on horseback. We rode out of the trap and tied our horses up at the trailer, as did everyone who did not expect to be roping that day. The potential ropers tied their horses up just outside the pen that the calves were in, but still inside the trap, and four men stayed on their horses in the trap to start roping. Todd's mother-in-law showed up in a truck with the branding equipment along with Todd's teenage daughter and a friend of hers. They drove the truck into the trap and everyone helped to unload and set up the supplies at Todd's direction.

By 9:00 a.m. everything was set up, the propane torches had been fired up heating the irons, and Todd starting assigning jobs. There were thirteen people in the ground crew, four of which (including myself) were women. Todd divided this group roughly into four teams, two teams on either side of the equipment set up; each team centred around a man running a Nord Fork calf catcher for immobilizing the calves during processing with the rest of the people being assigned the other processing tasks. I asked both Todd and Robert about the use of the Nord Fork as opposed to wrestlers and they both said that they liked using them because they felt it was easier on the ground crew to not have to wrestle, and better for keeping the calves' heads straight and stationary during de-horning. Using the Nord Forks required the ropers to keep the calves heeled for the duration of processing and everyone seemed comfortable with this style of branding and were able to move very quickly. The ropers generally went to the same side each time, but also worked together to ensure that no one in the ground crew was standing waiting for too long.

Figure 9: Calf immobilized with Nord Fork – OH Ranch



Source: Jennifer Bird Rondeau

The processing of the calves involved the ropers heeling the calves and dragging them to a waiting team, branding with "OH" on the left hip, the branders used two-character solid brands so one person could do the entire brand without going back for a second iron; a delousing pour administered with a measured spray gun attached to a plastic jug; one subcutaneous vaccine; de-horning with a specialized iron, done only as needed and there were very few; ear tagging with CCIA radio frequency identification tags; and castration of male calves with the testicles being cleaned and saved in buckets. Some people performed the same jobs for the entire branding while others were moved around at Todd's discretion. It took about forty-five minutes to process two-thirds of the herd, and once finished the calves were turned back out into the field with the cows.

The remaining calves being held in the first pen were immediately moved into the area with the branding equipment by the ropers. Some of the jobs were re-assigned by Todd, but mostly it was just a change in ropers. After about fifteen minutes Todd came over and asked me to start pouring the de-lousing drip that his daughter had been doing so that she could learn how to run a Nord Fork. Todd closely supervised the participants throughout the processing, managing the flow of activity more than anything, but became very meticulous close to the end to make sure nothing was wasted. He had a notebook with every job written down in it and who was doing what, as well as the quantities of supplies used. It took about an hour to process the remaining calves and once they were finished they were turned back out into the pasture with the cows.

Figure 10: Fully processing calves returning to pasture with the “OH” brand on left hip – OH Ranch



Source: Jennifer Bird Rondeau

At this point everyone helped pack up and stood around chatting for about half an hour. Todd’s mother-in-law and the girls took the truck with the equipment and headed back to the ranch. Todd asked someone where the cooler of drinks had gone, and they said it was in the truck. He said that was too bad because he would not mind a beer now; it was the first time the mood had lightened up that day. Everyone loaded up their horses and returned to the ranch where they parked at the barn and made their way over to the cookhouse for the meal prepared by Tricia, her mother, and the teenage girls.

CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data collected builds upon the theoretical and methodological foundations of cultural performance and ritual in understanding the role of the senses in creating, maintaining and communicating social identity. The overall analytic focus is on the influence of the senses as a major component within all of the ritual characteristics of cultural performance. The ultimate goal of this analysis is to explore what the senses contribute to the expression of social relations.

As described in the Methods chapter, the interviews were coded as they were being transcribed. The simple descriptive codes attached to interesting passages within the interviews accumulated into a master list of over thirty descriptive codes by the time all of the interviews were transcribed. Many of these descriptive codes became irrelevant as the analysis proceeded, and therefore the list of descriptive codes was revised to pull out the ones most relevant to the research questions. This revision resulted in a new list of fifteen descriptive codes: traditions, working together, insiders/outside, relationship with animals, involvement of children and young participants, the Code, teaching and learning skills, continuity and change, visual knowledge, auditory knowledge, olfactory knowledge, tactile knowledge, importance of food and drink, kinaesthetic knowledge, and extrasensory knowledge.

In revising the list of descriptive codes it became clear that many of them shared common foundations both theoretically and in the fieldwork. Three interpretive codes were created in order that the descriptive codes could be clustered together. Since many of the descriptive codes overlapped within the same interview passages, the interpretive codes helped to develop more manageable conceptual groups for analysis. The three interpretive codes are: cultural identity, transmission of cultural knowledge, and sensory knowledge. Once the clusters were arranged some preliminary interpretations were made about those interview passages and the rest of the research data. In particular the field notes were consulted in order to apply the interpretive codes to relevant sections for analysis.

Once applied throughout the research data the interpretive codes needed to be refined for dealing with the components of ritual used to frame the analysis.

Additionally, the focus on sensory knowledge was expanded to be addressed across all of the sections of the analysis instead of being confined to their own section. The interpretive codes were reviewed with a greater sense of abstraction in order to develop the overarching themes that surfaced as being the most important analytically. The overarching themes found in the research data are: elements of performance, shared social history, transmission of cultural knowledge, the Code, and extrasensory connections.

The aspects of sensory perception that contribute to the creation, maintenance and communication of social identity during performance are being used as a lens through which all the layers of that performance are viewed. Those layers of performance are detailed through the overarching themes arrived at through the thematic coding of the field data and interviews. The themes have been divided between the five sections of this chapter, representative of the five characteristic components of ritual activities detailed by Catherine Bell (C. Bell 1997, 138). Each section includes a brief explanation of that ritual component of the cultural performance, along with a larger subsection that discusses the related themes arrived at through interpreting the field data with the intention of analyzing the overall contribution to the social identity of the group.

The first section addresses the **formalism** of the ritual with a detailed explanation of the **elements of performance**. The second section is on the **traditionalism** of the ritual and how it represents the participants' connection to a **shared social history**. The third section describes the **invariance of actions** associated with cattle branding and why it is important in the **transmission of cultural knowledge**. The fourth section examines how the group enacts **rule-governance**, particularly through what participants describe as **the Code**. The fifth and final section deals with the element of **sacral symbolism** in the ritual, which in the event of cattle branding comes out through the **extrasensory connections** participants feel to the animals they work with, to each other as group members, and to their environment.

Formalism

“Formalization is the degree of formality [...] that marks an activity as ritual-like” (E. Bell 2008, 128). Formalization makes a statement about the importance of those activities to the people performing them. Catherine Bell describes formality as “one of the most frequently cited characteristics of ritual” and that “the more formal a series of movements and activities, the more ritual-like they are apt to seem to us” (C. Bell 1997, 139). The cultural performance of cattle branding consists of many ritualized elements that are all important parts of the overall event, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant each detail may appear when viewed on its own. As those details accumulate to form the cultural performance as a whole and are repeated over time, the event is formalized. This formalism also makes up the consistent patterns of behaviour that the group’s social identity is based upon (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 381). The elements of cattle branding that have taken on a recognizable degree of formality to be discussed in this analysis are all associated with the organization of the event.

Elements of Performance

The flow of activities at cattle brandings is always organized in a similar sequence regardless of where the branding takes place or who is performing those activities. This organizational process has become so formalized that most ranchers would not conceive of a branding event taking place in any other way; this is the natural order of events because it is what makes sense for their purpose.

The flow of activity begins with gathering the cattle into an enclosed space specifically designated for the purposes of safe capture and manageable handling. How far the cattle are moved, how long it takes to gather them, and how they are sorted for the purposes of processing is dependent on the particular circumstances of the branding event, but this is always how the event begins. Not all performance participants take part in this aspect of the event though. At the Bogi branding there were approximately a dozen people out of the total thirty-five participants helping with rounding up the cattle, and only three men on horseback and four on foot took part in sorting. They divided the herd into two groups of roughly equal size, locking one group

into the back half of the branding trap. From the remaining group of cattle the men sorted off about fifty cows out of the trap and back into the pasture to make enough room for the branding equipment to be set up and for the ground crew to have space to work. At the OH branding the ratio of round-up participants was higher, but there were still a small handful of people that arrived after the round-up was already underway. The sorting was done at two open gates on the outside of the branding trap, and the participants divided themselves between these two gates. Everyone remained on horseback, even the men working the open gates, and inevitably there were several occasions when calves would sneak through. Then someone would rush out, rope the calf and bring it back into the trap. In the photo elicitation slideshow I included several photographs of this sorting process. The interviewees that had been at the OH branding provided detailed explanations as to why it is important to them as a community to do as much work as possible on horseback, and that a group member's horsemanship skills are a distinct feature of their insider status. This means that the rounding up and sorting of the cattle is the first opportunity during the cultural performance for participants to display their skill through the performance of a task.

