

"The Face of the Cowboy"



- Perspectives on Myths and Identities among
Texan Cowboys

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Abstract

This paper is about negotiations and strategies for implementing cowboy identity and masculinity. I'll argue that this have to be seen in a multi-dimensional light. For this purpose I have divided the cowboy into three analytical dimensions: the Factual cowboy, who enfold the cowboys that lived in the 1800's, the Imagined cowboy, which comprise the common representations of the cowboy derived from Western movies and literature, and finally the Performed cowboys, who comprise the individuals that identifies themselves as cowboys. American history, ranching history, common generalizations and imageries about the cowboy, and different practices - all have to be taken into consideration when talking about cowboy identity. This paper is based on a research period of seven months in Texas. I also find it necessary to bring in other sources of information in the discussion, like American history and western film and literature, which is significant in the formation of the Imagined cowboy.

I'll argue that the hegemonic imagery of the cowboy is a figure that never has existed other than in myths and legends. He came into existence in a time when America was experiencing great changes, and he came to stand as a symbol for manliness and highly valued virtues, like freedom, individuality, rationality and progress. I argue that these virtues were abstracted from history, and together with certain symbols, like the horse, the hat and the spurs, they formed what I call the cowboy template. This template is a structure, a caricature, which can be filled with almost anything by anybody who wants to utilize its repertoire to relate to the cowboy identity. This template has no contact with history, and constitutes the structures of the cowboy myths. By introducing the notion of the cowboy template, I have opened up for an explanation of how anybody can utilize some of the templates' repertoire to connote to a cowboy identity. To be recognized as a cowboy by other cowboys demands more than putting on a cowboy hat and ride a horse; it also requires knowledge of practice, and a degree of habituation of these practices. Through these practices the individual cowboy can find a way to communicate his own identity as a cowboy, and the hegemonic masculinity that is attached to this identity. Male-to-male relations are important in this regard; in such relations the men can challenge each other and assess their identity.

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Chapter I. Introduction

No words. The cowboy and I ride in silence. The only sounds are the stamping of hoofs on the rocky ground, the animals breathing; every now and then they give a snort. No words are needed; the man knows exactly what to look for. I keep a distance so as not to disturb him. "I guess they'll be in that brush over there. They're probably about ten. Do you see them?" I don't. I don't know where to look or what to look for. The only moving thing I see is a lizard that crawls quickly to safety underneath a rock. We move closer and suddenly a small herd of cows with calves and a huge bull appear, as from nowhere. How could this man sense that they were hiding in this particular brush? A mystery to me. The horses take us to the top of the table-shaped mountain. He gets off his horse to pull up a handful of plants, and throws them away. "Poisonous weed. Kills the cattle." His dog follows his horse like a shadow. We move closer to the tip of the mountain. The sky is clear, but haze is blurring the horizon. I get to see a spectacular landscape, and if the vision was totally clear, I could see all the way to Mexico. We dismount the horses. Silence. The dog finds relief in the shadow of the horse, to cool himself down. The man rolls himself a cigarette and lights it. He looks at the scenery; so does his horse. His hat is pulled down over his eyes. I can't see his face, but the silhouette stands out; the only thing I see is a cowboy: an icon. My first encounter with a real cowboy. He is just like I imagined.

The Cowboy

I believe my imagination of the cowboy is quite representative for 'outsiders'. We have a clear image of him, we know what he looks like, and we know what he does: he wears a hat, rides a horse and tends cattle, or chases outlaws and Indians. He is often portrayed as a rugged individual, a lonesome rider who never settles down, a man of few words, aloof, and with an incurable need to be close to the nature, an honest man who is loyal to his values and beliefs. We have seen him in films, read about him in novels, seen him in commercials on television, and as kids we played 'cowboys and Indians', where the most attractive role was

to be the cowboy. The West with all its connotations is nearly ubiquitous, even here in Norway, geographically far away from the cowboys' supposed¹ cradle. We repeatedly use slang like *helt Texas*², to underscore a meaning and describe a situation we all think we know, and most of us take a *cowboy-strekk*³ once in a while. The cowboy has been a beloved, but also hated, figure from the turn of the 19th century to this day. His masculinity has been a model for men and a dream for women. His independence and ruggedness evoke a feeling of something solid, something true and pure, belonging to a bygone era, something rooted in history. He has become a historically significant icon of masculinity, individuality and national identity in the United States of America (hereafter United States or US). He has been abstracted from history and stands out as an authentic model of masculinity.

He is often portrayed as a rugged individual, a lonesome rider who never settles down, a man of few words, aloof, and with an incurable need to be close to the nature, an honest man who is loyal to his values and beliefs. The cowboy is one of the United States' most exported icons and also one of the most mythic and masculine (Kimmel 2006). Within American society the Wild West and the cowboy figure are omnipresent. Very often the figure is used in advertisements and campaigns to sell a product or get people to revise their opinions. Presidents have used expressions related to the Wild West to bring their message to the people; when John F. Kennedy ran as a candidate for President in 1960, he used the slogan "The New Frontier" to underscore his intentions as a President (Slotkin 1992), and hopefully gather votes under a slogan that would appeal to the masses. He utilized the mythical space of the cowboy, his location: an open space. Terms connected to the West have become trademarks, e.g., cars like Maverick, Bronco, Wrangler, all these are 4x4 -drive cars designed for rough driving. The cowboy made his way into fashion and style, selling everything from clothes to perfume, toys, cigarettes and liquor. The magazine shelves in supermarkets are crowded with fashion-magazines dedicated to ranch style, and designers

¹ The cowboy is not originally American, but said to be imported by the spaniards.

² Directly translated: 'completely Texas'; meaning something that is completely crazy, out of control, lawless.

³ Short nap wherever possible

repeatedly use the rough western style in designing top fashion clothes seen on catwalks all over the world.

The cowboy and the lifestyle connected to him is still highly present in one way or another for many of us, even though we might not think the cowboy has significant meaning in our everyday life, unless we know one personally. 'The cowboy is dead but alive' seems to be a common perception reflecting a notion that the old-time, traditional cowboy on faded pictures and in western movies, is no longer a living part of American society, but exists in myths and legends. What has made this figure such a pervasive icon? What does this have to do with reality? Is the cowboy really dead and long gone, and if not, what has happened to him?

In this thesis I will consider the cowboy and his surroundings' historical record. I will study their origin and see if I can find an explanation of how and why this man became what he is. This will be seen in a national perspective, where the national image or myth is exported to the rest of the world (Kimmel 2006), and the cowboy became a significant figure outside the boundaries of his home country. From a local perspective, Texas' history has nurtured the image of the cowboy, and individuals in history have created and maintained the cowboy image. I will also say something about the connection between the history of the image of the cowboy and what significance it has for the individual men who claim his identity today.

Definition

The term itself is not as simple as it appears; do we mean cowboys seen in western films, or rodeo cowboys, maybe wannabe cowboys, or ranch hands? A clarification of notions is needed. I will use three different analytical terms for the cowboy: the Factual Cowboy, referring to the historical cowboy, the Imagined Cowboy, referring to the fictional cowboy, and finally the Performed cowboy, which includes everyone who claims to be a cowboy today. The latter category is very wide, and needs to be further elaborated. It would be impossible to categorize all individuals who claim a cowboy identity, so for my purposes I will focus on what is important for my discussion in this thesis.

The ranch cowboy is what many would call the 'real' cowboy of today. A modern version of the old-time cowboy. The Working Ranch Cowboy Association defines a working ranch cowboy this way: "A 'working ranch cowboy' is defined as any person, male or female, deriving at least 90% of one's income taking care of cattle on a ranch or cooperative. Day workers are included" (<http://www.wrca.org/Foundation/rules.htm>, 18.01.2007). I find this to be a useful definition, even though it may include ranch owners/cooperative owners, as long as they take care of cattle, and it can also include farmers, since a farm can be a cooperative. I will keep this definition with a slight change: "A ranch cowboy is defined as any person, male or female, deriving at least 90% of one's income taking care of cattle on a ranch or *ranch* cooperative. Day workers are included." In this way I have excluded the farmers. The term 'ranch cowboy' will comprise all ranch cowboys, contemporary or not, who have continuously existed since the Factual cowboy in the cowboy era in the later decades of the 1800s.

In this thesis ranchers are owners of a ranch or ranch cooperative. To be a rancher does not imply that you are not a working ranch cowboy, as long as the requirements of the definition of a ranch cowboy are fulfilled. It is not usual for these two identities to coexist in the same individual, but when it happens, it may for instance be if a son works as a ranch cowboy on the family ranch, where he is also officially a co-owner. A rancher may or may not claim a cowboy identity; this depends on his individual definition of a cowboy. This means that the ranchers may not be included in the group of Performed cowboys at all, but since some are, I have chosen to include this category, but only including ranchers who claim such an identity. Some of the ranchers I met call themselves 'cowboy by heart', thus claiming such an identity.

Professional rodeo cowboys are per my definition men or women whose main income stems from rodeo performances. This is a category I will not concentrate on in this paper, but I find it necessary to define this group, so as to exclude them from my analysis.

These, and all other individuals who claim a cowboy identity, will be comprised in the term Performing cowboys, and when necessary will be described further in the text.

I will also present a figure of the cowboy that is the basis for the Imagined cowboy and the Performed cowboy. This is a template that shows the outer lines of a cowboy, his contours. Through this template we recognize the cowboy, regardless of what it is filled with; whether it is a cowboy seen in films, or a ranch cowboy, or even a wannabe cowboy. This template can be given several faces, to fit an individual's understanding of cowboy identity. An office worker in New York who wants to be identified as a cowboy would make this template fit himself in a different way than a rodeo cowboy in Las Vegas. Using this template does not necessarily make a cowboy, but will denote such an identity.

The cowboy template is more than just a model of the cowboy. It is also a model for action; it gives clues to the Performed cowboy of how to be a cowboy. There is a dialogue between the cowboy template, the Imagined cowboys and the Performed cowboys; they exist in a dynamic relationship to each other. There is an interaction between the narratives, the imageries and the performances, which in turn will influence all three, also in interaction with the actual time-frames and other discourses in the society.

Throughout this paper I extensively use the term 'cowboy tradition'. This may be a little confusing since I also explicitly discuss the invention of tradition, and in those instances treat tradition as practice. When using the term in this regard, I identify it explicitly. In all other instances I use the term as a wide-ranging description of everything having to do with the cowboy life. It will indicate a difference between the audience or consumers of cowboy imagery, between the insiders (people who know the cowboy tradition personally), and the outsiders (people who know the cowboy tradition through mediators in the society). To be an insider does not necessarily imply that you call yourself a cowboy, but that you have extensive knowledge and experience of this practice.

Historical background

Etymologists have traced the term 'cowboy' as far back as 1000 AD in Ireland (Slatta 1994). Wagner (1987) tells us that the first documented usage of the term was to describe Tories from New York who fought with the British in the Revolutionary War in the 1770s. The term has been used to describe men who were outlaws on the edge of society, including

criminals (Wagner 1987, Carlson 2000b, Slatta 1994). Cowboys were considered vagabonds, social and economic disturbances, and sexual deviants, although with a somewhat unclear definition. Allmendinger uses the opposition vampire and detective, to show that it was unclear whether the cowboy was good or bad (Allmendinger 1992). This also reflects the roles he later got in the western movies; he could be an outlaw, as he is depicted in “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid” (directed by George Roy Hill, 1969), or he could be the man saving the local community from devastation, as in “Pale Rider” (directed by Clint Eastwood, 1985). In Texas in the 1830s, the term was used to describe the Texan border raider who stole Mexican cattle (Slatta 1994, Wagner 1987). The term had negative connotations, implying they were thieves and drunkards, held in low esteem, and something most people wanted to avoid being called. The men actually working with cattle at that time preferred to be called hands, ranch-hands, cow-men: terms that are still in use today. John Clay describes the cowboy this way: “a devil-may-care, roistering, gambling, immoral, revolver-heeled, brazen, light-fingered lot, who usually came to no good end” (Clay in Carlson 2000).

Historians disagree to a certain extent about whether the cowboy originally came from Europe or Africa/Arabia, but they seem to agree that the tradition came into the United States by crossing the Mexican border, primarily into Texas, but also to a certain extent into Arizona and California. You will find similarities between the gauchos in Mexico and Latin America and the American cowboy (Clayton 2001). The most common explanation for the origin of the cowboy states that he originally came from Spain and was exported to Latin America at the time of Columbus. The wild mustangs in the United States are descendants of the Spanish Andalusian horse brought to America by Cortes and DeSoto, and the Quarter Horse, which is one of the most common breeds among ranch horses.

The Wild West

The Wild West is not just a geographic place. The term is loaded with connotations, and implies a space, in the middle of nowhere, where things are a little out of hand. It conjures a scene we so often see in Western movies, evoking images of a dusty place, where the grass is burned by the sun, where the horses are tied outside the saloon, and where you can hear the jingling of the spurs on the cowboys’ boots as they walk slowly across the dirt-paved

street, or swing around to participate in a shoot-out. The Wild West is also a place where Indians are fought by brave cowboys herding cattle, cactuses grow on the hillside, and waterholes are few and far between. It is a place where the norms are those of each man's moral conscience, and where lawlessness rules. The local sheriff and his deputies try to get things under control, but seldom succeed, unless helped by an outside hero. This lack of control stands out as one of the strongest connotations of the term. And certainly things *did* get a little out of hand in these places when settlers migrated westward.

The Wild West has a cultural location. According to Tompkins, geographically the West includes Arizona, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas and parts of California (Tompkins 1992). This is where the Wild West narratives take place. The West became a hiding place for the modern industrial society with all that implies, including unhappy personal relations and political disequilibrium, and symbolizes freedom and the possibility for personal success (ibid.). According to Starrs, the "American West [is] important as a ranching frontier and as a familiar and evocative landscape of the mind" (1998:xiii).

Texas

Compared to the other states in the United States, Texas has a peculiar history, belonging to four different countries until it became a part of the US. From 1685 Texas was a French colony, until the Spaniards took control over the area in 1690 and kept it for over a century, until 1821. When the Mexicans won the War of Independence, what we now know as Texas, became a part of Mexico. The people living in what is now Texas, and their leader Sam Houston, wanted to free themselves from Mexico, and the effort culminated in the well-known battles of Alamo and San Jacinto in 1836. In the Battle of the Alamo the Texans fought with less than 183 men against the Mexican army of 4000 men lead by Santa Anna, and although the outcome of the battle is obvious, it took the Mexicans over one hour to defeat the Texans, killing all 183, among them Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie. The battle became a symbol of courage and heroism, and the cry for an independent Texas was even greater than before. Six weeks after the defeat at the Alamo the Texans took revenge on the Mexicans, and won their independence in San Jacinto. Texans declared themselves

independent in 1836, and existed as the Republic of Texas from 1836 to 1845, with Sam Houston as Governor. In 1845 Texas became a part of the confederacy, which existed until 1870, when the United States was founded (Nevin 1975).

The Frontier

The Frontier has played a significant role in United States history. The term frontier implies a border, and is often used in connection with war, like a front line. In the 1800s it was used to describe the westward expansion of settlement, where the men had to face tough resistance, both from the harsh environment, from Indians and a poor economy (Slotkin 1992). People migrating from Europe wanted to start a new life and went westward, looking for a golden opportunity. Some people made it, but most did not and barely survived. American troops started to fight the Indians to protect the new settlers, and also to claim their land. The men fighting against nature and Indians have often been portrayed as cowboys. The frontiersman had a reputation of being a tough fighter; he was a man who knew and respected nature, he had a persistent soul, and was a fighter for the freedom of the nation, and a killer of savages (the Indians), to break new ground for the country. The cowboy has often been described in a similar way, tough, rugged, individualistic, and knowledgeable about nature. Most of the civil frontiersmen did own cattle, and did ride a horse, and did live a life that may in certain ways resemble what we have come to see as a cowboy life.

The frontier played a significant role in building American national identity. Slotkin describes what he calls the Myth of the Frontier:

“The conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who inhabited it has been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and “progressive” civilization” (Slotkin 1992, 10).

Slotkin demonstrates how the myths played a significant role in shaping American society to what it is today. The Frontier turned a man into an American, and was an important part of the process of achieving a national identity. One of my concerns is how this word, with all

its connotations and myths attached, influences the cowboys of today in their identification and presentation of themselves.

GTT - Gone to Texas

There is a simple reason why I chose to conduct my fieldwork in Texas. Many people assume that Texas is the birthplace of the cowboy and the heart of the Wild West, as a result Texan cowboys have received a lot of attention. Texas was at one point in history a perfect hiding place for outlaws escaping the federal law in their home state. The close proximity to Mexico also made Texas an attractive place for those on the edge of the law, making it easy to escape the enforcers of the law. The slang term “GTT” implies this: the person has fled to Texas (Bauman 1986). These factors, combined with the fact that Texas is the state in the US with the highest density of ranches (<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/agriculture/>, 20.02.2007), is why I felt it easy to choose where to go to study the cowboy and the myths about him, although I could have gone to any of the western states and find people in this kind of cattle-business.

My intentions when I left Norway were to collect material so that I could say something about the mythification of the cowboy, from the contemporary cowboys’ point of view. I wanted to try to understand how they relate to these legends and myths, and how much emphasis they placed on them when explaining their own being and identity. This original plan was revised several times, and it was not until after I returned and the writing process was well in advance, that I could identify the content of my thesis. During fieldwork my understanding of the cowboy developed and I gained new perspectives, and rejected earlier ideas. However, the concepts of identity and myth are still important for my thesis.

Two days later a man calls for my attention at the supermarket. He stands by the cooler with dairy products, and it seems that he cannot agree with himself if he wants yoghurt with strawberry or banana. In his basket he has collected milk, beer, and a newspaper. “How do you do, Cecilie?” He smiles. How on earth does this man know my name? I am confused for

a second, but then I recognize him. He wears blue jeans and a t-shirt with the imprints of 'Houston', and a hat made from straw. He is clean shaven. He smells of cologne. "Ben! I'm fine thank you, but I'm still struggling with soreness and sunburned arms after the wonderful ride we had the other day. How are you?" I'm blushing. I'm ashamed that I failed to recognize my cowboy.

Chapter II. Theoretical perspectives and anthropological method

There are certain overarching themes that stand out in my discussion of cowboys: these are identity/masculinity, tradition/practice, discourse and myths. These are themes that comprise much of the analytical complexity of the cowboy, and they constitute significant factors that cannot be overlooked. They are also interrelated, and although quite vague and diffuse, it is necessary to pay attention to all signs of meaning (Barth 1994).

I begin my analysis with a deconstruction of the cowboy - both the term and its implications. I find the deconstructionist perspective from Derrida and Baudrillard to be useful, with their focus on signs, symbols and meaning, and notions of the hyper-real and authenticity.

Deconstruction implies to take apart the pieces of the cowboy that we take for granted, the imagery or the myths, to show that a closure has taken place, and that a hegemonic image has been constructed. A hegemonic image is “an articulation, that through a *force* re-establishes the unambiguousness” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2005: 60, my translation, italics original). Jørgensen and Phillips further emphasize that ‘force’ is not synonymous with ‘power’; ‘power’ would exclude all other possibilities in the construction of an image, while ‘force’ points to dominance over other existing possibilities in the formation of an image. The opposite of deconstruction is hegemony, or discourse (ibid.). This closure is to abstract a notion from time and space, and deconstruction reveals that the hegemonic discourse could consist of other factors, or be non-existent, was it not for the voices and currents that were taken into consideration at the time the closure took place. The cowboys were abstracted into a figure, and I will discuss why this closure took place, and which voices and trends came to define this discourse. Deconstruction is a relevant approach, because it will hopefully reveal the underlying intention behind the hegemonic voices that originally constructed the notion. Foucault’s (1999) notions on discourse analysis will be a guiding line for me. He focuses on the formation of discourses in the society in question, and argues that there are voices that are not heard, both because the leading discourse is guarding the content, institutionalizing it, and because the voices that are not heard are regarded as wrong or improper. By this he employs the concept of power: a certain group’s power to form the content of the discourse.

This power is not exclusively a negative aspect, but something that triggers production of meaning; truth is something socially constructed through discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips 2005). I will discuss the period when the cowboys became ‘frozen’, who had the power to influence this closure/discourse, and why. It is crucial to look back at the recorded history that led to this. A discourse is not constant, it will lose its power if the opposition is influential enough, and new aspects will be added to the discourse. The discourse can also take on new forms, it might seem that it has been broken down, as Foucault argues in his discussion of the discourse of the mentally “sane” and “insane”. It might seem as though the society has begun to listen to the voices of the insane due to the use of psychologists and psychiatrists in treatment, but Foucault asks whether the discourse has just taken another form, and whether the insane are still regarded as inferior (Foucault 1999).

What will happen to the cowboy when the romanticised image of him is no longer accepted? Or, more correctly – why does the discourse about the romanticised cowboy still linger in society, even if most people know that this is not a true picture? I will argue that this preservation of a discourse is possible because the image of the cowboy is important and personal to many people. The cowboy is a general figure whose identity is claimed by many, not only working ranch cowboys or rodeo cowboys. The cowboy template is a contour that can be filled with almost anything, by anybody. The contest for his identity is hard. But just a few seem to be generally acknowledged by his surroundings to rightfully claim a cowboy identity. As I will argue, the common image of the cowboy is the fictitious cowboy, or as I have called him – the Imagined cowboy. The cowboy template can be filled with many faces, but the contour stands out. This makes the template a space where people can negotiate identity. The cowboy may no longer shoot from the hip; maybe he drives a car or even flies a helicopter instead of riding a horse, but he still claims to be a cowboy.

I will then look closer into the myths and imageries of the cowboy. Barthes argues that myths are a system of communication, a way of transferring knowledge and meaning, and the mythification can only happen in retrospective, because the content must be worked upon to become mythified (Barthes 1999). The cowboy mythification is a result of a process where the cowboy has become a symbol for something more than themselves. “A symbol is an object, real or fictitious, which contains a meaning in itself, but simultaneously has a

metaphorical meaning” (Dahlerup 2002:53, my translation). I will touch upon the content of the myths, and I will discuss the significance of the myths for individuals in general, and Performed cowboys in particular.

Leach’s study among the Kachin in Highland Burma demonstrates how myths that are fundamental to the social organization of the community, can be manipulated by the individuals in their own interest. This implies that the myths are not rigid or static, but rather flexible and plastic; the individual can make their own understanding of the content of the myth, even though the structure of the myth is generally agreed upon in the society (Leach 2001). The reason for this is that the contours of the myths, or the structures, are given, but the content can be negotiated. In an actor-oriented perspective, the myths in this case are both models for and models of action (Geertz 1993), they give directions, and they are structures. The myth of the cowboy can be used as an instrument to communicate identity, and I will discuss how the individual can mould the myth so that it fits his interests. The cowboy identity is a contested identity, it does not belong to one specific group of men in the society, but several practices claims this identity, and all of these will be challenged in their identification as cowboys. There is a constant and intense negotiation concerning who can call themselves cowboys, and by which parameters this is based. Who can rightfully identify himself/herself as a cowboy? This is a question that proves to be hard to answer; it is a question of definition. What is a cowboy? In this thesis I will show that there are several practices that represent cowboy identity. What is important for those claiming such an identity is that it appears habituated, or else the identity will be weakened. Habituation is a behaviour that becomes an automatic response, something you do without thinking or explaining (Bourdieu 2005), and if a man can habituate his cowboy practice, his identity as a cowboy will be strengthened.

My discussions of the cowboy identity will be concentrated around three analytical perspectives:

- 1) A discursive or symbolic perspective, concerning what the cowboy means, how the signs and the myth are used, and what the imagery tells us about the cowboy. Important in this is the use of symbols, which can, as I will show, lead to a question of identity.

2) A non-discursive or institutionalized perspective, this is factors that indisputably makes you a cowboy or not, a practical question of ownership, circumstances, and how this helps one qualify as a cowboy. This includes patterns and ways-of-doing, work methods, and knowledge of a handicraft.

3) Practice or action, meaning the strategies individuals use to communicate an identity and a masculinity that is in line with the cowboy imagery. This will include how persons are performing their cowboyness, regardless of whether they work at a ranch or in an office.

Richard Jenkins (2004) considers three aspects of a person's being: the individual order, which takes place in peoples' heads, the interactional order, which happens between people, and the institutional order, which describes patterns and normative ways of doing and being. I find these locations of identification useful, and I will relate them respectively to Personality, Self and Identity. These three aspects are simultaneous, and they occupy the same space (the same person), and hence we get an internal-external dialectic of identification (*ibid.*). I take a process-oriented theoretical position between the post-modern processual theorists like Barth, where identity is dependent on the situation (e.g. Barth 1966), and Goffman, who argues that the identity can be performed (Goffman 1992). I will employ some of their ideas, either to highlight differences in opinions, or because I find much of their considerations valuable. I find agency and praxis important, where we can observe the individual in action, but who, at the same time, is tied to and may have to conform to conventions/discourses. The individual is able to influence how he/she wants to be perceived and identified by others, but there are certain forces he/she cannot control but must conform to, like expectations, normative ways of expression, habituation, and context. The individuals' identity is not dependent on the situation, but contingent on it. The context is significant, but the individual can juggle his identities, within his repertoire. To be able to do this, his Self must be habituatedly in accordance with his identity chosen for the situation. Some situations are not open to manipulation identities, but requires an immediate and habituated action. Jenkins (2004) describes the achievement of an identity as a process, a practical achievement, and he considers collective and individual identity to be a different phenomenon. Individual identity focuses on difference, "I am separate from others", whereas collective identity groups people together, on the basis of sameness in critical contexts.

Ewing argues that people project multiple, inconsistent self-representations, which are context-bound, and that can change quickly. A person usually experiences oneself as a whole, but people are shifting and inconsistent in their representation. One Self can rapidly be changed for another Self, depending on the context and inner thoughts and feelings. A person's identity is connected to the discourse the person relates to, and to the contextual frames, and their inner thoughts and feelings (Ewing 1990). I maintain that we mediate several identities to our surroundings, but we do not feel that we have more than one Self, but rather a continuous, but flexible Self. I hesitate to apply 'multiple selves' due to my understanding of Self as an inner reflection of oneself, and therefore not consistent with a comprehension of multiple selves. Instead, I apply the notion that a cowboy has multiple identities, but that all his identities have to be in accordance with his personal Self, or else he will not feel that his Self is consistent. The boundary between inner Self and outer personality is important. The inner Self is tied to other processes in the body, mentally and somatically, which the surroundings cannot perceive, but this makes the Self feel consistent to the (mentally well) person.

A Self needs to be in coherence with the person's ascribed/acquired identity in the situation, or else the person's identity will be weakened. This may also be used as a way to obtain validity for a claimed identity. If the Self does not relate to the claimed identity of the person, the person will also meet sanctions, by not getting acceptance for this identity. Ewing (1990) would say that the individual has multiple selves, because the selves are attached to the identities. Or, as I will argue, a Self can be elastic and very absorbent. This will be expressed in a situation when the individuals' Self does not relate to the ascribed/acquired identity. Any man can claim a cowboy identity, but that identity will be contested. If his Self is not in accordance with this identity, he will not be identified by others as a cowboy, unless he convincingly manages the performance. The behaviour has to be habituated, that is according to Bourdieu, behaviour that is immediate, natural, not reflected upon (Bourdieu 2005). A performed role, in a Goffmanian sense, is not habituated, and a Self that is not in accordance with the claimed identity, will be a performance.

Masculinity is inseparably connected to a man's identity and Self, and it would be difficult to separate a discussion of the two. When it comes to masculinity, there are multiple ways to

be a man, both between men, and within one person. In daily speech, the meaning of masculinity is often used as an adjective, describing a person in a certain way, referring to what is considered manly in the culture or in the social group. The meaning of this word is culturally connected, and there is a significant chance that two persons living in the same community share the same understanding of the word. The term can also be used to describe females, or even objects and abstract expressions - it is not exclusively used for describing men. In recent years scholars (Archetti 1999, Connell 2005, Whitehead 2002, Kimmel & Messner 1998) have begun to talk about masculinities rather than masculinity, in the same way they talk about identities in plural form rather than identity. The saying "all men are alike" is no longer valid.

In social sciences, gender has traditionally been treated in relation to how gender is socially constructed, and scholars have argued that masculinity can only be regarded in relation to femininity (Connell 2005). The focus has been on the relation between men and women (Eriksen 1994), where the power of men over women, symbolically and factual, has been one of the main focuses (Bourdieu 2001). Archetti (1999) and Kimmel (2006) emphasize the importance of also to regard men in relation to other men. Discussions about men in relation to women have been, and still are, important discussions, but in this thesis I will adopt a perspective that emphasizes that a man's significant others, when negotiation over masculinity, is not necessarily a woman, but other men (Kimmel 2006). I will make use of Archetti's (1999) findings among the Argentinean men he studied and analyze the masculinity of the cowboy as a male-to-male assessment. To take on this perspective means a reconsideration of the parameters of masculinity, not one where the opposite is feminine traits or morals, but other masculinities. There is also a level of competition and contest over the negotiation and power to establish cowboy masculinity, in line with a discourse analytic perspective (Jørgensen & Phillips 2005). Domination and power is often seen in a gendered perspective, as men's power over women, but power should not necessarily be treated as only fundamental in gendered relations, but in all social relations, between men and men, women and women, and men and women (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994).

One of my goals is to demonstrate how masculinity is related to identity and how they are interconnected. For a man, every identity has one or several masculinities attached, but the

content and meaning of what is the normative masculinity varies across cultures/social contexts, historical time, personal age, sexuality, class, and race (Kimmel & Messner 1998, Whitehead 2002). Every man has, through his Self, a feeling and a personal expression of his masculinities. His masculinities must be in congruence with his identities, or else he will meet sanctions from his surroundings. He will be perceived to be failing in his masculinity, which is a hard accusation to face or deny.

A term that has become popular in the social constructionist discussion of masculinity is *hegemonic masculinity* (Addelston & Stirratt 1998, Connell 2005, Nonn 1998, Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994), which implies that there is a leading discourse about what being a 'successful' man implies, and that all other masculinities that do not fit into this hegemony, are inferior. Connell stresses the point that hegemonic masculinity has power over both women and men who belong to inferior masculinities (Connell 2005). He argues that there are four ways that masculinity orders and relates to each other: hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization. In my discussion I apply an idea of "leading masculine discourse", because I find it less categorizing than the notion of hegemonic masculinity. Connell has been critique for being too categorizing and rigid and not taking into consideration resistance and change (Lorentzen 2006). I understand the concept of hegemonic masculinities, but I find it difficult to categorize "ways -of -being- a- man" into fixed groups, because my concern is that there are many ways of being a man as there are men, and a man's masculinity is too complex to be categorized (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994). This allows for fragmented identities and masculinities; a man is not locked in his masculinity, neither in time nor context.

Greenberg (2005) describes a history with certain masculinities connected to certain times in American history and describes how men were expected to be in relation to this. Class and background dictated the expectations a man would meet when it came to being a man. I see a resemblance in Greenberg's treatment of masculinity to Connell's hegemonic masculinity; she shows how the content of hegemonic masculinity changes over time and geographic space, including who were likely to belong to these groups, based on class and age. In her work, she treats hegemonic masculinities to be epochal. I recognize this to a certain degree,

but I emphasize that masculinities are also modal, that a man has several masculinities, depending on where and when you ask him.

Traditional ways of doing things can be a means of personal identification for the cowboy; it demonstrates that he has mastered the “ol’ way” of doing things, communicates authenticity, and that the person is a good cowboy. This is especially important when it comes to working the cattle twice a year. My research shows a tendency that ranches that have access to cowboys with traditional skills, will prefer to do things the old-fashioned way, even if they have access to modern technology. They argued that it is more efficient, easier on the cattle and the men, and more attractive to the cowboys. “(...) tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals” (Foucault 1989:23).

It is natural for a cowboy riding a horse to wear spurs; it is a tool that explicitly signals to the horse what it should do in any given situation. But why does the cowboy wear spurs at the bar? Or even a hat? There are no horses immediately available, and no sun to burn the cowboys’ neck. Clearly the spurs and the hat (and other forms of apparel) have another meaning in these circumstances, and could be viewed as an invented tradition (Hobsbawm 1992), at the same time as the spurs can be seen as a symbol for cowboy identification. The cowboy utilizes some of his repertoire for performing his identity. The Imagined cowboy also wears spurs wherever he goes, and I will argue that several of the traditions we see today, stems from this. But the Imagined cowboy is himself invented, he is a product of the discourse of what a real man should be, a discourse that utilizes the old-time cowboy (the factual cowboy, who actually existed for a brief period of time) as a model. This implies that the traditions associated with the Imagined cowboy are also invented. Hobsbawm defines invented tradition in this way:

“‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (...) when possible (...) with a suitable historical past” (1992:1).

This is central to my discussion of the invention of the cowboy, a figure that for many stands out as a continuation of the past, a nostalgic longing to a time when everything was better.

Looking for cowboys

Personal networks proved to be important to me when contacting people. Coincidences in meeting people turned out to be decisive. I believe this in itself reflects how intricate the social network is, and it tells of a society where reputation and personal relations are significant, and opens doors to new contacts and relations for the researcher (Bourgois 2003). The turning point came when I went into an office in Houston to buy insurance for my car. While waiting for the company's computer-network to work, I started talking to the lady who shared my agent's office, and she asked me what I was doing here. I told her, and her immediate reaction was "I know some cowboys you can visit! I'll contact them and ask if they're interested". This turned out to be a door-opening experience; the "cowboys" she knew wanted me to stay at their ranch, and they put me in contact with other significant persons, who in turn knew others. The lady at the insurance office put me in contact with Joe and Eve, who do not call themselves cowboys, other than "cowboy by heart", as Joe said, but were labelled so by the insurance lady. Nevertheless they proved to be very important for my material and became two of my main informants. I often heard others call somebody a cowboy, but the person would not refer to themselves in that way, often explaining: "well, I couldn't really say that I'm a cowboy, that would be wrong of me...but I used to be one!" The term cowboy was clearly a positive label for these people, something they nostalgically longed after, or missed, and for the persons describing them in that way too. This network was not only important for me, but significant in other peoples' lives as well ; as Nick described: "Everybody knows everybody here (...) really in the whole West Texas area. You get to know people. I mean, this guy, Joe, I never met him before, I talked to him on the phone for 30 minutes [Joe helped me get in contact with Nick], and I feel like I know him. He's a nice guy." And as Benny, a rancher and cowboy, told me: "If you got a reputation of raising good cattle, that's it. Period. One of the biggest things about cowboys and ranchers is the word about them, you know. You depend on it."

My intention was to go to Texas and get to know some cowboys who live a traditional cowboy life, fitting my former image of cowboys, and learn some of the secrets behind the mysterious appearance they seemed to have. I knew before I left that this might be an impossible task, because I did not know where and if they still existed, and if they would

even talk to me, much less about their identity and tradition. I quickly realized that my definition of a cowboy was too rigid and naive, and I had to extend my definition of a cowboy; the traditional cowboy was no longer my main focus. I wanted to explore the same themes, but with broader material. To get in touch with this broader definition of cowboys was not particularly difficult, thanks to my informants and their helpfulness. In most instances it was not difficult to make them talk about themselves, their life, and the cowboy tradition. This thesis is a result of my interpretation of the material my informants provided, which is a necessarily subjective interpretation. I believe that each and every researcher's relationship with their informants is unique; some relationships develop into friendships, and we gradually get to know more sides of complex and intricate compound individuals.

'Blending in' as a researcher was not always easy. Being a young woman from the 'exotic' place Norway, travelling all alone to research cowboys in Texas, made me a curiosity. From my appearance I was as far away from being a cowboy as any could be, but that also helped people share their information. I never felt that any question was too stupid to ask; they knew I knew nothing, and they were willing to share. Some persons were harder to get to than others. It turned out to be much easier to get in touch with the ranch owners or foremen than the working cowboys, and I sometimes felt that this was a disadvantage for me. As is the case with the men at the round-up at High Ranch, where I was invited by the ranch-owners to come and visit during the spring round-up. While attending cow-camp, I felt it was difficult to get in touch with the younger cowboys, and was taken care of by the ranch owners and their friends. But while out riding, the boys approached me and I felt it was much easier to approach them as well. I believe this has something to do with me being an acquaintance of the boss, and thus not a person to mingle with for the cowboys.

Besides interviewing persons from different milieus and social settings, I talked to professors at universities in Texas, I visited numerous museums where I talked with the curators and/or studied the exhibitions, small and large, and art galleries where cowboys and ranching tradition were a focus. The art pieces or collected items in themselves, and how they are presented to the audience, tell more than the factual history behind the item. They are a part of a larger discursion, defining what is worth representing about the cowboy and the ranching tradition. I was also invited by the Working Ranch Cowboy Association to their

week long annual International Rodeo Finals in Amarillo, Texas. This was an interesting experience, although rodeo-cowboys were not what I intended to study extensively. But these rodeo-cowboys were not professionals, they were working ranch cowboys, and this was a competition between the ranches from all over the world, although most were from Texas. This arrangement set me in contact with new informants, and also let me get a glimpse into the tradition surrounding the rodeo competition, and cowboy etiquette.

I also went to several other rodeos and stock shows, including tourist magnets, like the stock-yard in Fort Worth, where they drive a small herd of Texas Longhorns through the streets twice a day, to people's (and my) amazement (the bulls' horns are at least 2.5 meters from tip to tip). Fort Worth also houses the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame and Cattle Raisers Museum, both of which I got the opportunity to visit. The stockyard is an old shipping-place for cattle, where cowboys from all over Texas drove the herds to, to load them on trains, or to sell them. The city of Fort Worth tries to save the tradition and bring it on, and these attractions and the maintenance of what has come to be known as "Cow town" is a manifestation of these efforts. Every year the 17 -days long Southwestern Stock Show and Rodeo is held and visited by a million people, which gave me a glimpse into another part of the stock and cattle tradition.

Although not the focus of my study, I also attended the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Alpine, Texas. This is an annual gathering of cowboy poets from all over the US and Canada, and which attracts people from all over the state. Cowboys come and perform poems, stories, tales, songs and shows, all which concern cowboy life. Some of the performers are actual working cowboys, but according to one of my informants, who was one of the founders of this gathering ten years ago, the poetry gathering had lost some of its focus:

“You were writing poetry and you imagine your audience to be your peers, your equals, which was the way it originally came from. Then you would write a totally different kind of poetry than if you’re trying to write it for performance, uh...to an audience that you either imagine as superior to you so that you are trying to impress them, or ignorant idiots that you’re trying to educate, you know, so you’re writing either from a top-down perspective or from a bottom-up perspective (...) to me it changed the poetry, changed the voice of poetry, (...) it used to be we instead of I (...) and then it changed into where the narrator was more often the hero, or the...and a lot of it is rimed jokes, or, you know, just meant for entertainment”.

This gathering nevertheless gave me interesting insight into the world of cowboy poetry, and although the poetry is insignificant in my paper, my observations about the audience contributed to strengthening the image I had of the cowboys’ importance in people’s lives.

I researched written material about the cowboy and the ranch tradition, both fiction and historical reports, and also magazines like *Western Horseman*, and the *American Cowboy*. I viewed western films about cowboys, both fictious and factual. Everywhere I went during my stay in Texas, I tried to be sensitive to things that related to the cowboy, and vice versa, things the cowboys related to.

Most of my information stems from participant observation, where informal conversations and observation and participation in practices were means to gather information. I also arranged formal, unstructured interviews with informants, either ranchers or working cowboys, or others who claimed a cowboy identity or had knowledge about cowboy tradition in other ways. The interviews were tape-recorded when practical and suitable, or I took notes during the interview. Most of the informal conversations were not tape-recorded, sometimes this was impossible, e.g. when riding or when helping out with chores at the ranches. I then made notes in the evening about the conversations. This made it possible to review my questions and continue the conversations with my informants the next day. The conversations did not always concern cowboys, and after getting to know some of the informants better, I felt it easier to ask more personal questions about cowboy tradition, and the informants understood, by being around me and answering whatever questions I might

ask, that my intention was not to reveal “the truth” about cowboys or give a negative impression of them. They understood that I would not use the information I got in any other way than writing this thesis, I would not comment on ethical questions concerning animals, or environmental question about grazing, like so many “animal-savers” and “three-huggers” had done, as they called them. These issues were rarely brought forth, and I never doubted their knowledge and affection to their land and animals.

One thing about my stay in Texas constantly concerned me: where to stay. I found it improper to invite myself, a total stranger from another country, to stay at peoples’ homes, as the ranches are. My Norwegian background tells me to be sceptical about inviting strangers into my home, and I assumed these people were not very different from me. I was wrong. On several occasions I was invited to stay and spend time at ranches, or I was invited to dinner, invited to go with them to church, to go with them to rodeos, to museums, to the homes of friends, or to go horseback riding. Living close to my informants for an extended period of time gives useful information that I would not have attained without this experience. When I did not stay at private ranches, and especially when in larger cities, I stayed in motels and hostels. I bought a car, which gave me the opportunity to be mobile and go wherever I wanted whenever I wanted, and it took me around Texas three times. There were periods of my stay that were of less informational use, and in these periods I had a chance to plan my next moves, visit museums and exhibitions, and read. I soon found out that information about cowboy imagery could be found wherever I looked for it, as long as I was sensitive to it.

Chapter III: The Cowboy Template

“Being a cowboy (...) being a true cowboy is a state of mind as much as it is a physical condition. Because a cowboy, a true cowboy, has a mindset that comes about being what he is. As much as being where he is, I think. It’s a state of mind. It’s being something, and you can’t be any other way. And even if you quit cowboying you’re still a cowboy, you can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy, you know [laughing]. That is so true, and I’m a living proof of that, I think”.

Frank, a former rancher, now retired, gets to the essence of being a cowboy in the above quotation. According to him, being a cowboy is a psychological as well as an occupational condition. But establishing a definition of a cowboy is not that simple. It is an occupation, but it also has a common image attached. This makes it hard to define what a cowboy really is. A prevalent problem of discussion throughout this paper is the identificational aspect of the cowboy. The background for this problem of discussion is not an urge to know what a cowboy is, but what he means, both for the persons who consider themselves to be cowboys, and for the rest of us.

Deconstruction

The cowboy is encompassed by mysticism; stories, tales, legends and myth flourish about him. These mix with historical accounts and reconstructions, and provide us with a general image of the cowboy. With this deconstruction I will try to go beyond the cowboy notion, and hope to find an explanation for why the notion has occurred, how it has persisted, what it has done with our conceptions of the cowboy, and what it has done to the cowboys themselves. Why do we want to preserve the romanticized version of the cowboy, and why have the cowboys allowed us to? Could some of the image be right, and mix with less accurate notions therefore making it difficult to grasp the real thing from the Imagined? We cannot ignore the possibility that the voices of the cowboys who stand up and react against the common cowboy image may not be heard. Or is it in the interest of the cowboy to keep the image? And then we have the well-known problem of “reality”, which must necessarily

be a subjective understanding grounded in personal existence and experience. This is one of the problems of history. The image of the cowboy is real enough when it comes to its existence, but what about its value of reflecting the cowboys of today? Are there any “rules” or guidelines for who can call themselves a cowboy? Who has the power to define a cowboy? And are the men we see in films more cowboys than the men working at a ranch today? What has happened to the cowboy, is he still out there?

For analytical purposes, I have chosen to divide the cowboy into three groups: the Factual Cowboy, the Imagined Cowboy and the Performing Cowboy. These categories relate to a notion of what I call the cowboy template, or the contour of the cowboy. I use these categories to facilitate the often confusing discussion about the cowboys; they are not meant to be definitive, but rather a tool to think with.

To a certain degree the template of the cowboy is derived from the Factual cowboys, but it has also been filled with our image about the old-time cowboys. The Factual cowboys were predecessors for the template, they lived at a time when America were in the process of finding a national identity, and my notion is that a template was formed by certain voices, whose effect was an abstracted idea of the cowboy⁴. My idea of the template is that it may work as if it is a structure, which content varies. Leach argues that the most significant thing about myths are their structure and that the content of these structures can be argued and bargained upon. This is possible because the myths do not have direct contact with history. If the myths had contact with history, the content would not be flexible (Leach 2001). I argue that the template of the cowboy is the structure of the cowboy myth. The structure is detached from history, and because of this it is possible negotiate the content of the cowboy myth. The template is abstracted; the cowboy it refers to does not have any face, any substance. The template gets a face by being utilized in different practices.

Slotkin argues that reciprocity characterizes the functional relation between cultural constructions and material experience (Slotkin 1992). This is characteristic for the dialogue between the cowboy template (which is nothing but my own construction), the Imagined

⁴ This will be discussed in chapter V

cowboys' narratives, and the practices of the Performing cowboys, and this dialogue is not abstracted from time. The template is static in a way that it makes us recognize the contours of the cowboys. But the template is also dynamic, through its interaction with the narratives and the performances of the cowboy. Its shape will get adjusted, but certain forces keep the template recognizable. This is why we can recognize both the bandit and the hero as cowboys. What are these forces that keep the template in its shape? I will argue that what lies as a structural basis in the cowboy template is a heroic American individualism. The cowboy is a character that embodies individuality, and this is where he gets his power from. This was also important in abstracting the cowboy template, as we will see.

“The rest of the population (the outsiders) imagines that cowboys are tall, thin, riding in the saddle...yeah, that is an image, you know. Boots... Sandy hair... And then you've got these 'urban cowboys'. They live in cities, and they may never have been to a ranch, at least not worked a cow, and maybe never ridden a horse. But they go to these western dances... and they dress just like me, with jeans and boots, and western style clothes” (David)

David shows that there are certain things about the cowboys that are prevalent, independent of whether you are a wannabe cowboy or a ranch cowboy, or if you are talking about the general imaginations about the cowboy. There are some features in the template that stand out and make us recognize the cowboy, sketch the contours of him, and which make up his repertoire. These are the hat, the boots, the flannel-shirt, the spurs, the horse, the lasso, and several more. Most of this apparel was used by the Factual cowboys due to their usefulness in ranch work. They give associations to the cowboy tradition, the cowboy morality and the cowboy landscape, both physical and metaphorical. Put a cowboy hat on any man and we have a cowboy. The template also describes what the cowboy character does: he rides a horse. Ringo, a ranch cowboy and the foreman at X7 Ranch, laughs and tells me his own consideration on the popularity of cowboy apparel:

“They’ve (the wannabe’s) made it tough for us; all we can afford now is a baseball-cap and a T-shirt. I could buy a good hat for a hundred bucks, and I used to get good boots for 125, but you can’t do that no more. Horses you could buy pretty cheap, you can’t buy ’em cheap no more. Everybody wants one and got one, but they’ll just ride ’em once or twice a month”.

This was said in a joking tone, but it expresses an underlying discontent with the general utilization of cowboy symbols by anyone.

Robert, the CEO at one of the largest ranches in Texas, said to me; “It’s funny – nobody dresses up like a truck driver, but for some reason people like to dress up like cowboys”. He alludes to the popularity of the cowboy apparel in performing a cowboy identity. By introducing the notion of the cowboy template, I have opened up for an explanation of how anybody can utilize some of the templates’ repertoire in communicating an identity. To succeed in being identified as a cowboy demands more than putting on a cowboy hat and a pair of boots and to ride a horse, but it will give certain connotations to such an identity.

The cowboy hat connotes a rugged outdoorsman; it is dusty, the brim is stained by sweat and dirt, due to being well-used. The hat protects the man from the beating sun, the brim gives shade for his eyes and neck and it protects him from the freezing cold in the winters. Usually a cowboy has hats for different seasons: winter hats may be made of beaver felt, summer hats may be made of straw. And he may have a hat to wear in church on Sundays or to weddings and the like. Steve, one of the first ranchers I interviewed, told me that he did not particularly like the cowboy apparel; he wanted to be an unconventional cowboy by not using the often associated gear. He had tried for a season to change his cowboy hat and long-sleeved shirt for a baseball cap and a t-shirt, but had come to the conclusion that it did not work. The sun burned his neck and his bare arms, so he went back to using a cowboy hat and a shirt instead, “to protect his skin from cancer”, as he said. The cowboy hat is usually custom-made and formed in individual shapes, according to the preferences of the buyer. The cowboy hat is used by policemen, bankers, brokers, anyone who wants to be associated with a type of cowboy identity or morality. Several US presidents regularly wear/wore cowboy hats, and at one occasion president Bill Clinton brought cowboy hats for all the delegates at a global economic meeting (Wright 2001); presumably it was a symbol to

communicate to the world leaders the assumed role he played in the civilization of modern American society, and hence an important symbol he was proud to share.

The boots and the spurs are powerful cowboy symbols. The boots have the same connotation as the hat: ruggedness, dusty, well-used, and masculine. In fact, most boots have high heels, not a thing that is usually considered masculine, but rather feminine. The high heels and the pointed tips are for securing the feet in the stirrups, so that the rider will not slip through the stirrup if he gets thrown off the horse. The slick design is also for this purpose, so the rider does not get fastened to the stirrup or in the brush that he rides through. We find all these functions in English riding boots as well. The cowboy usually has several pair of boots worn at different occasions, and are also often custom-made (Clayton 2001).

The spurs also come in a wide range of varieties. They might be custom-made and decorated, or they may be plain. The wheel at the tip of the spur may be of different sizes and aggressiveness. A wheel with many, long, and very pointed spikes are more aggressive than a wheel with no spikes, which are gentler to the horse. The spurs are usually made of steel, and the cold, shiny, aggressive appearance immediately connotes masculinity, power and control. The spurs are used to intensify the rider's signals to the horse, and if not used correctly, they can injure the horse, or at least make it insensitive to the rider's signs. As one of my informants told me: "The spurs are no worse than the man using them." Maintaining control over the horse might symbolize man's control over wild nature, which is consistent with the cowboy imagery. The wheels make a jingling sound when the cowboy walks, which also appears in western movies, typically in the moments before a shoot-out, when the cowboys approach each other in the middle of the street. Then we hear nothing but the blowing wind, and the jingling of the spurs as the tension builds. Even today a few cowboys wear spurs with jingle-bobs, enhancing the sound of jingling. I suggest that the spurs are the most masculine symbol among the cowboy paraphernalia.

The chaps, which are leathered leggings to wear outside the jeans, also protect the rider from heat and cold, and from the brushy terrain, and to a degree from the hoofs of horses and cattle. The chaps come in a variation of models and many cowboys have a pair that is custom-made, with their initials or with the ranch's brand, and some include fringes.

The cowboy template is equipped with a revolver or a rifle. He needs it to protect himself from dangers: enemies include Indians and villains, gunfighters or wild animals. Everything that threatens his freedom, his reputation, his power. There are few western movies that do not contain a gunfight or a shoot-out of some kind. The Imagined cowboy is inextricably tied to violence. The conflicts he engages in are solved with violent confrontations, and the revolver or gun is natural apparel in the cowboy outfit. Slotkin (1992) argues that the use of firearms is legitimized through the intention of the fight: progress and civilization, and the right to control their own destiny. This is contrary to what I observed among my informants. I never saw a man on a horse with a firearm of any kind, at least not visible. There is little need for protection against such dangers, and for a working cowboy it is rather impractical to have a gun-belt around his waist. There were guns at the ranches, and they were exclusively used to protect themselves or their animals from predators or snakes, when hunting, or practicing for hunting. The ranch cars had rifles in hangers behind the front seat (usually there were no backseats in these cars), but only once did I see it being used, and that was when Joe and I drove in his *dune-buggy* (an open, often home-made, vehicle used at ranches), looking for cattle. A rattlesnake appeared, and Joe shot it with a single shot to its head. Some months prior to this incident, Joe had lost a cow to a rattlesnake; it was bitten in a leg, and did not survive the venomous damage.

The cowboy template has a lasso, rope or lariat (different names for same thing) Few other than cowboys utilize a lasso in their work . The lasso is used to rope animals and is invaluable equipment for the cowboy. It is tied to the front or the back of the saddle, and is often complementary to the saddle. Several of the saddles I rode had a lasso attached, even though I would never use it. Learning to rope an animal requires a lot of practice, if the cowboy does not succeed in roping the animal on the first try, he will have reduced his chances by letting the animal know it is going to be roped. It can also be frightened and exhausted, as Frank told me:

“A good cowboy knows when to use his rope. You try not to rope the cattle unless you are working them (to castrate, burnmark, earmark, give shots, to dehorn, and other jobs involving close contact with the animal)...a lot of cowboys like to pull their rope down and go after everything they can. But a lot of them...If you chase cattle too much, you can kill them, run them to the ground. And if you rope them too much, they may get wild”.

To be a good roper requires practicing to maintain the skills, and I observed that the cowboys did practice rope-tricks when they had time. They also practiced by roping all kind of things, like chairs, three-branches, fence-poles, and each other. To be able to rope a bull from a galloping horse requires that the technique is embodied, there is no time to think about what to do. An embodied action is an action that has been habituated, an action that is located outside of the person’s consciousness, and which is executed without thinking about how to do it (Bourdieu 2005). I got the impression that roping was something the cowboys like to practice. Clayton argues that: “In fact, some consider skill in using the rope well the best indicator of a cowboy’s ability” (Clayton 2001:95). This may be the reason why the old way of rounding up cattle seems to be the most attractive for the cowboys. This traditional way of rounding up the cattle imply that the cattle are gathered by men on horses, and then roped and held down on the ground by the men, as I will discuss later. A man can draw a lot of his cowboy identity from showing that he is a skilled roper. Benny, rancher and working cowboy, told me: “Roping is what everybody likes to do at a ranch. Some people run their herd off, just so they can catch it by rope

The horse

Bill: “Cecilie, do you know why the horse has four legs?”

Cecilie: “ehh...no..”

Bill: “So that it can run. Do you know why the man got two legs?”

Cecilie: “no”

Bill: “So that he can fork the saddle! Ha-ha!”

The horse is essential to the cowboy, it is often said to be “the backbone of a cowboy”, or “the cowboys’ better half”. It is ascribed human features, and most cowboys have a personal relationship with their horse. The horse is a living creature with their own distinct personality and if not treated right, the relationship between horse and handler may become troublesome. A cowboy needs to be able to trust his horse, to be sure that it will obey his commands when they work together, as a team. And the horse needs to know that it can trust its rider, to be able to execute some of the challenging tasks the rider asks it to do. This relationship is gradually built up by working and training together, and being around each other. A skilled horse e.g. a cutting horse⁵, takes years to train, which requires a great investment of time from the trainer. The horses used by cowboys are of different breeds or of mixed breeds, but the majority are American Quarter Horses, American Paint Horses or Appaloosa. In western movies the relationship between man and horse is pictured in different ways: it might be a loyal companion, like Roy Rogers’ horse Trigger. Or it may be just a mount and peripheral to the story in the movie. Several times I observed a cowboy being compassionate to his horse by gently rubbing its forehead, brushing its tail, or small-talking to it. That they have a personal relationship was not surprising to me, and was confirmed when I unintentionally insulted George, the foreman and one of the full-time cowboys at High Ranch. We stood around the corral and admired one of his Quarter horses, apparently his favourite one. I said to George that the horse’s head looked almost like the head of an Arabian horse, which I personally find very beautiful, and meant as a compliment. George apparently did not agree; he got angry and said that it did *not* look like an Arabian at all. He turned to the horse and said it should not listen to me, and after that he did not say very much to me for the rest of the day. An Arabian is a breed that is recognized by its endurance, high speed, beauty and elegance, but has a (somewhat undeserved) reputation of being nervous and sensitive. The Quarter Horse on the contrary, is considered a stout and reliable mount although fast (thereby the name Quarter horse, it is said to be the fastest horse on a distance of a quarter mile), robust and strong, and at the same time be light on its feet, and gentle to ride. Evidently a more masculine breed than the Arabian, and maybe more appealing and “proper” for a cowboy. It is also interesting to note that the term

⁵ Cutting horse is a horse trained to “cut” out one animal from the group of cattle

“horse” almost exclusively means a male horse, if the horse of reference is a female, it will be called a “mare”. This is also in accordance with how human beings are spoken of: “man” and “woman”, where “man” is also used to refer to humans in general. The horse expresses the freedom and mobility of the cowboy. It takes the cowboy out on the range; he rides away, into the western setting sun. What we seem to forget is that the Factual cowboys were actually not free to ride away like this; they were tied down by a ton of work, and by the ranch boss who required the cowboy on duty.

There are other things that complete the cowboy picture: a decorated western saddle, a flannel shirt, and maybe a vest and a huge silver belt buckle. And not to forget the landscape. The wide open range without a single tree. The dusty earth, the red mountains. The rattlesnake and the coyote. All these are pictures we get from the Imagined cowboy in the western movies and stories, but which at the same time are likely to be found in reality where the cowboys are, at least in the western part of Texas.

Women constitute a factor to the cowboy template. They can be regarded as props, which, through their contrast to the cowboy, the template draw some of its features: masculinity, freedom and individuality. In western movies and literature the female is on the other side of the fence; she stops at the gate, while the cowboy rides on into the horizon. She represents the domestic, while the cowboy represents the public, the outgoing, in a classical Rosalbian anthropological perspective (Melhuus, Rudie & Solheim 1992). Persisting for the females in the western genre is that they are stereotypical; they are good or bad, virgins or whores, pretty or ugly, quiet or bragging, smart or stupid. We see her cast the roles of a whore, as a girl-friend, as a schoolmarm. She tames the cowboy; that is, if he chooses to marry her, as he actually does in many of the narratives, like in Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* (Wister 1968). By marrying her he experiences a personal closing of the Frontier, which, as we will see, represents progress and individuality. He settles down. Most of the women in my material are also peripheral when it comes to typical ranch work out in the pastures. The pasture is the man’s area, while the organizing of the home and everything that comes with it, cooking, children, gardening, and more, were women’s area. I will not say that the women did not participate in ranch work, but my observations suggest that this kind of work is typically done by men. One of my informants is a female rancher, and I went with her out in the

pastures to feed the cattle. I also at one point went with another woman out in the pastures to set up predator snares. These two instances were rather the exception than the usual.

We also meet female cowboy figures in the narratives, like Annie Oakley or Calamity Jane. The template has been used to fit the female, but she becomes a tomboy, like the women just mentioned. There exist female working cowboys today, although not very many, but these are not in focus for this paper.

The template of the cowboy is absorbent. It can, and is, filled with different content, depending on who claims the identity. The contour is wide and general, and this makes it a contested space for identity, not only for working ranch cowboys, but for any person who wants to claim a cowboy identity. The cowboy image is attractive to many persons, and they all claim his identity. A millionaire from the Deep South wears the cowboys' hat and boots, and uses the cowboy morality in his own businesses, by being tough and independent. A truck driver from Norway also wears a cowboy hat and listens to cowboy music, and the image of the cowboy as a lonesome rider applies to him; it matches his own way of solitude. A man working at a ranch in Texas also claims the cowboy identity. The term cowboy does not only indicate a man working with cattle from the back of a horse, but everyone who wears clothes we normally think of as "western" (Clayton 2001). The cowboy has become a contested icon of identity, dead or alive.

Chapter IV: The Factual Cowboy

What I will call the Factual cowboy is the open range cowhand who lived before the 1880s. Long before English speaking settlers arrived in Texas, a distinct Texan Cattle ranching economy existed (Starrs 1998). The Factual cowboys were a heterogeneous group, with different backgrounds, styles, motivations, and moralities. Contrary to what many people seem to believe, many of these first men working with cattle were actually boys as young as 12 years of age, and the average age was 24 (Carlson 2000c). There were local styles and practices in the adjustment to this way of life. They wore practical clothes for their work, and although their clothing resembles what we now know as cowboy apparel, they were quite different from what we see modern cowboys wearing (Dickey 2001). They often wore baggy pants, held up by suspenders, not the tight-fitting jeans and a silver belt buckle we see in movies and on most modern cowboys. The hat and the boots evolved as a response to the necessary function of working gear. Many early Texas cowboys adopted the broad-brimmed Mexican sombrero with a flat top (ibid.), which were developed as local variations and perfected to function optimally during daily ranch work. Stetson designed and started manufacturing a cowboy hat in 1865 (Slatta 1994).

Many of the Factual cowboys were not Anglo-Saxons, but Latino, African, French or Dutch immigrants; they all brought different work methods and unique apparel from their backgrounds, making both the practices and the apparel differ from each other (Carlson 2000b). During this period, the term cowboy was regarded by many as synonymous with drunkards, cattle thieves or outlaws. Many focused on some of the law breaking, cattle stealing, heavy drinking men who were also called cowboys, and even though most cowboys at that time were decent people, their reputation had grown in a negative direction (Wagner 1987). The American Civil War from 1861-1865 came to be a kind of turning point for the American cowboy

Fighting on the Frontier

The Frontier played an important part in the shaping of US history and the contours of the cowboy. The Frontier time began in the early 1800s when people not native to the western part of the US started migrating west, in search of new land and new opportunities. The settlers met resistance: they had to endure bad conditions and a challenging natural environment, and they had to fight the Indians that were already in the area. The Frontier and the struggle the settlers met were considered necessary to expand the development of the nation. The settlers were often referred to as pioneers, and their means for achieving their goals were regarded necessary and justified. According to Slotkin (1992) the frontier myth is the oldest and most characteristic myth in the US and is expressed in literature, folklore, ritual, historiography and polemics. The myth states:

”[T]he conquering of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it have been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and “progressive” civilization” (ibid:10).

In the 1890s F. J. Turner submitted a thesis about the Frontier; in it he claimed that the contemporary crisis of American development was caused by the closing of the Frontier (ibid.). The Frontier made men American; the Frontier gave the individuals and the Nation a masculine identity. Slotkin analyzes the frontier myth and recognizes a moral scenery divided by oppositions, where wilderness vs. civilization and Indian vs. white are the most significant. The Indians and the wilderness are the enemies of the settler, but at the same time they give him a new reality that he has to relate to, to be able to change the world. The Indians and the wilderness were aspects that contributed to the definition of the settlers. The heroes in the Frontier myth have to be “men-that-know-Indians”, and to be able to do this, their sympathy and knowledge must be on both sides of the Frontier. They are mediators between the savage world and the world of civilization (ibid.).

After the Civil War (1861-1865) the cowboy term became more standardized, applied to boys/men who got their salary by working with cattle, and the somewhat bad reputation weakened. The semi-desert range lands of Texas were most suited for ranching; the arid land was not suited for farming. The first ranchers were free-ranging, meaning they let their herds

of cattle graze freely, unbound by fences, and roam over enormous areas. The cattle owners hired men to look after their animals, moving them from place to place and taking them to market. Young, unmarried men were hired; they needed money, and were able to stay out in the wilderness for long periods of time, not having to worry about a wife and children.

During this time, job opportunities were few and many young men spent a season or two in the saddle for a cattle company, riding for a brand, on the “trail”⁶ (Slatta 1994).

The period commonly remembered as the cowboy era is characterized by open range grazing and great trail-drives, and lasted only about 15-17 years (Slatta 1994). This surprisingly brief period was a time of bonanza for the cattle business. The cattle were driven by cowboys over enormous distances, at least 3.5 million cattle were driven in herds of 1500-3000 heads from South Texas to cow towns in Kansas, Nebraska and Wyoming, which were connected to rail lines (ibid.) This required a bunch of good men, willing to renounce comfort, family and friends for little money, hard conditions and great risks. One of the most frequently used routes was the Chisholm Trail to Abilene, Kansas (ibid.). Working long hours, cowboys drove the cattle from watering hole to watering hole, and they protected the animals from *rustlers* (thieves), straying cattle and *stampedes* (the herd of cattle would be frightened and flee in panic, being very hard to stop) at night (Clayton 2001).

This open range, trail driving period lasted less than two decades, from about 1865 until 1880, when the barbed-wire fence was introduced, changing the style of ranching. The railroad network was also extended, and cattle were shipped by train. This made the transport of cattle to and from market much easier and less time (ibid.). The cattle owners benefited from the new transportation, despite the higher costs. The cattle kept their weight, thus earning more at the market. The men were less vulnerable to *rustler*, accidents, or stampedes, when some cattle would run away never to be found again. The trail drives was also hard on the cowboys. They had to face everything from Indians to mountain lions, from thirst to snow storms. Some men did not return from the trail drives (Haley 1949).

⁶ The phrases “riding for a brand” and “on the trail” are recurrent in cowboy slang and in films and literature. “Riding for a brand” reflects the loyalty the cowboys supposedly had for their ranch owner and colleagues. “On the trail” refers to the practice of driving cattle from horseback over large distances, which sometimes lasted for several months.

What kind of men were the Factual cowboys?

The Factual cowboy initiated the cowboy tradition, developing techniques and skills that proved to be useful in ranching, and also socially, by gradually and unnoticeably turning the cattle business into an identificational practice. This identification was more oriented toward the practical work the men did than their behaviour and expected roles, but certain traits were more appreciated or necessary in this group of men for practical reasons. The history of the Frontier explicitly emphasizes virtues like bravery, stamina, endurance, physical strength and so on. These traits were also important to survive as a cowboy at that time. The masculinity tied to the Factual cowboy is a masculinity that values physical conditions. A Factual cowboy stayed away from home for long periods at a time, sometimes for years, to drive the cattle over long distances or work at a ranch. The constant search for jobs, which were not well paid, required the men to be moveable, thus implying that young, unmarried men constituted the major work force. Good physical health, strength and endurance were also required in this job, or else one would not last long in this physically challenging environment. Knowledge of nature was important to survive, and the men learned more by experience. A strong mentality was necessary to endure these circumstances, the strain of staying away from family and friends for an extended period of time, to overcome the unpredictable forces of nature, and to function well in an isolated group of colleagues.

Although belonging to the largely heterogeneous group I have labeled the Factual cowboys, this does not give complete identificational aspects of *how* to be a cowboy and *who* could actually be one, but it gives certain cues to what kind of qualities were preferred or even necessary in the men executing this job. To be a Factual cowboy was first and foremost an occupation. The occupational aspect has continued to be important, also for the contemporary ranch cowboys, as Bill told me: “There is pride among cowboys. And the pride isn’t in being a cowboy; it’s a pride in the job you do, that you don’t see elsewhere”.

Conclusion

The Factual cowboy does not exist today. He belongs to the past. The Factual cowboys were heterogeneous, as are the Performing cowboys. It would be more correct to say that there are some common features between the Performing cowboys and the Factual cowboys, just like the Factual cowboys did share common features amongst themselves. Much of the work apparel and working techniques are almost the same, surviving history and time, due to their usefulness. Many of the techniques are adjusted to modernity, and developed to be more efficient. The job of a cowboy continues to require physical strength and endurance.

This Factual cowboy is neither the cowboy we meet in the traditional western literature or films, nor is he the person we have in mind when we think about cowboys. This cowboy is what I will call the Imagined cowboy, and which I will discuss in the next chapter.



Out on the Range. Gathering Texas Longhorns. Photo: L. C. Helling

Chapter V: The Imagined Cowboy

The cowboy most people outside of the cowboy tradition is acquaintance with, is the discursive cowboy we see in Western movies and literature, and this image constitute our images of the cowboy in general. The Imagined cowboy is the template of the cowboy based on most people's perceptions of the cowboy. Western film and literature as we know them today, both evolved at the same time in history, shortly after the turn of the 20th century, and the Imagined cowboy started his career in both these genres at the same time. The first cowboy autobiography was published by Charles A. Siringo in 1885, with the impressive title, *A Texas Cow Boy or Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck on a Spanish Pony Taken From the Real Life of Charles A. Siringo, an Old Stove Up Cowpuncher Who Has Spent Nearly a Life Time on the Great Western Cattle Ranges* (Slatta 1994). The western film genre were initiated by Thomas Edinson's film company in the early 1890s, which produced vignettes about Annie Oakley and Buffalo Bill, that were soon followed by other filmmakers (ibid.). The genres developed simultaneously in just a few years. The Imagined cowboy is an almost homogenous figure; he is exalted into a stereotype, lifted up from real life, he is an idealized cowboy. It is an invented character, he has become a myth. The Imagined cowboy has no real life match, living or dead, but is a fulfilment of features desired in or expected of a cowboy. The Imagined cowboy is a copy without an original; as a result the myth is impossible to verify or falsify (Butler 1999). At the same time it is a myth that is flexible and can be stretched in different directions. The Imagined cowboy has several faces, but they all provide a hegemonic image of the cowboy.