Once the cattle are corralled the next organizational element of the performance is setting up the branding equipment. Again the actual methods used may differ between ranchers but the process of setting up has to be completed before processing can begin. The supplies are always organized beforehand. Certain participants will be engaged in setting up the equipment while others are expected to wait before they get involved. At the Bogi branding the branding equipment was unloaded and John Bogi, along with several other older men, organized the gear. They had built a rack out of welded steel that had a wooden box on one side which held all of the supplies, and a large steel frame on the other side that the cradle for the branding irons was fitted onto. There was another rack attached that held two propane tanks for heating the branding irons. While those older men were setting up the rest of the participants stood around in small groups socializing. At the OH branding the equipment was unloaded and set up mainly by Todd Snodgrass and the other ranch foremen Robert Hoff and Cody Veilleux with some of the other participants helping out as directed. Two large propane tanks

were unloaded from a pickup truck and set in the centre of the branding trap and three cradles of different heights were arranged for the branding irons. The rest of the supplies were organized on a fold-up table nearby, and the overall arrangement made a rough triangle in the centre of the trap on either side of which the Nord Forks were anchored.

The designation of tasks is also a formalized element of the performance and may be done by skill-set; at the Bogi branding there was no explicit direction in designating tasks to the ground crew but it was apparent that people had come with the intention of performing specific tasks, and they took on these roles immediately without being directed. The three men who came to rope stayed on their horses, the younger men broke into teams to wrestle, and the older men and the women set about making up the rest of the ground crew. At the OH branding the designation of tasks was different because Todd, being ranch manager, was in charge of assigning tasks to participants and this fact seemed clear and understood to everyone. Tasks were also re-assigned for some participants and this transition was managed completely by Todd. The actual activities associated with the processing of the animals will be discussed in the section on *Transmission of Cultural Knowledge*.

Once the animals are processed, the branding event continues as the participants move on from the branding trap to where the after-event meal will be shared. By sharing a meal after working together the participants create an occasion for togetherness based on a sensory experience. It is expected that the rancher whose cattle are being branded that day provide a meal for the participants, and the planning, preparation and eating of that meal communicates the value that the group places on sharing with their community.

It's so important and you know like it's a fun time, you tell stories about the old brandings and the new ones, and I think people really enjoy themselves if the branding went well. They feel good about themselves, and they express that just by the celebration afterwards. We have quite a few of those because we not only have a celebration after branding, you know our cattle drives we have a celebration after that, our round-ups, weaning time, you know the branding is probably the most important. So they're all times of celebration when we sit down and enjoy each other and enjoy what we do and tell stories. We don't get paid a lot and these people that come, they don't get paid at all! But that's their payment, is scotch whiskey and beer and roast beef and pie. That's their payment. And they love it! They wouldn't want to be paid anything else (Bews 2010).

At the Bogi branding there was a truck parked outside the branding trap that had a cooler in it with water, beer, sandwiches and cookies provided by the Bogi family. Participants were encouraged to help themselves to these items throughout the day, particularly during the break at noon and after the processing was over. There was also a meal organized at the Bogis' home by Diane Bogi, her mother, her daughters and daughter-in-law. They prepared lasagnes, beef on a bun, salads, baked potatoes, and about a dozen different pies (for which the Bogi women are famous in the community). The meal was served with everyone dishing up buffet style in the kitchen. All of the men took off their boots and shoes in the entranceway before filling their plates, and then went to sit picnic-style on the grass in the Bogis' backyard under the trees. The atmosphere was very relaxed and congenial, many of the participants' families arrived to share in the meal, and everyone spent the rest of the afternoon socializing.

At the OH branding the meal was organized by Tricia Snodgrass in the ranch's historic cookhouse. Once the processing was over she was joined by her mother, daughter and her daughter's friend in helping to prepare the food. As the branding participants made their way into the cookhouse they all removed their boots and hats, even if they chose to sit outside on the patio. The bar was set up and all of the men were drinking something, mostly scotch but many were drinking coffee as well. The women were busy in the kitchen preparing lunch; mixing salad and slicing buns, and also breading and frying the calves' testicles collected during the morning to make

prairie oysters. At one point Tricia started to make a hot sauce for the prairie oysters by pan-frying hot peppers. The smell was so strong that it filled the entire room; it stung my eyes and made my throat close up so that it was hard to talk. I was not the only one suffering this and almost everyone went outside on to the patio to get away from it. The meal was roast beef, buns and salads, served buffet-style out of the kitchen. The participants chose to either sit in the dining room or out on the patio to eat. It was very noticeable that before, during and after the meal the men all struck up enthusiastic conversations but were obviously selective about whom they sat with and talked to. The different groups of men did not move around and mingle, and some of the men seemed visibly uncomfortable with my presence amongst them.

The research participants, whether at the brandings or in the interviews, all agreed that branding events are largely attended by community members because they are a good excuse to get together socially. Each branding is an important social event in the year that they look forward to and an opportunity to see and reconnect with friends and neighbors that they otherwise do not see very often.

I mean misery loves company in some respects, but you're so busy between April and into May calving, and finally the first guy that calves early might brand in the middle of May. And it's the first time you get out and see your neighbours and have some empathy and camaraderie with, because you know they were battling through the storms and everything else the same as you were, so then you get to go to a branding and work for a few hours and have a little fun, and away you go (Butters 2010).

This reconnection to the community is why the social and sensory aspects of sharing a meal as part of the branding event are so important in fostering the maintenance of the participants' social identity.

Traditionalism

Traditionalism is the “appeal to tradition or custom” and the desire to “repeat historical precedents” found in most rituals, and is the basis for ritual-like activities (C. Bell 1997, 145). Catherine Bell explains traditionalism as:

The attempt to make a set of activities to be identical to or thoroughly consistent with older cultural precedents [...] As a powerful tool of legitimation, traditionalization may be a matter of near-perfect repetition of activities from an earlier period, the adaptation of such activities in a new setting, or even the creation of practices that simply evoke links with the past (C. Bell 1997, 145).

All three of these scenarios are present within contemporary performances of cattle branding as group members repeat the traditional practice of branding while adapting to new styles of ranching other than the open-range methods used in the past, and maintain the rituals that evoke their shared social history.

Cultural performances are used by communities to re-enact the creation of their social identity, reinforcing their shared past and origins. The component of ritual activities centred on tradition is the common rationale based on “the assumption that it has always been done this way” (C. Bell 1997, 150). The maintenance of those cultural precedents through performance and ritual provide stability for communities. People involved in cattle ranching faithfully attend the brandings of family and neighbors, continually recreating their social identity, reinforcing the values of their shared heritage, while fostering a spirit of community through communal work.

Shared Social History

The cultural group of cattle ranchers in southern Alberta share a long collective history that is part of the broader social history of the province itself. The ranching community continues to prosper and remain economically relevant due to its ability to simultaneously maintain the “time-honoured traditions” of land-use while also making the changes necessary for diversification and modifications to satisfy the constantly changing market factors of the beef industry (Foran 2004, 311). One of the traditions that has endured is cattle branding; the reason for this is that the practice has become an important factor in keeping the ranching legacy alive while communicating the value the group places on that legacy. The traditions branding participants share provide rituals of interaction whereby the group’s social identity is communicated through expressions of their shared cultural understandings (Turner 1986, 139). During the

portion of the interviews when the photo elicitation slideshow was used the interviewees all expressed great interest in the archival photographs, comparing what they saw in them to present-day ranching activities. They expressed great respect for the heritage of the ranching industry and clearly felt pleased to be part of that tradition.

Cattle branding is a provincially-legislated and industry-regulated best practice process of livestock identification, the precedent for which was set in Alberta in the nineteenth century. The use of cattle branding began for practical reasons but very quickly gained social importance for succeeding generations of participants. The cultural function of cattle branding as a performance of identity has become just as important as the business practice of it. The research participants addressed this connection to a shared social history directly, unabashedly taking great pride in it.

Ranching culture is different – it's something that helped create Alberta and is part of Alberta's identity. No matter where you are you can associate with another rancher and have a conversation based on your background and what you do. You know what they go through so you have a different level of understanding with them (Kading 2010).

I think that ranching is my life, and I'm glad that I've chosen it, and I'm happy with it. I'm a happy man for choosing it – I'm a lucky man for being able to live here and have such a beautiful country to call home. It's a way of life and I really enjoy it, I couldn't think of a better way to spend my years on this earth (Bews 2010).

Many members of various ranching communities share connections that include blended families, creating bounded descent groups (Noyes 1995, 452) that become constant fixtures over time, much like the ranches their families are connected to. Family members and close neighbours will often see each other and work together almost every day, and can trace those connections back over the past hundred years. These ongoing everyday actions of sharing communal work are an integral part of the occupational traditions of this group, and a component of their social identity that they take great pride in.

I could call my neighbours at the OH and they'll come and help me out, if they're free they'll be there in a minute. If they're not free we'll figure out a day that they can help and I'd do the same, like we come to brandings together, we do the weanings together, big cattle drives that you need more than just you and your family, they're there for you. [...] That's the way we are. And that's pretty nice (Bews 2010).

Working together is identified by participants as a major component of their social identity, in particular how they continually maintain their position within the social structure of the community. They consider working with their community members paramount to the combined success of members' ranching operations, but also as a source of camaraderie, integrity and uprightness unique to their occupational group.

I think the agricultural community – I don't care where you're at – they look out for one another, even though they don't get along they look out for one another. I think that's kind of the beautiful thing about agriculture. If somebody's going down, they're going to help them to keep them from crashing. You see that all the time. They're not digging dirt to help it go down any faster, they're there to help. I've never run into anybody that's lived and grown up in agriculture that would ever stick you in the back – never! (Bews 2010).