The hegemonic image of the cowboy is one where he rides in solitude, handles all the challenges thrown at him, whether it might be stampeding cattle, bucking horses, merciless rustlers, as in Zane Gray's novel *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1949). Or Indians, burning sun, freezing snowstorms, or a stubborn girlfriend, as in Owen Wister's' novel *The Virginian* (1968). Or he is a gunfighter who fights greedy outlaws that are threatening the community, as in *Shane* (directed by George Stevens, 1953). Or he might be an outlaw himself, like in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (directed by George Roy Hill, 1969). He conquers them all, even if he loses his own life in the effort. And if he does save his life, he ends up

alone, riding into the western sunset and continues on his adventurous journey. Or he settles down with the woman he eventually marries, and his cowboy career comes to an end, either by prospering into becoming a rancher, or by finding other jobs. This version of the is consistent with the characteristics I usually hear from outsiders to the cowboy tradition when asked to describe their general conception of the cowboy. The tendency of people to think of this cowboy as the authentic cowboy complicates the picture, both for the Performing cowboys and for the perceivers of the cowboy imagery.

When confronting people in Norway with my conclusion that there is no such cowboy as the Imagined cowboy, and have never been, they look at me in disbelief: “Have cowboys ever existed? Is that what you are saying?” is the common reaction. “Some real cowboys must have existed!” they often answer. Of course real life cowboys do exist, but not in the form and shape many people seem to believe. What has become clear to me is that while this cowboy myth is strong, it is in such a way that people never think of it as a myth, but a fact, perhaps because it merges with the concept of the living cowboys. People seems to have no problems admitting that parts of their concepts are myths, but it is too much to accept that the movie-based cowboy never existed. I often met the reaction: “Where have all the cowboys gone? Aren’t they a breed on their own? Are there any real ones left?” I will argue that what most people outside of the cowboy tradition believe in when it comes to cowboys, and what they call the real cowboy, is this version of the myth. Their concepts stems from the Imagined cowboys.

I argue that people outside the cowboy tradition often have a general assumption that the Imagined cowboy character seen in films gives an accurate description of how the old time cowboys (the Factual) used to be. This is not surprising; many western films and dime-novels claim to be authentic, and some of them are quite down-to-earth in their descriptions, like Haley’s book *Charles Goodnight* (1949). These characters’ appearance may look like the Factual cowboy in certain, and perhaps crucial, ways; Banes (1990) argues that when the sign or image develops beyond the signified or represented, a question about origin arises, because simulations are not representations of the real, but on the contrary, the representations produce the real, and that is exactly what I believe has happened to this mythical cowboy. The commercialized cowboy has become the real for most people, the

referent, to such a degree that he has the power to identify individuals according to his imagery. A man that does not fulfil this imagery is not a real cowboy.

Do the insiders to the cowboy tradition treat the Imagined cowboy as if it describes the actual way of life for the cowboy in the 1880s, like the general assumption people outside of tradition seem to have? I once asked Joe, who is a rancher, a “cowboy at heart” and a western movie enthusiast, what kind of western movies he likes the most, and why: “There are plenty of bad movies, but I like the ones with John Wayne. They are really telling the story like it is, they are authentic.”

On another occasion I talked with Nick about western movies:

C: “Do the romanticised western movies have any foundation in reality?”

N: “Yeah, I think so, I think so. They have been pretty realistic of how they portray the cowboys in the movies. I don’t know, you might have seen some of the movies, all the way back to Clint Eastwood. They are pretty realistic, I think. Pretty realistic, not exaggerated that much”.

Both Joe and Nick confirms my initial question, they do regard some of the movies to portray an accurate picture of the cowboy. They too are influenced by the common notion about the cowboy. Even if some of the films are “pretty realistic”, it may imply that the insiders to the tradition are influenced by the common notion about the cowboy too. This supports my notion that there is a constant dialogue between the Performed cowboys, the narratives and the template.

The invention of the Imagined cowboy

“Although we know that the daily life of this real American cowboy was filled with dust, sweat, toil, loneliness, and frequently death, the “popular” image of the figure – that is held by many people today – is infused with an aura of romance that elevates him to a pure-hatred knight-errant (...) This cowboy (...) must be considered part of the myth of the West, for indeed he still looms larger than life” (Clayton 1984: 205).

Why couldn't our conception of the cowboy just continue to be a Factual cowboy, just with a little adjustment to modernity, instead of developing into the Imagined cowboy? The Imagined cowboy character is a social construct, as is the Performed cowboys. They are templates filled with certain features. The features of the Imagined cowboy are not derived from the Factual cowboy, but from discourse in American society at that time, which formed a national identity, a national discourse on masculinity, of what the American man should be like. This creation of national identity was already occurring at the time of the Civil War and Frontier time, and is the basis of my notion on the abstracted cowboy template. The Factual cowboys happened to live in a time period when American national identity was being formed. They had participated in a westward expansion that required manhood colored by bravery, toughness and an adventurous mind.

I will show that some of the insiders to the cowboy tradition themselves played an active role in shaping the cowboy template, which was later taken up by Hollywood and western novelists. All these factors served as catalysts to produce the Imagined cowboy character as he drifted away from the somewhat blurred and necessarily subjective reality of the Factual cowboy.

Voices

The mythification of the cowboy is not entirely the work of outsiders, but I recognize the tremendous influence Hollywood and writers have that enable them to communicate values and trends. There are always a selection of voices in the culture that lead discourse, any discourse, and establish meaning in the world (Bourdieu 1996). These are the voices of persons or groups of people with the power, symbolic or real, to be heard (*ibid.*), and more often than not, they are in the elite group of the social area concerned. According to Bourdieu symbolic power is invisible, and can only be exercised with compliance from the dominated people who do not want to recognize that they are being dominated. Symbolic power can also be exercised with compliance from the dominating groups that do not want to recognize that they are dominating. The reason symbolic structures, like myths, can exercise a structuring power, is because they themselves are structured; they are structured structures (*ibid.*). The unawareness of the dominated that they are being dominated is what Bourdieu

(borrowing Marx) calls false consciousnesses or apathy. The order that is established by this domination is further legitimated by establishing distinctions and hierarchies, and in turn these hierarchies are legitimized by the domination (ibid.).

What role have the cowboys played in shaping and maintaining the image about themselves? They may personally gain from this imagery, for instance the notion that the cowboy is a strong masculine figure. As a cowboy himself, and as a man wanting to be perceived as masculine, it is not unlikely that he will have personal interest in the public perception of the cowboy. If this man were in a social position where he could impact the general cowboy image, as a writer, a poet, a song writer, movie maker, or storyteller, he could directly influence the general perception of the cowboy. He would be a discourse leader, which would legitimate his exercise of establishing such hierarchies (ibid.). But if he has a more subtle position in the cowboy tradition, say he is a common day worker at a ranch, would he then have the power to shape the image? According to Bourdieu's hierarchy, he would not. He would rather be dominated. But I argue that he does have some power in shaping his own image, by maintaining and complying with the general cowboy image, postponed by the elitist cowboy. He could choose to not live up to the expectations of the cowboy that are immanent in the cowboy myth/image, or he could protest against it by other means and resist. He could even try to show that the image is wrong, by living a life that does not conform to the myth. There are factors in the cowboy myth that the cowboys themselves may want to maintain, like the emphasis on masculinity, and integrate into their personal life, thereby enforcing the myth. But on the other hand, the imagery may be so strong and have such power, that not living up to the myth or imagery would concern the cowboys' personal identification. These two aspects are not mutually exclusive, the less powerful common cowboy may take personal advantage of aspects of the cowboy imagery at the same time as he literarily has no choice, if he wants to be identified as one. He lives by an ideology that others define for him, but which is of his own personal interest to comply with, because the content is advantageous not only for the elitist group defining the content, but also for the less powerful.

The strongest basis for my argument is that there are certain persons, who strongly influenced the national American picture of the West between 1885 and 1910: Theodore

Roosevelt, Frederic Remington, Owen Wister (Slotkin 1992), and William F. Cody, aka Buffalo Bill. These men represent four different genres of tradition and the links between them are many. I believe this is of value in understanding the purpose of the myths, and also in explaining the formation of what I have called the cowboy template. Their interventions deliberately shaped the worlds' view of the cowboy, to their own interest.

Theodore Roosevelt was the American President from 1901 to 1909. He founded the Rough Riders Regiment in 1898, and led them in the Spanish-American War, where the battle of San Juan stands as the most important. Roosevelt worked as a rancher for two years after his wife and his mother both died in 1884. Between 1885 and 1895 he published numerous articles and books on the West, and in 1907 the *Winning of the West*, probably his most well-known book, was released. He romanticized and internalized his western experience by describing his life as a rancher and cowboy, extensively using descriptions about the rugged life of the cowboy (Slatta 1994).

Roosevelt believed that the history of the Frontier was a vital element in shaping American institutions and national character, and as a president he used a language filled with traditional ideological symbols from the Frontier to explain the recession in the American economy, to maintain a healthy morale among the people in those depressed times. He viewed the Frontier history as an American recapitulation of the stages of civilization (Slotkin 1992):

“Through the agency of writers like Turner and Roosevelt, [the Frontier] was becoming a set of symbols that constituted an explanation of history. Its significance as a mythic space began to outweigh its importance as a real place, with its own peculiar geography, politics and cultures” (ibid: 61)

Roosevelt described cowboys as Anglo-Saxons, ignoring the ethnic diversity among cowboys at that time (ibid.). As a politician, a writer, a Harvard graduate, a lieutenant colonel of the Rough Riders regiment, and a president of the United States, Roosevelt had a tremendous influence on his audience, and thus had great power to form people's conception of Frontier history, ranching and cowboys. Not only by directly referring to the ruggedness of the tough cowboys or the bravery of the Frontier fighters, but also in a more subtle way through how he used language to suggest such ideology. Roosevelt strongly contributed to the cowboy discourse, and he certainly had the power to be heard. He spoke of the

frontiersmen as heroes to maintain morale in society, and thus created national heroes. Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club, and here he spent social time with Frederic Remington and Owen Wister, who influenced the discourse in other areas, respectively art and literature (ibid.). Roosevelt helped create the Imagined cowboy traits that present the cowboy as tough, persistent, a kind of boyish fighter. Roosevelt's position as a president can be seen as a way to legitimate the cowboy by the state.

Frederich S. Remington was a painter and sculpturer, born and settled in New York, known for his authentic looking paintings and bronze-sculptures of Indians, cavalymen and cowboys, and “ [He]probably did more than any other artist to create enduring images of nineteenth-century cowboy life” (Slatta 1994:13). His work depict men and animals in action. The pictures are detailed and vivid reconstructions of cowboys on bucking horses, Indians on horseback hunting buffalos, and stampeding cattle; he communicates the ruggedness of the cowboys, the wild power of untamed animal, and the supposed ferocity of the Indians. He also succeeds in portraying the harsh natural environment, the snow, the burning sun, and the thorns on the brush where the cattle hide, and so on. He successfully captures the details, which make his work distinctive and realistic. He communicates man's mastery of such dangers, either the wild animals, uproaring horses, stampeding cattle or blood thirsty Indians. Remington belongs to the artistic period of romantic nationalism, and his paintings and bronzes are widely known. His work contributes to the commemoration of Western history, and enforces cowboy discourse. Remington filled the contours of the cowboy with a nostalgic, esthetic and exalted image of him. As a famous artist who was believed to realistically portray the cowboy, he had, and still has, the power to shape the audience's perceptions.

Owen Wister played a significant role in the creation of the West. As an author he wrote many novels about “the West”, his most well-known work is the novel *The Virginian* which he wrote in 1902, and in 1929 was made into a film. Mythic vision and realistic perception appear in most of his writing about the West (Davis 1987). Wister was a typical “intellectual easterner”, meaning he was highly educated and lived on the East Coast, living what Greenberg would call a “restrained manhood”, which at that time was competing with

“martial manhood” as the form of hegemonic masculinity in America⁷ (Greenberg 2005). After a recreational period in Wyoming, he became so fascinated by the West that he decided to start writing about it. His works appealed to the eastern cultural establishment (Slatta, 2004), and he found a large audience, among them his friend Theodore Roosevelt and Rudyard Kipling. In the *The Virginian* (1968) personal experience and fiction are brilliantly woven together; it is as though the author has experienced everything himself, both due to the way the story is told, and through the detailed descriptions of people and events. He manages to depict the West as being a land of golden opportunities for the moral individual, a hiding place from the corruption, tyranny and discontent in the East. There are several underlying morals in the story, and I perceive the strongest to be the distinction between good and bad, which manifests itself through the distinction between East and West, where East is considered civilized and the West on the contrary is a savage land that provides opportunities to the men who master the wilderness. Wister communicates the cowboy's role in the struggle between civilization and savagery, through his protagonist the Virginian, whose name we never learn, and his struggle with Indians, cattle barons, cattle – thieves, unreliable cowboys, the harsh environment, and of course the love of his life – Molly Stark; all this, while managing to keep his honor in everything he does, by always keeping his word. Wister provides an intellectual portrayal of the cowboy. *The Virginian*, one of the earliest novels on Western life, gives the reader a feeling of authenticity in its descriptions, and it is easy to be persuaded and captured by the romantic cowboy imagery presented in the novel.

William F. Cody, aka Buffalo Bill, was first known by his extraordinary skills as a scout, he had first-hand experience on the Frontier, served in the Civil War, was at one point a rider for the Pony Express, worked as a buffalo hunter, and made a living partly by guiding and scouting with tourists who came west for hunting. He earned his nickname “Buffalo Bill” after he shot thousands of buffalo to provide meat for workers at the Kansas Pacific Railroad. At one point he came in touch with a writer who began to take an interest in his life. After a while Cody became the lead character in several dime novels and scene shows.

⁷ See page 53 for an account on Greenberg's notions of restrained and martial manhood.

Cody began touring with his own Wild West show in 1883, and the show became immensely popular (Slatta 1994). Although the productions were amateurish, it was a great success because of the audience's uncritical enthusiasm for the West (Slotkin 1992). The audience was amazed by the spectacular show, and the claim of authenticity made it even more spectacular. Cody and his show went far to portray a realistic description of Frontier events, using old time cowboys and Indians; he even hired Sitting Bull at one point (Slatta 1994). The audience received an elaborate story with few roots in reality, and they uncritically took it for being real (Slotkin 1992). The audience got the impression that what they saw was realistic, through the authentic costumes of the actors, and the fact that Cody was a "real" person in flesh and blood, who had lived the "real western life", and thus knew the culture from the inside. But Cody himself knew the show was imprecise and incorrect in its portrayal. Nevertheless he saw its effect on the audiences, and he deliberately made use of this to his favor to make money (ibid). This is a good example of Bourdieu's symbolic power; the audience complies with a world view presented to them, but they do not want to know that they are dominated by the Wild West Shows' deliberate use of authenticity as a commercial factor. Cody portrayed the cowboy as an adventurous fighter in the battle between good and bad, between the progress of civilization vs. the savagery of the Frontier (Slatta 1994).

In 1887 the show went overseas to perform in England, and was introduced as "Americas National Entertainment" (ibid.), a realistic performance about American history. This description of the show must have had tremendous influence on the audiences, shaping their comprehension of American Frontier history, and their view and perception of cowboys and Indians.

Western movies

Narratives in western movies probably provide our primary understanding of the cowboy. These movies have been tremendously popular all over the world, communicating a value that clearly is attractive to a huge audience. In the US and Europe western movies were most popular during the 1920s through 1960s, after which time fewer movies were made (Wright 1975). Some films were produced in the 1980s and 1990s, and many reached record high

earnings, like the film *Dances With Wolves* (directed by Kevin Costner, 1990). In the movies, the cowboy was divided into two binary oppositions: the Good and the Bad. The cowboys portrayed in western films and literature, and also in the myths, were often in conflict with somebody or something. If he is on the Bad side, the cowboy is depicted as a gunfighter, train robber or villain. But there are often Good cowboys in the same story, who fight the bad cowboys. At times we can find the same man is portrayed as both good and bad, so the oppositions are not absolute and excluding to each other. Hollywood positions the myths between two extremes: the cowboy as a hero and the cowboy as a careless slob. The Imagined cowboy absorbs several different identities, unlike the pioneers or the Indians, who are most often portrayed as civilized or savage (Tatum 1997).

Western movie directors and actors have contributed to shaping the hegemonic image of the cowboy. John Ford, maybe the most well-known western movie director, showed the struggle between civilization and savagery, between cowboys and Indians, and he portrayed the cowboy as a masculine hero in his earlier films (Slatta 1994). John Wayne, probably the most well-known western movie actor of all times, inhabited many roles of the cowboy, and Wayne has got a larger than life-status. He has become an icon of the cowboy.

The gunfight at OK corral between the Earps and the Clantons in Tombstone is familiar to many of us. A great number of movies that cover this story have been produced, from the 1930's to the 1990s' (Berkaak 1999). Berkaak shows that this feud was triggered by economical and political conflicts, and can be regarded a manifestation of the conflicting interests between the traditional society based on agriculture, and the modernizing processes that took place at this time, with industrial development and capitalization. "In this perspective, the Earp-brothers will appear as 'incorporation gunfighters' (...), and the Clanton-brothers as 'resistance gunfighters', who fights to protect their traditional values and to resist the modernization" (ibid.: 12). The audience and the producers of these movies are divided in their opinion of who is regarded the heroes in these narratives over this story, and several versions flourish in the films.

In both film and literature the stories differ to a degree, but the moral of the stories are based on a basic common understanding. These genres portray a narrative kind of myth, which allow for common notions of what a cowboy is and should be. Wright (1975) uses his

analysis of western movies to validate his notion that there has been a clear pattern of structural change in western movies, in accordance with changes in American society, and he argues that this explains the westerns' popularity. He analyzes 64 films, selecting the films that were among the top grossing films the year they were released, between 1930 and 1972. In so doing, he distinguishes four categories of westerns, based on their narrative and structure, and the categories appear to be related to time. He named the four categories: the Classical plot (films like *Shane* [1953], *The Plainsmen* [1937] and *Cimarron* [1931]), the Vengeance Variation (among them *Stagecoach* [1939], *Apache* [1954]), the Transition Theme (*Broken Arrow*[1950], *High Noon*[1952] and *Johnny Guitar* [1954]) and the Professional Plot (like *The Wild Bunch*[1969], *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*[1970] and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*[1968]. Wright systematically goes through the films and writes down their structural layout, and categorizes them according to these structures. He focuses on the hero's position related to the society, and what he fights for. He concludes his analysis by arguing that the Western is a myth of contemporary American society, and that he has shown how this myth functions as a model for social action. He later analyses the cowboy myth and connects it to modern market ideology: capitalist market individualism (Wright 2001). Again he points to the role the cowboy had in shaping civilized American society, the cowboy stands as a hero of the battle against wilderness and villains in the fight for a democratic civil society. He argues that the corrupt sheriff that often emerges in the western movies symbolizes an oppressive state, and the cowboy saves the community from it. "The historical reality of the West provided fertile soil for the growth and development of myth. The result has been one of the richest narrative traditions of modern times" (Wright 1975: 4).

Western fiction stories similarly paint a certain picture of what a cowboy is like, what he does, and how he is a successful man. "The stories contain white men's vision of national and gendered identity" (Cameron & Pye 1996). The image has great power. There have always been ranch cowboys, ever since the first Factual cowboys occurred. The cattle of America did not disappear with the barbed wire and the railroad; they were fenced in and transported by train, and still needed attendance. Although the process was modernized, many techniques remained as they were. The ranch cowboys always existed alongside the evolution of the Imagined cowboy; they have been on-lookers to the mythification of

themselves. But why did people not react when they saw that the Imagined cowboys from the movies did not resemble the ranch cowboy? One reason could be that they shared many of the cowboy apparel, which we recognize as cowboy symbols. This makes it difficult to distinguish the two. Nick, a ranch-owner, explains: “People live in cities now, they never come out to the ranches, and they never get to see the ranch life, the cowboy life.” The distance between the ranch cowboys and society in general has become more distinct, both physically and socially, the contemporary ranch cowboys live in two distinct spheres: at the ranch and in the local community. Louise also experiences the distance:

“The girls at work [in a supermarket] teases me about my cows and horses, they think I’m weird, having this passion in my life. They call me Annie Oakley, and by the way; I know that if I lived at her time, I would have been her friend. It feels like I have been born a hundred years too late”.

Billy the Kid

Henry McCarty, alias William H. Bonney or Billy the Kid, was born in New York City in 1859 (Tatum, 1997). Very little is known about his life. Not very much except his birth date and name are unchallenged. What is certain is that he is generally considered an outlaw cowboy. However, Tatum shows us how many different versions and stories, with sometimes diverging content, have developed around this boy, and within a year after the Kid’s death, seven dime-novels about Billy the Kid were published (ibid.). Historians are quite certain that Billy the Kid killed more than one man in his short life, but the numbers differ from eight to 21. Some versions suggest the murders and lawlessness were meant to be helpful, à la Robin Hood, and emphasize his sense of righteousness and his sympathy toward other people. He has been compared to the devil, and called an unpredictable and cold-blooded slaughterer. The fact that we know very little about this man allows room for different versions, and for the myths to flourish. Tatum follows the myth-making of this man, and describes the reactions the Kid evoked in the society, from when he was alive to the present day. He looks at the myths and stories in the actual time-frame they emerged, and looked to the society to uncover a reasonable explanation for why the Kid has been portrayed in different ways in different periods. He shares the view of many anthropologists,

e.g. Leach, that myths are mouldable and that people can interpret them to their advantage. It is interesting to see how Tatum shows that the faces of Billy the Kid has changed parallel to the time they occur. He deconstructs and analyzes the representation of the Kid in light of cultural preoccupations: from the 1880s, through the Cold War, the Watergate Scandal and up to the 1980s. His question is not which version is the most precise, but why the versions gained popularity in the society. His explanation is close to my notion of the template cowboy; that he is a figure that can be filled with several versions, according to hegemonic voices in a particular time.

The Kid was a young boy, he was 21 when he was killed in 1881 by Pat Garret (according to several versions of the history about his life). He lived at a time when the cowboy template had started to emerge, and The Kid became very fascinated by the portrayal of the cowboys. Harpers Magazine had written about the heroic cowboy, and The Kid wanted to be just like them. He used them as a model for his own life. He already had a template, a model. Harper's got to know The Kid through his actions, and started to write about him. The Kid in turn read this, and further shaped his life to fit into what was written about him. He took an active part in inventing himself (Tatum 1997).

The mythification process

The voices described here is only a handful of significant persons and voices in the process of inventing the cowboy. We see that Remington, Wister, Roosevelt and Cody portray the cowboys in different ways, but they all contributed to shaping the cowboy template. Western movies make use of this template, and are a significant, if not the most significant, medium in the formation of the Imagined cowboy. But to be a painter, entertainer, movie director, actor, or an American president is not sufficient to make an icon of the man we know as the cowboy. There is reason to believe that underlying structures in the society made the invention of the cowboy possible. If we turn to the history of the US at the time when the first Imagined cowboys emerged, we see that there was a process of national and personal value formation. The United States was going through great changes at that time, and searching for a unifying national identity. The 1840s to the 1870s a time of progress in American society, and individuality and freedom were strongly held values. It is easy to

forget that during the cowboy era, other groups of people were fighting for their rights and freedom. The Ku Klux Klan had their heyday, and Race riots occurred, and the State searched for new territories to explore close to and within its own borders. American society was experiencing upheavals in several areas.

The Land of Endless Opportunities

The word of endless opportunities in the Land of Gold made hundreds of thousand of Europeans leave their homes and start a new life in America. Many of the settlers expanded westward, where land was plenty and everyone were responsible for their own fate and success. Most of the settlers experienced a new life that was at least as hard as the one they left, fighting every day to put bread on the table. The environment was harsh, and the competition over resources was tough. A few were successful in accumulating wealth and creating an economically secure life. The dream of the land of endless opportunities became a myth in itself for most people. The West was associated with expansion and progress, and the men who lived this adventurous life became symbols of the fight for their rights. “The West became an ideal golden world of heroic Anglo-Saxons whose courage, common sense, stoicism, and willingness to fight for what is right affirmed and preserved true American ideals of democratic freedom”(Tatum, 1997: 60). We must not forget that the majority of men in the west did not live such adventurous lives, but the few that did got a lot of attention. “When history is translated into myth, the complexities of social and historical experiences are simplified and compressed into the action of representative individuals or ‘heroes’” (Slotkin 1992:13). The cowboy was a figure that fitted perfectly into the myth that had already started to grow, and the cowboy template started to take shape.

After 1893 the Frontier did not officially exist as a geographical place, but continued to exist as a mythical place (ibid.). The myths continued to develop and were in constant change, but no longer had a physical place to be connected to, and the myths were in a position where they could develop in either direction. Slotkin (ibid.) argues that myths exist for the society they are formed in, as a way of explaining problems that occur with time, and when the problem can no longer be explained by the myth, the mythical explanation will be modified into something that fits. He argues that the myths express values in a narrative manner:

“Myths are stories drawn from a society’s history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society’s ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness-with all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain. Over time, through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, “icons”, “keywords”, or historical clichés. In this form, the myth becomes a basic constituent of linguistic meaning and of the processes of both personal and social “remembering”” (Slotkin, 1992:5).

Expansion was seen as progress, a development from wilderness to domesticity, and had implications for national identity and personal masculinity: “Hegemonic American masculinity (...) was actually made manifest through the process of antebellum territorial expansionism” (Greenberg 2005:17). In her study, Amy Greenberg emphasizes two dominant ways of being man around the 1850s: restrained manhood and martial manhood. Restrained manhood was a form of masculinity where success in business, being morally upright, family, home, and personal faith was important for being successful as a man, while the martial manhood emphasized traits like physical strength, domination, aggression, violence, bravery, and adventurous life. Restrained men were committed to their families and their jobs, while the martial men reified their masculine virtues through qualities like aggression, physical strength and even violence (ibid). Closer to the turn of the century the restrained men period gradually declined, due to several reasons: the economic crisis from 1893 to 1897, increasing immigration, violent revolts from workers, among them the Haymarket massacre in 1884 and the Pullman strike in 1894, and martial masculinity gained popularity among the middle class (ibid.). This popularity of the martial manhood happened, as we can see, just a few years before the first fiction stories about the cowboy emerged. The cowboy template made the cowboy a perfect figure of martial manhood, and this could be the reason why he became so popular in fiction at that time.

The Imagined is what Hobsbawm would call an invented tradition, which include: “(...) both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those merging in a less traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps-and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (Hobsbawm 1992:1). The West and its history has been fertile ground for stories and interpretations. With the historical background it is easier to see the shift from being a Factual cowboy to becoming a cowboy template, which

allowed the Imagined cowboy to evolve. The trail drivers, the rustlers, the frontiersmen, and the open range cowboys were identified by a new face in western literature and films: the face of the Imagined cowboy.

Slotkin shows that the Frontier went through a similar process:

“The Frontier had always been seen through a distorting-lens of mythic illusion; but until 1893[the official closing of the Frontier] it had also been identified with particular geographical regions, actual places capable of generating new and surprising information as a corrective to mythic presupposition (...) But after the 1893 regional realities no longer affected the development of the mythology identified with “the West”. For most Americans (...) the West became a landscape known through, and completely identified with, the fictions created about it” (Slotkin 1992:61).

Considering this I would say that the time and place for the cowboy era is significant in the myth making process, I would go so far as to argue that it is in fact one important necessity for the mythification process. The era was used by novelists and the film industry to create stories that they knew would appeal to the audience, exactly because of the significance the notions of masculinity, individuality and freedom had already started to form in people’s minds.

The cowboy is the primary American masculine symbol (Carlson 2000a). He is distinctively masculine, and through his actions demonstrates his successful masculinity, and thus the myth becomes a tool for the audience to learn how to be manly in a cowboyish manner, which is in many circles regarded a hegemonic masculinity⁸ (Connell 2005). I will turn this notion around and propose that this Imagined cowboy can be regarded as a product of the construction of masculinity in accordance with American imperialism in the twentieth century, as both Slotkin (1992) and Horrocks (1995) implies. Again, there is a dynamic relation between the template, the narratives and practice. The Imagined cowboy is a myth that most people have come to consider the reality, and serves as a model for individual masculinity, or as a construct of masculine ideas in line with historically based morals of masculinity in the American society.

⁸ See chapter X for a discussion on hegemonic masculinity.

The story behind

A deconstruction of the cowboy seeks to reveal the underlying interests of the hegemonic voices that formed the image of him, a search for political processes that have produced social consequences (Jørgensen & Phillips 2005). Derrida argues that binary structures are not just contradictions, but structures of a hierarchy of values (Dahlerup 2002). One part will always be inferior to the other, whether it is cold-warm, man-female, nature-culture, cowboy-Indians, or East-West, and the inferior will always be explained on the basis of the other. These contradictions can only be maintained through techniques of illusion (ibid.). These illusions are what a deconstruction seeks to reveal. I argue that the reason why the Imagined cowboy has become the hegemonic cowboy is that he is a product of a certain interest in society. The Imagined cowboys' most significant trait is the individuality he inhabits, along with his rationalism and belief in progress. Individuality, progress and rationality, are also nation-building interests. The faces of the Imagined cowboy have changed throughout time, parallel with currents in the society. Wright (1975) demonstrates that the individualism that were typical for the Classical Plot, which started to disappear in the 1950s, reflects a hero that, through his strength, protects the unstable and weak society and individual against wrongs. The hero in the Vengeance Variation, which replaced the Classical Plot, also gives his support to the society, but the society has become stronger, and has started to restrict rather than encourage the individual. The Vengeance Variation almost disappeared after the 1950s, and was taken over by the Transition Theme. The narratives in the Transition Themes show a shift from the Classical Plot and the Vengeance Variation to the Professional Plot, which became popular at the end of the 50s, and into the 60s and 70s. In the Transition Theme the hero cannot reconcile his own interests and values to those of society, and he fights for individual values like courage, honor, loyalty and individuality, and not for social values, which have become "conformity, prejudice, cowardice and intolerance" (ibid:165). Finally, in the Professional Plot, the hero fights for money, they are professional fighters, and the reason for fighting varies from selfishness to noble intentions, and they are no longer defending social values, but for the values behind the fight, which Wright argues are capitalist market individualism (Wright 2001). Wright shows that the narratives in the western movies change in correlation with society, and this underlines my notion that the template is dynamic.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Imagined cowboy is the hegemonic notion of what a cowboy is or is supposed to be, and what the old time cowboys were. This is the commercialized cowboy communicated and distributed through genre like western movies and literature. The Imagined cowboy has several faces, but they all indicate a certain way to be a cowboy: rugged, tough, independent, free, mysterious. This image has been extended by Hollywood and writers, and also by insiders to the tradition themselves. This could not have been done without a figure that was open to interpretation. To be open to such interpretation, the image has to be detached from history, which I have argued the template is. The interests behind the formation of the Imagined cowboy are many and varied. Hollywood and writers had economic interests, but they needed an image they knew would appeal to society. The Imagined cowboy did this, through his independence, masculinity, mobility and rationality. These were issues that were important in the formation of American identity.



Riding tall in the saddle. Photo: L. C. Hellum

Chapter VI: The Performed Cowboy

What I have called the Performed cowboy is any person who claims a cowboy identity. This includes everything from wanna-be cowboys and rodeo cowboys to working ranch cowboys and “cowboys at heart”. There are numerous versions of Performed cowboys, about as many versions as there are persons who call themselves cowboys. Identification is not constant; a man may present himself as a cowboy in one social context, while in other settings he may not. I experienced that former ranch cowboys, who now run their own ranch or work in an office, may also call themselves cowboys, either explicitly, or by saying that they are “cowboys at heart”. This suggests that being a cowboy is not necessarily dependent on visible characteristics or occupation, but also a state of mind. This is in line with what Frank describes in the introductory citation to chapter III.

Bill, who used to work full time as a cowboy for several years, now works in accounting in one of the major cities in Texas, explained the cowboy identity:

C: “Do you still call yourself a cowboy, even if it is more than 20 years since you worked as one full time?”

Bill: ”Yeah. I would, because I enjoy doing it (cowboy work). The work ethic, you still have it with you. I like to get things done and find out how to do things and such. This fall I hadn’t been on a horse for five years, and I’ve put on 60 pounds and my feet hurt because I haven’t wore my boots for a long time, and when I put my boots in the stirrup, the bridge ripped, and the other cowboys laughed at me. But you know, again, there is something about that freedom you get when you put a foot in a stirrup, that you never get nowhere else. And it’s like you...you...just never left it, you know. It’s right there. You get that horse underneath you and...I just want to be there. I’d go and do it again in a minute, you know. To be a cowboy is more of an attitude than a way of life, the way you look at things whether you are working a cow or punching a computer key. There is something there, that you’re gonna take with you”.

Bill still wants to call himself a cowboy, but he can't find support for this in his daily life. He does not work as a cowboy anymore; it's been five years since the last time he rode a horse. Despite this, he feels like a cowboy. He says he has something inside him that he got from being a cowboy, which he brings with him. His practical cowboy skills may have declined due to little practice, but his cowboy morality is still habituated. For Bill, this is sufficient for identifying himself as a cowboy. People that don't know Bill would not regard Bill a cowboy, and Bill knows that. But that doesn't seem to be important to him; it is his inner feeling that matters to him. Cowboy identity is clearly a complex matter.

Authenticity

"Anybody could dress like a cowboy. Sometimes I can tell if they are real cowboys or not. They dress up pretty good, in good disguise! [laughing] You can tell, especially from Europe...some of those cowboys, we'll call them drug-store cowboys or wannabe cowboys, you can tell. Some of them live in Texas, but never rode a horse, but they know the style. They want to be a cowboy, it's a vision, a fantasy"(Nick).

Authenticity seems to be important to the outsiders when defining a cowboy. Nick's statement suggests that outsiders and wannabes believe they can put on cowboy garments and claim to be a cowboy. Authenticity is debated in anthropology. One problem is to agreeing who can decide whether something is authentic or not, a problem reflected in Bourdieu's discussion on power to influence a discourse. Another problem lies in deciding when a factor is genuine or invented (Hobsbawm 1992), and where the authenticity label is used on things that are considered genuine. This is problematic, because every aspect of a social culture is, in essence, invented. When does a continuation and elaboration of a tradition cross the line into invention? I argue, following Hobsbawm (ibid.) that tradition by definition involves change. For a tradition to be viable, it has to be flexible to the extent that it can keep up with the movements in the culture, but still be considered the same practice, it is a historical process (Toren 1988). To decide whether something is authentic or not by considering whether a tradition is genuine or invented, becomes a dangerous task, and there is a risk of leading a tradition to extinction by freezing it.

Authenticity concerns whether a thing is what it says it is, or not. If a painting is said to be a copy of a Van Gough, it is authentic in its presentation; it was never claimed that it was a painting by Van Gough. But if it on the other hand was a picture by Van Gough, but for some reason said to be a copy, it would not be authentic, because it is not what it says it is. Even if it is a painting by the master himself.

This implies that a tradition could be considered authentic, but so could a tradition that claims to be invented. I use this meaning in relation to the cowboys, this means that if a man claims to be a cowboy, and is identified by others as one, he is an authentic cowboy. If a man that is not identified as a cowboy claims to be a cowboy, he is not an authentic cowboy. But on the other hand – if he claims to be a wannabe-cowboy, he is an authentic wannabe-cowboy. The question if he is an authentic ranch cowboy would not be relevant, because he never claimed to be one, and thus can not be regarded authentic or not in this respect.

To all the cowboys and ranchers I spoke with, work and practices were what they used to judge a good cowboy. To them, it seems that the decisive factor is that you know what you are doing and that your work ethic is good. Ringo, full time cowboy, and also foreman at X7 Ranch, explained:

”Common sense. And...and...to read your cow. You’ve got to read your cow before she does it. And there are a lot of people that can’t read a cow. You gotta be able to outthink that cow. And you’ve gotta be able to maneuver your horse up to that cow. A cow may tell you pretty well what she is fix’n to do if you pay her attention; she might throw her head up in the air or show that she’s nervous. Just ridin’, pay’n attention and have common sense. And a lot of people doesn’t realize that that’s what you’ve gotta have. You learn that with time. You can’t just pick up from one day to the next,’ takes a lot of time. I’ve noticed that the last ten years, there are not as many cowboys or men that wanna work as a cowboy. The average age is getting older.

We've had some boys here that really would like to be a cowboy, and I tell them: 'ok, give me a call, and we'll set you up'. And you know, I'd give them a chance. The opportunity. One of the best hands I've ever known is 57 years old. I've got some younger cowboys that I have used before, but there are a lot of these young people that wanna be a cowboy, but only if the weather's good. When the sun shines and it's warm. If you don't wanna do it unless the weather's good, you might as well not bother. This is a 24 hour job, 365 days a year, 7 days a week. Things happen, and you have to be ready to go off even if it is in the middle of the night. I love it; I've got the biggest office in the world!"

Wanted - dead or alive

The question of what happened to the American cowboy seems to concern people. His image tells of a man of a different breed, a breed that must nostalgically be conserved, as if history might be lost if he died out. I argue that the premise behind such a conclusion is wrong, and I find support for this in my empirical data. One condition I would like to problematize is the *orientalization* of the cowboy, according to Said's use of the term (Said 1979).

Orientalization points to the process of making a distinction between "us" and "them", and is tied to Edward Said's analysis of the relation the West⁹ has to the East, based on imperialism. He criticizes the West's historical, cultural and political perceptions of the East, and argues that this perception has influenced the East's possibility to present an accurate picture of itself, but instead has an image that is an obstacle when it comes to getting a true understanding of the area, which is characteristically diverse, and which the West's image ignores to a large extent. I argue that the cowboys have been orientalized by being regarded as something different, a breed of their own. I often got comments like "cowboys, huh?"

⁹ Throughout this paper I will use the term the West as referring to the symbolical and geographical area connected to cowboy territory, the Frontier and the westward expansion in the 1900th century in the USA. Geographically this refers to the states of Arizona, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas and parts of California (Tompkins, 1992). Said uses the term the West to refer to the common meaning that geographically and socially/symbolically embraces the developed and industrialized countries, most often associated with Western Europe and the USA.

They're something else, aren't they? Have you found any yet?" from other American outsiders to the tradition that I met during my fieldwork, and comments like these enforce my presumption that the cowboy has been orientalized. The fact that scholars and writers set out to reveal the "true" cowboy also shows signs of this. The cowboys are imaged as something else, something special, and thus an us-them distinction is established and maintained. This in turn will contribute to a perseverance of the image of the cowboy, and change in image is further complicatedly done. This does not do justice to the modern cowboy, or to the consumers of the cowboy notion. As soon as we rid ourselves of the us-them distinction, we can open up for a more nuanced image of the cowboy, where there also will be room for change.

A dying breed

Vicky, a professor who grew up at a ranch, and later married a rancher, told me:

"There is probably more cowboys now than it ever has been, the whole West, you know, all this open country is taken care of by somebody, and...uh...because of the way, you know, they manage the cattle tighter now than they did, there is more of them because it takes more to keep all the water up, it takes more to keep all the fences up...uh...so there is more cowboys now than it used to be when there was just open range, and you let them die when the water...went down...So they're not a dying breed, you know, there is lots (...)"

It seems like there is a prevalent disagreement among my informants about whether the cowboy is downsizing in numbers and viability in American society today. None of them look at the ranch cowboy as threatened by extinction, but they seem concerned about some of the traditions being diluted, and that the "good 'ol cowboy" will disappear. A few regard the modernization exclusively as a longed-for improvement and adjustment to modernity, and a few show complete disapproval of this. But the majority of my informants express ambivalence; they embrace some of the improvements, while they disapprove of others, and

ultimately view this as a necessary, but not unconditionally wanted fact. Joe, a rancher in his sixties, operator of a cattle-and hunting ranch, regards the matter in this way:

J: "There are not many real cowboys left these days, maybe you can find some in Nevada and Arizona or Montana"

C: "Well...?"

J: "You've got many different kinds of cowboys, but not many of the real kind left"

C: "What do you mean by "real kind"?"

J: "Well, it's hard to say, it is a man that takes off his hat when entering a room. That old-time cowboys....there is a huge difference between cowboys today and the traditional cowboys. The cowboy has changed. Now they use helicopters for round-ups, it's so much easier, and so much quicker, more comfortable"

C: "But I guess somebody still possess the knowledge of the cowboy?"

J: "Yes! We still possess that knowledge! But it will soon be gone"

Benny, who runs the family ranch together with his brothers, noticed a difference when it comes to cowboys. He faces problems getting hold of cowboys to work for him, because he wants cowboys with their "back-bone" still intact:

"The cowboys are a dying breed, that's for sure. The values, the love of the land, it's just...eh....you didn't do it for money; you did it because you loved it. And it has evolved a lot, which has everything. I mean, I don't believe in evolution and that [laughing], but everything changes. It's harder and harder for a rancher to find people to work for you that actually were raised handling cattle. There's an art to it, as there is to everything else, there's an extreme art

to it. (...) The old-time cowboys taught me a lot. People are different now. Kids believe they know everything....but riding a bull and throwing a rope in an arena is not cowboying in the sense of ranching.

They come here and they know it all already, they get mad if you try to tell them how you want it done, and they leave. I'm still learning myself. The backbone is not in the people anymore”

These statements show me that my informants disagree about several points, and the most significant is the definition of a cowboy. Even the insiders to the tradition could not give me a unified answer for what a cowboy is. Tasha, Joe and Benny fill the cowboy template with different content, and they have their own reasons for doing that. Tasha is not a cowboy, and for her, it is sufficient that the occupational aspect is fulfilled, for a person to be allowed to call himself a cowboy. Benny and Joe seem to place an additional aspect to the cowboy identity – a psychological aspect. Benny and Joe know that as long as there is a demand for beef, there will be a demand for people to look after them. But that alone does not make someone a cowboy to them. Benny is still calling himself a cowboy, even if he is also the owner of the ranch he works at, and Joe does not call himself a cowboy, but a rancher, and “cowboy at heart”. Benny and Joe want to relate to the cowboy identity, and emphasize the moral aspect.

Don't Fence me in!

There is no doubt that the cowboy and ranching tradition has experienced several adjustments in modern times. I discussed modernization in ranching with Frank:

F: “I ran the ranch since 1966”

C: “Have you seen a lot of changes?”

F: “Lots of changes. Lots of changes”

C: “Like what?”

F: Oh, the taxation, as far as the business aspect of it. Government regulations and such, and that have been a major obstacle. The land tax as well as the income tax. As one of the old-timer once said to me: 'This ain't no fun anymore'. And of course I remember when it still was fun. Oh, it's got where it ain't all that fun. And as one of these other cowboys told me: 'they're ain't making no more cowboys anymore'. This is the major problem; in finding qualified help and get the job done. (...) Well, now they have to see TV and that, and I don't blame them, that's just a part of today's life. Life has just changed so much over the last hundred years. That they're just ain't making no more cowboys.. This is the major problem; in finding qualified help and get the job done"

C: "Why do you think it is like that? Hard to find cowboys?"

F: "It's...well...to be a computer-type is just so much more alluring to somebody. Instead of being a cowboy. Of course, when I used to be a cowboy...Man! Then we were out in the country from morning til night, then all alone too. And we just didn't...cowboys really just didn't have all of the glorious things of life, and now, with TV and all of the technic jobs, all of the...notorities of money...you just...you just...the normal child, the normal boy child just doesn't look favorably of doing something that doesn't pay big dollars, and then...He's got to be somebody that loves solitude and loves to be out by himself or the guys you work with...eh...in an arena like that, and just...still even though cowboying is not what it used to be, they still...now they use to cowboy from morning til night, and when that comes, boys tend to head for town, and it's just the...the way of the cowboy has just changed so greatly, you know. On the big ranches, the big big ranches, which there aren't that many left – on the big ranches the cowboys would take off when working season started, and be working claves and such. Then they would take off and they wouldn't see other people. Just be alone by themselves. And they would have their horse and bed-roll and have just few personal items, and they would

just be by themselves. Well, now they have to see the TV and that, and I don't blame them, that's just a part of today's life. Life has just changed so much over the last hundred years. That they ain't making no more cowboys. And it's going to be a problem".

C: "So you believe that is a threat to the ranching business?"

F: "I think it is, I think...because the small towns are the places the cowboys still come from, but you see the declining populations of small towns. Because when children in those small towns grow up, they don't stay in those small towns anymore. They go to Houston, they go to San Antonio. They go to places where money is, and where cowboying is not. It is just not that much of an attraction anymore. In one time it was fun, but the fun just got out of it now...people don't know it like I did forty years ago"

C: "And you know what it used to be"

F: "Yes. And it has just changed drastically. As have life over the past 40-50 years. The old cowboys didn't care about the modern conveniences so much, because he was just used to the way he lived. Out in the country. (...) Fewer cowboys are needed now than when mobility was not as easy, whereas now they've got big trucks. We used to move the cattle from horseback or feed the cattle from wagons pulled by a team of horses. And now, with pick-up trucks raise the time compared to what it used to take to ride a horse to the other end of the pasture. In my lifetime we started using pick-ups, but I can still remember when we would ride to the other end of the ranch. The mobility have just become such that the big vastness of the ranches isn't near as big when you can use a pick-up. It's getting smaller, just as the world"

C: "Do you appreciate the modernity?"

F: "Yeah. I've gotten used to it"

C: "Or do you wish it was like it was in the old days?"

F: “Well, we talk about the good ‘ol days, but then, when we really get down to it, we don’t want to go back to the good ‘ol days, because the good ‘ol days weren’t as near as easy as they are now. As a fantasy we think it would’ve been great, but if it really came down to it ...no, we wouldn’t go back. Not for anything. Without all of the modern equipment we have now, it wasn’t as near as easy as it is now”.

Frank sees a problem in that “they’re just ain’t making no more cowboys”. The cowboy that fits into his conception of what a cowboy is, is a dying breed. The cowboy that stays out for months in a time, and appreciates solitude and being out in the open. The modernization in society has made the cowboy occupation less attractive, and other things are so much more attractive. He says he understand the young boys today; being a cowboy is not what it used to be. He goes as far as to call this trend a threat to the ranching business. But despite this, he would not go back in time, to the good ol’ days. He says the modernization is not all that bad; it has made it easier for the ranching business in many ways. I got the impression that he appreciates the modernization in ranching business, but that he misses the old-time cowboys. But the cowboys have modernized in line with the ranching and the rest of the society. He does not romanticise the old cowboy life, but his nostalgia is directed toward the old-time cowboys, admiring their skills and morals.

All my ranching informants have complied with some modernizing processes, some more than others, but at the same time they appreciate some of the traditional ways of dealing with the challenge of surviving in the cattle business. They explain this modernizing trend and the innovations as a way of surviving in a tough business, and additional sources of income, like hunting and leasing out land, are explained in the same way. Christopher, the owner and operator of X7 Ranch, has implemented modern technology in the daily running of his ranch:

“We’re computerized. It helps keeping track on when we sell or when we doctor the calves and such. We have cross-fenced our pastures, and we rotate the cattle every 60 days to try to keep the pastures fresh. The computer tells us when to rotate. But Ringo, my cowboy, also rides horseback through the pastures, to keep an eye on the land”

When I first met Nick, we had an appointment for an interview. He is about 45 years old, and he is the ranch boss on a large cattle operation I have called High Ranch. I asked him how the ranchers had adjusted to modern times:

N: "By all this technology you can...it helps you a lot. That's how I have adjusted to...There has been some things that were better back in the past, but there are things that are better now than they were in the past. Eh...transportation, you know, communication has gotten so much better, like anywhere else"

C: "So what is worse now than in the past?"

N: "Well, the money. Money is...not now as much as it used to be, a dollar is not worth as much now as it used to be a long time ago. So it takes more dollars to do things now. That's everywhere I guess. Cattle prizes have gotten a little better than the last 100 years...80 years. Now what you get per head is better. Eh...along with modern conveniences there's a lot of...there's more people, more houses than it used to be. It used to be more solitude, quieter. Now there are so many telephone poles, electric poles...eh...you know. You used to look across the pasture and not see all the buildings and all that...improvements...or something, you know. That is something that was better then than it is now. Medicine! Medicine is a lot better now than it used to be"

C: "And I guess it is easier to take care of the animals when they get sick?"

N: "That's right. Usually when we had a drought or they got sick, they just died. And the droughts would kill a lot of them. Now we have a lot better transportation movement of cattle, we can get them out of here and sell them before they get too thin or we have too many weaklings. A long time ago they would not move that fast. The vet is much better than it used to be. It's...you know...a lot of people say they would like to live back then...but, you know...I guess it is a kind of romantic thing"

Modernization has made the cattle business more efficient, fences are built to keep the cattle in and keep out the *rustlers* (cattle thieves) and predators. The cattle are moved by trucks instead of men on horses when going to the market or moved for other reasons over larger distances. Thus fewer men are demanded per cow. Extensive genetic breeding programs and artificial insemination¹⁰ have made the cattle more suited for modern ranching; they are often fed additional protein in the winters to enhance weight gain, veterinary medicine like vaccination has improved to protect the animals from otherwise deadly diseases¹¹, and equipment used for handling cattle has modernized. Both Joe and Christopher use video sales when selling cattle. The cattle they want to sell are videotaped and distributed on television throughout the country. In that way the buyers do not have to come to the ranch to consider the animals; the deal is done by telephone or email. This is considerably more convenient, regarding the enormous distances and remote location of many of the ranches in Texas. There is an extensive use of cars, 4-wheelers and even helicopters in the daily routines at the ranch, to check on the animals. This is economical when it comes to time, a man in a car or a helicopter can cover a much larger area in one day, than a man on a horse.

Every informant agreed that there are certain things that still have to be done the traditional way, and will always need to, because this way has proven to be the most efficient when it comes to time and money. But what would take five or six men to do a hundred years ago, now requires only one man, as Dan, CEO at a large ranch, explained to me:

“No machines have been invented to do all the things a good cowboy on a good horse can do, and it never will. Like when we two weeks ago had 1500 yearlings we wanted to select, we wanted to take the poor ones out before we begin to breed them. So, one way to do it is to round’em all up, take, you know, 1500 heifers into a set of corrals and run’em down the alley and pick’em out and it’ll take two or three days to do it, but what we did is there was four of us, you go out in the pasture and there is 400 of the heifers, well,

¹⁰ Few of my informants practice this, most use natural impregnation by letting bulls run with the heifers and cows.

¹¹ This is an ongoing process, old diseases disappear, new ones appear, and cattle still suffer and die from several diseases.

you throw'em up in a corner somewhere, they were standing there very peaceably, you know, and you'd go in on your cutting horse¹² and take the ones that you didn't like and cut'em out. And it would take about...oh...three or four hours. And then you'd take those...50 that you didn't want and take them to the pen so you didn't have to pen everything and chase them. So there is a practical aspect to it that goes beyond the romantic...or the....fun or the...the...tradition or what you want to say, it's just practically...more efficient I think. Easier on the cattle, the horses, the men, you know, I think it's just the...an easier way to do things”.

Invention of cowboy tradition

Like all other identities, the Performed cowboy is a cultural construct; he is influenced by the Imagined cowboy as well as the Factual cowboy. The Performed cowboys cannot be invented in themselves; they are individuals who claim a certain identity. What can be invented are the practices they perform, the notions about cowboy identity and masculinity, and the symbolic meanings of their universe. I will repeat what Hobsbawm defined as an invented tradition:

“‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (...) when possible (...) with a suitable historical past” (1992:1).

Clearly many of the practices of the Performed cowboys are invented, especially when it comes to the wannabe cowboys, who do not have a practical basis for using cowboy apparel.

I spoke with Ringo about changes and traditions in the cowboy life:

C: “You have been a cowboy for quite some time, have you seen any changes in the way of being a cowboy?”

¹² Cutting horse is a horse trained to “cut” out one animal from the group of cattle.

Ringo: “Yeah, there is a lot of stuff that is not what it was like 15, 20, 30 years ago. You’ve got more feed trucks¹³ in doing your cow work, and...now they’re big into the deer hunting. But that is making money, and I can’t blame them for that. Nowadays it doesn’t take as many hands, cowboys, to gather cattle or to move cattle as it used to ten years ago, because of the feed trucks. I’m not complaining about the feed trucks or anything, they’re good to have, but you also got to have the men, because you don’t want to have all you cattle left over to the feed truck you know. I can ride across the pasture on my horse and look at my grasses along the road. You can’t do everything out of that feed truck that you can do on horseback. You can’t drive everywhere it needs to be. But if you have your cattle broke to the truck, you can pretty much round’em up all by yourself. The feed truck is good. I hate it, I hate to see changes like that, but it’s coming”

C: “Why don’t you like the changes?”

Ringo: “Well, I guess because I’ve got it in my blood. I mean...There is no better feeling than having a horse between your legs and you rid out there and do what you need to do. I’ve ridden a lot of horses that have run me off, bucked me off, or someone will just flip over and fall, and you know, them I don’t keep very long. There is nothing better than ride a good horse and do your work. As long as you’ve got cattle, you’ve gotta have cowboys. But time is changing, and so are people”

Christopher, Ringo’s boss, modernized several aspects of the ranch, but went back to the old way of *working* the calves (burnmark it, cut its ears, castrate, give vaccination, dehorn, and other things if necessary), by the *drag to the fire-technique*(to use a lasso to catch the animals that are going to be worked upon, requiring good riders and ropers, and good horses). He explained the shift by being more attractive to the cowboys:

¹³ In the winter the cattle are given extra protein, and this is often done from a pick-up with an electric feeder. The driver activates a siren at the same time as he activates the feeder, and the cattle will learn that this siren means food. They react to the siren, and after a few repetitions their behaviour is conditioned. They will run to the car by the sound of the siren, even if there is no food provided.

“We’ll hire day-workers when necessary, at round-ups and such. They come out and are being paid by the day, and not very much, considering what they are doing. We always try to feed them well and take care of’em. Do all the things that make’em wanna come out. A couple of weeks ago we were branding our calves, and we had a chuck wagon¹⁴ come out here for a couple of days. It seems to be a big hit!”

Linda, the only female rancher I met during my stay, told me that the cowboys working for her begged her to do the round-ups in the old-fashioned way, by roping the calf and drag it to the fire. “They love to throw a rope, and I have decided to let them have their way. It is actually very efficient when we have two ropers and a bunch of men that burnmark and work the calves”.

I often heard from several informants that this way of working cattle was more attractive to the cowboys than the modern ways, meaning they will use a few horses and men to gather the cattle, but also cars, 4-wheelers, and even helicopters, and a *working table* is used to keep the calf still when working on it. The calf that is going to be worked upon is lead into a chute that leads to a trap, when the calf is into the trap the steel bars presses lightly around the calf’s body and keeping it still and tight, and making it easy for the cowboy to work on it.

This traditional way of working the cattle requires great skills, and implies a lot of training. For a ranch cowboy, this is an opportunity to show that he masters the traditional way, and in this way strengthen his identity as a good ranch cowboy. This traditional way of working the cattle involves horseback riding, roping and teamwork, all being arenas where good cowboy work can be performed. The best ropers are designated for the roping work, and nobody asks questions or complains about that. This rationalism is a part of the cowboy identity; get the work done, in the best way. I believe rationality and loyalty is what Bill describes when saying:

¹⁴ Originally invented by Charles Goodnight, this was a wagon pulled by horses, and functioned as a kitchen when the cowboys were staying away from the ranch, operated by the cook (Slatta 1994). It is seldom used anymore, but some ranches still employ a modernized version of the chuck wagon, now pulled by cars.

“If you had a day off and were going to town or anything, but you spotted a cow that needed help, or a fence that was tore down, then you stopped and did what you needed to do. And you didn’t go on with what other business you had until that was fixed. Until the fence was up or the cow had got a vet looking at her. It was pretty much unspoken”

The necessity of habituation

We see that it is difficult to define a cowboy. Any identification is not simple, it does not take place along a singular axis; a man does not have only one identity. We are multi-faceted and relational, and so is our identity. Surely the cowboy imagery has created a picture of the cowboy as a total definition, which may disrupt the definition of cowboys. Many of the references of identification brought forth by the cowboy imagery are beneficial for any man who considers himself a cowboy. He can make use of some of the symbols to reinforce the impression of being a cowboy, he can wear a large-brimmed hat and shining jingling spurs, and buy himself a horse and learn to ride. The man who is a ranch cowboy can also use these symbols to communicate an identity, in fact, if he did not, he would not cease to be a cowboy, but other peoples’ identification of him as a cowboy would be weakened. The general sentiments of what a cowboy is like have become hegemonic, and thus very powerful. Here we see the consequences of the cowboy discourse discussed above. Bourdieu argues that economic capital can be transmitted into symbolic capital to a certain extent (Bourdieu 1995); a man can buy himself a fine saddle and a nice hat (economic capital) in his effort to enhance his identity as a cowboy (symbolic capital). He utilizes the cowboy template like a shell that he can pull over himself, to claim a cowboy identity. He might succeed to a certain degree, but he will need more than symbolic capital to gain acceptance for identifying himself as a cowboy.

Some would identify a cowboy by clothing and style, implying that a man is a cowboy by the way he looks. A man can dress like a cowboy without ever touching a cow or a horse, and an untrained eye would probably believe he is working with cows, just by the way he looks. But my informant Joe told me that he “can tell the real ones from the wannabes by looking at their hats.” I asked him what in particular about the hat, but he could not answer

that question, he “just knew”. Other cowboys told me the same thing. I argue that to succeed in being defined as a cowboy, the traits, practices and behavior have to be habituated, or look like they are. He has to show a habituated way of wearing his hat or conduct himself. Bourdieu proposed the idea of habitus, to describe a deep, innate and socialized disposition for acting in a certain way, that is not totally automatic (ritual) or totally calculated (goal-oriented) (Prieur 2005). Bourdieu describes habitus in his own words as an, “enduring sets of dispositions, that are predisposed to function as structuring structures, that means, as principals that produce and structure practices and representations” (Bourdieu 2005, my translation). Our habituses are self-moving; we do not think about them as long as we do not meet any resistance or reactions to them. The habitus becomes an unreflected habit. A habituated action is unreflected until we meet reactions, and we become aware of our habitus, and eventually alter or abort our usual way of action. We suddenly start to reflect over *doxa*, the unreflected, the taken-for-granted, which is then brought to consciousness, and we will try to find new and better ways of doing things (Berkaak 2002), that after a while will probably become habituated too. A cowboys’ actions have to be habituated or look like they are so, to attain credibility. To be a habituated cowboy implies that you have to learn by practicing. Ringo told me how he passed on knowledge to his son:

“I tell my son: ‘I can’t tell you, you’ve gotta watch me doing it, and then you try to do it. You may not do it like I do it, but find you’re way to do it your way. As long as it serves the same purpose. You just learn as you go’.”

If his actions are not habituated they would communicate to the surroundings that he might be a novice in his field – a trainee. To be a novice in practicing an identity will raise doubt about his authenticity: is he really a cowboy?

Conclusion

In these chapters I have deconstructed the cowboy to show the origin of the cowboy myth, and how this myth evolved into such a pervasive image. This image will eventually affect the Performed cowboys, but a man who wants to be a cowboy cannot be accepted as an authentic cowboy just by claiming to be so. He has to be involved in the cattle business in

one way or another, but he also has to take the repertoire of the cowboy template into consideration, and integrate them to a certain extent. I have shown that there is a third element he has to consider, which I argue is the most significant. It is not enough to show up at a round-up wearing all the right apparel and riding a horse and be proficient at driving a herd, he must also show that this is not something he wants or tries to be, but really is. My research proposes that to call yourself a cowboy, you may utilize the cowboy template like a shell you put on, with its repertoire. But to be acknowledged by the insiders to the tradition as being a cowboy, it must become innate in the person, something that still exists when the external traits or the occupational factor is gone. Changes due to modernization in the cowboy tradition can be a challenge, and may affect the identification of the cowboys.

Chapter VII. The Lonesome Rider: Cowboy myths in the society

“The term cowboy has stood for INDEPENDENCE, HONESTY and FREEDOM for more than a hundred years, It brings to mind a campfire on a starry night, riding the range with the wind in your face or conquering a ton of bucking bull for an eight-second ride” (Introducing words in *The Way for Cowboys*, NIV 2000, original emphasis).

This quotation indicates what I have repeatedly stressed in this thesis; that such romanticized images of the cowboy have come to stand as a common image of the cowboy, like he used to be, and still lingers on as an image of how he is supposed to be today. The imaginary and nostalgic physical and mythical landscape of cowboys has been preserved by a tradition of different forces – film producers, artists, painters, western-literature writers, historians to mention a few, and is also extensively used in commercial advertisement and political propaganda. The landscape of desolate semi-desert, wide open spaces, portrayed as the backyard of the lawless, and where every man has to fight for himself, attaches to the cowboy imagery.

I am primarily focused on how the imagery influences the contemporary cowboy and his interpreters. My ongoing discussion of the cowboy myths shows a complex pattern of the imagery, where the media of the myths are diverse, even all-consuming, and the grasping of a single presentation is impossible. This imagery, as I have argued, has the content of the Imagined cowboy. In this chapter I will take a closer look at the cowboy myths, their manifestations, and their eventual function in the society.

Cowboy imageries

The cowboy myths/imageries can be found in a complex mixture of many notions, stories, legends and tall tales, poetry, songs and art, movies and literature, fact and fiction. The myths move between all these notions, influencing and intermingling with each other, and maintain a mythic cowboy discourse. Some of the narratives are clearly fictional and do not pretend to be anything else, while others claim to be factual and rooted in history, but most are located somewhere in between these two extremes.

There is not one single myth about cowboys. There are millions of versions, variants and sources, but the main consequence is that they give us a stereotype of cowboys in general, an archetypal cowboy. The Imagined cowboy. Recently, writers, like Sharman (1993) and Brooks (1993), have tried to paint another picture of contemporary cowboys, a picture that may be more accurate, but their message is not reaching through to the masses, they are drowned in the myriad of voices of the leading discourse. The image of the cowboy does not seem to change despite such efforts. Others claim to give a representative picture of the contemporary cowboys, but fall into the traps of the discourse, like Arnold (2001).

According to Brooks, many believe that popular history has contributed to creating myths about cowboys, and also that some cowboys have deliberately created the myths as well (Brooks 1993), as I also demonstrated through presenting the voices in a previous chapter. Even if people are aware that parts of the image may not be exactly right, it seems that this is less important.

Myth or reality?

”There are a lot of myths about the cowboy, but some of it is true, you know...It can still be a lot like what it was. You get up every morning, and there is something to be done 24 hours a day some days. But you want to do it, you want to see it done. You take pride in what you are doing. You need to see what you have been trying to do get accomplished. And even if you can’t go through, you know you did the best you can. Whether you make it or not depends a lot of the weather. And you do what you can. The most important you want is to be a good worker, have good work ethic. Just get up every morning and do what you have to do. And you want to do it. Do a good job for the ranch. You may work for a ranch, but when they drop you off in the pasture, you are pretty much your own boss out there. It’s up to you and your horse to get the job done. You get to be around people, and I’m a person that likes to know how other people managed to do things, and I ask them: ‘how did you do that?’ I want to improve, to figure out. I try to ask what the other cowboys did, and they took me under their wings” (Bill)

It is difficult to conceive what cowboy mysticism is, what is true and what is derived from myths. Barthes (1999) argues that a myth is a significant message, and an object or an idea cannot be a myth in itself. An object cannot become a myth, because a myth is not something tangible, it is a communicational form, a linguistic form. However, an object can become a *symbol* for a myth, like the cowboy hat or the spurs. But to become such a symbol, the idea it signifies has to be mythified. For something to become a myth, it has to be opened up for processing, and get a social convention attached, a meaning that extends the pragmatic form. Mythification can therefore only happen in retrospect, it has to be experienced before social conventions can be attached. And since myths are a system of communication, the thing mythified has to be processed into a communicational form, and therefore needs processing. This means that the processed version gets mythified, not the initial version. It is the meaning of the myth that becomes a myth (ibid.:177). The Imagined cowboy has become a caricature of the cowboy, reduced to a myth, and the myth is always less nuanced than the initial version.

The myth surrounding the cowboy intervenes with what it signifies - the cowboy. This makes it difficult to separate the factors that have been mythified from the factors that have not, and I argue that the effect of this is that the cowboy culture as a whole, has been influenced by the mythification. What I will next concentrate on is the common imagery or caricatured form of what the cowboy is like, his personality, his morality, his masculinity, and his life.

The myths about the cowboy are largely diverse when it comes to shape, content and location. Whether it is legends, songs, movies or stories, what they essentially do is communicate something about who cowboys are. The conceptions are seldom explicitly presented as myths by the teller, but as fact, as a description, or as assumptions. A few examples:

“It is sometimes difficult to separate the cowboy of legend from the real cowboy - a man who works on horseback, lives in the wide-open spaces, makes his living from the land, and performs skillful tasks like riding and roping. He is fond of dogs and children, invariably polite to women, completely dependable, honorable in his dealings with others, and willing to perform any task that can be asked of a man and a horse” (Richard Farnsworth in Arnold, 2001:vii).

“Cowboys are viewed as representing rugged individualism, unbending principle, frontier spirit, and manly courage” (Slatta 1994:252).

“A lone cowboy emerges from a vast wilderness. He rides a horse and wears a gun, and he represents freedom and equality” (Wright 2001:1)

“To be a man in the Western is to seem to grow out of the environment, which means to be hard, to be tough, to be unforgiving” (Tompkins 1992:73).

“Perhaps the outstanding cowboy trait, above even honor, courage, and generosity, is the relaxed, calm attitude toward life. Though he lives intensely, he has a calm, self-assurance, knowledge that he can handle everything. He is good-humored and jovial. He never takes women too seriously. He can take a joke and laugh at himself” (Davis 1954: 124).

These examples are generalizations that are taken for granted, and not necessarily reflected upon as a myth. Myths can be dealt with in different ways. A general and often used notion is to view myths as something untrue, unreliable, a fairy-tale, something opposed to reality (Cowan 1986). But these myths have become what most outsiders view to be reality. I want to see if this in turn has an effect on how the men who identify as cowboys, think about themselves and their identity.

A myth is not constant; it gives room for interpretation, and is significant for the receiver, and for the processor of the myth. This is possible because the structure of the myth is fixed, while the content can be argued about (Leach 2001). Although they may be presented as fixed units, as complete and directionary wholes, they are plastic (*ibid*). I have argued that the cowboy template form the structure of the cowboy myth, while the content of the myth is varying.

People relate to myths. Different aspects of the cowboy may be perceived as a myth by some, while others may reject the idea, thus implying that a myth is not always a myth for everybody. The imagery of the cowboy encompasses American society, and to be able to be such a pervasive myth, I argue that the myth must necessarily be mouldable; it must appeal to men and also women, young and old, black and white, foreign or native, educated or illiterate, rich or poor. In his research in Highland Burma, Leach (*ibid.*) challenged the traditional functionalistic approach that argued that myths had a function in maintaining an integrated and stable social milieu. He found that the myths among the Kachins did the opposite; instead they created an unstable society. The myths in Kachin society are closely

related to practical social organization, and the telling of myths causes direct consequences for the actors. The myths in question have the same structural organization, but are ambiguous, and the different variations of interpretations have different consequences for the social structure. The structure of the myth in the Kachin society decides who is the leading family in the society, and all the families agree on this and its consequences. But each family tells different versions of the myths, to get them in their own favor. Leach emphasizes the importance of storytelling and how this ambiguity in interpretation creates conflict, and he de-emphasizes the actual narrative content of the myth. He shows that the person in Kachin society, that can tell that he is of a certain family through the myths, can claim a position of power (ibid.). The Kachin achieve their identity through the myths, as belonging to a certain kinship, which in turn has implications for the social organization of the society.