Arguably the most important traditional aspect regarding the branding event that all research participants emphasized was the fact that family, friends, and neighbours came together to perform the work. This is a communal activity, done with a spirit of sharing, consideration, and honouring their commitment to one another. This group of people takes their relationships with community members very seriously, endeavouring to maintain those relationships in order that they may continue to work together agreeably at future events, thereby maintaining their social identity through shared traditions. Should those relationships break down the very existence of the group could become threatened because it is the continual performance of the cultural knowledge shared by group members that reinforces their social identity. If they stop branding cattle together the knowledge required to do so becomes superfluous, and that bodily basis of community (Noyes 1995, 469) will be lost.

I just hope to God that we keep some of the traditional side of this business, because if we don't it will be a total crime, it will be something that will be lost and it will never be regained again. I think we've got to keep some of this tradition going. It has value. It's got to continue, and I hope it doesn't come to the only place that we can see this is in the archives. I hope we can still go out and experience some of this stuff, and not just from a historical point of view because it does still have its place, it's still working. We don't have to change everything (Gallup 2010).

Invariance of Actions

The actions associated with ritual are generally performed the same way every time the ritual is performed. Invariance is “[o]ne of the most common characteristics of ritual-like behavior”, evidenced by “a disciplined set of actions marked by precise repetition and physical control” (C. Bell 1997, 150). The main features of invariance within a ritual

may be [...] the careful choreography of actions, the self-control required by the actor, or the rhythm of repetition in which the orchestrated activity is the most recent in an exact series that unites past and future (C. Bell 1997, 150).

These are the actions that, when repeated consistently over time, formalize the event into a ritual while also creating and maintaining the participants' social identity. Cultural knowledge must be part of the shared interactions of groups in order to be relevant. That shared cultural knowledge is therefore contingent on members' connectedness with other cultural members, and it is particularly important that members share a connectedness to their cultural heritage. There is a real danger that cultural knowledge can be lost to a group if it is not continually performed because it is only through those performances authored by the collective that members' social identities are reconstituted.

The actions being analyzed in this section are the ones associated with the transmission of culturally-contingent ways of knowing that are bound by shared sensory experiences. The teaching and learning of this cultural knowledge is an integral part of communicating the consistent patterns of behavior (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 381)

that entrench the group's social identity through performance. The transmission of cultural knowledge is based on the "component of discipline" central to invariance, which "suggests that one effect of invariance is generally understood to be the molding or shaping of persons according to enduring guidelines and conditions" (C. Bell 1997, 150).

Transmission of Cultural Knowledge

The process of cattle branding used on Alberta ranches has remained largely the same for the past one hundred and fifty years. The actions associated with branding continue to be performed the same way each time within the large, interconnected communities of cattle ranchers. This is in spite of the technological advancements in livestock identification, such as micro-chipping, that could possibly negate the need for branding at all (Livestock Identification Services 2012). Ranchers continue to hold annual brandings in the spring, sharing the work with family, friends and neighbors, and perform the related processes with faithful and diligent certainty.

There are set tasks to be completed at cattle brandings and they are performed the same way on each animal throughout the course of the event. Cultural members do not consult manuals or textbooks written about how the event of a cattle branding is to be performed; they learn the process by participating in the branding ritual itself. The teaching of processing practices to young people is considered valuable in this cultural community; participants are expected to be cognizant of there being a right way and a wrong way to perform each task. Physical control is paramount when dealing with livestock, which includes understanding how to perform a task with minimal stress caused to the animal, and also knowing where and when to place oneself in relation to an animal and other participants.

These embodied practices of cultural knowledge privilege the body as the source of knowledge (Pink 2009, 24) and the primary site of transmission through the senses. The senses are a collective medium of communication which are like language but not reducible to language; there are things that cultural members come to know, store, and pass on only through their bodies. People engage with one another and animals by

employing their individual sensory perceptions and the shared values, norms and ideals that are all part of their social identity. They embody the cultural heritage that inspires them to continue traditional practices in a contemporary context. Their experiences and cultural knowledge are emplaced as they use their minds, bodies and responses to the environment to complete both the planned and emergent tasks at the branding. Cattle branding is a multisensorial event that employs cultural knowledge that is transmitted across generations, embodied in cultural members and materials, and emplaced during cultural practices.

I think your senses become stronger that way because they pretty well have to, you know to deal. You kind of got to think a step ahead, and so I think you build that sense up a lot more than the average person would. A lot of that is just experience; you're doing it before you even think about it. But I think that's cultivated over years and years of experience, it just becomes second nature to you. I don't think young people – they just don't have that ability to start with (Gallup 2010).

Participants described their sensory experiences of the branding event in order to help articulate these components of cultural knowledge stored in the body. Many of their responses were strikingly similar, particularly in relation to sound, suggesting that these sensory codes are shared by group members even more than were previously considered.

For me it's the calves bawling and part of that comes from looking after them babies and bawling babies – usually that's a sign of stress, or that's a sign of something is wrong - so that's the first thing, it's the bawling. I'm not necessarily listening for *something*, but I think it just shows that there's concern about that, let's get these calves done, let's get them back with their moms, and let's eliminate the bawling (G. Meadows 2010).

Bawling. Bawling is the big thing. Usually when you just ride into the field the bawling starts and that doesn't quit until after the branding. It's just non-stop from the time you start until you kick the calves back out (Gallup 2010).

These descriptions are related to the participants' sensory memories of past events; using the senses to invoke past experiences and draw them back to the branding event.

Many descriptions were directly related to the processing tasks that participants were likely to perform at those events.

For everybody say my age or into their eighties that KRS would be one smell that everybody knows, everybody used to use it and it was used as disinfectant for castration and for flies, everybody sprayed or squirted it on the brands years ago. And that's just stuck in my head. If I were to smell something that's similar to that, I could be on 8th Ave. downtown Calgary and right now – it would make me think of branding (G. Meadows 2010).

Sometimes when you're wrestling you actually have to hold your breath because [the smell of burning hair] just comes straight at you, so you have to hold your breath until it clears off a little. If you suck that in it's not good (Gallup 2010).

I guess for me the first thing is the touch of my rope, the feeling of my rope, and is it the right one – I always take two or three and I'm always worried that I have the wrong one, and throw it away and get another one. And I can almost feel my [branding] iron when it's burning, if it's gone too deep, I can almost feel that. And I can tell if my iron's hot enough or cool enough by feeling it, because you can feel it vibrating, if it's hot, you can feel it (Wambeke 2010).

Although the entire branding event depends upon the synchronized and well-managed conduct of activities on the parts of the participants in order to be successful, it was the participants who had worked as wrestlers during processing that had the most to say about the intention and feeling behind working with another person in a designated team effort to accomplish a task. Their descriptions demonstrate that shared cultural knowledge, skill, and a willingness to cooperate are all paramount in these occasions of working together. Besides simply pairing up to accomplish the task at hand they also describe the experience of working together as being enjoyable, thereby further highlighting the ongoing social aspect of the branding event.

We found wrestling very easy [when we were young], and if you wrestled with another guy a lot you got to know each other's movements, it just became so easy, well then you didn't want to wrestle calves with anyone else. You were a team and it made it so much fun. You know we got so when you go to a branding, you knew who you wanted to wrestle with so we'd go to the branding and the guy would come along and say you wrestle with him and you wrestle with him, and we'd say no – I want to wrestle with him. So we would absolutely refuse (Gallup 2010).

I pretty much always wrestle calves, I find it the most fun. We change up [partners] quite a bit, it depends on who's at the branding. Usually it takes a few calves to get your groove together, to get your timing right, and then it gets better after that. The first few are usually a bit rough, but some guys you just click with right away. A lot of it has to do with [being from] the same community because you get taught by one guy who wrestled with all your parents, and then they get taught by their parents and you kind of comingle (Bunney 2010).

There is a repertoire of cultural knowledge possessed by cultural members that embodies memory and all non-reproducible knowledge (Taylor 2003, 20). The repertoire requires presence; cultural members participate in the production and reproduction of cultural knowledge by actually being there, taking part in the transmission of that knowledge through performance. This is how communal memories, histories, and values are reconstituted and transmitted from one generation to the next (Taylor 2003, 21). If these practices are not shared and passed on to the next generation they run the risk of being lost forever; the cultural group will fracture and eventually the repertoire will be forgotten. The participants I spoke with all expressed great concern over this issue of potentially losing their social identity; if the cattle industry is not viable for the next generation the children of ranchers move on to other occupations and stop taking part in the cultural performances that recreate their social identity. The cultural knowledge it takes to perform those tasks and effectively be a member of the group are lost.

Everything is lost along the way; you know you could only pass so much down. I think a little bit is lost in every generation (Gallup 2010).

[The younger generation] We're in the transitional era between the brandings of yesterday and the brandings of tomorrow. We're kind of in a hard spot now because we have to figure out how to get the job done and keep everything culture-wise that separates you from the rest of society (Kading 2010).

It's sad [that more young people are not involved] because how much longer are we going to be able to do this physically. And this is my concern all the time – how are we going to pass this on? (L. Meadows 2010).

This is another reason why cultural members take the event of cattle branding so seriously, and enjoy the performance of it every year. By taking part they are reaffirming their social values and connectedness to their heritage.