I have argued that the content of the cowboy myths are similarly flexible. A person can interpret the myth to make it fit his own use, whether he is a ranch cowboy or a wannabe cowboy. What is fixed is the cowboy template, the structure of the myth. Geertz (1993) argues that cultural patterns, which are “systems or complexes of symbols” (ibid: 92), are models *of* the thing they signify. They can at the same time be models *for* the things they signify, in giving a structure of relations between elements. I find this notion useful to understand the cowboy, but the template it is not a general notion or something people explicitly think about. This template is a model of the cowboy. It provides the outer lines, the basic necessities. When filled with a certain cowboy, say the Imagined cowboy, it will also be a model for action. It will give the receiver of the image a guideline for how to be a cowboy according to the Imagined cowboy. If the template was filled with a ranch cowboy, the guidelines would be different than for the Imagined cowboy. The cowboy myths do not give the society a direct model for organizational structure, like the myths do for the Kachins, but they offer a model for personal organization – concerning identity and practice for the Performed cowboys, and masculinity and national values for everybody. Wright supports my argument, in saying that the Western is a myth for modern American society, and further argues that “the characters in a myth represent fundamental social types (...) and their actions become images of significant kinds of action (...) It is in this sense that a myth *explains* social interaction” (Wright 1975:129).

Benny, a rancher and cowboy, shared his opinion of what a ranch cowboy is like, and what they do:

“A lot of the ranch cowboys are rowdy wild men, they still are. The rancher makes all the decisions, and the cowboy sticks beside you, and do everything you want him to do. They’re content to do that. They are carefree and live from paycheck to paycheck, and that’s the way they wanna live. When they work, they work hard, and when they play, they play hard”

Benny’s perception of a cowboy life looks much like the cowboy image: a loyal, hard-working, untamed man, who gives everything in whatever he does. Benny’s description is general, and according to him, it applies to most ranch cowboys. This image tells of the cowboys’ actions, and their morality. Of course Benny knows that not all ranch cowboys are like this, but his image provides him with a model of how they should be. I argue that Benny borrows traits from the Imagined cowboy and places them in the contemporary ranch cowboy. But Benny also has personal experience with cowboys; he works with them every day, and he also regards himself as being a cowboy, on the grounds that he does a lot of the cowboy chores himself. Because of this, and seen in the light that Benny has told me that it is hard to get hold of real cowboys anymore¹⁵, I argue that he describes the cowboys in the way he *wants* them to be. Why would he do this? One reason could be that he wants to be associated with this way of being a man, a kind of boyish, playful, rugged and loyal way of being a man.

Ubiquitous myths

The most widely distributed myths are found in media, such as television and advertisement. The cowboy image is used extensively in commercials, and items related to the cowboy, e.g., 4x4-trucks, are not only used by ranchers and cowboys who need a powerful car in their daily work, but also by other people. Bill explained this to me:

¹⁵See page 63

”We’ve got caught up in the corporate thing. You want stuff because everybody else has that, you know. Like the huge 4x4 truck you see on some of the ranches. You don’t need that most of the time. And if you get stucked, you’ll need a caterpillar or bulldozer to come pull you off. It’s just a whole different attitude”

I observed that these vehicles were very popular among the general population, counting almost as many trucks as cars in the larger cities. These trucks have names such as “Bronco”, “Explorer”, “Silverado”, and “Maverick” – names that have connotations to the West and to the cowboy. A car is not a typical cowboy symbol, but has become a secondary symbol through the powerful engines that are suited for rough country, almost like the modern mans’ horse, and has adopted names that remind us about the imagery of the West. The horse, and now the powerful 4x4 drive cars, indicates the mobility of the cowboy, and the freedom to ride away into the setting sun, into the wide open spaces, into new explorations and opportunities. It gave him his individuality, his freedom, his identity.

Many recently built buildings in many cities are designed with a flat roof, they have swing doors, wooden porches, two-storied with wooden columns supporting the balcony. The layout of some of the towns are reminding the visitors and the inhabitants of western movies, the shops are located on each side of the main street, with boarded side-walks on each side, as if taken out of a western movie. This is the case with the little town of Bandera, located in what is known as the Hill Country, in Central Texas. This town claims to be the cowboy capital of Texas. Some of the towns may have existed well before the Factual cowboy lived, but the question of origin has receded into the background. If the town has a particular place in history, the local community is quick to commemorate it. Stan, the only informant I had made an appointment with while I still was in Norway preparing my fieldwork, invited me to his ranch. He owns and operates a quite large ranch in Central Texas, close to a rather small town called Gonzales. I stayed at the ranch for a week, and this period coincided with the local community’s annual celebration of the defeat over Mexican troops in 1835. The local community of Gonzales communicates their influence that led to independence, saying that “It all began here. First shot fired for Texas independence” (Gonzales Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture 2002). A cannon was fired toward a Mexican troop at October 2,

1935, and the Mexicans fled in terror. “The first shot for Texas independence had been fired and the first battle won on this second day of October, 1835” (ibid.). The kids got up early this morning to prepare their horses; they were groomed very well, and their manes and tails were decorated with pink color. We loaded the horses on the trailer, and drove to town. The day is commemorated with a parade where decorated fleets and cars drive through the main street, children are dressed up in costumes, some are riding their horses, bands are marching, and the parade ends up in a fair. I drove Stan’s huge 4x4 truck in the parade, while the kids were riding their horses, and Stan went ahead to help them with the horses when arriving at the fair. When the horses were loaded after the parade, we all went to the parade, where food and beer was served, and Stan met several of his friends. The next day we went to a rodeo, which also is held to celebrate and commemorate the ‘come-and-get-it’¹⁶ day. The rodeo is an exciting event for the whole family, and almost every seat in the arena was taken. People meet with friends and family, and enjoy the spectacular performances of the bulls, clowns and cowboys, who came from all over Texas, and also from other states. The whole weekend was a celebration of the role Gonzales had in the fight for Texas’ independence

Country music is widely appreciated among my informants, and wherever I was in Texas, I could tune the radio in my car into several different country music stations (that is, wherever I could receive radio signals). Country music is a broad genre, and extends the traditional cowboy song music that many seem to associate with the country genre. Some of my informants preferred country influenced by rock; others preferred Mexican mariachi-inspired country music. The traditional cowboy song lyrics often describe the cowboy life and the challenges the cowboy may encounter. Modern country music embraces all aspects of human life, cowboy or not. What has happened to country music reflects what has happened to the cowboy, he has become an object for the masses. I got the impression that a large part of the Texas society is generally tuned into a ranching and cowboying way of style.

The natural environment is the background of many of the expected traits in the cowboy, like stamina, endurance, and ruggedness. The cowboy is envisioned in a certain landscape.

¹⁶ A white flag with the symbol of a black cannon and the Texas star and the inscription “come and get it” was attached to the cannon the Americans fired toward the Mexicans (Gonzales Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture (2002)).

This is certainly not a modern city or a sunny beach, not even a deep forest. Media and cultural images tells us that the cowboy belongs in the wide open spaces, where the earth is dry, the trees are replaced by cactus or brush, and the mountains, if any, have a red tint. This landscape is seen in most western movies, it is what we read in most western books, and this is how the landscape actually is like in many parts of West Texas. The the physical landscape is a part of the imagery. The supposed freedom of the cowboy is attached to the vast areas of ranching land, where he can ride for weeks without meeting another person. The physical landscape is a bearer of a significant meaning, in addition to being a beautiful background scenery. Thelandscape is a symbol of the myth, and the morality of the Original cowboy (Wright 1975).

Malinowski (1984) demonstrated how myths influence the landscape: “A meaningless configuration of landscape acquires significance, obscure no doubt, but full of intense emotion” (ibid.: 298). This can also be said about the western landscape. The landscape depicted in western movies, literature, art, and songs is valuable to the individual in another way. For the Imagined cowboy, the rugged wilderness was an opportunity for freedom, bravery, strength; he mastered this kind of nature, and derived his identity from it. I argue that this is also true for the Performing cowboys, as Bill says:

“I can’t wait to get in some wild country I haven’t seen before. It’s a neat life. You get to see the country. I want to go down in a canyon I haven’t been in before, I want to go on top of that next hill, I want to see what....just ride off”.

The western landscape offers more to the cowboy than just beautiful scenery; it provides an idea of traits that are ascribed to his identity.

Myth and history

Myths are always stories about the past. Our experience of the present is to a large extent based on our knowledge of our past (Connerton 1989). Myths are a legitimizing institution that legitimize factors like power and violence, by referring to and explaining the history (Slotkin 1992). The experience of reality and history is not objective.

Bauman (1986) argues that in Texas, most people do not account for their arrival in the land by divine explanations, but rather by secular historical terms. Contrary to this, I argue that myths do have significance in people's apprehension of history, and thus serve as a symbolic validation and justification of a people's claim to a place.

Earlier anthropologists have argued that "modern" societies do not explain history by myth, but by access to historical sources. On the contrary, Malinowski recognizes that the natives distinguish between myth and history, but that they have problems with formulating this distinction, and that they would not explicitly try to distinguish them. "Modern" societies refer to written historical sources to talk about their past, whereas "primitive" societies find their explanations in myths (Malinowski 1984). I have shown throughout this thesis that modern American society utilizes the cowboy myth to paint a picture of American history. And maybe the modern society faces a problem similar to Malinowski's informants – that to a degree we do not distinguish between history and myths or legend, even though we know there is a difference between them. We know the legends are somewhat ahistorical and imprecise in their narratives, but the content can nevertheless stand as a historical explanation of a certain event.

History was very important to some of my informants. The three that emphasized history the most were Al, Brad and Stan. Al, now closer to 80 years old, used to live as a working ranch cowboy when younger, and operated his own ranch until recently. Stan, about 45 years old, operates his own cattle ranch. Brad, about 75 years old, still operates a huge cattle and horse ranch. All three had an overwhelming knowledge of cowboy history, and of Texan history in particular, and vividly told me their versions. Stan brought me to several historical places, and lectured me about the historical events that had taken place there. Al lent me several historical books and showed me old photographs hanging in every room in his apartment. He also brought me to one of the largest and most well-known ranches in Texas, where we spent a day together with the foreman, who showed us around and told us about the operation. Brad showed a passionate interest in literature and history, and shared his life-long experience of ranching with me. All three men told their history with a nostalgic touch, with a sense of being connected to the past. At the same time they all seemed to appreciate the modernizations and the new technology brought into the cattle-business, and when I asked

them, they did not unconditionally say that everything were better before. Their interest in history did not lie in an assumption that “everything was better” at that time. The history was rather a door that opened up an understanding of their heritage, which was important to all three. All these men, and several others of my informants advised me to read Haley’s book *Charles Goodnight*. They all in general had the same answer when I asked why: “This book gives a perfect image of how things used to be. It is down-to-earth, and tells realistically about the ranching like it used to be”. I followed their advice and read the book (Haley 1949), and it tells about the cattle-drives, the Indian fights, the hardships of being a rancher; the picture painted is not very romantic. Charles Goodnight did exist, and together with Mr. Loving, he was the first to initiate the Goodnight-Loving trail, that went from Fort Belknap, Texas, to Fort Sumner, New Mexico. This became a well-traveled route for the cattle-drivers. Haley describes the challenges of operating a ranch at that time, and how Mr. Goodnight resolved the problems. Goodnight greatly influenced ranching tradition in Texas, and is viewed to be a pioneer in this regard. Larry McMurtry later co-produced the film “Lonesome Dove” (1989), based on the life of Charles Goodnight (Slatta 1994).

Slotkin argues that:

“Mythology is a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world’s vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors. The narrative action of the myth-tale recapitulates that people’s experience in their land, rehearses their visions of that experience in its relations to their gods and the cosmos, and reduces both experience and vision to a paradigm” (Slotkin 1973).

The cowboy myth and tradition is not only telling about a heritage, but is also nostalgic. Nostalgia could be described a romanticized longing for the times when things were supposedly easier, more authentic and real (Frykman & Løfgren 1994). I argue that nostalgia creates a link between past and present in people’s lives. Many of my informants were collectors of antique cowboy paraphernalia, such as old spurs and saddles. In Bill’s living room he had an impressive collection of spurs, halters and saddles, and on the walls there are numerous old pictures of cowboys and horses, and old maps of ranching country. His knowledge of the cowboy tradition in Texas was great, and so was his willingness to share that knowledge with others. His nostalgia was first and foremost directed toward his own life, when he was young and made his living as a cowboy. These were really good times, but

also hard. He told me vivid stories from his life as a cowboy, emphasizing the hardships, but telling with an enthusiasm that testified to his longing for these times:

“When I was out there, we worked on a ranch. Checking water holes, digging post-holes, fixing windmills. And of course riding, doin’ some regular ranch stuff. The season started with the spring round-up, when they brand calves. I traveled from ranch to ranch and helped out, and ended up in Mexico early in July. And then it was back to dig post-holes again. Until fall round-up, when they ship cattle to the market. That’s when I traveled from ranch to ranch again. And when all the ranches were through with round’n up, I went back to post-holes. In 1972 we were breaking horses for 10 dollars a day. We went to town only once a month, after receiving the pay-check. And then we had to stay out of town for a month, so that people could forget us in the meantime [laughing]. This is the life, I thought. Well...it’s isolated, but...you know, the people you get to know...everybody helps out. It’s something about riding for a brand. You rode for an outfit. You did for the ranch what the ranch did for you. Even now I watch for weather. I still like to be out in the range”

His nostalgia was also directed toward the general history of the cowboy tradition. He told me about Indian wars, cattle drives and the cowboy life in general as it was a hundred years ago.

The way Nick talks about bygone times¹⁷, also reveals his personal relationship to history. He speaks as if he had experienced these things himself, “there used to be more solitude, quieter”, “you used to look across the pasture(...)”, and “usually when we had a drought (...)”. It is as though he felt it in his body, but he is talking about things that happened at least a hundred years ago. Connerton wants to distinguish between social memory and historical reconstruction. Social memory is embodied, while historical reconstruction of the past “is possible only through a knowledge of their traces (...) that is to say the marks, perceptible to the senses, which some phenomenon, in itself inaccessible, has left behind”(Connerton

¹⁷ See page 67

1989:13). Further he argues that social remembering happens parallel to the writing of history, and that these two practices are not dependent on each other, but will mutually influence each other. The embodied social memory is evident in Nick's treatment of history, and the influence of social memory on historical reconstruction in the cowboy tradition is symptomatic of how the past is remembered.

Remember the Alamo

Texas has an eventful history, and has a significant place in US history. However, many historical events, such as the battle of Alamo, are poorly recorded, and the reconstruction of what actually did happen needs elaboration (Fehrenbach 1986). The fact that it seems that the recording of the Alamo is accurate and rich, due to vivid details and an exiting story portrayed in films and literature, history-books and tourist-brochures, contributes to passing the legend on as a series of actual historical events, not as a myth. There is no doubt that the Battle of Alamo did happen, and that it played a significant part in the liberation of Texas. But the historical records of what actually happened that day in the Mission of Alamo, are poor. The Mission of Alamo is located in the middle of San Antonio, and is visited by numerous tourists every day, and this historical site is among the most popular tourist attractions in Texas. Visitors can walk through the Mission and into the garden behind the walls. When I entered the Mission, I got a feeling of stepping into a sacred place, and the atmosphere was calm and filled with respect for the people who sacrificed their lives for the independence of Texas more than 170 years ago. The silent whispering of stunned tourists, the lit candles, and the inscriptions on the walls telling a history, all contributed to this feeling. People wait in lines outside the entrance to the shrine, and when one person leaves, another one is permitted entrance. The site has a museum and a souvenir shop, and a beautiful garden with a pond. The garden is a perfect place to sit down and relax and retire from the horde of tourists. The gift shop is almost as crowded as the Mission, and people can bring home all things imaginable with a print of the Mission, or the inscription: "Remember the Alamo". The site has regular lectures for tourists in the plaza about the historical event that took place on 23 February 1836. But few accurate facts about the Battle of the Alamo are found. As Brear shows in her study, several groups lay claim to the heritage of the

Alamo, and to support their claims, they interpret and rewrite the myth in their favor: “The tensions surrounding the Alamo narratives extend throughout the United States, for the Alamo also serves mythologically as a second birthplace for the American, who undergoes a regeneration in the sacrificial death inside the Alamo” (Brear 1995:2).

How can people vividly remember such an event as the Battle of the Alamo, when they were not there? The collective memory is the basis for this remembrance, and stretches beyond the individual person’s memories. Roy Wagner distinguishes between genealogic time and organic time, where the genealogic time goes beyond the individual’s experience, and the organic time relates to the personal experiences of the individual (Berkaak 2002). Thus the Battle of the Alamo belongs to genealogic time. Connerton argues that if there is such a thing as social memory, it will be found in commemorative ceremonies (Connerton 1989). He further argues that images and recollected knowledge about the past is maintained and distributed by performances, through commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices. The collective is inscribed, and becomes personal. He emphasizes incorporated and inscribed history, where memory is a part of the body, but the history is collective (Berkaak 2002). There is a constant dialogue between personal memory and collective memory, and the commemorative memory can be altered to include aspects that individuals would like to include to make it fit their perception (ibid.). In this way the commemorative memory can change over time. This dialogue has the shape of a discourse, where certain voices are louder and more powerful than others. This is literarily true for the Alamo. The lectures, the guided tours of the museum, the frequent theatrical plays describing what took place the day of 23 February 1836 and pre-revolutionary life in San Antonio, leaves a colorful and vivid memory of the fight, of Santa Anna, of David Crockett and Jim Bowie, in the visitors’ minds. The writing of history is a powerful business, since it shapes our experience of today. But who decides what to remember as history? Who decided that David Crockett and Jim Bowie should stand out as the most remarkable heroes of the battle, and that Crockett’s fur hat and Bowie’s knife should stand as their symbols? Why have several more of the men not received such legendary attention? Perhaps Crockett and Bowie showed extraordinary effort in the battle, compared to the other men. Or perhaps they got their heroic status by the story being told and retold, and thus have come to stand as *the* story of the Battle of the Alamo, leaving the other voices unheard. Why is the Battle of Alamo more widely known and

celebrated than the Battle of San Jacinto, where the Texans actually defeated the Mexicans, and where the independence of Texas was won? Possibly, the lack of evidence makes the story mouldable, and the story takes on its own life, and is protected by being a story about an actual event. I argue that the same thing happened to cowboy legends. The legends have been told and retold and shaped throughout time, and under the cover of portraying historical reality, has become a powerful myth. Clayton asks what influence the truth has on the image of the mythical cowboy (Clayton 1984). This question needs to be more precise. What and whose truth? I have continuously argued that many see the Original cowboy as the true cowboy. To them, the myth is the truth and the contemporary cowboys are measured against this truth. What I believe Clayton asks is what influence the contemporary cowboys have on the Original cowboy. I will refer to the discussions above, and answer that the image of the Original cowboy is a powerful discourse. By being a discourse it is mouldable to fit certain perspectives, but these perspectives will not be shared by everyone, and the discourse will resist attempts to change that does not apply to the leading discourse.

Mama, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys¹⁸

Outsiders are receiving a message from the commuters, whether it is movie-directors, novelists, advertisement, designers, presidents using cowboy connotations, or others, and relate directly to this message. These receivers are not cowboys, and do not have to consider this as a matter of personal identity, but relate to the moral ideal communicated through the media. The outsiders do not have a filter to sort the imaginaries through; they have no practical source to check the messages against. All they have is the social commemoration and the historical reconstruction of events, which are in themselves, as seen in the previous chapter, prone to flexibility and change. This is not to say that the outsiders are ignorant of the mythical part of the cowboy, taking everything for a fact, but it implies that the outsiders and the insiders are positioned differently in their relation to the cowboy myth. The outsiders

¹⁸ Taken from the title of a Willie Nelson song.

get support for their beliefs from a discourse about the American society brought forth by the myth-making-processes.

I asked Ringo and Christopher how they believed the rest of the society regarded the cowboys:

Ringo: "They think we're a bunch of fools"

Chris: "They're used to see the movies and it's a lot different. The movies don't resemble the real cowboys. There is some now that are going close, but still they're a long way off from what a real cowboy does"

Ringo: "The day workers have to love to do it; they don't do it for the money. When you get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to feed your horse, and be on the ranch at 6, you've gotta love it. You work hard all day"

On a different occasion I asked Louise the same question, and she confirms: "People think that cowboys are lazy, since they don't have a regular job, people believe that all they do is riding all day long, having fun. But they are working from dusk till dawn, and probably have the most demanding jobs of 'em all".

All people do not consider the cowboy to be such an honorable man; many regard him as ignorant, stupid, lazy and of little education, as I learned early in my fieldwork. When I first arrived in Texas I was invited to a charity party hosted by the woman from whom I rented a place to stay the first week. She is highly educated, has an exciting job, lives in a modern and brand new three-story house with a garden ; from what I could see, she was economically and intellectually "well off". Most of the other party attendees seemed to be "well off" too I was with a group of people who for the most part, had access to more monetary wealth and education than others in the community. After the charity program was over, and many of the elder and formal guests had left, the charity party transformed into a social party. People came over to me and wanted to hear more about my project, and some of them wanted to tell me the truth about the cowboy. Especially one guy who appeared to be quite extroverted and loud, and claimed to know how the cowboys actually were. He apparently meant that cowboys were rednecks, which is used as a derogatory adjective, but

he stressed, “cowboys are a little better than the rednecks and the WT (white trash), which is a typical farmer, truck-driver or blue-collar-worker with little or no education and racist views.” He said he was talking about the *wannabe cowboys*, because he claimed there are not many real cowboys left, and that the rodeo cowboys are who I should look for in my search for cowboys. His view was not representative for the whole group, but for two or three of them. This told me that people have an opinion of how cowboys are, without knowing much about them. Many of the cowboys do not have a higher academic or professional education, but start their cowboy career as soon as they are finished with high school. I would draw the conclusion that he is thinking about the person I have described as the Imagined cowboy when he says they are almost non-existing any longer, and thus he is right when it comes to that they would be hard for me to find, due to my basic notion that they have never existed in flesh and blood. This is an example of how assumptions and general notions have come to stand as accurate, in describing the real or authentic cowboy. The wannabe cowboy is for him a substitute for the Imagined cowboy, a man that builds his identity on somebody else’s identity. I argue that the degrading view of the cowboy stems from a divergence in what is regarded as important. For the higher classes, education and economic wealth seems to be the yardstick against which success in personal and social life is measured. For the cowboy higher education is not necessary, and will rather keep him away from what he does best: cowboying.

The true cowboy?

The cowboy imageries are important when it comes to personal identification for persons that call themselves cowboys, but the outsiders to the tradition lay many of the premises. The cowboy discourse is not shaped by the insiders alone. The outsiders, which consist of the majority of the American society (and the world in general), have a major part in this process, as previously discussed. The majority, the outsiders, seem to relate to the Imagined cowboy. The cowboy as masculine, rugged, independent, strong, playful, a hero.

During the conversation with the group of outsiders to the cowboy tradition at the charity party, I understood that the outsiders are unsure what a cowboy really is, and that they also disagree about the definition that eventually came up. Kate argued that there were two kinds

of cowboys – rodeo cowboys and ranchers. She soon added that there were a few crossovers too. After thinking about it for a while, she concluded that it is sometimes very difficult for outsiders to see the difference between the different kinds of cowboys. “Rodeo cowboys like to portray a myth about masculinity and solitude and such. They use a lot of the symbols, but have maybe never been to a cattle ranch”. A discussion started between Kate and Rita, they did not agree on what a cowboy were like, and Rita argued: “I have dated a few cowboys, and not all are rodeo cowboys or ranchers. And even though they emphasize solitude, it is not always like that!” The discussion quieted down when Rita and Kate agreed that they were actually talking about different things, Kate meant the supposed reality, while Rita was discussing the “truth”. I got the impression that Rita viewed the wannabe cowboys to be a little simple-minded, and so did two of the guys who participated in the conversation. They laughed at their expense, called them ignorant hicks. I immediately understood that Rita’s experience with cowboys was not representative, and their attitudes toward cowboys stemmed from a division of class. The persons in the group were higher middle class, and it seems like some of them regarded the working class cowboys, and others belonging to this class, as inferior. What I find interesting for my discussion is what they repeatedly emphasized the loneliness and the masculinity said to be experienced by the cowboy. They did not talk about this as if it was their own impression of the cowboy, but they believed these were important identifiers of cowboys, something the cowboys themselves wanted to communicate. They went behind the myth, and saw how the cowboys utilized it to portray a picture of themselves.

The groups discussion is a classical example of how the cowboy has been orientalized (Said 1979). Their actual knowledge of cowboys was limited, but they nevertheless had a clear and lasting impression of what cowboys are like. This impression is based on assumptions and myths, not on first hand experience, and this impression will reduce their chances of getting a more nuanced image, because their existing image is believed to be the truth.

The contemporary cowboy is by outsiders often confused with the Imagined cowboy, and is used in relation to identification of cowboys. A conversation with Vicky, an insider to the cowboy tradition and professor at a Texas University, shows this:

C: “Has there been a change in the cowboy culture...I mean the real cowboy, if it is possible to talk about a real cowboy?”

V: “I think so, but of course, you know, who am I to say this, but...uhh...the thing that bothers me the most is I see so many...people...that seem to want to be a cowboy now, you know, it’s like the people who want to be a writer but they hate to write...you know, but they want the mystique of being a writer, they want the attention of being a writer, so it’s the same with that, that they get a lot of, you know...um...I see a lot of young boys that want to be a cowboy only because it helps them get girls, [laughs], you know, and so it is not that they really care that much about taking care of the cattle or making sure that the cattle have water you know, because they just assume they not have to deal with that so that they can go to town...ehh...So I think...all the mystique is like, you know, athletics or sports or something...um...some people get into it because they just really are athletes who wanna play the game, other people get into it for other reasons, you know, that they need it for self esteem or something, and so...I think there is a lot of that today”.

C: “Yes, that they are attracted to the mystique about the cowboy...”

V: “Yeah, they’re getting involved with the culture for the wrong reasons”

The insiders have information that go beyond the descriptive myth when it comes to identifying each others as cowboys or not, and do not use the myth for this purpose, but rather as parameters. The insiders know they are judged by the outsiders along these mythical parameters, and may use the myth to mediate their identity within society, consciously or not. This contributes to the regeneration of the myths. Using the same myth to mediate identity to insiders is not advantageous, because the insiders use other points of reference. I would argue that using the symbols among insiders for identification purposes would actually be to highlight that one is *not* a cowboy, but rather a ‘wannabe’, because you do not know the internal codes.

Conclusion

Myths offer a background for explanation; they are sources of information. They create a feeling of common understanding, and are commemorated in different forms. The society at large accepts a hegemonic understanding of the cowboy myth. The cowboy myth is a myth of social origin that reflects social theories, and becomes a model for social action (Wright, 2001). Both Wright (1975 and 2001) and Slotkin (1992) analyze the cowboy myth and try to relate it to social development in the US, showing how the myth became a model for social action. Their approach is general, and does not say anything about the individual cowboy or man, and how he relates to the myths. This is difficult, of course, because the myth is so pervasive in the society, and it is therefore impossible to select a concrete myth and try to see how this myth has become a model for action for each individual cowboy. I argue that the cowboy myth has influenced and shaped the focus on men in general, and the moralities attached to the cowboy through myth; independence, ruggedness, honesty and so on, have become a hegemonic notion about what a successful man should be. In this way it gives the individual man a clue to what he should be like and what values he should have, to be regarded as a successful man by the society in general. The cowboy imagery is a guide for the individual man for how to be a “real” man.

The cowboy myths are powerful myths. They have the capacity to influence a society's values by legitimating and explaining significant events of history. They function as common mediators of values and ideology to the society's members or audiences elsewhere, and they get much of their power in the alleged actual historical foundation. A function of the myth is to communicate and allow the readers/listeners/receivers to take part in the collective memory concerning cultural values in a society. The cowboy myths commemorate parts of American history : Frontier history, the Battle of the Alamo, the Indian wars, the cattle barons and the bonanza that emerged with the cattle industry, the legendary trail-drives, the hard life on the prairie, and the settlers. I argue that many of these people had little to do with the cowboy, but their histories are connected, because of the resemblance to cowboy history: the place and time they lived, the clothes they wore, the horses they rode - their daily life in general. The cowboy became a symbol for the entire time period. Others who lived at the same time eventually became peripheral.



Watering the horses. Photo: L. C. Hellum

Chapter VIII: Cowboy up! The cowboy image as seen by cowboys

During a conversation with Louise, she mentioned “western ideals”. I asked her what western ideals meant to her:

“Western Ideals” Let’s see if I can define it. . .

I’ve always been an early riser. I think that with each sunrise when you wake, it’s a whole new beginning. You get to make different decisions for a different day. Waking up in the morning to a morning of quiet. The rooster crow echoing off the canyon walls instead of the honking of horns in a busy town or city. Waking up in a slow easy manner, not worried about getting to work on time. Having breakfast as a family in a relaxing way, the smell of coffee on the stove and frying bacon in the pan. Fresh eggs and homemade bread that’s still warm from the oven. After breakfast, the steady repeated chores. Chores that are done every day in the same way. A repetition that brings comfort to the soul and quietness to the mind. The animals getting their feed are happy to see you and give off the sweet yet pungent smells that mean home. The sweet smell of the hay being feed to the animals. The steam rising off the bucket of feed on a winter morning and the warmth of fresh chicken eggs plucked from under the hens. The solitude of riding across the pasture on horseback checking fence lines and cows that have calves and horses with foals.

Knowing the peace of needing nothing other than what is grown or raised on your place. Going back to the house to delight in playing with the grandkids when they are down and enjoying time with the family around a campfire. The cuddly feeling of a comfortable mattress and feather filled quilt in a room with a fireplace when its time to go to bed. The clear star filled skies at night. A sky so bright with stars that not even the moon is needed to see by.

The night filled with the sounds of the desert, the cry of the coyote, the trill of the night hawks, the soft sounds of the breeze through the mesquite trees, and the sounds of the animals in the corrals. The freedom to ride from one end of the pasture to the other without seeing another soul and not worry about being stopped for doing it.

Not taking advantage, or being taken advantage of by your neighbors or anyone else. Knowing that when a man or woman gives their word, his word is bond. It is worth more than a pot of gold. When you or your neighbor needs help, the only cost is to return it to them or someone else. Not with money, but with trust and a helping hand. The enjoyment of spending an evening with friends without worrying about “driving home” and the problems it may bring. Having a comfortable room ready for your visitors and know that when you visit them, you get the same treatment. A time without any worries other than making sure that the animals are fed. . . . and most of all a time of trust and is uncomplicated...

I hope this gives you a better idea on what my “western ideals” are. I know that most of it sounds like a movie set, but it’s as close as I can come. Both my husband and I have lived that life before and we both crave it as if it were a drug. I know it seems as if I go on and on about ranch life, but once it’s in your blood, there is no going back. Not even the biggest mansion in the world can compete!”

Now Louise and her husband live and work in a small town in Texas, but she spends as much time as she can out at their rather small ranch, an approximately 40 minutes drive from the house. Here they keep a few heads of cattle and some horses, and they are constantly doing repairs on the ranch headquarters, so they will be able to retire there in a not so distant future. Louise lives a stressful life that wears on her body, and I believe her when she says that she is dreaming about her future ranch life all the time, and that this dream allows her to continue. The fact that the ranch they own is quite small contributes to the hardships. The

ranch is not large enough to support them entirely; there are more expenses than profit, making it necessary to have jobs in town. The more time they spend in town, the less they can take advantage of what the ranch has to offer. But the romantic and nostalgic life at the ranch keeps her going. Even if she knows how unromantic the ranch-life often is: waking up before daylight every morning, going out to the pastures in snowdrifts and rainstorms or degrees well above 40 Celsius, looking after cattle and horses, making sure they have water and feed. Constantly repairing rusty windmills and broken fences. Riding in the pasture looking for, and manually clearing out, poisonous weed. Paying regular veterinary and feed bills, land taxes and insurance, but not having a steady income. Always worrying whether the rain will fall.

So why does Louise use the above words when describing her ideal ranch life? It might of course be to persuade herself that the costs of the strenuous life she now lives is worth the gains she will enjoy when she can retire and settle down at the ranch. However, I doubt this is the whole explanation. I suggest that Louise knows too well the hardships of ranch life, and knows that her romantic description, which is an ideal, does not reflect the reality. Besides being a nostalgic reflection on how much better life was when she lived a ranch life, I would say that this is also a way of talking about and mediating values: a kind of language. This language is packed with metaphors that constitute a myth, and create an atmosphere of safety, freedom, and self-reliance. The smell of the animals, the bright stars in the sky, the frying bacon in the pan - it is all a part of it, but I believe her words mean more than this. I argue that much of the western jargon in literature, films as well as in speech and informal utterances is a mythical language intended to mediate feelings and atmospheres to underscore the values and morals connected to the cowboy way of life. The typical apparel used by cowboys become symbols of this language. At the same time as they are invaluable tools that help the cowboys in their daily work. This duality is reflected in everything involved in being a cowboy: it is an occupation, a source of income and a mythical figure being used by a variety of people to negotiate values. This contributes to the regeneration of the myths.

I would argue that the outsiders, create many of the definitions for the insiders, especially the cowboys themselves. It is time consuming to acquire the knowledge and experience that

is required for becoming a *really good man* (cowboy), and involves years of practice. Nick described it in this way:

”You can learn how to be a cowboy. Sure you can. If you wanna do it about enough. Just like I can...I could...be the captain of a ship, which I don’t know anything about, if I wanted to learn it, if I wanted it bad enough. It’s the same thing; you have to want it bad enough. It takes a lot of time. Years”

Know everything, master of nothing

At the headquarter of X7 Ranch I discussed the cowboy life with Christopher and Ringo, and Ringo told me about his life as a cowboy:

R: ”I have been a cowboy for 25 years, I started to break colts when I was 12, for 50 dollars a month. So I’ve been in it for a while. It’s a pretty good way of life, and you learn as you go. I haven’t learned everything. The man who says he knows everything about a cow hasn’t learnt anything. I tell my son ‘you just keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, and you’ll learn a lot. Sit and watch and do as you are told, that’s the way to learn’. You have to learn it the hard way, and people can’t teach you something if you don’t wanna learn. And it sure is a rough life sometimes. It’s cold in the winter and hot in the summer, but you gotta do what you gotta do. You have to check’em anyway. It takes a lot of patience and common sense”

C: “Why do you like it so much?”

R: “Most of my family on my mother’s side was cowboys, and my dad was one, and I can’t do anything else. I’ve tried to do other things, but I came back here. I just like it so much, even though it doesn’t pay much. I’ve always liked to ride good horses, to tame horses. You’re out in the open and you get to see a lot of stuff. You learn a lot. You’ll learn, if you pay attention, the animals will teach you, what you need to know. On how they look, they let you know if you have too many cattle or too few cattle. Mother Nature lets you know. You kind of have to keep it balanced out”

To become a good cowboy you have to watch the ones that are better than you, and listen to what they have to say, learn by tradition and practice. There are no schools or books that can give you everything you need for becoming a good cowboy. Many are lucky; they have grown up on a ranch, and thus grown up in the tradition. Acquiring practical knowledge about horses, cows and breeding may be experienced as boring, and physical skills like riding and roping require perfection to work well. But this is what distinguishes the amateur from the skilled man. Investment of time creates distinction:

“It is the personality that is in question, that means, it is a persons quality that are being expressed through the ability to acquire a quality object. The things that have the most distinguishing power are the ones that witness of qualities in the acquisition, and through that, witness about the owner” (Bourdieu 1995:101, my translation)

To be a skilled cowboy requires years in the saddle, and this tells of an ability to acquire knowledge, reflecting distinction in a man. I asked Jim about defining a cowboy:

J: “Well, it is hard to answer that. You’ve got different versions of cowboys; you’ve got day workers, ranchers, rodeo cowboys, Hollywood cowboys, wannabe cowboys and so on. But I guess I have to say that I regard the cowboy to be a man that is in the cattle-business. If you are going to define what a cowboy is in your book, you can write that it is not one kind, but many different, and many ways of defining them. I believe it is something you’ve got inside yourself. Passion for the land”

C: "I understand that one can learn the practical skills that are required for being a cowboy, but that one needs to have a passion inside to be able to endure the life as a cowboy, because of the strenuous life, the poor pay and so on? Am I right?"

J: "Yes, that's exactly right. You've got to have it in you. I love this land more than anything, besides from my family. I'm incredibly lucky that have got everything I need; everybody should have the opportunity to live off of what you love the most to do in life. One should follow ones dreams"

C: "But not everybody is lucky to have the possibility to do that. I'd love to be a cowboy, but I'm a girl and live in Norway – impossible!"

J: "You can move here and become a cowboy. Everything is possible!"

It might seem that Jim does not agree with himself about what constitutes a cowboy, either a practical knowledge or an intangible inner quality like "something you've got inside" or "passion for the land". What I believe he says is exactly what Bourdieu describes above, the "something you've got inside" is a quality that provides the ability to acquire knowledge to distinguish oneself, to be a distinctive cowboy. Jim is clearly not that concerned with the cowboy imagery, it does not matter if I am a girl or if I am Norwegian, although he recognizes the imagery in saying that "anything is possible", as if this was a difficult obstacle, but not impossible. An outsider could become an insider by having certain qualities.

Freedom

The insiders to the cowboy tradition are also receive the same message from the media as outsiders, but this becomes a personal matter to them, whereas the myths are loaded with guidelines for the cowboys about what is expected of them. The message is supposed to apply to their own life, but they have personally experienced the cowboy life, and know that it is usually not what is reflected in the media. But insiders also know that outsiders see this message as realistic, and have to relate to this in a twofold manner: both directly and indirectly, through the outsiders' perception of themselves.

Brooks (1993) argues that the freedom and independence is something outsiders have ascribed the cowboy. This may be right, because the ranch cowboys are bound by a heavy load of work that needs to be done, expected by the rancher and the other cowboys. But my informants tell me otherwise. I asked several, both ranchers and working cowboys, what they appreciated the most about the cowboy-and ranch life:

Ben (45): "The most important aspect for me is the freedom. To do whatever I would like to. To avoid the annoyances the city life implies. To ride every day, being outdoors. Even if we get days with snow and rain, it is a part of it, and something you just have to live with"

Woody (27): "I love this life, I travel from ranch to ranch, and this is what I always have done, and I can't imagine doing anything else. I love the freedom of that"

Ted (32): "The freedom this life gives"

Jones (50): "I don't regret for a second that I quit my veterinary practice and started in the cattle business! I had a constant ache in my stomach, but that let go the day I started as a rancher. What I like the most is being my own boss and the freedom that gives me"

Paul (40): "The freedom, ridin' alone, the landscape, you can go wherever you want. This is the good life. You don't get rich off it, but what is money exactly?"

Bill (50): "It's something with the freedom you get when you out that leg in the stirrup that you don't get anywhere else"

Frank (70): "I think the freedom of it. And I like being out in the country. Not having neighbors quite so close"

These few examples show that either Brooks is wrong, or the cowboys are influenced by the myths as well. I argue that there is something true in each argument. There are reasons to believe that the cowboys do have a feeling of freedom and independence; and besides,

feelings are subjective. A cowboy may feel free by having responsibility and trust from the ranch owner, while others, may feel free by having no responsibilities. But there may also be reason to believe that like the outsiders, the cowboys also are influenced by the myths of freedom. Freedom is, as argued in previous chapters, one of the underlying forces from which the cowboy template draws its power.

How does the cowboy imagery impact the cowboys today? Clearly the ranch cowboys do not shoot from the hip, and there are other things that do not seem to immediately fit the imagery, like being lonesome, fighting for truth and justice, defying authorities, and other activities. What is left of the actual myth for the modern cowboy? He does have the skill of mastering wilderness, and he is lonesome sometimes, but most of the work is done together with others, depending on how large a ranch he owns/works for. Many of the men are married and have children. Some of the work does involve riding for hours looking for cattle, alone. Does he act independently? Yes, he has to make decisions sometimes, but a hired cowboy always has an order from a manager or the like. A ranch owner or manager are the ones to make the big decisions. Does he still fight for truth and justice? Not more than any other citizen, nor do they defy the authorities more than others either. Freedom? He has a certain freedom in being responsible for his own labor; he is left to himself and has the choice of doing a good job or not, as Robert explained:

R: "That's something real unique about the cowboy...culture or whatever you want to call it, is the fact that the men have a whole lot of responsibility, and they're not... (...) the men have to be self motivated and they have to be very responsible"

C: "Is that the managers or the cowboys?"

R: "Both, because, you know, manager can tell me 'Oh! Things are going fine', and there's no way I can know until we wean and ship calves, and they're not there. The cowboy can go off horseback and say...he can go out a mile from the house and lay down under a tree and nap all day and then come back and say everything is fine...so it's not like a man working in a factory and you keep an eye on him. You have to have guys with some characters and self motivation...and some pride in their work"

For many people, imagining the cowboy on his horse, the two of them going west, into the setting sun, he might symbolize individualistic ideas. Individualism is highly valued in the American society, also among cowboys, and the cowboy has come to stand as its symbol.

In being such a hero to most people, the Imagined cowboy offers a set of guidelines, concerning behavior, moralities and masculinity, that the Performed cowboys can learn from. The Imagined cowboy possesses many of the same traits that inhabit hegemonic masculinity in Texas, not to mention the American society at large. To be an incorporation of such hegemonic masculinity, automatically ascribes the person certain traits that are connected to this masculinity. He is expected to be tough, rugged, independent, and self-reliant. This creates a certain expectation of fulfillment, and this have to be done in certain ways, as I will discuss in the next chapter. But what happens when the Performed cowboy, and especially the ranch cowboy, do not, in practice, meet the expectations of cowboy imagery?

Contesting the image

I argue that the cowboy myth does not only bring advantageous effects to the Performing cowboys. The myths create a sentiment in the persons concerned, to explain and excuse the deviance from the common cowboy imagery. The hegemonic cowboy (the Imagined) has to be shaped to fit into the life of the Performed cowboys. It creates a need to protect their cowboy identity, because there are some deviances from the Imagined cowboy. What about a cowboy that does not ride a horse? Or a ranch who has more African antelopes than cattle? Or more cars than horses?

Cowboy entrepreneur

“I have to work in town to support the awful expensive habit of cowboying”, Preston says and laughs. He has to have an additional income. His ranch is rather small, and as a cattle ranch it would not support him and his wife, so both have jobs outside the ranch. To operate a viable cattle ranch requires a ranch of a considerable size, requires knowledge of how to best take advantage of the land without damaging it, and requires capital to be able to survive on an unstable economical income. Preston has the knowledge, but neither the acres nor the capital required. A successful running of a ranch is also conditioned by forces that can not be controlled by the rancher; cattle prizes and weather (drought in particular) are the most crucial factors. Several of my informants have down-sized their herd of cattle the last years, because of the drought that had lasted for about ten years in Texas. The semi-desert soil of West Texas is particularly vulnerable to climatic factors, and rain is crucial for the sparse grass to grow. But it does not rain in excess in Texas, and that makes the feeding conditions for the cattle rather bad. To sustain a cow on grass in West Texas will require about 100 acres of ranch land, whereas the same cow would need only 10 acres in East-or Central Texas, according to several of my ranching informants. Paul told me that some years he has to burn off the spikes on the cacti so that the cattle can eat the cacti, because there is no grass or brush. Some ranchers also buy grass feed for their cattle, and considering the size of some of the herds (several thousand cattle), this requires economic capital. Another problem is that a rancher gets his paycheck only twice a year, after the round-ups, when the cattle are sold. A rancher thus has to arrange his finances very well, to be able to overcome unforeseen expenses.

Due to this characteristic insecurity in the cattle business, many of the ranchers are forced to consider alternative sources of income, and Joe is just such an example. In order to survive as a cattle rancher, he has had to think like an entrepreneur. To be an entrepreneur means to break down barriers between different spheres, to be able to exploit more than one sphere simultaneously, and maximize the profit (Barth 1967). One challenge is knowing when to invest the right amount of time and capital between the spheres, and find the balance between them to maximize results. Joe has shown the ability to be an entrepreneur, he is not

the first one to exploit the operation in the way he does, but he has managed to balance the two economic spheres he is involved in.

Joe and his wife Eve call themselves ranchers. They own and operate two ranches located in two different areas in Texas. The two ranches operate in different ways, due to different climatic/ecological conditions. The smallest ranch in size (consisting of 1450 acres (5,9 km²) of land; the larger consists of more than 47 000 acres(190 km²)) is the one with the greatest amount of cattle and most income from ranching. The soil and climate offer a better basis for holding and feeding animals, in this instance cattle and horses. At Dry Creek Ranch, the larger ranch, hunting is the main source of income. Joe also keeps a small herd of cattle at Dry Creek Ranch, and a large herd of goats. Without the hunting income, the running of the ranches would be very difficult. Joe and Eve spend about half a year at each ranch, commuting back and forth quite often. The fall and winter are usually spent at Dry Creek Ranch; fall is hunting season, and it is necessary for Joe to be there to manage the hunting, and for Eve to be there to cook for the hunters and guests. When they stay at Dry Creek Ranch, the smaller cattle ranch is operated by a manager, a man that has worked for the family for 20 years, and lives on the premises with his family. Some years ago Joe and his sons invested in a *high-fence* at Dry Creek Ranch. A huge pasture is fenced in with a 2,5 meter high fence, and inside they keep exotic animals like oryx, addax, gemsbok and other different kinds of African antelopes, and a number of foreign (African, European and Asian) species of sheep. The work and the cost of building such a fence are enormous, and it is also costly to import animals, or buy them from other ranches within the State.

The exotic animal population stabilizes after a few years, and Joe has a healthy population that breeds, meaning he does not need to buy more new animals, unless he wants to introduce fresh blood to the herds. It is important for Joe to manage the animals well, inbreeding is a threat, and weak animals are shot at what is called a “management hunt”. He has to control the number of exotic and domestic animals thoroughly, including the white tail deer.

Dry Creek Ranch

October 2003:

“Kill a buck with big antlers and everybody know you’ve got big balls, the ones with smaller antlers are for those with no balls!” (Joe). The men had to shout to be heard, the noise from the car made conversation difficult, even though we were driving very slowly on the bumpy road. The washed-out dirt road was almost too much for the ranch truck we sat in; there is no way we would have made it in a regular car. The rifle that had been placed on the dashboard made a rattling noise with each bump, which annoyed all three of us. Tim tried to put something underneath it, but the rattling kept on. Joe got angry with him for not managing to stop the rattle. None of them tried to move the rifle and place it in the rifle-hangers behind our heads. We were out in the pastures to fill up the automatic deer feeders with corn. The ranch had about 60 feeders that had to be filled up every second or third week, and considering the size of the ranch and thus the distance between the feeders, it was a time consuming job. The men would have to start over again right after going through all the feeders. The sacks with corn were placed in the flatbed, and Joe drove us to where the feeders were. Not once did he fail to locate the feeder, he knew exactly where they were. The feeders go off twice a day, spreading out corn for the deer to eat. The deer know exactly when the feeders will go off, and gather around it to eat. Small shacks called blinds are put up not far from the feeders, between 75-100 meters away, and this is where the hunters sit and wait for their prey. The hunters have their rifles ready, pointing at where the animals usually gather, and if an appropriate animal shows up, he or she will shoot at it. I asked them on different occasions if this was not a kind of cheating, but the answer was always the same:

”We are hunting! We don’t call it killing but hunting because we don’t always manage to shoot something. The animal may catch the scent of us and run off, it might not show up at all, wrong animals may show up, or the distance is too far, the angle wrong, the hunter might fail and the animal will run off, and so on. There are so many uncertain things about this kind of hunt”

“Go check the blinds for wasp-nests, Cecilie, but be careful! Look out for rattlesnakes, watch every step, they are everywhere out here, and if they strike you, they’ll kill you!” I do as asked, and I watch the men from a distance. The sight leaves no doubt about who is the employer and who is the employee. Tim is struggling with the heavy sacks, while Joe is directing and telling him what to do, with his cigarette lit in his mouth as always. Joe’s declining health makes hard physical work a challenge for him, and the help from Tim is invaluable. Tim used to come to the ranch a couple of months every fall, to help with the hunting guests and chores connected to the hunting, like filling up feeders. It is important for him to get to know the land as thoroughly as possible so as not to get lost out there, which could easily happen in this vast country with few natural landmarks. The best way to learn is to go out with Joe.

We drive from one blind to another and the temperature is rising. By 10 am the temperature has reached 28 centigrade, and we all want to get the job done as quickly as possible, so that we can drive back to the headquarters where Joe’s wife Eve will have lunch ready in an hour and a half, and then continue after lunch. I sense that Tim feels a little tense in the situation. Joe is a man of relatively few words, and with a rough humor, but a warm heart. He is the one who makes all the decisions, and by talking and giving orders in a very direct and determined way, he makes it quite clear to everyone that he is the boss. Still it seems like Tim and Joe have a special relationship, Joe seems to like him and is more patient than usual. He tries to make a fool out of Tim in a subtle but friendly way, but Tim patently ignores this. He is more interested in getting to know the pastures and where the feeders are located, and Joe tells him about the different pastures and the animals kept in them. The tone between the men is friendly, but tough. The conversation centers on hunting, telling each other stories from hunting trips and the like. Although the humor is dirty and typical male humor, I find it easy to talk to Joe in this situation, he is more extroverted here than what he has been back at headquarters.

Suddenly we get stuck in a mud hole, the tires dig themselves further down into the mud when Joe tries to get us out. Joe calls for assistance from the ranch headquarters with the car radio, and we are glad to know that Pedro and a couple of men are soon on their way, even if we know that it would take the men at least an hour to get to where we are, if they can find us

at all. The thought of walking back does not tempt any of us, considering the heat, that by now has reached above 30 centigrade, the burning sun, the lack of water and the distance. It is safer to stay by the car where the radio is, and the car will also provide a little shade from the sun. While waiting for assistance the humor between the men gets even rougher, they tease me and try to scare me by telling me we had to stay out here, that nobody will ever find us, and that we will starve to death, if the predators do not eat us first. I am joking too, and after a while they realize that I am unaffected by their teasing, and we start to talk about hunting and ranching instead.

“You never imagine seeing a cowboy do these things, huh? Filling up the feeders with corn and check the blinds. Getting stuck with a car in a mud-whole. You never see this in films. Well, I’m a rancher, and this is what I do. I’m a cowboy at heart. Hunting has become the new business for the ranches, it pays off economically. The myths about the cowboys do not reflect the reality, most of the ranches are operated differently than a hundred years ago; it is more convenient to use helicopters and trucks to gather the cattle than to use 40 horses and just as many men”(Joe)

Suddenly it strikes me: I have been at the ranch for a couple of days, driving out in the fields with the men, but so far I have not seen a single cow or horse or goat at the ranch, just a lot of deer and different game animals and birds. At headquarters I have only seen dogs and pigs. No horses ridden by cowboys. One reasonable explanation can be that the ranch consists of 47 000 acres of land (190.2 km²), which is a huge area for the cattle, goats and horses to hide out; another explanation can be that they only keep about 100 cattle, about 25 horses and about 1000 goats, grazing in different pastures throughout the ranch. But still, the lack of horses and cattle strike me as peculiar. I later learned that the cattle and goats were kept in pastures quite far from the headquarters of the ranch, and in the opposite direction from where we had been driving in the car; the horses run more or less freely. They come to the ranch every once in a while hoping to get extra snacks. The horses are not ridden very often, except a few that are used by Pedro and Jorge, the hands living at the ranch. I realize how important the hunting is for this ranch. And most important – I realize that I had

expected to meet the Imagined cowboy and his lifestyle. I had fallen for presumptions about ranch life.

In the middle of nowhere

I got the feeling that Joe preferred to be at Dry Creek Ranch than at the smaller ranch. Dry Creek Ranch is literally located “in the middle of nowhere”; it would take Eve more than half a day to drive to the nearest grocery store with a decent supply of goods, and back. I went with her a few times, and we started early in the morning. We drove for a couple of hours to get to the grocery store, and Eve would fill up two or three trolleys with groceries to bring back to the ranch. The cooler in the back of the truck was filled with milk and meat, and the rest were packed in bags. Eve would get supplies that would last a week or two, depending on how many guests they were expecting. She was responsible for the food supply and the food preparation at the ranch. She did all the planning and all the shopping herself, and almost all the cooking. During busy times she would hire a cook to help her, who usually stayed a week or two, maybe even longer. She also got invaluable help from her son’s wife Ann, who lives with her family at the ranch for periods throughout the year. Eve told me she grew more and more tired of the hunting guests, and all the cooking, steadying and planning that came with them, it was hard and boring work. Eve is a tough woman, she knows how to get things done, and asks for Joe’s help only when absolutely needed, and never about cooking or cleaning. Joe never sticks his nose in Eve’s cooking, and Eve never interfere with Joes daily routines at the ranch. They do confer with each other, Eve has to know how many guests are coming, and Joe does sometimes have special requests for what should be served.

Driving back from the grocery store, the dirt road leading to the ranch headquarters is muddy and a challenge even for a 4x4 truck: “Joe never worries for me, even if I get home hours later than planned. He knows I’ll manage, he considers me one of his men. He cares but never worries about me”. Eve knows how to get herself out of tricky situations after living at this ranch for 30 years, and she knows when to call for help. The precautions taken out at the ranch are great, if an accident should happen, it will take several hours to get to an emergency room or to get a doctor to the ranch. There is no cellphone network with coverage at the ranch, and the radio in the car won’t receive any signals from any radio

stations. The critical point is the ranch road leading to the headquarters. After taking off from the main road you lose any contact with the rest of the world, and if something should happen on this 10 km long rough dirt road, you will just have to sit and wait and hope somebody will worry for you and come looking. Walking is not an option, unless on a rainy or cloudy day (which is not very often). The heat and burning sun are too dangerous. This is why Eve and everybody else at the ranch always bring water in the car, in case they have to spend a day.

Hunters pay to come to hunt at the ranch, and some animals are more expensive to shoot than others: some of the exotics cost up to 3000 dollars. The different game animals are hunted in different seasons, like wild turkey, javelina, dove, deer and the exotics. In the busy hunting season, Joe will get help from his grown sons and Tim to guide the hunters out to the blinds, and sometimes he even has to hire some other men as guides. Each guide usually brings 1-2 hunters with him to the blinds. The guide has to know where the animals usually stay and thus which blind they should go to, and he has to make sure the hunters do not kill an animal they should not kill, like a doe with fawns, or animals that for other reasons should not be killed. The guides usually know in which area the bucks with the most *points* (referring to the number of spikes on their antlers; the more points the greater a trophy) usually stay, and they look for them every time they are out in the pasture, so to keep a track of where they are, and how many they are. Tim often drove out in the pastures when he had time off, just to get a glimpse of a ten-or-more-pointed buck.

The hunting guests are accommodated in a house at the headquarters, and all meals are provided for them. The guests leave at five o'clock in the morning, to get out to the blinds before daylight and before the feeders go off and the animals get there. Eve usually gets up to cook for them, eggs and bacon, pancakes and sandwiches. The hunters get back to the headquarters by noon, and the subject of conversation is the hunting of the day. "I almost got him! A huge buck! Shame he got scared by something and ran away". "Well, a great shot you had there, son! Right in the shoulder! We have to get some pictures of you with the animal after lunch, and we have to weight him and then we can get Pedro to skin him and clean him out". Sometimes all the hunters know each other, but more often the hunters come in different parties without knowing each other. They soon get acquainted, and conversations

about the trophies and prizes won are common, usually they manage to tell without bragging, asking each other the right questions. The lucky men have blood on their clothes and under their nails, and one can see a huge grin underneath the dusty faces. Their expressions tell everybody they were content if they had managed to shoot an animal, and others could not hide their disappointment if they had failed. After lunch the hunters rest for a while, then they leave again for the evening hunt, at least the ones that were not lucky earlier in the day. They return in the evening to dinner, prepared by Eve, and by now more of the men have been lucky. The dead animals are brought back to the headquarter in the flatbed of the truck, and they are weighed and skinned by Pedro. The men gather around him to watch and talk and compare the dead animals. Pedro works in silence, his English is not fluent, and few of the hunters speak Spanish; he is a worker, while they are paying guests. He is not one of them, although he probably know more about wildlife than many of the guests.

Putting up predator snares underneath the high-fence is a job that has to be done every once in a while, in addition to checking them for animals. The predators, in this area most often bobcats, but also mountain lions and coyotes, will dig themselves under the fence and go inside and prey on the calves of the exotic animals or the deer, and they have to be controlled. The predator is representing the wild and raw nature, brutally killing fawns and weak animals, even calves or infant horses. Man is protecting his property and defenseless animals against the brutal nature. And when man is killing deer at hunts, he is killing for the best of the deer, keeping their population under control, and also saving the soil from over-grazing.

Hunting for money

Hunting is the new business for ranches. All the 10-15 ranches I visited exploited the opportunity for hunting for additional income. None of the other ranches I visited came close to the advanced commercial hunting at Dry Creek Ranch. Most of the ranches leased out land for local hunters to come and hunt, with no guide, and no accommodation. As Nick at the High Ranch said: "This is money that just lays there, income without having to work for

it, it just lays there, waiting to be exploited”. Few of the ranch owners hunted themselves, not any more, the time would not allow, or the interest was not there anymore.

Commercial hunting has become a sport and leisure time activity for Americas’ middle-class. To be able to go on such trips you have to pay a lot for the stay, the hunting authorization, registration fees for the killed animal, equipment like cammo pants and jackets, rifles and ammunition. Most also get to the ranch by air, due to the enormous distances, either by a private plane or by regular flights, and are picked up at the airport. Most of the hunters I talked to used to go on such hunting trips at least once a year, often more, hunting different animals throughout the year. Some guests kept coming back to Dry Creek year after year, the hunting was usually good there, and the hosts are warm and welcoming. It is essential for Joe to keep a good reputation, as in all businesses, so it is in his interest that the visiting hunters get a successful hunt. One turkey-hunter told me:

“Last month I was hunting turkey at a ranch close to San Angelo, I stayed for a week and didn’t even see a javelina!! I left in anger; I’ll never go back there. I came here, and this is so much better, look at the two gorgeous turkeys I shot today, my first day here! Look at those feathers!”

A satisfied customer means a satisfied rancher. Some of the guests have read advertisements in papers and magazines, other have found the ranch’s homepage on the internet. And many have heard words and recommendations from friends and family.

Hunting in history

Commercial hunting is not innovative in the ranching business, it has existed for decades, but to be successful one needs to have good managing skills and comprehension. I got the impression that the ranchers started the hunting business out of necessity, and not so much out of interest. The extra labor that follows an extended hunting business does not fit into the cowboy imagery, even though hunting has been associated with the West for a long time. To be as successful as Joe, the interest has to take priority. Many of the ranchers told me they would not consider leasing out land for hunting, if not for the necessity for additional income. They would like to spend all their time and all their acres on the cattle ranching.

Hunting has been a part of the West ever since the westward migration started. Owen Wister made his first acquaintance with the West and the people he would later write about, through guided hunting trips to the West. Buffalo Bill used to make a living by scouting for and guiding easterners on hunting trips to the West, before he got famous as a cowboy with his Wild West Show. Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887, a gentleman's hunting club, where Wister and Remington were among the members (Slotkin 1992). "He [Roosevelt] began to see his own ranching and hunting experience as a model for regenerating the lost manliness and vigor of his class" (ibid: 37)

The hunter was a conqueror of the wilderness, not unlike the cowboy. The hunter and the cowboy met similar challenges and their knowledge were often the same. Hunting is considered a masculine sport or activity, just like cowboying. Hunters have not been going through such an elaborated mythification process as the cowboy, although hunters and hunting also have myths attached. Hunting and ranching/cowboying seems to have much in common, and it is not surprising that the combination is as extensive as it is. Going to commercial hunts at ranches like Joes' are, as mentioned, considered a privilege for segments of the middle and upper class. Cowboying is not, it is considered an employment for the working or lower middle class. You will not get wealthy from cowboying. Ranching on the other hand demands monetary investment, and the scale and accomplishment is based on what layer of the social class the ranchers are considered to belong to. Regardless of this, all the ranchers I spoke to, from small-scale to large-scale ranchers, told me that ranching alone does not make a man rich. They struggled every day to find the best solution for their ranches, and the main challenges were the cattle prizes and the weather. These forces were uncontrollable:

"We keep hoping for rain, that's all we can do. If we could see into the future ten years ago, and see that it would be ten years of drought, we would quit.

We have to be really optimistic and hope for the best" (Eve).

Hunting is an insecure business, especially when taken to such a scale as Joe has. The overall economic situation in the US has made people more aware of saving money,

according to a group of people gathered in the local feed-store¹⁹ in a small West-Texas town:

A: "Hunting is on its way down now as well. We have seen a decline in the demand for products the last years, a drastic decline! It is not as huge and income-producing as before. It seems like people don't come here to hunt any more"

B: "Yes, this year we have less hunters coming to the ranch than usual"

Cecilie: "I wonder why?"

A: "It is because people are worried for their personal economy; they don't dare to use as much money as before"

Hunting is considered an additional income for most ranchers, but for some, like Joe, both ranching and hunting are important sources of income. He relies on both to be able to keep ranching, but cattle ranching is closest to his heart. Several times he reminded me that he is a cowboy at heart, although he did not cowboy anymore. To him the cowboy in him was a state of mind rather than an activity or occupation.

Joe seems to be aware of the incongruence between what he is, a rancher, and what he actually spends his time doing, filling up the deerfeeders. He explicitly commented on this, in a way that made me feel as though he was excusing himself for doing boring work like filling up the feeders, when what he was supposed to do as a rancher was look after cattle: "Cowboying is a life style; it doesn't matter if you did it a long time ago or now, it is still a life-style. I'm still a cowboy, even if I don't do the work a cowboy does anymore".

¹⁹ Hunting and ranching equipment and animal feed

A cowboys' new image

I have proposed that the cowboy has a template, which can be filled with almost everything by anyone who wants to relate to the cowboy. To be identified as a cowboy requires more than filling this template with what might suit the individual. What can it be filled with, and the person still be identified as a cowboy?

The Wild Horse Ranch is located in the Texas Panhandle, and has met many of the same challenges as Dry Creek Ranch. The drought that lasted for several years is an example:

“The drought has been real bad here, worse than anywhere else in Texas. People say it is bad where they are, but it is not as bad as here. They say they need a real rainfall for the grass to come back, we need ten. (...)I hate you to see my cows like they are now, they look terrible, they are just skin and bone. Some of them are extra skinny because they have just given birth, and are nurturing the calf, and that takes a lot of energy out of'em. (...)This business is very unpredictable. I cannot make a budget; it is not possible, because you've always got unforeseen expenses. You never know what's goin' to happen. You have to be optimistic and look for opportunities. Many have a tendency of getting depressed. Many people believe we're rich because we own land, and maybe we are, but you cannot run the land without any money. In hard times, when I just want to give it up, I have to see the opportunities I've got. I've got land and animals; I can do whatever I want with that. Find new solutions if possible” (Benny)

Many ranches have been forced to look to other sources of income to be able to survive in the cattle business. The really lucky ones find oil on their land, and if an oil company regards it as actual, this may secure the income for the ranch for a long time. Texas has a considerable amount of oil, and all ranchers I asked, said that that things would change a great deal if they were lucky to find oil. Only two of the ranches I visited had found oil that was worth extracting. This and other alternative ways of running a ranch leads to alternative ways of being a cowboy. In addition to looking after the cattle, the cowboy has to look after pipelines, check for leakages, or he must, as at Dry Creek Ranch, feed the deer and guide the

commercial hunting guests. What will this eventually do to the cowboy imagery? Barth (1967) argues that if the individual administrator of resources tries to maximize his/her resources, they will practice a durable and constant pressure on the existing boundaries, and seek not to be limited by unreasonable factors or be stopped by social conventions. Thus the social conventions will gradually be altered, so as to fit the new pressure. Will the society accept such an alternation of their cowboy imagery?

Hunting could be perfect in this regard, when the ranchers have to look for other resources. Hunting is a masculine practice, even if one can find several female hunters. The killing of live animals, the mastering of firearms, the preparation of the killed animal is typically considered a man's practice. The aspect of masculinity is still taken care of, and I argue that it is to a degree overcommunicated in relation to hunting. There is no practical reason why hunting is considered masculine, a female can do just as well as a man, even if she does not have the same level of physical strength. Physical strength is not required in this practice.

It is impossible to predict what will happen to the society's image of the cowboy, but I believe that the cowboy myth is strong. The cowboy imagery is a model for action, and to change this model into accepting that cowboys fill up deer feeders or driving guests to the blinds, is complicated. It is even difficult to imagine a cowboy herding goats; what he is supposed to herd is cattle. This image is rooted in the conception of the cowboy, and I believe it will be very hard to change this.

Being different

Being a Texan man generally, according to the leading discourse on masculinity, implies a degree of conservativeness: he usually votes Republican, he is the breadwinner of the family. This is reflected in my empiric material. Except for one independent and one democrat, the rest of my informants are supporters of President George W. Bush, and their support of him is strong and evident. At the time I was in Texas, the US was anticipating a coming presidential election, and the campaign for the two main parties, the democrats and the republicans, ran non-stop on national television. My informants generally expressed their contentment with the then President Bush, who was running for re-election, and they uttered

negative attitudes for the democratic delegate and their politics. Eve explained this to me during one of our conversations:

C: "I've got the impression that most ranchers are republicans, is that right?"

E: "Yes, that could be right. Most of us like Bush. Republicans are more conservative"

C: "Does that mean that most ranchers are conservative?"

E: "Well, I don't know, but they probably are. I like Bush because he executes what he says he is going to do, unlike many others. He is the most honest president we've ever had"

Nick told me that as a rancher, things had become better after Bush was elected the first time. The republicans want to cut estate tax, which I was told was very expensive, and are therefore popular among ranchers. The republicans also argue for little intervention from the government, and greater freedom for the individual. Independency and freedom is central to the cowboy imagery.

Women

Tradition has it that there are very few female cowboys, and there might be a good and practical reason for that, combined with a continuation of tradition. One part of the reason is probably due to typical gender roles, women take care of the children and the house, the man leaves the house to sustain the family. There is still gendered socialization of kids: boys start to practice roping and riding at an early age; girls can as well, but "just for fun". Girls often practice barrel-racing²⁰ or reining²¹, which are sports of speed and precision, but are seldom

²⁰Ride the horse as fast as possible around three barrels placed in a triangle without tipping the barrels over.