Participants place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of passing on cultural knowledge to the next generation, and had a lot to say about the process of learning skills through direct experience. These experiences of learning helped to shape them as cultural members, building up a stock of knowledge that they would be able to draw upon. Participants describe a progression of learning that is common throughout the cultural performance of cattle branding. Young people are introduced to the processes of the event gradually by being brought into the branding trap as early as eight years old. They are given age-appropriate tasks, are allowed to learn from their mistakes, and are expected to pay close attention to the conduct of senior cultural members in order to become accustomed to the rhythms of many people working together. They are expected to learn to stay out of the way of more important activities being performed by senior participants, but also to observe those activities closely so that they collect the knowledge they will need to draw upon later when called up to the next task.

As a person that was too young to wrestle, I carried a branding iron. That was the first thing that I did. So if you were interested, carrying a branding iron to whoever was branding, pretty soon you figured out the order and who was doing what, it didn't take you very long. So pretty soon you figured well when I get big enough I'm going to be able to wrestle. It used to be you carried a branding iron, and then you wrestled – if you were a girl you probably vaccinated

because girls didn't wrestle when I started, not as many. But now girls do wrestle (Wambeke 2010).

When you start out and you're little they'll pass you off with one of the older guys, like someone else's Dad, then that way they can teach you – you think you're helping but really you just sit there in front of him getting your picture taken. It's the guy doing all the work, you don't really do anything. We were allowed to be in the way, and everyone just kind of tries to teach you but in a way that you don't get hurt. Everyone just kind of looks out for everyone. If you screw up no one gets mad, they just kind of tell you how to fix it. Everyone's really patient – they don't get mad, they don't lose their temper (Kading 2010).

I think the first year I ever branded it was because somebody didn't show up! And I was probably twelve or something. My Dad's brand was Bar O C and we had three brands each on their own handle, so it kept you busy. And there would be three sets of wrestlers, but you had to go to each calf three times. And I put the bloody C on backwards on one of them – and I didn't live that down for years! (Butters 2010).

When I was about eleven or twelve, I was too small to wrestle but I thought I could. I remember getting beat up by a lot of calves, trying very hard. It was fun – it was a challenge. I wanted to be with the older group and show them you could do it (Bogi 2010).

I know from my own personal experience I was very fortunate because up the Highwood River there were five ranches and very, very good cow men, good horsemen, and I think there was a little bunch here that was so fortunate to have grown up with those guys. Like we admired all those older fellows so much. And all you basically had to do was listen and watch those older fellows and that's how we learned, you know if you weren't doing your job right they would tell you, you weren't doing your job right. So that's how we kind of learned, you just learned from the ground up basically (Gallup 2010).

The gradual progression through the tasks performed was considered very important by the older participants interviewed, and they expressed some concerns over the consequences of young participants being allowed to move up the ranks too quickly. In

effect, they thought it necessary for young people to earn their passage up the hierarchy of the branding event.

It's changed a little bit now with the [Nord Fork] snares, because the snares let a kid that's eight years old rope, as long as he can rope both hind legs, and bring them in. And as long as he's in control, and can hold that calf as long as it's there. So there's a few things that changes those younger kids can jump way up above where they used to (Wambeke 2010).

As an occupational group cattle ranchers engage in a large proportion of physical activity due to their engagement with livestock and their sensory models are significantly affected by this. Their understanding of this difference in sensory engagement is bound up in their cultural heritage, communication and meaning-making, and is transmitted as part of their stock of culturally-specific knowledge. A major component of the transmission of knowledge and performance of social identity is skill. Tim Ingold explores the ideas of skill and communities of practice in *The Perception of the Environment* (Ingold 2000). According to Ingold, skill is dependent upon

the total field of relations constituted by the presence of the organism-person, indissolubly body and mind, in a richly structured environment (Ingold 2000, 353).

This is the emplacement of cultural members described by David Howes; “the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment” (Howes 2005, 7). Ingold explains that

skill is not an attribute of the individual body in isolation but of the whole system of relations constituted by the presence of the artisan in his or her environment (Ingold 2000, 291).

This means that the emplacement of an individual affects their ability to acquire culturally-contingent skills, as does their connectedness with other cultural members who share that knowledge with them. “[I]t is not through the transmission of formulae that skills are passed from generation to generation, but through practical, ‘hands-on’ experience” (Ingold 2000, 291). Novices in a cultural group do not learn culturally-contingent knowledge by studying up on it. Rather, one generation passes on to the next what Ingold describes as a “corpus of representations” (Ingold 2000, 354), described in this thesis as culturally-contingent ways of knowing. Through “selected

opportunities for perception and action” (Ingold 2000, 354) cultural novices are immersed in situations where they are tasked with learning new skills and displaying competence. This discussion of skill is important because it helps explain how younger participants at the brandings are becoming full members of this group through cultural performance (Smith 1972, 158), and that the skills cultural members share are directly related to their social identity:

[...] the particular kinds of tasks that a person performs are an index of his or her personal and social identity: the tasks you do depend on who you are, and in a sense the performance of certain tasks *makes* you the person who you are. [...] [T]asks are never completed in isolation, but always within a setting that is itself constituted by the co-presence of others whose own performances necessarily have a bearing on one’s own (Ingold 2000, 325).

Comparable examples can be drawn from both the Bogi and OH brandings where the introduction of cultural novices into the various aspects of processing the calves was part of the cultural performance. I observed young people being thrown into performing new tasks that they had never done before. There was little to no preparation, they simply had to learn to do the task by doing it. Often a more senior cultural member, sometimes a parent, would step in and correct the novice, but not until they had made an attempt at action. At the Bogi branding there were two boys in their early teens that hung around the ground crew but were not participating. A particularly young calf was drug over by a roper and John Bogi encouraged the boys to try and wrestle it because it was small. Along with three older men, including the boys’ father, John instructed the boys how to properly wrestle the calf and hold it during processing. They were very awkward but the men just talked them through it, and did not take over as the boys struggled. They were encouraged to master their physical control over the calf in a calm and positive way. This was clearly an initiation into the branding ground crew, specifically the wrestlers.

At the OH branding Todd Snodgrass’s teenage daughter had been pouring a delousing drip for the first half of the branding but was reassigned by Todd to learn how to run a Nord Fork for the second half. He set her up on the opposite side of the ground crew from where he was working and it was the older participants on that side that

showed her what to do. Her first few attempts were disastrous and the other members of the ground crew had to jump in and take over for her, but after a few more attempts and steady encouragement from the other participants she eventually caught on and was able to operate the Nord Fork quickly and efficiently. The fact that Todd both wanted his daughter to learn this skill and that he entrusted other participants to teach her signifies the importance of the community aspect of the branding event; the cultural knowledge shared by members can be confidently relied upon by everyone because it is understood that they all subscribe to the invariance of those actions. If the novices were able to draw on the appropriate and contingent means of perception in that moment they were successful in acquiring the cultural knowledge and accompanying skill. This is the beginning of a nuanced and culturally-specific way of knowing that cattle ranchers recognize themselves as having, and how they integrate new members into the group through performance (Smith 1972, 158).

There is an accompanying sense of pride associated with learning and mastering a skill. The hierarchy of a branding event always places the roper at the top, being the one who sets the pace of work. This also places the greatest amount of responsibility on them. Without fast, efficient ropers the ground crew is stalled, waiting for animals to work on. Therefore attaining the position of roper is generally considered a mark of honour that demonstrates to other cultural members that you are a skilled person who can be depended upon. This is why some participants expressed concern over young people attaining that position too soon; there is a certain level of maturity and integrity associated with attaining that position. It may not always be clear that a young participant embodies those components of social identity to a degree sufficient to warrant their being placed so high in the hierarchy so soon. However once given the opportunity, attaining that position becomes a distinct source of pride for many young cultural members and an experience that they remember fondly as adults.

There isn't one job that isn't important. But it's the progression thing, and I think – looking back from experience – you should go through every one of those jobs. I know today there's a lot of kids – and roping seems to be the big thing. When I went through it, you were probably twenty before you were even allowed to grab a rope, or asked to. Now I go to a branding and I see fourteen or fifteen year old kids dragging calves to people that are way older than they are, and I just, maybe I'm from the old school, but I find that hard to take because I know from experience unless you've wrestled calves, you don't really know how to drag a calf into those calf wrestlers, because you don't know what the wrestler's faced with (Gallup 2010).

My Dad, he wanted you to rope good because he didn't want you looking bad with all the neighbours! So he'd get a little bunch and put them in the corral and you'd practice roping before the branding, that's how we did it, because he didn't want you screwing up at the branding! So he'd make sure that you'd rope decent enough to rope at a branding and we'd get cattle in and do that right in the corral. So that was kind of a pride factor too, you didn't want your kid looking bad. And then of course you didn't want to let your Dad down (Bews 2010).

When I was growing up, the same two guys roped at all the brandings. One of them – when I was about fourteen – he said come and bring your horse down to my branding and you can start roping, and I don't care if you only catch three calves all day, just go in there and rope. I always remembered that, because it's always so easy to hand it off to the same guys. Ever since, we always rotate the ropers (Butters 2010).

Teaching skills to young participants, particularly cultural members' own children, is an integral part of the branding event. It is a time for young people to gain the direct experience that will build their stock of knowledge. It is also building their social identity by including them in those unwritten aspects of their culture that only performance can create. In teaching young participants skills and practices at a branding event, cultural members are also passing on social values and embodied knowledge that defines the group. It is also an exciting time, watching young people learning and sharing in the camaraderie and sociality inherent in the performance of the event. Parents especially

enjoy sharing the work with their children as a bonding experience, watching them grow and become more fully integrated cultural members.

I wanted them [their children] to be with Gary, and I wanted us to do things as a family, so they were just out there. And it was fun, they enjoyed it (L. Meadows 2010).

I don't know how many people I've taught, and I'm sure I've said the right things to some young people, and I'm sure I've said the wrong things. But the big thing is that you keep their confidence in a positive way and that you keep helping them and encouraging them (Wambeke 2010).

I think it's a wonderful thing [to have young people involved in ranch work]; they have to work alongside you to understand it. It's a way of life – it's a wonderful life. I think it's good [to have young people involved] because that's what we're here to do, I think we're here to teach, and pass it along to the next generation, some of the old ways and some of the new ways. It's nice to have that lifestyle that you can take them with you. That's how you get to know people, when you work with them. They'll brand with you and then have a couple of beer after and a meal and a visit. That's how you get to know the kids on a different level (Bogi 2010).

There is real concern that should the tradition of integrating young people into the cultural group through working with them start to deteriorate the group will be irreparably changed, and perhaps even lost. This process of transmitting cultural knowledge has already begun to change considerably, as evidenced in the older participants commenting on how younger participants can now move up the ranks without progressing through the tasks at a branding event gradually, failing to gain an appreciation for the multiple skills required. Without the ritualized education and initiation of the next generation into the invariance of the actions of the cultural performance, the bodily basis of the community (Noyes 1995, 469) and the traditions of the branding that make up social relations expressed through sensory relations (Howes 2003, 55) will be lost.

I hope that this goes a long way because you can see that I probably think a lot about branding, and it's in my heart and it's in my body – I hope that this is somehow conveyed on for a long time (Wambeke 2010).

Rule-Governance

Within ritual activities are embedded “rules that guide and direct the activities, especially by designating what is not allowed or acceptable” (E. Bell 2008, 128).

Catherine Bell explains that:

Rule-governance, as either a feature of many diverse activities or a strategy of ritualization itself, also suggests that we tend to think of ritual in terms of formulated norms imposed on the chaos of human action and interaction (C. Bell 1997, 155).

These rules and norms are in place to not only “hold individuals to communally approved patterns of behavior” (C. Bell 1997, 155) but to also help group members develop and maintain the consistent patterns of behaviour (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 381) that are key features of their social identity. The rule-governance enacted through performance permeates the daily lives of participants through a generally accepted code of conduct.

The Code

Cultural groups make use of codes of conduct for their members to ensure group cohesion and mutual understanding. These codes can be highly specific and technical, or can entail nuanced and unwritten standards of behaviour that it is expected for members to know without being told. The culture of cattle ranchers is no different. A major component of the shared social identity of this group is their adherence to an unwritten and generally accepted code of conduct. Research participants referred to this code of conduct in various ways: as a hierarchy, a set of rules, and as simply the Code.

The culture that developed historically among cowmen and cowboys constituted a kind of fraternity, and there was a gentlemen's agreement to certain rules of conduct

(Dary 1981, 278). These rules were based on the principles established by the men who “sought to lead lives that were free from falsehood and hypocrisy”, the standards of which were as high as any presumably more cultured society (Dary 1981, 281). The Code continues on today, many ranchers making reference to it openly, like they might reference scripture, in explanation and justification for their actions. Some of the standard behavioural expectations of the Code are:

a cowboy is expected to be cheerful even if sick or tired; a cowboy is expected to have courage; no real cowboy was a complainer; a cowboy always helps his friend; a cowboy does the best he can at all times (Dary 1981, 278).

The Code has been expanded and written down since the days of the open range, but is no less significant in the daily lives and dealings of cultural members. One research participant even made a point of showing me where he has a copy of the Code in a frame on his kitchen wall, much like the way some people frame a copy of the Ten Commandments to have in their homes.

We are a cultural group. We live by the Code. Most of us do, you know the ones that are born and raised here live by the Code. We might bitch and moan about our neighbour and everything else but when he's in a bind we're there for him. Everything is forgotten about and you're there for him, you might not have talked to him for two years but when he's in a bind you're there for him. [...] Life is about relationships, and if you don't have that you don't have a life (Bews 2010).

It's a simpler life – they're happier with less because they have had to do without. They're more simple, down-to-earth people. They're moral, they're ethical – they have rules of what is right and what is wrong (L. Meadows 2010).

These rules of conduct are used as a guiding principle for the conduct of all of life's social interactions, but are also specifically applied by members to the events of cattle branding. Group members know and understand how to relate to each other during the performance through these rules, and take them very seriously as a matter of personal integrity.

People have stayed along the set of unwritten rules, you know, the branding rules and etiquette and it comes with the gathering, to the sorting, to the actual branding, and then the actual mothering up of the calves after they're branded, and then to the social. I think there's a set of unwritten rules and if you don't obey those rules, somewhere along those lines those items that I stated it's going to get out of bounds and you're not going to have a very successful branding (Wambeke 2010).

Knowing how to conduct oneself at a particular branding event is very important, and a clear indicator of one's insider status. Different brandings have different atmospheres, which were clearly felt at both the Bogi and OH brandings. At the Bogi branding there was a practical joke being played on the wrestlers by some members of the ground crew who were vaccinating, in particular John Bogi's daughter Paige. She would use her spray paint to mark not only the calf she had vaccinated but also the legs and boots of some of the wrestlers. The whole group seemed to find this funny and enjoyable, and the joke appeared to be one that was commonly known to the participants. I included some photographs of the "marked" wrestlers in the photo elicitation slideshow, and was very interested in the different reactions they provoked in the interviewees. The interviewees that had been at the OH branding were obviously taken aback that this was a common joke played at the Bogi branding, and were very serious that such behaviour would never be tolerated in their community. Other interviewees were surprised and a little shocked by the photographs, but then went on to describe for me practical jokes that they had seen at other brandings, some of which they thought were funny and some that they did not. These differences in what is considered acceptable behaviour at different brandings show that there are variations to the Code used by different communities.

A major component of social identity is being able to identify group insiders from outsiders, and being able to recognize an individual's understanding and adherence to the Code is a good example of how this is accomplished. Participants made it clear that being recognized as part of the cultural group is more complex than simply being involved in the cattle industry; there are also important aspects of cultural heritage, familial and community connections to be considered when determining whether

someone is an insider to the group. For example, when contacting a participant of the OH branding to request an interview he readily consented but informed me that had he not been introduced to me by Todd Snodgrass at the branding that day he never would have accepted. An individual's conduct and intentions are closely evaluated and are readily used by the group to determine the status of potential group members.

Most of the producers think the same way. There's some that don't. And the ones that don't won't usually stay in the business very long; they're likely pretty new to it. The history boils back to the [ranching] operations that are going to stay in it and keep going. Right now they're the ones that have a long history in it. The people that have just got into it aren't going to stay in it [...] the new people aren't part of the group because they don't want to be part of the group. They want to have the name or to say that they're doing this; they don't want to be part of the group (G. Meadows 2010).

Everybody wants to be a cowboy these days. Well they'll never get into the same way those true ones did, so they're kind of an imitation type of cowboy. And some of them that eased in, and do it in a nice way, and win the respect of the [ranching] families, and there's outsiders that have come and they've won the way into those people's hearts because they're not pushy and they've taken the shit and the blood and the abuse and now they're accepted. But that's as close as they're getting – they're never going to be part of the heritage (Wambeke 2010).

A lot of times still I feel like an outsider looking in, because I've been outside. Most of them haven't, this is it, this is what they know. It's a safe world, sometimes it's a little world, which can be good and can be bad (L. Meadows 2010).

They [ranchers] are kind of close – they're all in a group and they don't really like other people coming in (R. Meadows 2010).

During the photo elicitation slideshow in the interviews it was surprising how many interviewees commented on the clothing worn by participants at the Bogi and OH brandings. I had not given much consideration to the differences in clothing when assembling the photographs, but the interviewees had definite opinions about the way branding participants dressed being directly linked to their insider or outsider status.

The young men wrestling calves at the Bogi branding were mostly dressed in old clothes, jeans and t-shirts, and wearing caps instead of cowboy hats. Some interviewees immediately commented on this, and asked if these were men from the city who came just to experience a branding. When I explained that these young men were all from the local Cessford community of cattle ranchers and farmers some of the interviewees found it hard to believe, all based on how they men were dressed. Similarly, in viewing the photographs from the OH branding one interviewee noticed that my father was the only man wearing a cap instead of a cowboy hat and he asked if anyone teased my father because of that. I was again surprised by how seriously clothing marked my father as an outsider to that particular group of branding participants. These distinctions in status are subtle but clearly very important to group members, and that may not have come up without the incorporation of the photo elicitation slideshow.