²¹ "Contestants are required to run one of several approved patterns which include small slow circles, large fast circles, flying lead changes, roll backs over the hocks, 360 degree spins done in place, and the exciting sliding stops that are the hallmark of the reining horse" (<http://www.nationalwestern.com/nwss/home/index.asp?rpg=/nwss/specialevents/uset.asp> 12.02.07)

trained in other cowboy sports like bulldogging²², bronc-riding²³, or team-roping²⁴. Max, one of my informants, and previously a successful rodeo cowboy, trained his only child, his young daughter, in roping (not common for a girl), using a dummy head attached to a bale of hay:

“Barrel-racing is good for nothing. I want her to practice roping instead of this barrel-thing, roping is useful! That’s what I used to do, I used to compete, but was not that good. And by educating my girl in this, I have an excuse for start doing this again, I love this, but have not time otherwise. She prefers barrels because the roping is difficult and takes hours of practice to learn, but she’ll understand...I tell her to throw that rope like a boy, and she is doing better”

There is a practical reason for this clear majority of men in this tradition – cowboying requires hard physical work, the person that does this has to endure rough country, bad weather, and unreliable horses and angry bulls

One of my informants lives a life that speaks against this notion. Anna took over the family ranch when her father retired, and is now the manager and sole owner. The ranch holds 170 heads of cattle, which is actually a low number for this ranch; she was forced to reduce her amount of cattle by 50% because of the drought. She told me that lack of rain is the main threat to the ranch, and she has to put a lot of resources toward handling that. Her husband is a teacher at a Texas college, this secures the future of the ranch, but he seldom has the opportunity to help Anna manage the ranch. She has a man working for her when needed, he gets to live at the ranch in exchange of helping her out, and if necessary she hires day-workers. I got the opportunity to go with Anna during her daily ranch work, and she

²² bulldogging or steer-wrestling: A team of two riders. A bull is released from a chute, and “the steer wrestler catches up to the steer as quickly as possible and then leans over, jumps off of his horse and grabs the steer by its head (...) (The second rider) keep the steer running straight and from turning away from them. (<http://rodeo.about.com/cs/steerwrestling/a/steerbasics.htm> 12.02.07).

²³ Ride an untamed horse

²⁴ A team of two riders are going to catch and tie a steer at the fastest time. One rider aims at the horns, the other at one of the hind leg, one of the riders jumps off the horse and throws the steer to the ground, tying its feet down.

performed the tasks in the same way as, I prior to this, had only seen men do. We went out in her feed-truck to feed the cattle, and to check on fences and pipelines. Oil is an additional income at this ranch, and so is hunting. She has managed to balance and integrate these three areas well: cattle, oil and hunting. I asked Anna about being a woman in such a male-dominated business. She replied that she felt respected and taken seriously, and she never felt she was ridiculed if asking “the old guys” for advice. “Well, most of the time, though”, she added after reflecting for a second.

C: “How do people react when you tell them you’re a rancher?”

A: “Most people laugh and say ‘ how interesting’, and then they ask how many cattle I’ve got and such things. Most people think it is cool and tough, even if I myself don’t feel it like that. It’s just my job, and just something I do without considering it in that way”

Anna does not consider herself a cowboy, she is a rancher. I did not meet a single female working cowboy during my stay, although many of the ranchers’ wives told me they used to help out at round-ups when they were younger, now they did not have time to do that, even if they would like to. My research shows that females seldom constitute the cowboy work force, but they are supportive in considerable ways, like cooking at round-ups and hunts, by checking fences and traps, and at times riding with the men when looking for cattle. This does not exclude the chance that there are some working *cowgirls*, but these are not represented in my empirical data. Anna is proof that the ranching business is not solely a man’s business, women can succeed as well. But she would never be a cowboy.

Homosexuality

Tradition, protestant religion and to a large degree conservatism seem to be strong in Texas, which became visible to me at several occasions during my stay in Texas. One of my informants explicitly told me that he was very conservative, he did not tolerate homosexuals. During our discussion his view appeared to be ambivalent; he believed that God created every man and woman the way they are, but not homosexuals. He feared their preferences would infect his children, he would never allow a homosexual teacher to be the teacher of

his children. The way he argued during our discussion showed an uncertainty, and I believe my informant was influenced by a common view in the society, without really thoroughly and critically regarding the matter. The conservatism in the society influences the individual. His conservatism seemed to embrace the idea that everything was better before, also when it comes to ranching tradition.

This conservatism toward homosexuality became even more evident to me through the release of the film *Brokeback Mountain* in 2006, directed by Ang Lee, where the story is about two gay cowboys. The movie was controversial in Norway, focusing on homosexual relationships in a milieu where this was not expected. What I find interesting is that the informants I asked about this film did not want to see it, and the controversy about it was significant in Texas too. Could it be that gay cowboys in particular should not exist? Not because they are gay, but because they are cowboys? A cowboy is by definition (according to the imagery) not homosexual; that is against all common views about him. Could it be that this film were considered a threat to their identity, not necessarily on a private level, but rather the cowboy imagery we tend to identify with?

Homosexuality was not a topic I was concerned with when interviewing my informants, but it came up every now and then in conversations. When it came up, people generally had negative opinions toward this group, and did not want to be associated with them. "A man and a woman, not a man and a man, that's the way God wants it" Paul told me. A few were a little more nuanced, they felt pity for "these people", but did not accept their way of life. This atmosphere gave me indications of the notion that there is no room for homosexual cowboys.

Conclusion

It is impossible to predict what will happen to the cowboy image, but considering the influence the images have on American society, the cowboy myths will most likely be maintained. The gap between the hegemonic Imagined cowboy and the Performed cowboys will broaden with time and modernity. If the myths stay their original form, they will not fit the modern cowboys particularly well. The cowboys and the receivers of the myths can

interpret the myths to make them fit the modern cowboys. The cowboys can interpret their own practices to fit the myths. If the myths continues to be as pervasive as they are, even if they do not fit the practices of the contemporary cowboys very well, the imagery or myth is stronger than what it actually concerns – the cowboy.

What could happen is that the ranch cowboy will not be identified as a cowboy. A cowboy will become a historical figure, a man belonging to the past, and the contemporary men working with cattle will be seen differently. Not real cowboy, but maybe a derivative of hi; modernized to an unrecognizable extent. My empirical data show signs of this already, some consider the real cowboy to be on the verge of extinction. I have argued that there is a dialogue between the cowboy template, the narratives and the practices; the myth is not constant, but can be altered. This needs to be done if the modern Performing cowboys are going to fit into the cowboy myths.

The function of the myths and imageries are diverse, and they do give premises that people relates to, whether personal in an identificational way, or as shaping their view of history and masculinity. The cowboys themselves meet a twofold challenge: they relate to the Imagined cowboy through his hegemonic place in society, but they also have to relate to it personally, through being what is the essence of the myth – a cowboy, a real man. This could create explanatory problems for the individual when the myth does not match the real life, and their identity is at stake. Not necessarily for themselves, but toward the outsiders of the cowboy tradition.

In the next chapters I discuss the implications the cowboy imagery has for the individual cowboys' identity and masculinity.

Chapter IX. Cowboys like us

“Cowboys like us sure do have fun

Racin’ the wind, chasin’ the sun

Take the long way around back to square one

Today we’re just outlaws out on the run

There’ll be no regrets, no worries and such

For cowboys like us” (George Strait, artist)

This chapter will be based on an event I attended toward the end of my fieldwork, and which proved to be an excellent opportunity to observe several versions of the Performed cowboys in action. The events observed at the round-up will be discussed in light of masculinity, personal identity and the individual establishment of the Self. I hope to show how the cowboys perform a cowboy identity, and that this can be done in several ways. The individual man has to live his own masculinity, through his own self, connected to his established identity, but in a cultural discourse concerning how to be a man and a cowboy. A man participates in several different universes of discourse (Barth 1989); a cowboy is not only a cowboy, he simultaneously has several other roles and statuses, and as all humans, he partakes in several different discourses. These constitute a necessity and possibility to move between the worlds he engages with and lives in; his cultural construction of reality is not based on one singular source, but is a compound of different worlds. Nick’s answer to my question whether he regarded himself as a cowboy or a rancher shows this: “Eh...rancher, cowboy, eh...grandfather, husband, father...everything”.

Every individual engages in several social relations, whether it is at home, at school, at the workplace, in the grocery store, with friends, colleagues, husband, wife, kids. Some of these social settings require that the individuals occupy certain roles, like the father’s role toward a son, or a friend’s role toward a friend. Most of these different roles function very well in combination with other roles, even if they are present at the same time. But some are not compatible if they have to be possessed at the same time by one person, as Barth

demonstrates (Barth 1971) in his studies from Pakistan. The roles do not function well together because they have converging interests and converging expectations of normative behavior. Barth shows that the “immanent attributes of the relations” (Barth 1971 in *ibid.* 1994: 67, my translation) is confronted in relations concerning kinship and affinity, but he emphasizes that it may exist in all other social relations as well. He explains the attributes of the relations to be necessary to define the relation, and none of the participants in the relation can ignore these attributes, without ignoring the relation. The problem arises when a man finds himself in two conflicting relations simultaneously. Additionally, the man living as a cowboy also has to consider the common interpretations of the cowboy. He cannot ignore the Imagined cowboy. And he can certainly not ignore the expectations about how to be a man with cowboy virtues from within the cowboy culture.

Identity/Personality/Self

I treat identity as identification connected to ways- of -being that are general, overarching, normative, and connected to expectations of behavior and roles. The Identity is judged by normative conventions, normative set of rules. Jenkins calls this identity “the institutional order” (Jenkins 2004:21). The individual will meet sanctions if he/she is not willing to or able to follow the expected norms that attaches to a certain identity, e.g. being a cowboy. I argue that there multiple identities and roles exist for multiple situations.

I regard personality as personal (inner) experience of oneself, which is inaccessible to direct observation (Erchak 1992). This is what would be the individual’s reflective experience of his own identity. I understand that this is what Jenkins label “the individual order” (Jenkins 2004:18)

I consider a person’s Self to be the expressive, flexible, interactive, and sometimes habituated aspect of being a social person. Jenkins argues that the Self is inseparably tied to the body, and that individual identification always is embodied (*ibid.*). *Habitus*, the autonomous acting, has to be in accordance to the conventions of the person’s identity. A person’s self is presented to the surroundings, and must comply with the person’s identity. I believe my definition of self is what Jenkins calls “the interaction order” (*ibid.*:19)

I argue that masculinity can be treated in a similar way, and the relation between the orders is related in the same way as the orders concerning identity. This is because masculinity is an inseparable part of identity. This notion implies that a man shows visible, normative, rule-bounded masculinities, like he shows identities, and which I call normative masculinities. It also implies that he has a personal and expressive experience of his own masculinities, just like his own personality and self are in relation to his identities.

How do the ranch cowboys of today handle and express the aspect of their identity concerning cowboyness, and particularly masculinity? This is done predominantly through action, when he can display a habituated behavior. If the behavior is not habituated, the identity as a cowboy will be weakened. Habituated behavior is behavior that has become an automatic reflex, an automatic response, done without reflection (Bourdieu 2005). The fact that the behavior is habituated will express to the audience/surroundings that this is something the person has done many times before, and that he does not have to think about it. This can, in some situations, be an attractive expression in itself, and they may try to display an identity by trying to express a habituation that is not really habituated, but played out as habituated. To succeed with this, the person has to be extremely clever at playing a role, or the audience themselves must be devoid of such knowledge about the context/situations. An outsider to the cowboy tradition would probably not be able to tell if a “cowboy –behavior” expressed by a man is habituated or just played out really well by a man that has more knowledge about the tradition than themselves.

Riding With the Cowboys

To shed a light on the discussion of identity and masculinity, I find it appropriate to give a thorough description of one of my experiences in the field –one day at the spring round-up at High Ranch. My intention with this extended review is to give the reader a more complex, and a more comprehensive basis for my analysis to come. To participate in this event left me with some unanswered questions: Do the men have a sort of unspoken common understanding of how to be a cowboy or a man in this specific situation? Do they have a common perception of the situations? How do the men express their identity? What are the

important factors when interacting in the group, or the smaller clusters of men? It can not be taken for granted that all the men in the group are included in the group based on similarities, thus sharing a symbolic understanding. Are the men concerned about their behavior, and do they deliberately express their masculinity or cowboyiness? I will try to answer these questions in this chapter and in the next.

I was invited to the round-up by Liz and her husband Bill. Liz is the co-owner of High Ranch and sister of Nick, who runs the ranch. Ranches usually have two round-ups a year, one in the fall and one in the spring. At the fall round-up, all the animals are checked, *culling* (sort out) the ones they are going to sell. High Ranch is considered one of the larger ranches in West Texas, and even though the ranch is up date when it comes to modern adjustments, the ranch still rounds up cattle in the old way, meaning they gather the animals using horses, and use the *drag-to-the-fire-technique*.

I was told more than once that I was lucky to be invited to this special occasion. Some of the cowboys participating came from other places in Texas, even other states in the US. They were traveling a long way, and most of them came back every year. This was obviously an attractive round-up to attend. Each man at the round-up had their own reason for being there, and they would emphasize different aspects as important and of value, e.g. that Nick might be a reasonable man to work for, there might be an imbalance in their reciprocity-relation and the work will even out the debt, they might be there because of the beautiful and challenging terrain, the good horses, to get a distinctive outdoor adventure. They might be there to re-strengthen their identity as a cowboy, to freshen up their knowledge in cowboying (for those who doesn't work as a cowboy), to meet friends they seldom see, to be a part of a team. Or it might be that this ranch's roundups are attractive to the men because of the ranch's tradition in doing it the old way, meaning not using cars or 4-wheelers or helicopters, staying out in the mountains for weeks at a time, having the meals prepared on a camp fire and served from a chuck-wagon. The men at cow camp do have the luxury of having outhouses, and they have a very primitive shower, heated by propane. They have the possibility to seek shelter in the tack-room, but most of the men slept in *tepees* (small pointed tents, usually seen as Indian tents).

What struck me when arriving in cow camp the first morning was that the scene could have been taken from any western movie (except for the cars that took us there). The authenticity of the situation, and its ability to convey that authenticity to the participants, is an aspect I cannot ignore. And also the fact that to be able to complete a successful round-up in this manner, Nick needs men that are clever in their practical skills, who know what to do and how to do it, that will take orders, and that will get along with the rest of the group and the team-work. Cooperation and understanding between the men and between Nick/George and the men are essential. I once asked Nick how he would define a good cowboy, and after considering he answered: “A man who reads the situation, who reads the men, who reads the animals, who knows what the cow will do before she does it.”

This practical aspect implies that the men who are hired and paid for the job they execute are good cowboys. Just by being there, the hired men were identified as good cowboys. That is, with some important reservations: that Nick’s apprehension of what constitutes a good cowboy is general, and that he is estimating his men correctly.

Not all the men are hired men, and thus this first identification as a good cowboy by simply being there is not applicable for all the men, and it is not necessarily important to all the men either. The men who do find this important have to live up to the identification by showing that they really are good cowboys. Some of the men at the round-up were not considering themselves cowboys, their professional occupation was not being ranch cowboys, but they did know how to ride a horse and how to behave socially at a round-up. They had come to this event before. Some of the men were retired cowboys, now with other professions, maintaining their cowboying skills. And there were females present too, among them me.

The Round-up at High Ranch

Friday morning, 0500: An early wake-up call at the ranch’s’ headquarter.

Nick is already up and about, making sure that everybody wakes up in time. He walks from door to door, knocking and banging, making sure that nobody is still sleeping. He needs to be in cow camp in time, he is the one who tells all his men what to do, and he is the boss. The men in cow camp are probably already awake, the cooks are probably making the fire

right now, so that the breakfast will be ready at 0630. The dirt roads leading there used to be dry and dusty, but the last days' heavy rain have made them muddy and slippery, not fit for a car, nonetheless a car with a horse-trailer, that we are bringing with us. Nick does have a 4x4 truck, but that is not a guarantee under these circumstances. He says he is worried that they need to cancel the day, but is sure that he wants to give it a try, even if he risks making his car and all of us get stuck in the mud. He has no choice; he has to try to get us up there. He is eager to start.

There are eight of us going to cow camp this morning, we hurry into the kitchen, where the smell of newly brewed coffee meets us. Plans are made for how to get to cow camp, we need two cars. Nick is bringing his truck and Matt, his son, is bringing his. I get in the truck with Nick. In the truck are also Liz, Nicks sister who lives in a big city on the East Coast, and who is the one that invited me to the roundup, Matt's' father-in-law, and another man that is going to help Nick for the day. The car is a gigantic Ford 4x4, and I am happy about that, because it increases our chances of getting to the cow camp. We haul the empty trailer after us. The rest get into Matt's' car.

It is still dark when we leave, city lights do not spoil the beautiful sky covered in stars. The only thing I see is the tracks in the light of the headlights of the car. Now and then a jack-rabbit or a cotton-tail tries to get safely to the nearest bush. I am completely disoriented, and also very tired. The time is 0545.

The atmosphere in the car is excited; everybody talks with low voices, as if not to disturb the driver. We try to keep an eye on the headlights of Matt's car, to see that he has no problems following us. Nick is constantly on the radio with his foreman, George, who is in cow camp, and also with Matt who is driving behind us. Nick, Matt and George argue about which route to take, the long way or the short-cut. Nick wants to go the long way, because that is safer with the trailer. Matt decides to take the short-cut. George doesn't know the conditions of the roads; he hasn't been there after the heavy rain last night. Liz praises Nick for his clever driving; he gets us safely all the way to cow camp. The drive has taken us about 45 min. Under normal conditions we would have made it in 25.

It is still dark when we arrive in cow camp, and the men are already up. They have spent another night in their tepees, sleeping comfortably in their *bed-rolls* (sleeping-bag and sleeping mattress in-one, easily rolled into a bundle that can be attached to the saddle). The night's rain does not seem to have disturbed their sleep, although quite a few of them said they moved into the tack room when their tepees started to leak. These men spend weeks up in cow camp like this. Some of the men are full-time employees at Dry Creek Ranch, but the rest of the men are hired for the occasion. I learned that *neighboring* is a common practice among the ranches; the ranches in the area call on each other when help is needed. Nick has managed to get hold of about 15 men to help him at the spring round-up, in addition to his own men, about 5-6. The men get paid about 75 dollars a day, which I was told by several informants is common pay for such a job, and this includes all meals, but they have to bring their own horses and tack if they can. They also have to stay in the cow camp for as long they are going to help, and they all sleep in tepees. Sometimes the round-ups last for 3-4 weeks, and they spend all this time up in the mountains, maybe with the exception of a couple of nights off on the weekend, when they get to go to town, or home to their families.

Sharing meals and nights and working in a team like this does have implications for the identification of the group. Even though the heterogeneous selection of men consists of men from different backgrounds and with different motivations for being at the round-up, they might be considered and consider themselves to be a group when they are up in the mountains at the round-up. They constitute a work force, and the dynamic of the group is dependent on the ability of the individuals to understand and practice the social skills required for this situation. The group identity is constituted on similarities (Jenkins 2004), and to enhance this, the men may over-communicate sameness and under-communicate difference (Barth 1966), in their relationship to persons they want to be identified with. This can be done by using a special way of speaking, using terms that anthropologists call "emic", dress in certain ways, follow the code of cowboyness. These practical and social forms of knowledge constitute a boundary between the men who conform to this normative system, and those who do not. The fact that Nick did not sleep in cow camp but rather went down to the headquarters, might be a way for him to set himself apart from the other men; he is not like the men, he is different in that he is the leader, and by keeping a distance to the men, he underlines this difference between them. He has the privilege of going down to the

headquarters to sleep in a comfortable bed and take a hot and pleasant shower in the morning. I am no certain the men envied Nick this, but if they did, they would probably never admit it. That would be contrary to cowboy behavior. The men seemed to enjoy being at the round-up, this was the place and opportunity to show that they were men and cowboys. And as a bonus, this place was particularly beautiful.

The sky soon starts to lighten. It is still very cold, and I am not the only one freezing, I can tell from the tight shoulders and the gathering around the camp fire. The smoke from the camp fire makes our eyes run. The two Mexican cooks have the breakfast ready, and the men wait in line for their turn. The men that spent the night at the camp get to help themselves with the breakfast first, even Nick waits for all his men to get served. Liz explained to me that the reason for doing this was to ensure that the hard-working men did get enough to eat. I could think of another effect of this gesture too. By letting his men eat first, Nick would not only communicate that he was the courteous host and appreciated his men, but also that he himself was different from them. The abundance of food for every meal could imply that there was never an actual threat that the men would go hungry.

Nick is the boss at the ranch and everybody pays him great respect, but they all have a relaxed tone between them. Nick makes plans for the day together with Matt and George, his trusted second-in-command. Matt also has some influence, and he is regarded by the rest of the men as a kind of leader, a deputy for his father. And he is the one to take over the running of the ranch after his father has retired.

We get to see a spectacular sunrise, and the men seem anxious to get started. Nick makes two of the men go out and gather the horses that are going to be used that day. Meanwhile the rest of us get ready, we rinse off our trays and cutlery with a hose, leaving the dishwashing to the cooks. I get my assigned saddle and bridle and follow the men to where the horses are. The horses do not wear any kind of halters during the night, so they have to be roped. Two or three men get the task of roping the horses, the men who are the best ropers, we do not have time for missings, and they want to be as easy on the horses as possible, they try not to upset them more than necessary. The rest of us are gathered in the other end of the pen, waiting for our horse to get roped. Nick decides who should ride which horse, he knows the temper of the different horses, and he knows the men's individual

ability to ride. Several men bring their own horses, but one horse is used for half a day, and then needs to be changed into a fresh horse for the rest of the day, and they seldom use the same horse two days in a row, so the men need to bring a lot of horses if they are riding their own each day. Most of the men also have to ride the horses belonging to the ranch. Nick knows all the horses, and knows which ones are gentle and which ones need a real experienced rider.

When we get the horses we go out of the pen and start to brush the dust off the horses, and check for injuries before saddling. The men are very helpful, they try to help me in every possible way, not knowing that I am an experienced rider and used to horses. I let them help me, and I am thankful for their help, considering that a western saddle weighs about 15 kilograms or more. And I am not an experienced *western* rider, so I do really need some help getting all the *tack* (equipment like saddle and halter) right. I get up on the horse and wait for the rest to get ready.

As we finish saddling we gather in a circle waiting for everybody to get ready. Suddenly we hear a bang and the sound of hoofs jumping; some of the horses are uproaring. The men start to laugh, and I see a man getting up from the ground, he has been thrown from his horse, all of a sudden, without any warning. He manage to hold his horse by the reins, and jumps back on it just as quick as he had fallen off, still with the men laughing, even Nick and George are laughing at him. Nobody ask him if he is ok, but he seems alright. This incident intrigued me – why did all the men laugh so much and make fun of him, and why did no one ask him if he were ok? That is normal custom were I come from, if somebody get thrown from a horse you ask if everything is ok. I have to say that my “social equestrian background” mainly, or rather exclusively, consists of female riding company, and this might affect my experiences and comprehension of the situation. I tried to find an explanation though, and it struck me that maybe they laughed because they did want to show that this was a surprising thing, as to “cover” for the man that got thrown, and the man also smiled himself. If he was used to being thrown he would be a lousy rider and they would not laugh. These men ride *broncos* (horses that have not been ridden before, usually bucking and trying to get rid of the rider) for fun, they are really good riders, and are probably used to get thrown. If nobody laughed it

would be more embarrassing for the thrown rider. This would comply with my own experience as a rider. But could there be another reason?

Challenge

The man that got thrown did identify himself as a cowboy, and was also identified as such by the others. He was one of the men Nick assigned for the tasks that required good roping skills, and there was no discussion about him, he was accepted as the man he was. He was accepted as a cowboy. The episode when he got thrown from his horse gave him the chance to reinforce this impression. He made a fool of himself by getting thrown, but he managed the situation very well. He got back on the horse, he did not complain or wimp, he did not blame or punish the horse in any way; he just got back on, laughing. I argue that his Self was laid bare by this situation, but he showed that his Self did comply with his identity; he showed to be a man by taking it like a man. The other men gave him the chance to show this, if they would have asked him how he was, he would not have the opportunity to show that he could take it like a man. The question from the others would rather imply that he was not a man, like how a cowboy is supposed to be in this situation, but a wimp and a man that had to be looked after.

Bourdieu (2005) has studied the notion of honor among his Algerian informants. He argues that to challenge a man means to recognize his qualities as a man, a man that is worthy of being challenged. He has to be considered a man of equal status. The reaction of the men when the cowboy was thrown was a challenge given to the man to show his identity/masculinity. The challenge gives the rider the opportunity to feel like a man, to show the other men which manly qualities he possesses. The other men would dishonor themselves if they challenged a man they knew was not capable of taking up the challenge. And the challenged man would not find a challenge worthy of answering if it came from somebody he did not regard as of equal status (*ibid.*).

The group of men considered the thrown man to be of equal status, and thus worthy of being challenged. The thrown rider took the challenge, he considered the group of men to be worthy of answering.

When everything quiets down, we wait to be told what to do and where to go. There are about 25 of us, and George stands in the middle on his horse and shouts out the names of who should ride with whom. He has made these groups in cooperation with his boss, and he knows the names of all the men, Cindy and me. Cindy is another girl riding with us, a friend of Liz and Bill, and she is an experienced rider (although not western rider, but English style, like me). We get divided into two main groups, and the two groups ride out in different directions. I ride far back in my group, I have heard that there are certain unspoken rules and etiquette that one should follow, like never ride in front of another man unless that is your designated place. So I decide to stay back and try to observe what is happening in the front. We ride out in a frisky trot, both men and horses are happy to be out, and the temperature is starting to rise. The men are chatting lively, I cannot hear what they are talking about, but I guess it is about the day that lies before us. I can tell that the tone between them is a joking tone, with laughter and teasing. The chatting and laughter quiet down when we get farther out from cow camp and closer to where they expect the cattle to be. The ground is covered with thick brush, and that is a good hiding place for a cow, both from the sun and from the men.

After 30 minutes George divides us into smaller groups of three or four and we all ride in different directions to cover a larger area, and to end up in the same place at the end. I am riding with Brad and Jack. Jack and Brad are riding with about 100 meters between them, and I am zigzagging between them to make sure no cows are hiding in the brush. We are riding like these for about an hour, and I can sometimes hear the men from the other groups shouting to each other, and whistling at the cows. I search the brushes for cows, but nothing but jack-rabbits and a few lizards are hiding there.

When we meet the others from the larger group, we turn up empty-handed. Some of the other small groups have gathered a few cows, but not very many. The larger group forms a line, and we ride side by side, with about 50 meters between us, and with the gathered cattle in front of us. We have to make sure that we don't miss anything on the way back to cow camp. We find some more cows, and join them with the cows we already have. Since we have to make sure we get everything with us, it takes a long time. We are walking slowly and have frequent stops; it takes us more than 1 1/2 hours to get back to the cow camp.

Back in cow camp we meet the other large group, they have not been very lucky either; they have just a few more cows than we do, about 20 heads altogether. This does not include their calves, which are not counted, but “included” in the count of their mother. We all ride side by side, close, so that none of the cows will be able to get out of the group, and drive them into the same pen we had the horses in earlier this morning. The pen is about 40x40 meters. We are getting off our horses, and I am getting into the pen to watch and take pictures of what is about to take place. This is the main event of the day, everybody except the cooks, which are preparing lunch, are gathering around to watch. Most of the men are in the pen, some horseback with ropes, some with cameras, and some without anything in their hands. It all seems chaotic to me at first, it takes a moment before I get a general view of what is going on.

Two men are still on their horses, they are the ropers; and one of them is Matt, the other one I do not know. These men are chosen to this task by George or Nick because they are good ropers. Their task is to rope the calves and drag them away from their mother and to the branding fire. This ranch use a portable branding fire, heated on propane. The branding irons are placed in the fire until hot and ready to use. These irons are practically the same as were used a hundred years ago; they are iron bars, approximately one meter long, with a brand on one end. Each ranch have their own distinctive brand, they are required by Texas law to brand their cattle. The end of the branding iron is heated until it becomes glowing hot.

The ropers on horses have one team of men each, who brands, *cut the ears* (together with the brand this will mark the calf), *doctors* (give the calves vaccination), castrate and *dehorn* (remove the horns if necessary) the calves. When the calf is roped and dragged to the fire (thus the expression *rope-and drag*), two men lie the calf on the ground, they manage to hold it tight by having one man sitting on the neck while bending one of the front legs in towards the chest, while the *flanker* grabs one of the hind leg and stretches it out, so that the calf is not able to get the legs underneath itself and rise up. This is hard work, the calf is mobilizing all its powers to get away, but when the men hold it like this it usually calms down and lie still. The team of two men has to be coordinated with the roper, as soon the calf is on the ground, the rope is detached, and the rider goes out for another calf. There are specific procedures for the two men to follow, to avoid injuries from the calf, which is fighting for

his life. Two men are using the hot branding irons to brand the calf. If it is a male it gets the ranch's brand on the right flank, if it is a heifer she will get the ranch's brand on the right side, and also a number that shows which year the animal was branded on the left flank. The smell of burnt flesh and hair is overwhelming. Yellow smoke from burnt hair is rising and stings the men's eyes. I have heard people talking about this smell before, but I never thought it would be that pervasive. The men have to know what to do, if the iron rod are held too long or too hard onto the calf, it will burn its way through the skin and be very painful, and the wound will be vulnerable for infection. But if they press it too softly or for too short a time, the brand will not stay. The calf also gets two shots, and if it is a male they will castrate him. The *flanker* screams out whether it is a male or female, and if it is a male, a third man with a sharp knife runs over and cuts the testicles off and place them on the propane heater to be eaten by the men afterwards.

As a female and as a student of anthropology I immediately sensed the showing off of masculinity in this eating of *cowboy oysters* (the cut-off testicles), but I did not understand why the ones who ate it did it. Not all the men did, rather quite few, and none of the girls, even though Liz and Cindy told me they had eaten it on several occasions before. They told me that prepared in proper ways, maybe in a restaurant, it tastes ok. But prepared like this, when they get burned at the outside and almost raw inside, they do not taste good at all, and the consistency is rather indelicate. So I guess the eating is not for gastronomical reasons, and if so, I would suppose that more of the men would have a bite. An explanation that the men needed protein would also fall to the ground, the meals the men get served at round-up are rich in protein, and if this would be the reason, all of the men would eat the testicles. I do not believe any of the men thought they would get the strength of a bull by eating the calves' testicles either, so this would have another reason. And why the testicles? Why couldn't they eat the cut-offs from the calves' ears? Considered the source of the masculinity of the bull, this would have implications for the men eating the testicles. This ritual has long traditions; it is done for hundreds of years. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the tradition started out as a need for protein, the food the cowboys brought with them at that time were probably short on protein, having less facilities for keeping fresh meat. The fact that this is a tradition might have something to say for the men eating it today, just like the attractiveness of the High Ranch's way of doing the round-up the old way. A way to show that they live in

a cowboy tradition. It might also be a way to show their masculinity by overcoming the natural aversion of eating such a thing. But what about the men that did not eat the cowboy oysters? Were their masculinities weakened in any way? Was their identity as cowboys weakened? I could not sense anything that would point to this, the men did not change behavior, either toward the men that ate the testicles, or to the ones that did not. In the end the whole ritual might turn out to be showing off, being able to eat something that is not supposed to be eaten.

The calf is also dehorned if it has gotten horns already, which they seldom have. They do this to reduce the chance of the calf to injure the other calves, or the men and the horses when handling them. Another man cuts a piece off the calf's ear, this is an additional way to mark the animal. Every ranch has their way of cutting the ears, and that makes *rustling* (stealing) more difficult. It is sometimes possible to brand over an already existing brand and in that way steal an animal and by altering the brand, 'make' it one of their own to keep or to sell. By marking the ears the risk of having animals stolen is reduced. The little pieces they cut off the ears are kept to keep the count of how many calves they have worked. After being worked on, the calf is turned loose and it immediately rises and runs back to its mama, who is calling on her baby. The whole process is done very quickly and efficiently; it will last for 3-4 minutes for each calf. Since there are two ropers, they can get through quite a number of animals in a short time, and all the men involved seems to know exactly what to do, everybody knows their place, even though it seems a little chaotic and incidental to me, with the men running and shouting, some others roping, and yet other ones helping out with other things. That became very clear to me when one of the "visitors", Cindy's husband Blake, who has been visiting/helping at round-ups at the ranch for a couple of years, got in the way of one of the ropers. Blake is not working with cows except when he is coming with his friends Liz and Bill to this ranch once a year, and I could tell by the men's general behavior toward him that he probably is considered an outsider by most of them. He seldom talks with the working men except the few men he knows, he sticks to Bill and Nick and Matt and some of the other men he has befriended. It doesn't seem like he has any interest in talking to the rest of the guys, I get a feeling that he places himself in a superior position verified by the fact that he is a friend of the boss and is doing this for free, and considers it as recreation, he has no obligations of working for Nick, he can leave whenever he wants to. Blake wanted

to help and asked Nick if he could be a flanker. Nick said yes, but Blake proved too slow and hesitant in his action, and got between the roped calf and the rider, a potentially dangerous position to both himself and the other cowboys on the ground, a position that no cowboy would put himself or the other team member in. Blake was yelled at by the men working the calf, but also others on the sideline yelled at him, and in particular George, who was the foreman and thus having a responsibility for the men. Blake pulled himself away like a dog with the tail between its legs, aware of the scene, and also aware of the potentially dangerous position he had put himself in, and hindering the men's work. He was obviously embarrassed and emotionally hurt; he kept talking and excusing the episode the rest of the day, to try to restore his dignity.

Take it like a man

I find it interesting to compare this incident involving Blake that got in the way with the episode when the cowboy unexpectedly was thrown from his horse. This cowboy was one of the younger men, he works for Nick as a full-time cowboy, and seemed identified by the surroundings as a good cowboy, due to the way they behaved toward him. He was included in the group, accepted, hired by Nick because he is a good cowboy.

What happened when he got thrown? If you are a cowboy, to get bucked off a horse in a situation like this is very unexpected and quite unlikely, and one could say that this was probably quite embarrassing for him, since he is expected to be a good rider, and a cowboy is expected to be able to ride all kinds of horses, even the ones that are uproaring once in a while. So he made a fool of himself, just like Blake did. The interesting difference lies in the reactions from the surroundings, and the reactions of the two men. When Blake got in the way, he met sanctions from the others, because, as I have described, he tried to communicate an identity by trying to execute certain behavior, but failed. His own reaction to this exposure of Self is decisive. He got out of the way, but not without trying to excuse himself by claiming that he was just going to help, that he did not see the position of the other two men, that he just tried to be considerate. He also repeatedly reminded us the rest of the day of the episode, and I got the understanding that he felt he had been treated unfairly, due to his repeated excuse that he was just trying to help.