Despite the fact that I come from an agricultural community and am known to some of the branding participants outside of these particular events, at both the Bogi and OH brandings I was a first-time visitor. This immediately put me in the situation of being an outsider and I had to carefully negotiate my way into the group. In some cases I was successful but in others my outsider status was clearly reiterated by the actions and attitudes of branding participants. At the Bogi branding the group of participants was made up of a lot of young men, many of them from Cessford families. My husband Patrick was eventually able to join in with their conversations, joking along with them and generally being openly accepted. He encouraged me to go join that group as well since the men were being congenial to Patrick as an outsider already. However when I joined the group the dynamic of the interaction changed abruptly, the men became noticeably guarded and careful in what they said. Once I left Patrick said that their demeanors changed back to being light and entertaining. I realized that the nature of this interaction had to do with my being female and being introduced to the group by Patrick as his wife. These young men would have been raised to respect women by not interacting with them the same way they would with men, particularly not when they are someone's wife. This is an aspect of rule-governance within this social group that

establishes the proper manners that must be observed between the sexes, and which caused the young men to clam up when I joined their group. The codes of conduct established generations ago for uprightness, gentlemanly behaviour and the status quo of social dynamics endures even now.

Sacral Symbolism

Through the building of tradition by repeating formalized activities consistently over time the group begins to hold those objects and actions associated with the ritual as sacred because “these activities express [the] generalized belief in the existence of a type of sacralty that demands a special human response” (C. Bell 1997, 156). This can include a direct appeal to the supernatural during the ritual itself (C. Bell 1997, 155), or the association of the ritual with “something beyond itself, thereby evoking and expressing values and attitudes associated with larger, more abstract, and relatively transcendent ideas” (C. Bell 1997, 157).

The cultural performance of cattle branding is no different although that appeal was not at first clearly observable. It was through closer examination of how group members relate their embodied knowledge to their emplacement in the natural world that the sacral symbolism of the event was revealed to be based on that “interrelationship of body-mind-environment” (Howes 2005, 3) because “ritual-like action is activity that gives form to the specialness of a site” (C. Bell 1997, 159). The supernatural element being appealed to is actually more of a blending of the group’s shared connection to the natural world as a symbol of the divine, and that connection influences their sensory experiences and their ontological foundation. Participating in the ritual activities that make up the cultural performance of cattle branding becomes sacred to group members because

[s]uch activities differentiate a sacred world – however minute or magnificent – in the midst of a profane one, thus affording experiences of this sacralty that transcend the profane reality of day-to-day life (C. Bell 1997, 159).

Extrasensory Connections

The cultural group that takes part in performances of cattle branding feel connected by the relationships between their individual sensory experiences as related to their shared cultural stock of knowledge and the natural environment in which they spend much of their time. Their connectedness to the land and livestock, and the demands that the environment places on them in making a living from both, creates the insight that as ranchers they have access to a higher spiritual plane of experience. This was one of the most surprising discoveries in my research, gleaned particularly from the section of the interviews dealing with sensory perception. Participants articulated in subtle and understated ways their feelings about being at one with nature, or their emotional and intuitive responses to the same, as a type of extrasensory connection to other group members as well. This acceptance and peace with oneself and the world has always been directly related to the strong conviction that there is dignity in the calling to be a rancher (Dary 1981, 166). The landscape itself inspires soul-searching in the people who feel connected to it and their empowerment in that feeling is directly related to their feeling spiritually connected to some higher power (Dary 1981, 164).

The cattle branding event is just one small aspect of how these connections are enacted, but it also clearly demonstrates the importance of embodied knowledge being used in actual situations to communicate shared values. The sacral symbolism of the cattle branding event is heavily tied to the kinaesthetic knowledge that cultural members share. This is knowledge not of a formal kind, and not generally transferable outside of the contexts of its practical application. It is based on a shared feeling culminating in the skills, sensitivities and sensual orientations that develop through the experiences gained in a particular environment. As a researcher, accessing this realm of the extrasensory perceptions and the associated spiritual connection of a group is daunting, hence the need for a clear understanding of the body as a source of knowledge (Pink 2009, 24). The use of the photo elicitation slideshow was very useful for eliciting the subtle details of these extrasensory perceptions from interviewees, getting them to describe some of their feelings of deep connection to the natural world.

Participants expressed that their engagement with livestock, whether that be the cattle they are handling or the horses they use as work-mates, is based on both their access to their cultural stock of knowledge and an instinctive aptitude unique to their group which enhances their ability to work effectively with other branding participants. Keeping in mind that the human sensorium is a product of culture (Howes 2005, 3) and that sensory experiences become permeated with social values, these experiences of dealing with animals becomes another important component of their social identity. The inability to effectively negotiate those human-animal relationships can seriously affect their ability to then fully participate in the performance as a complete cultural member.

I think the really good ones [ranchers], it has to an inborn thing. I mean I have ridden with people, and I'm not being arrogant about this – I know it's a fact because we talk about it a lot amongst ourselves - there are some people that we've ridden with that you could ride with them for thirty years and they're not going to be any better thirty years from now than they are today. They're just not going to be. And other people – I think there is something inborn. I know some people that read cattle so well. They'll be there before that cow is going to make that move. That's the number one thing with working cattle, and some people will always be late. They'll never be there on time. They're always just a step or two too late. Some people don't have that ability (Gallup 2010).

There's a real art to handling cattle, being in the right spot and if you want to hear people cuss and yell and jump up and down that's because you're in the wrong spot! You don't have to yell at each other if you're working with people that know what's going on. And that's kind of beautiful; you know when we work up here, when you get people in the corral working cattle you don't have to yell at them because they know where to be. It's easy on the cattle, it's easy on you, it's easy on your horse. You're bringing in cattle properly without fighting (Bews 2010).

It's almost like you just know what needs to be done. There's a guy that works with us and he's from a different area, when he first started he wasn't too sure on the cow end of things, but there's a difference between then and now, there's really no talking going on because we all just know what needs to be done. We work as a team along the

same line of thought. Once you get the right set of eyes you just know what you're looking for (Bunney 2010).

This sensory knowledge is embodied and therefore beyond language, which makes it applicable to the participants' relationships with the animals they are working with. Through this embodied knowledge they are able to attain a deeper connection to the animals at an instinctual level. This connection is a distinct component of their social identity and a remnant of their cultural heritage. Working with animals is a revered aspect of their shared cultural heritage and occupational history as ranchers, and it is at the very heart of their connection to each other; without cattle to brand there would be no cultural performance to help them create and maintain their social identity.

There is a great deal of respect felt and demonstrated among group members for the animals they work with. This is a clear indication to members of an individual's insider status. Participants were very passionate on this point, that the animals they work with are highly respected and valued, and their extrasensory connectedness extends to the animals as well as other group members.

I mean every brand that goes on you *feel* for each of those babies, and maybe it's just me, or just us, but there's [only] two things sweeter than them baby calves in the spring – that's your wife and your kids. If we didn't have to do it, I wouldn't want to do it [...] every time you're handling that calf, or that calf gives a beller, there's a little piece of you that feels that, and if you don't your heart's not in it (G. Meadows 2010).

I think it's just the overall *feeling* of the people that own cattle; they want people to know that they aren't there just to drag the livin' daylights out of them and to hurt them. They're part of the land, and so look at how they've changed the environment, and look at what they're doing to protect their creeks and weeds and control – it goes right through to the cow. And I think that the aggies are understanding that they have to let the outsiders know that they do care of how they live and how they protect their land, how they protect their cattle, and how they feel about what they're doing with their cattle (Wambeke 2010).

Well you know it's funny, I know one thing, gathering lots of times you watch your horse and your horse will pick up things that you don't pick up. So you learn to kind of pay attention that much more to him, especially back here. They can hear better than we can, lots of times they can see things better than we can, and they have an intuition that we don't understand. So I think you become more in tune – you start paying attention to the way your horse is reacting to different situations and you're smart if you listen to them a lot of the time. We think we're pretty clever. As a human race we think we're the smartest thing that God ever put on earth but you know what? We're not. We may be in some ways, but there's other ways that we have a lot to learn (Gallup 2010).

This reverence for the livestock is directly related to group members' connection to the cattle industry, living by that previously mentioned unwritten Code, and their personal convictions of being tied to the natural world through embodied and emplaced cultural knowledge which connects them to the elements of the natural world that they hold sacred.

Why Does This Matter?

Cultural performances are constantly being renegotiated. As expressions of shared cultural understanding (Turner 1986, 139) they are relevant only when practiced by the community. The “living practices” (Taylor 2008, 92) associated with cultural performance are part of the group's cultural knowledge, memory and social identity that are transmitted through the embodied behaviours from one generation to another through reiterated behaviour (Taylor 2008, 92). As part of the repertoire based on their shared heritage and culturally-contingent ways of knowing, that transmission can only take place through the body (Taylor 2008, 92).

Cultural performances fall into the category of “intangible cultural heritage”, defined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage as:

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity (UNESCO n.d.).

This begs the question; can these cultural performances and the associated ritualistic activities be protected and safeguarded as living history? Given that the cattle branding process is being slowly outmoded by technological advancement in livestock identification that are industry-regulated and required by law, it would be prudent to assume that cattle branding could become obsolete within the space of a generation. As shown in this thesis, it could then also be assumed that the loss of this cultural expression would potentially result in a loss of group identity. Those consistent patterns of behaviour (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003, 381) required for the creation of social identity will be altered or ceased altogether. “The importance of intangible cultural heritage is [...] the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next” (UNESCO n.d.). Losing the performance could affect the ability of the group to maintain and effectively communicate the embodied knowledge that is the foundation of their social identity. The shared cultural heritage of the group would be relegated to the archive rather than continuing on as an important aspect of a vibrant community of cultural members.

The codes and structures of these performances need to be studied and understood “in order to think about how past behaviours and practices continue to be imperative in the present” (Taylor 2008, 100). This is exactly the purpose of this research study on cattle branding. The large cultural community of cattle ranchers has endured, expanded, and maintained its rituals for over one hundred fifty years, leading to the final interpretation that this group is dynamic enough to retain its social identity manifested through cultural performance while adapting to the social and technological changes it is faced with. It is through the continued performance of the ritual activities

associated with cattle branding ritual that this group's social identity will be preserved because "[t]hese performances make manifest a community's sense of itself as stable and recognizable yet ever changing" (Taylor 2008, 98). Communities must assume the responsibility of safeguarding their own cultural performances and intangible cultural heritage (Taylor 2008, 96). Clearly then, the practice of cattle branding will only thrive as long as cultural members find it meaningful; once that meaning is lost, the performance will be lost as well.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

The academic study of communication has a history that covers several disciplines within the social sciences, traversing boundaries and ever-expanding definitions and parameters of inquiry. The study of communication can also be a highly personal one, branching directly from the lived experiences and personal history of the researcher. This not only creates a richness of feeling in the work itself but has the effect of creating even more complicated webs of subjectivity within an already highly subjective field of study. The researcher's life is embedded in the particularities of the story of the communities from which their identity is derived, and without the existence of those particularities there would never be anywhere to begin. How this work is situated within my own life, and where the impetus for its very creation came from, can exist only because it encompasses moving forward from such particularities. This project has been a difficult one both personally and academically because it demanded that the boundaries of what I considered to be the mundane, quotidian experiences of ranching life to be expanded theoretically and investigated as research. In doing so I believe that I have tapped into a depth of knowledge, experience, and understanding about my occupational community and my cultural heritage that otherwise lay hidden under the dusty tasks of everyday agricultural life. In creating this project I feel that my gift to posterity is a glimpse of the potential for inquiry that lay on our very doorstep; that our own lives and the people we live them with are worth closer study.

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how the industrial practice of livestock identification through cattle branding also functions as a cultural performance that communicates the social identity shared by cattle ranchers and branding participants. The exploration of culturally-contingent ways of knowing within the social group, understood as cultural knowledge based on sensory perceptions specific to that cultural group, and the transmission of the same through various means was considered closely. The results of the data collection and analysis of the same was focused around the components of ritual used to study cultural performance, while sensory studies were incorporated into the analysis as a lens through which the multiple layers of the ritual were viewed. The generation of the overarching themes was emic –

guided by what the research participants expressed to me. My interpretations of those themes was privileged in part by my previous experiences within this cultural group but always related directly back to the branding events observed as part of this research study. The insights that emerged regarding social identity throughout the research process and analysis largely affirmed many of my initial interpretations of the data as guided by the conceptual framework established through the literature review.

Conceptual Ground Gained

What conceptual ground can be gained by incorporating sensory ethnography into a study of performance and identity? Using sensory ethnography in this research was intended to add breadth to data collection during field work. It was also intended to provide a way to more fully understand the components of the cultural performance that rely almost exclusively on the cultural group sharing sensory knowledge. Those components are a shared cultural sensorium, how members use their senses in a culturally-approved manner, and the body awareness required for group membership. By incorporating sensory ethnography into the overall methodology of this thesis these components of the performance became centrally important, spreading across the whole analysis as a lens through which to view all other aspects of the performance. This also helped to bring to the forefront of this research the group's use of embodied knowledge in identity creation, maintenance and communication. Incorporating sensory studies into a research project on performance and identity makes this thesis more conceptually compelling because that combination of theoretical elements provides a fuller, richer analysis of how this group's sensory relations affect their social relations (Howes 2003, 55).

Communication researchers, along with all qualitative researchers, face what Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln describe as the continuing crises of praxis, representation and legitimation (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 19). The crisis of representation was most significantly felt in this thesis because it is challenging – and at times impossible – to fully represent the lived experiences of research participants. In the particular case of sociocultural studies involving performance or culturally-specific

sensory perception these crises relate to the interpretive paradigm under which they fall. As both positive and negative aspects of this designation, the interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to operate as a “bricoleur” producing “a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 4). This is positive because in research projects such as this thesis it allows for greater fluidity in application of theoretical positions and research methods when creating a research plan. The negative aspect relates to the crossing of academic boundaries which can blur the lines of practice, theoretical position, and legitimation, raising the questions of whether a conceptual model is appropriate only because the researcher thinks it is or if disciplinary boundaries should be in place to safe-guard certain sets of representations reserved for a particular field of study. I clearly lean towards the interdisciplinary model of study, building a methodology from conceptual pieces that blend together to achieve the research goal, whether those pieces be from communications, sociology, anthropology, or emerging fields of study. In a small way I hope that the combination of these various disciplinary elements has some grace to it, and can contribute to building upon the established fields of sociocultural studies, communication studies, performance studies, and sensory studies.

In June 2012 I attended the Public Ethnography: Connecting New Genres, New Media, New Audiences conference hosted by the ethnography.media.arts.culture (emac) network at Royal Roads University in Victoria. The conference “attracted over 70 delegates from all over the globe and featured a remarkable keynote address by West Chester University Anthropology Professor, Paul Stoller” (Vannini, Public ethnography listserv / mailing list 2011). The conference was designed to explore

public ethnography and its multiple variations--from visual ethnography, to action research, collaborative ethnography, sensory ethnography, narrative scholarship, multimodal ethnography (Vannini, Public Ethnography 2013).

In a session on *Cultivating Food, Farmscapes and Agricultural Practices* I presented a paper titled *In The Field: The Issues of Methodology and Dissemination in the Branding Trap*. What I discovered from giving this presentation, and in being inspired by many of the other conference presentations (particularly Paul Stoller’s), is that researchers are

hungry for new ways to blend creativity with academic rigor. Ethnographers want to find interdisciplinary methodologies to explore new substantive areas of research. I feel that my thesis makes a good start on such an endeavour, and what I started could be taken up, used and expanded for further study.

The Way Forward

The research participants all expressed concern over a perceived lack of education regarding the cattle industry and the people who make up the occupational group of cattle ranchers involved in that industry. They emphasized a need for there to be more understanding regarding the practices cattle ranchers use and how producers are being faced with multiple choices in practice due to industry pressures. This concern of theirs connects directly to the movements of consumers becoming more vigilant and interested in the production of their food. Cattle producers want to be involved in this movement, but on their own terms. They articulated a desire to show how their cultural heritage and shared identity is tied to certain practices, such as cattle branding, and that these traditions have value and meaning in relation to livestock production and the agricultural way of life.

This translates into teaching elementary-school age children about the importance of livestock production, not only in terms of where their food comes from but *who* is producing it and why. There already exists some lesson plans regarding the branding of cattle; they mostly deal with the history of cowboy culture and cattle identification. I believe that there exists an opportunity to modernize educational tools surrounding the cattle industry in Canada to incorporate more contemporary examples of the people and practices present in food production. An excellent example to build upon comes from the Longview School in Longview, Alberta where teachers Karen Wight and Alison England developed a lesson plan for grades one, five and seven called *Celebrating our Ranching History, a Longview Community Project* for which they were awarded the Governor General's Award for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History in 2009 (Awards n.d.). The inquiry-based lesson they created for their students closely resembles collaborative ethnographic research:

Their unit features the Longview community's vibrant ranching history, focusing on the ranch brands and the brand histories. Karen and Alison's students work collaboratively to create questionnaires, conduct interviews and experience a working cattle ranch. Students interacted with guest speakers, local historians, performers and story-tellers from the community. They then showcased their project by planning, organizing and hosting a school and community event, "Party 'til the Cows Come Home". A pancake breakfast was followed by interactive games based on a ranching theme, an authentic chuckwagon lunch and an afternoon showcase of western entertainment. Students then shared their learning through an original song, slideshow, speeches and the unveiling of a completed display board dedicated to Longview's ranching history. A website is under development to share this local history with a broader audience (Awards n.d.).

Lesson plans like the one at the Longview School could still build upon lessons of history and cultural heritage, while incorporating explanations of industry best-practice and present-day occupational group members. Lessons of this type could fit easily into established social studies curriculum, expanding students' knowledge and understanding of cultural identity, institutional structures, and technology. Students would have the opportunity to access, synthesize, and evaluate information to communicate and apply social studies knowledge to real world situations. They would also learn how to demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships. Educating children about the cultural dimensions of cattle ranching could not come at a better time as there are some significant changes in livestock identification taking place in Canada that will have serious impacts, both positive and negative, on livestock producers.

The Canadian Cattle Identification Agency's introduction of radio-frequency identification (RFID) ear tags for all cattle sold in Canada gives our country the reputation for arguably having the best trace-back system in the world, but since coming on the market there have been major issues with the system from the perspective of producers. The low-frequency (LF) RFID tags, like all ear tags, are highly fallible; the ears of cattle are susceptible to tearing and frostbite which results in the tags being frequently lost, and of course it is also very easy for these tags to be cut out in cases of

fraud. These tags also had to be read one at a time using scanners, making them essentially useless for quick identification in large groups. To rectify the issues with LF RFID tags the Alberta Meat and Livestock Agency has funded an Ultra High Frequency (UHF) RFID project at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (Furber 2013). The new tags will provide a method of tracking more information and detailed identification of livestock; the amount of information that could be stored in multiple databases is endless and many of the issues with readability have been eradicated:

The tags can be read up to 12 feet with the hand-held reader and 21 feet with a stationary reader. [...] UHF technology can read multiple numbers simultaneously. [...] Trucking companies use the same technology to track vehicles moving at highway speeds, so it is more than sufficient to read tagged animals as they move through an alley. The readers have a built-in safeguard to prevent double counting the same number. UHF tags have a built-in memory making it possible to write information directly to the tag using a smartcard built into the hand-held reader. Data can be retrieved directly from the tag in the same way, or from the AniTrace server when the reader is operating where Wi-Fi or cellphone service is available. A portion of the memory is secure, meaning only people with proper authorization can write information to the tag and it can't be erased. This part of the memory could be used to store owner and premise identification numbers so that a permanent record of ownership and the animal's whereabouts would be with it at all times. The non-secure part of the memory is erasable and useful for entering information such as treatment protocol codes and withdrawal dates that can be viewed by anyone in the production chain using an AniTrace reader (Furber 2013).

While these technological advancements in livestock identification are positive overall for trace back purposes, it is important to note that the cost of the tagging system is borne heavily by producers. Although CCIA does not set the price of the tags, their requirement that all producers use them, who for generations have preferred the quick, cheap, and easily identifiable method of branding their livestock, places additional costs on the already expensive venture of raising cattle. The implications are that small producers will be edged out due to the inability to make livestock production a viable economic enterprise. Changing the way that livestock are identified may not appear on

the surface to have serious cultural implications, but if these processes are changed and the traditional method of cattle branding and all of the cultural dynamics associated with that cultural performance are lost there is a real risk that the social identity of this group will be negatively affected due to the fact that only large-scale corporate producers would be able to afford to raise cattle. In the face of vast technological change research like mine could help shed some light on the cultural dimensions of the cattle industry which are certainly felt by producers although not always articulated.

If these practices are not shared and passed on to the next generation through actual performance the cultural group will fracture, and eventually the repertoire of embodied knowledge will be forgotten. The challenge to adapt to technological advancement while continuing to create, maintain and communicate social identity through cultural performance belongs to the next generation of the ranching community. This makes the potential of the research in this thesis all the more important for educating that next generation about the cultural groups involved in contemporary food production, and the opportunity for the cattle industry itself to begin to recognize the need to promote not only identification best practices but also cultural preservation.

Ride for the Brand

The term “Ride for the Brand” comes from the vernacular history of cowboys being hired men on large cattle ranching outfits in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ranch owners placed a great deal of trust in the men they hired, and literally thousands of dollars’ worth of property was under their care. Cowboys were entrusted with the duty to guard and protect the ranch owners’ cattle, real estate and ranching outfits. The value of the cowboys’ personal integrity was implied in that trust. To say that you rode for a particular brand was to set yourself apart, identify which ranch outfit you worked for, and make it clear where your allegiances lie. Riding for a particular brand was a matter of reputation and honour.

Over time the term also became an accolade to be paid to individuals in general. It became an expression of loyalty and a compliment of the highest order; to be described as someone who rides for the brand is to be characterized as fiercely loyal, a

credible individual, and a true representative of the Code. It is a term used widely in the world of western culture, from church congregations, to cowboy poetry organizations, to marketing and promotions companies. The meaning behind the term is implied and perfectly understood, recognized immediately as a term of respect for faithfully representing something greater than oneself.

In the effort to make this project methodologically sound and of some small academic importance it was also my intention to fairly and openly represent a small portion of a large cultural group. It is important to make their voices heard in the midst of an academic narrative because it is their shared heritage and lifestyle being discussed. The participants in this study, and the greater social group they represent, demonstrate great openness of heart, a commitment to their way of life, and an uprightness of character that I think speaks highly of them as individuals and that characterizes the cultural group. Whether acknowledged as such, they were in effect riding for the brand in representing something much larger than themselves.

I hope that I, too, have shown this cultural group in a light that is honest, upright, and representative of the honour and integrity embodied by its members. The meaningfulness and value of their cultural heritage, chosen occupation, and shared social identity is the brand that I rode for in this project.

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**APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTIONS OF PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN ELICITATION
SLIDESHOW**

<u>Slideshow Section</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Description</u>
Round-Up	I.i.A.1	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-118-2	Ranching scene, cattle in Pine Coulee during round up, Willow Creek range, Alberta [ca.1890-1895]
Round-Up	I.i.A.2	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-2042-1	Cattle round up near Calgary, Alberta [ca.1900-1903]
Round-Up	III.i.B.1	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Sorting cattle in the branding trap - Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Round-Up	III.i.OH.1	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Rounding cattle up out of pasture - OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Round-Up	III.i.OH.2	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Cattle being run into branding trap - OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Round-Up	III.i.OH.3	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Riders following cattle into branding trap - OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Round-Up	III.i.OH.4	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Sorting cattle through open gates while on horseback - OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Round-Up	III.i.OH.5	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Riders working together to sort cattle through open gates - OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Round-Up	III.i.OH.6	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Cattle being sorted through two gates – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Processing	I.ii.A.1	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-1939-3	Branding cattle in corral, Jumping Pound Ranch, Jumping Pound, Alberta [ca.1885-1894]
Processing	I.ii.A.2	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-936-39	Calf branding at Pincher Creek, Alberta [1886]
Processing	I.ii.A.3	Glenbow Archive Call No. NC-43-22	Branding cattle, Beynon, Alberta [ca.1890]
Processing	I.ii.A.4	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-2212-1	Branding calves, North Fork Ranch, Alberta [1895]

Processing	I.ii.A.5	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-3309-11	Branding on MacKay ranch, Millarville district, Alberta [1916]
Processing	I.ii.A.6	Glenbow Archive Call No. NB-16-261	Branding at the Bar U Ranch [ca.1919-1920]
Processing	I.ii.A.1	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-2489-7	Branding cattle on Ova Brower Ranch, Aden, Alberta [ca.1940s]
Processing	I.ii.A.2	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-3047-8	Branding calf at Towers' ranch using wooden calf table, Cochrane area, Alberta [1959]
Processing	III.ii.B.1	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Equipment set up – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Processing	III.ii.B.2	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Heating up the branding irons – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Processing	III.ii.B.3	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Three teams of wrestlers and misc. ground crew – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Processing	III.ii.B.4	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Four teams of wrestlers standing waiting for calves – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Processing	III.ii.B.5	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Two ropers bringing heeled calves to wrestlers – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Processing	III.ii.B.6	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Three teams of wrestlers holding calves and ground crew working – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Processing	III.ii.OH.1	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Equipment set up – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Processing	III.ii.OH.2	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Todd Snodgrass using Nord Fork to catch heeled calf – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Processing	III.ii.OH.3	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Calf immobilized with Nord Fork – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Processing	III.ii.OH.4	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Two calves immobilized with Nord Forks and ground crew working – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Processing	III.ii.OH.5	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Branders reheating irons – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]

Processing	III.ii.OH.6	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Calf heeled by roper and immobilized with Nord Fork – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Processing	III.ii.OH.7	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Left-handed roper swinging a loop – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Social	I.iii.A.1	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-3660-4	Hired men at Swenson and Boyle's farm, Rockyford area, Alberta [1919-1920]
Social	I.iii.A.2	Glenbow Archive Call No. NA-5196-1	George T. Berry branding Canon W. James, Pincher Creek, Alberta [ca.1900]
Social	III.iii.B.1	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Ground crew members whose pants and boots had been spray painted as a joke – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.B.2	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Ground crew members whose pants and boots had been spray painted as a joke – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.B.3	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Ground crew members whose pants and boots had been spray painted as a joke – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.B.4	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Calves' testicles cooking on cradle for branding irons – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.B.5	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Break time – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.B.6	Jennifer Rondeau	Stacey Kading checking Facebook on her phone during the branding – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.B.7	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Wrestlers leaning on fence chatting – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.B.8	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Ground crew drinking and socializing in the branding trap after turning out the calves – Bogi Ranch [06/15/2010]
Social	III.iii.OH.1	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Men sitting in cookhouse dining room during lunch – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]
Social	III.iii.OH.2	Jennifer Bird Rondeau	Men sitting on cookhouse patio during lunch – OH Ranch [07/23/2010]

APPENDIX B: GLENBOW ARCHIVES USAGE AGREEMENT

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DATE: September 18, 2013

APPLICANT

Name: Jennifer Bird Rondeau
Organization or agency: University of Calgary
Address: Calgary, AB
Phone:
Email:

MATERIAL TO BE USED

Number/Description: NA-118-2 / NA-1939-3 / NA-3309-11

INTENDED USE OF MATERIAL

Title or working title: *Communicating Social Identity: The Sensory Performance of Cattle Branding*
Form: Thesis: print and electronic
Author/producer/publisher: Jennifer Bird Rondeau
Projected date: November 2013

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