When the cowboy got thrown from the horse the other cowboys reacted with laughter, and he himself smiled, calmed the horse down and remounted in the blink of an eye. No excuse was uttered, no blaming at the horse, just a replacement of the hat and that's it. As I discussed above, he got the chance to show that his claimed identity was embedded in his Self, and he succeeded in reinforcing it, contrary to Blake, who tore his chances for being accepted as a cowboy further down by not taking it like a man that claims to be a cowboy should. If he should have any chance at all to restore a kind of cowboy masculinity, he would have to accept the yelling, get out of the way in an instance, and not mention it for the rest of the day. Of course, to further enhance his opportunities, he should not have tried to impress the other cowboys by executing a job he did not succeed in. He should have stayed on the side line, observing, and learning. Like the other cowboys have done to become what they now are. The cowboys did not challenge him (Bourdieu 2005), it was Blake's own idea to try to work as a flanker, and Nick did not reject his wants. When he got in the way, the other men did not open up for Blake to restore his masculinity; they yelled and wanted him to get out of there. They did not view Blake as a man of equal status, a man worthy of being challenged when it comes to his cowboy identity (ibid.). In lack of a challenge to answer, Blake felt unrightfully treated, he felt the men overreacted, and tried to restore his dignity by blaming the situation.

Blake's identity as a cowboy is weakened because his masculinity did not comply with that of the normative cowboy identity. Blake did not master *this* way of being a man, a cowboy, even if he tried to, and this shows us that there is more to a cowboy identity than just outfit and practical skills. Not only did Blake lack experience in how to execute certain cowboy chores, he also showed a morality and behavior that was not congruent to the cowboy way.

Social spheres

Blake may have weakened his masculinity in a situation where he tried to be something he was not, but in other contexts he may master the normative masculinity excellently. Blake travels from his known home-environment, where he is successful in being masculine due to his parameters and his social contexts. He is successful at work, drives a huge (and thus expensive) 4x4 drive truck, eats in fancy restaurants, have a good-looking wife and a nice

house, and he might say he's got everything a man could wish for. But when he finds himself in another context, in this instance a cowboy context which he, if he is like many other American men (Carlson 2000a), may consider masculine, he experiences that he can not be a man in the same way as the other cowboys. The men at the round-up would probably respect his identity had he not tried to be a cowboy like they were. It was not his personal masculinity per se that was called into question, but his cowboy identity and cowboy masculinity that failed, disclosed by his personal masculinity and Self. There is reason to believe that for men living in a cowboy tradition, manly virtues like being tough, brave, not a sissy, independent, rugged and so on is part of what defines you as a cowboy, and hence what they consider the best way to be a man. I would like to precise that these men are not locked up and totally restrained by these virtues, these men are not homogenous, which easily can be the perception when talking about hegemonic masculinity in a group. They all have their own agendas, their own moralities, their individual life, and even if they consider these virtues to be manly, they may not want to or be able to fulfill them at all times. They too move between different contexts, and find themselves in relations where they show several other masculinities, like caring for children. And when discussing and analyzing masculinities like this, there is a risk of giving an impression that masculinity is particularly important to these men. I argue that being manly is not more important to these men than to most other men.

The men at the round-up probably don't care if Blake is a skilled polo-player and have a swimming-pool in his house, or have an account full of money, they devalue these parameters in favor of the cowboy virtues. Any man that decides to invest his working in cowboying knows that this is not a lucrative business, this is endlessly repeated in jokes, songs, poems and conversations and so on, where 'this is a price worth paying', is the main message. Being a real man is different here than in the social contexts Blake is socialized. Although Blake's social milieu might consider success in business as *the* manly virtue, they also know that the manliness of a cowboy traditionally has been considered the male icon. Blake has probably told the men and surely the females at work that he is going to cowboy²⁵

²⁵ The verb "to cowboy" is repeatedly used to describe the work a cowboy does, and refers to a certain morality achieved by doing these chores.

for a weekend, and in this way he shows them that he has an exclusive admittance into this context, and that he can be a *real*, real man. And he surely masters some of the codes or traits, but not enough for the cowboys to accept him as one. An interesting hypothetical question would be if his colleagues at work would accept his cowboy identity if they had observed him at the round-up? Well, my answer would be that it depends. If they saw a picture of him sitting on a horse, looking after some cattle, or sitting around the camp fire drinking his coffee, they would probably accept it. But if they observed his actions, especially the incident when he got in the way, my answer would be no, because the normative masculinity of the cowboys are well known across contexts and even culture, and the colleagues would probably notice Blake's whining and at times childish behavior, according to my standards, but also others told me they considered some of his reactions as immature.

The working of all the calves take about 20-30 minutes, we do not have a lot of calves to work on today. When George and Matt are sure they have worked all the calves, they make two of the men turn the cattle loose and lead them on the right way back to where we had found them. They explained to me that cows tend to stay in the same place for a long time, and that makes it easy to avoid gathering the same animals twice. Next day the men ride out in another direction.

After finishing the cattle, it is time for lunch. The cooks have prepared a delicious meal on the fire; we get potatoes, potato stew, meat, sauce and beans. They have also made a dessert as they use to, today it is cherry pie, prepared in a Dutch oven on the fire. Again the men get to help themselves first, and then the owners and the boss and we "guests" get to eat. The men chat with the cooks, who speak little English but Spanish. A lot of the men speak Spanish fluently, and some speak *Spanglish* (a free mix between English and Spanish), or know enough to have a small conversation. The cooks are a father and his son, and the father has worked for Nick for many years. He is full-time employed and is a "handyman" the rest of the year, looking after equipment and one of the abandoned headquarters, and is also helping looking after the cattle. He knows this land (meaning this ranch's area) better than most of the men working for Nick, because he has been on the land for so many years.

While eating we find a place to sit, either on big rocks or other suited things. This cow camp consists of a storage house which stores firewood, and a tack house, in which they keep equipment for the horses and cars. There are also some pens in cow camp, small and large. The tepees are scattered around in camp. While eating, some of the men sit down inside the storage room, in lack of suited places to sit. The chat is lively among the men, but there are no high voices, and I can hear a laugh here and there. Most of the men stick to their friends, and very few of them get over to me to talk, except the men I know from before, like Ben. The men range from about 23 to 65 in age, most of them are probably around 28-30 years. A few seems actually quite intimidated by my presence, they are not used to have women, and at least not from another country, in cow camp. They were all very polite and nice towards me, and they all smile to me, but I found it for some reason quite difficult to walk over to them and start a conversation. One reason could be that I was a guest of the boss, and in that way I was on the boss' "side", if one can call it that. Meaning that they probably felt that they needed to show Nick respect by showing me respect, and it was difficult for both them and me to break the distance between us. I was in every aspect an outsider, except from the fact that I was used to horses, and the affection towards horses and the nature was something I shared with them. Me being from a foreign and exotic country far away, being light-complexed, blue-eyed and blond, relatively young girl traveling by herself, not knowing anything about cows, not knowing very much about the land and the flora and the fauna, not knowing but a few persons at the round-up, I did not speak the language as good as they did (naturally), and so on. I was set apart. But I tried to use that as a good reason and excuse for paying attention and asking all kinds of stupid questions, in that way they had to teach me things, and that was also the way I got to learn things.

The younger men, most of who are working ranch cowboys, keep to themselves, gathering in one group or in a few smaller groups, somewhat away from the rest of the men, creating a division between the younger and the older men. The rest of the men regularly come over to the camp fire to warm up, the younger men stay inside an empty container to get shelter from the wind, and come over to the camp fire exclusively to get food or coffee. The younger men are talking and laughing, and it seems to me they are kidding each other. At one occasion Cindy walks over to the group to ask one of the younger cowboys, Woody, one of 4-5 full-time cowboys at High Ranch, who also is a clever spur-maker, to make her some

spurs. Woody blushes and shows all signs of being intimidated, and the group of men giggles even more than before and teases Woody when Cindy leaves the group. The older men are eager to talk to me during lunch, some of them know me from before, others are very interested in my thesis, and yet others ask a lot about my home country. There are no such giggling and teasing each other because of this between the older men, even though they are telling jokes and laughing at each other.

After lunch Nick, George and Matt decides to call it a day, there is not much to do this late in the day. The time is already past 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and it is too late to ride out to gather another group of cattle, if they do they will not have time to work them before dark. A couple of men are chosen to ride out after the *remuda* (which means all the horses, the herd). Horses are gregarious animals and won't stay far from the group. The men find the horses and bring them back to the pen where we earlier had the cattle worked, now joining the horses we had used this day. Nick and George pick a horse for all the men for the next day, and those horses are roped and checked by the rider. The rest of the *remuda* is turned loose again, and the selected horses are put in a larger pen, so that it is easier to gather them in the morning, just like this morning. In this way every man knows which horse to ride the next day.

We feed and check the new horses, and it is now time to pack our stuff and get back down to the headquarter. The men are still staying in cow camp, but all of us that came up with the cars this morning, are going back down this afternoon.

Observations

This day at the round-up gave me some interesting observations I would like to discuss more thoroughly, and I was left with some unanswered questions about the social organization and individual masculinity. The persons gathered at the round-up constitute a largely heterogeneous group, with generally the only common concern of gathering the cattle. As mentioned, the individuals might have diverging incentives for being at the round-up, some might be there for pleasure, some for earning money, some for respect, some for expectations from others, to see and be seen, and so on. Coming from different backgrounds

and being there for different reasons, I find it interesting to ask in which respect they share a symbolic universe or not, rather than asking if they share the same culture (Eriksen 1998). This symbolic universe will have implications for their group identification, based on similarities.

Identity relations

The identity of a person is connected to the person's role in the situation (Barth 1971). This became evident to me when I first met Nick, the manager at High Ranch. I got acquaintance with him through a cowboy I met at Dry Creek Ranch, who had worked for him as a cowboy at several occasions, and though knew him personally as an employer. Nick is well known in the area, primarily for being the manager of a large ranch and having an heir that is a well respected family through their donations and contributions to the local community, but also as a well-liked individual and employer. I had prior to my encounter with the cowboy at Dry Creek Ranch heard about Nick via others, and I was happy when it finally appeared that I would get the chance to meet him. This was about four months prior to the round-up, and we met at a local restaurant in his home town. We sat down and ordered lunch, and he asked about me and expressed an interest in my thesis. We talked for an hour or so, and what struck me were his mild appearance and his gentleness, being overtly polite and talked with a soft and quiet voice, quite different to my previous experiences with interviewing informants (they were all polite, but often loud and articulate). He did not conform to my stereotypical image of a cowboy; he did not wear a cowboy hat or boots, but looked rather like a common man, well dressed and well articulated.

After eating lunch and talking for a while he asked if I would like to come with him to the headquarter and help him with loading some cattle that were going to be *shipped* (transported by truck) the same afternoon. At the headquarter he put on a pair of boots and a cowboy hat, both which he had in the back of his truck. He introduced me to George, the foreman, and I could immediately sense a difference in Nick's appearance. He became more quiet, but also more firm and authoritarian, although Nick and George seemed to have a good and respectful relationship between them. Suddenly George was the person that addressed me, while Nick drew himself away from the conversation. George were joking

and talking about cowboy life while we rode in the pen with the cattle, and Nick watched us and told us what to do. At the headquarter George was the person I found easiest to talk to and relate to. George has the responsibility for and the daily contact with the 4-5 cowboys working at High Ranch.

Nick's change in appearance might be influenced by different factors, e.g. changes in mood. The truck that were coming to pick up the cattle did not show up at the expected time, rather an hour late, and would be a reasonable contribution to an alternation in his mood. But his appearance did not change after the cattle were safely driven away, he still had a rather concise appearance toward George, and me. He gave George orders and discussed a few practical matters with him, and even though he was friendly and joking, he had an authoritative attitude. I argue that my observation of the change in Nick stems from him displaying different sides of himself toward different persons, in different situations. He had a totally different relation to George than to me, and in his relation to George it might be of importance that Nick is Georges' boss, and therefore overcommunicates his superior position in this way. Toward me, he has no previous relation and nothing to relate to except from what he has been told about me, and took up another attitude toward me than toward his employee. George, on the other hand, showed an attitude of being inferior to Nick, he joked with me, he executed self-assigned tasks like helping me with saddling the horse I was going to ride, and he rode in the pen, while Nick stood on the outside of the pen, waiting for us to bring the cattle to the truck. Toward me he was joking a lot, and we talked about trivial things like horse-training.

In some settings we want to over-communicate the aspects of ourselves we want others to perceive, and undercommunicate the things we want to make not relevant, according to Barth (1966). In an essay concerning Norwegian fishermen on a fishing vessel, he seeks to explain what kind of choices people make in certain social situations, choices concerning behavior in transaction. Barth calls transaction those sequences of interaction which are systematically governed by reciprocity. Reciprocity involves an evaluation of values, and seen in an economical perspective like Barth does in this essay, each party seeks to get maximum profit for themselves out of the transaction. Barth builds his thoughts on a goffmanian perspective of roles and highlights the significance of roles and statuses in

transaction, where the participants first have to agree on a definition of the situation to distinguish which of the participants many statuses' that should be relevant in the particular situation, and form the basis for the interaction. Barth does this by first explicitly describing the different men's work at the vessel - the skipper, the net boss and the fishermen, and then shows how the men in the different roles under-communicates or over-communicates aspects of their behavior to enhance their role, and to reduce the chance of disagreement about the situation. I understand Barth as to explain behavior in commitment to statuses to secure an unproblematic transaction, and not in particularly connection to identity, which I am concerned of. I will yet utilize his notions about over-and-undercommunication, but rather in relation to establishing and maintaining identity in different situations. I do also find his methods of explicitly analyzing the different statuses on the ship useful, and I will try to show the different statuses of my informants in this particular case (the round-up), and try to explain the inconsistencies in maintaining statuses and identities by conflicting situations and role-dilemmas.

The most evident roles I observed at the round-up were *the ranch owner* (Nick), *the foreman* (George), *the ranch-owners closest alliance* (Matt), the *older cowboys* (the hired men above approximately 35 years) and the *cowboys* (the younger hired men younger than about 35 years). I could have treated the two latter categories as one, but I find the difference in behavior between them so diverging, that I have chosen to put them in two categories. Each man within these five categories has a huge repertoire of statuses, roles and aspects of identities, but he has to choose which one to be relevant in the particular situations. The shift of situations and thus the shift of performing the Self can happen in a moment, the man being able to display parts of his identity continuously.

At the round-up I got the chance to see both Nick and George in a totally different context, and I observed another "way of being" Nick and George. I found the greatest divergence in George, now being the boss' right hand and collaborator, and executive leader. He now had 20 men under him, and had a very authoritative and serious appearance, being almost harsh in his communication with the men, not talking very much to the men while working, and not talking to me. He and Nick communicated a lot by talking to each other privately, also including Matt. The three of them made the decisions together; Nick had the chance of

making the ultimate decisions, but conferred with Matt and George on important matters before deciding.

Nick was quiet and serious at the round-up when executing his leader role, and when he spoke the men listened. In informal situations, like when eating, he did laugh at jokes and was not uninterested in talking to the men, and he was also the one that helped me with my horse when needed. He made all the decisions of who should ride which horse, who should ride with who and where to go. He gave extra responsibility to George and Matt. He was friendly and firm, but tolerates, and seemed fair in his leading. His appearance clearly made a distinction between him and the cowboys, and between him and George/Matt.

This communication of differences between himself and the men may be a way for Nick in a transactional process, which according to Barths terms includes reciprocity, to achieve something he wants; good men.

The communication between Nick/George and the men when riding and working was of a delegating kind: Nick and George didn't have to instruct the men in their practical execution of the tasks. The men knew how to do the things they were asked to, and they complied with what were asked of them. This can be seen as a kind of rationality, as I have argued was one of the basic virtues in the formation of the cowboy template, and is contributing in keeping the template in a recognizable shape.

Contingent Identity

This discussion implies that our identity is complex and compound, that we are showing different sides of ourselves at different times and in different situations, deliberately or not. Goffman and Barth occupy two opposite approaches when it comes to the influence of the context in creating behavior. Goffman (1992) argues that the situation is decisive when it comes to playing roles and performing identities according to normative behavior, while Barth (1966) argues that the individual is a rational actor, and most of the time is maximizing profit, also in social relations. The context thus has less decisive power than the will of the actor. These two approaches, which both have been criticized for excluding important factors, may not be as contradictory as they seem, but are rather asking two

different questions, emphasizing different aspects of social relations (Eriksen 1994). I find myself in a position between these two theorists. I argue that our identity is contextually contingent rather than situationally dependent. If our identity was dependent of the situation, it becomes very rigid and uncontrollable, and this notion implies that everything we do is governed by the situation, and that the specific situation decides our identity. I do like to believe that we have a little more control over our actions and behavior, that we are able to choose to a degree how we want others to perceive us, and not left to the situation to decide for us. The situation does have a lot to say, but it does not have total control.

I also see a problem with this situationally dependent identity when it comes to habituation. To express a believable identity as a cowboy it has to be habituated, meaning one have to express it without deliberately thinking of it (Bourdieu 2005), or at least that is seems like one doesn't try to do it. The action has to become a part of the body, it has to be embodied. At a point every cowboy learn how to be a cowboy, one are not born with the skills of roping cattle or riding horses, although it may seem like it comes easier to some than others. One also has to learn how to behave like a cowboy, through observating others, and learn through the method of trying and failing.

Robert, a CEO of another large cattle operation I interviewed a couple of months prior to the round-up, told me:

“he [the leader] rides in front. Nobody rides past him, nobody goes past him, and then when you’re working a herd, if I need to go from here to over there, and there’s a rider between us, I go round behind him, you know, I never go in front of him...and...Just a lot of different etiquette things like that, you don’t ride a horse up to the chuck wagon, you don’t want dust you know, and...so you always keep your horse far away from the wagon, and you stay...you never get between the cook and his fire, you know (laughing), you get BIG problems if you get between...and little things like that, but there’s certain things like that you sure need to be careful to observe or else you can get in a lot of trouble. (...)Nobody talks about that, you just gotta know, you know, you gotta watch and...The thing is – that’s the problem, yeah, that’s the problem. You may show up and not know, and there’s no written set of rules, but they are, they’re there, you know. And an older cowboy would take you like his...son, you know, and tell him those kinds of things. And one of the things that I find down here where the ranches have been in existence a long time, is that you’re getting a...like a 3. and 4. generation of cowboys that work...their daddies worked, the daddies before them, (...) and their daddies will help them know that, you know, how you’re supposed to do it, what you are supposed to do”

If a cowboy behaves outside of the cultural norms, the chance is great that he will meet sanctions by the surroundings. Erchak (1992) goes beyond the questions of Barth and Goffman and focuses on how the individual identity is socially constructed, independent of whether the individual is maximizing profit (Barth 1966) or playing a normatively constructed role (Goffman 1992). What lies behind the incentives for a certain behavior is formed by social forces. This culture-relativistic approach implies that culture is learned and shared by the participants in the culture (Erchak 1992). Blake’s behavior did at times not comply with the expected and normative cowboy behavior. It seemed that he by several means claimed to be a cowboy, both by utilizing cowboy symbolism and cowboy practice, but he showed that he was not able to display a cowboy identity. Therefore he got sanctioned

by the rest of the men identifying themselves as cowboys. He did not behave according to their normative standards.

Personal Identity

We usually talk of identity as something innate in the individual. “That’s the way Nick is among his men” when explaining his introvertedness, could be a common example. The identity is not something physical, nothing we can take out of the person and dissect it and tell how the person is. Rather it is quite vague; the only perceptible factor from which others can assume an identity is the person’s behavior. Looked at the other way around, the behavior is the only way a person can intermediate his/her identity. The behavior does not necessarily reflect the person’s identity and Self at all times, we are all able to play roles and mask our inner Self in certain situations (Erchak 1992).

At some situations we do consciously choose what image we want others to perceive of us, it could be a job-interview, at the first date, or when playing with the tough boys in the street. We want to exercise impression management, in Goffmans (1992) terms. This is important for our identity, what we want to be like, and reflects our values, and says quite a lot about ourselves. I argue that a lot of this movement in identity is done unconsciously, but rather as a consequence of habituation, in accordance to Bourdieus’use of the term (Bourdieu 2005). Deliberate choice becomes necessary if the situation is of a kind that is conflicting with the normal, or if a person wants to communicate certain aspects of himself to the immediate surroundings, which I believe happens quite often. Problems occur when this impression management becomes obvious for others. Even everybody knows that everybody does exercise impression management from time to time, you have to do it in a way so that it is not visible to others, so that you don’t get disclosed. The impression management has to seem authentic and reflecting the way you really are, or else others would sanction your behavior as pretending. If a man dresses like a cowboy, but with a too large a hat and too shiny a belt-buckle, the chance for him to be judged by others as a pretender or wanna-be is great. He might be perceived as either over-playing the aspect of himself wanting to be a cowboy, or that he makes fun of the ones that are cowboys, and in that way articulate a negative attitude toward them. Other possible reasons for dressing like that become less

important, like the possibility for the actual dresser to have a certain taste and not being sensitive to how to dress. Visible over-and under-communication in expressing identity may also manifest itself through behavior. Walking and talking like a cowboy (like how one believes a cowboy walks and talks, usually according to imageries rather than to actual experiences with cowboys) may be used as means to be perceived as one, but if it gets too much, the effect on the audience might be rather the opposite. Goffman (2005) explains this by comparing it with a theatrical play with an audience, where the actor is the one expressing a role, and the audience are the people around him judging his acting. He argues that the player's identity has to be acknowledged by the audience, or else he/she meets sanctions. He uses terms like *frontstage* and *backstage* to describe the different situations, where frontstage is the situation where we put on a role and play it out to the audience, while the backstage is situations where no such impressions are expressed. I believe the actions of Nick and George, and to a certain degree Matt, are good examples where impression management is evident, and also is supposed to be so. They deliberately put on a certain behavior to communicate a social position that is necessary in this context. Blake gives another example of impression management, he tries to be a good cowboy like the other men, but his impression management is not meant to be evident, and he fails. He could probably have made it in this situation if he had more experience and better skills, but that does not automatically imply that the men would acknowledge him as a cowboy, on the basis of this single situation. He would have to show a consistency throughout all his behaviors and observable attitudes to manage to convince the men that he is a cowboy.

Conclusion

The round-up is a male area, and it gave me a good opportunity to observe strategies for and negotiations about personal identity and masculinity, and the discussion will be continued in the next chapter. Male-to-male relations are important in this respect; such relations give him the opportunity to perform and restore his cowboy masculinity toward other men. Knowledge about practice and social 'etiquette' is decisive, and so is the knowledge of implementing the cowboy symbols in a correct way. In addition to this, I have argued that the performance of an identity/masculinity has to be habituated, or at least seem like it is.



Drag to the fire. Burnmarkin of the calves. Photo: L. C. Hellum

Chapter X: Looking like a cowboy

“I’m not as rugged as that [laughing]. But some of the cowboys are. But I like...sleeping in a house and I can get a shower and watch the 10 o’clock news at night, you know, these things. The western moviemakers romanticize the cowboy. And it is hard. I mean, you can’t get away from bad weather, if it rain or snow and you have to work cattle, cold, wind...You gonna do it if you’re gonna do it” (Nick)

When we encounter a person, the chances that we think we know something about this person, which social identity he has got, on the basis of his appearance, are great (Goffman 1975). “We create first impressions and change them into normative expectations” (ibid.:14). Nick says he is not “as rugged as that”, referring to the cowboys in the western movies. It seems like it is not very important for Nick to be rugged, even though the cowboy image requires a cowboy to be rugged. Nick is not a cowboy, and he does not try to be perceived as one, even if he in some situations uses all the repertoire of the cowboy template. Nick does not have to constantly make himself deserved for his role as a rancher any more; he does not have to argue for, it is accepted by his men. This is not to say that they do not judge him, or try to assess his masculinity, and if he takes some wrong steps and bad decisions, his role may come into question. But Nick has got a reputation of being a good man in his local community, a good man to work for, an ideal ranch boss.

Goffman, in his work *Stigma* (1975), is one of the first sociologists to discuss the implications of being different from normative expectations. By arguing that there exists a leading masculinity in the American society, which according to him requires a man to be

“(…)a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports...Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself-during moments at least-as unworthy, incomplete and inferior” (1975:160)

Implicit in saying this, he ascertains that there are alternatives to this hegemonic masculinity, that there are several ways to be a man. Other post-modern scholars, among them Kimmel, Connell and the anthropologist Archetti have elaborated this in their works. The Imagined cowboy does not fit into Goffmans argument of what is the leading way of being a man in the United States, actually he conforms to only a few of the requirements he proposes: he is not married, he is not urban, he can be northern, but usually he is southern, he is not a father, does certainly not have college education, and is not always fully employed, and does not have a recent record in sports (except from rodeos or horse competitions). Thus he should feel unworthy, incomplete and inferior from time to time (the Imagined cowboy cannot feel a thing; he is a stereotype, a myth).

Contrary to what Goffman describes to be the hegemonic masculinity in the American society, I find support in several works, among them in Slotkins *The Myth of the Frontier*, in Kimmels’ *Manhood in America* (2006), and in Carlson’s *The Cowboy Way* (2000a), that the Imagined cowboy has been an ideal for men throughout American history, up to this day. Cowboys are said to be *the* masculine symbol of the United States (ibid). He represents an ideological masculinity that calls for toughness, independence, self-reliance, bravery, and he is: “(…) Americas’ contribution to the world’s stock of mythic heroes” (Kimmel 2006:99).

I have already discussed the relation between the Imagined cowboy and the ranch cowboy, but how does the ranch cowboy relate to the normative expectations he might meet by being a Performed cowboy? His appearance certainly is of importance and maybe his behavior too?

A cowboy is a man with a hat'n boots, and who rides a horse

Symbols are signs that stand for something else than the sign itself, they are powerful condensations of meaning (Turner 1967). Symbols can be used for identification purposes, both for the person who would like to communicate an identity, and also by the identifiers, independently of the users' intention. The social information that is being imparted by a certain symbol might serve to verify what other points of reference tell about the individual, and in this way fulfill the image he has already given to his surroundings (Goffman 1975). Identity is not bargained solely by symbols, but they can be used as instruments to enforce a particular identity. Symbols can be used to express both personal identity, based on difference from others, and to express group identification, based on similarities with others (Eriksen 1998). "Difference is reconciled with the production of collectivity through the interpretative malleability of symbols that can be stretched to accommodate a wide range of different views and meanings." (Amit and Dyck 2006:10).

An outsider would probably not be able to tell a wanna-be cowboy from a real cowboy by looking at his physical appearance, since the cowboy hat and the spurs, horse and flannel shirt is available for everyone to utilize. Would the symbols be less powerful in expressing identity because of this? Would it be in the cowboys' interest to 'protect' the symbols from wanna-be's, to strengthen the power of their own symbols? This concerns the cowboys as a group, as recognizing each others as cowboys, set in contrast to the surroundings. Turner argued that symbols are involved in social processes, and he was one of the first anthropologists to analyze the symbols within specific fields of social action (Moore 1997): "The symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends, and means, whether these are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behavior" (Turner 1967:20). It is necessary to analyze the symbols within the social context of the cowboy.

This can be seen in the light of one of Barth's studies on ethnicity and identity (1994), where he argues that symbols are used for mediating collective identity among a group with otherwise diverse individuals. He refers to the studies of Tambs-Lyche in *London Patidars* on how the Indian patidars could use the whole prototype of the patidar-merchant to express a role and an identity, because the homogeneity of these merchants' lifestyles was great.

Groups with larger diversity among the individuals can not utilize the entire prototype as such a symbol of identity, they have to be content with using more confined metonyms (Barth:179). A parallel can be drawn to the cowboy. Can the ranch cowboys utilize more of the Imagined cowboys' symbolism than other Performed cowboys? And do the wannabe-cowboys have to be content with using fewer of the symbols? Or, looking at it in another way – do the ranch cowboys *have to* internalize more of the symbols than the wannabes, to show their identity? To argue this implies that the working ranch cowboys are more homogenous than the wannabe cowboys. The ranch cowboys have the same kind of jobs, they live in the same tradition, which means they meet many of the same challenges in communicating their identity as cowboys. The ranch cowboys are not homogenous, but as a group, compared to the group of wannabe cowboys, they may have more in common between them than the wannabes have. The ranch cowboys naturally utilize more of the cowboy symbols than most of the wannabes. It is their job to ride a horse, to be around cattle, to swing a lasso, to burnmark a calf. It has got a practical aspect. Is that the reason why they wear a cowboy hat and boots and beautifully engraved spurs? Or do they feel they have to wear this to communicate their identity, both within the 'group' of working ranch cowboys, and also outwards?

Cowboy looks

Cecilie:” Do you think that the cowboys try to portray a specific image of themselves?”

Robert:” Yeah. Oh yeah! There’s no doubt, I mean, if you...if you took those boys that work for me and said: “guys, starting tomorrow, we probably gonna need to wear ties and get rid of our boots”, and they’d quit immediately you know. And...because they wanna look ...the part...besides doing it, you know, there is a certain image that they...it’s almost like...no, I don’t know, I was gonna say it was like the knights, the medieval knights you know, where you had the allegiance to your group, and pride...and you see these boys, they’ll get their boots made and they’ll have our ranch brand put on their boots, you know. They wanna feel like they’re a part of that; they’re a part of a bigger thing. There is a lot of camaraderie you know, like “I cow-punch for the 888’s” or “I’m with the Hackamore Ranch” you know...I think that helps in give them a sense of belonging, and yet they can be pretty independent in what they do, you know. But there’s a real...mystique to it, and they wanna look

like...how they think they ought to look (...) and I’m not any different, you know. I want a good hat that is spaced right, and nice boots and look right...but it is funny how...to what extremes they’ll go...a cowboy will go, to look like a cowboy, you know [laughing], it really is”

According to Robert, the cowboys go to great lengths to feel to be a part of a “bigger thing”, a tradition. This is done predominantly by symbols, which by this usage will communicate an identity, a belonging to a tradition. I believe that the question, if the cowboys more extensively *have* to utilize the symbols to communicate an identity, is very interesting. Wouldn’t it be enough for the ranch cowboys to be just that? Working ranch cowboys? Isn’t that *per definition* defining them as cowboys? The thoughts Robert shared with me made me think that the symbols are vital to the working ranch cowboys, more than I had come to believe. I had countless times observed working ranch cowboys with their equipment, and the pragmatic part of me made me think that this were work tools. Bill once told me:

”All the cowboys are wearing hats and boots, and each saddle is a little different, the shape of their hats are different, the boots are different. The gear they use, they all got their own little deal. So you can spot somebody and know who he is, you know, by the way he sits in the saddle, by he way he looks from long way off. You know who he is before he gets there”

I observed the individual differences and the sometimes thoroughly adorned equipment, I even got to visit a saddle maker in his workshop, where he showed me the different methods he used for engraving the saddles and bridles, which was quite intricate. I recognized the symbolism in the cowboy equipment, but I did not believe the symbolism was that pervasive, I believed the most important thing was the utility of the object, and that the symbolism was secondary to this. I now argue that the symbolism is as important as the utilization, the two factors have been integrated in each other. That is, if what the working ranch cowboy wants to communicate is a belonging to a cowboy tradition. It is not certain that all working ranch cowboys want to communicate such a picture.

In chapter III I presented the most significant cowboy apparel. These constitute the landscape of symbols the cowboys operate within. These items that symbolize cowboy imagery are well integrated with their practical utilization, and to be able to successfully communicate an identification aspect by employing these symbols, the individual is required to also have knowledge and show a habituation of how to use them as a practical tool. And to be able to tell if a man uses the items right, the identifier also has to possess such knowledge about these items. An outsider would not know if the equipment is placed correctly on the horse, if the boots bear signs of wear and tear in the right places, if the lasso is thrown the right way, as if habituated. Amit and Dyck (2006) put it this way:

“...It is in social enactments that the individuality carries its most risks and costs. To enact forms of personal distinction or to seek recognition of particular versions of individuality is to risk social repudiation or failure. To proclaim forms of personal distinction rather than merely to think them or to prescribe them is to express, implicitly or explicitly, a dependence on others for their mutual recognition, acceptance or emulation of that endeavor. And that dependence intrinsically entails social risk.” (2006:9)

I have come to believe that the working ranch cowboys share a symbolic universe.

Proving cowboy identity

In the previous chapter I introduced Blake, the man I got to know at the round-up at High Ranch. By utilizing a range of cowboy symbols like a hat, a pair of cowboy boots and spurs, and bringing his own western saddle, Blake performs and communicates an identity to his surroundings. His surroundings will thus expect certain other characteristics that follow a cowboy identity, like knowledge about cattle and horses, and knowledge about cowboy behavior. The symbols alone are not sufficient to demonstrate an identity, but will rather create a greater expectancy among the other cowboys to show that he is a cowboy. If Blake put on a baseball-cap that morning, and a pair of sneakers instead of boots, and did not bring his own saddle, the expectations about showing cowboy behavior would probably be minimal. But clearly Blake did want to perform a cowboy identity and thus cowboy masculinity, and he has to follow up the rocky path he has initiated. Blake had been to these round-ups before, and the cowboys knew that he was living on the east coast, working in an office, playing golf and polo, pretty much fulfilled Goffmans' introductory cite about what a ideal man would be. By utilizing *their* symbols, and wanting acceptance for it, they demand that he fulfills the requirements needed to have the right to use them, and be taken seriously. If anybody could put on *their* symbols to rightly claim a cowboy identity, their own identity could soon be diluted. The cowboy identity would then embrace a wide variety of identities and masculinities, and would eventually not say anything about identity at all, it would not be a certain kind of masculinity associated to this anymore. So the cowboys may have a personal interest in uncover Blake's identity.

I first met Blake the day before we went to the round-up, at the ranch' headquarter, and he showed great anticipation toward the next day, he talked about the saddle he brought with him from home, the equipment he was going to take with him the next day, and what to wear. He was obviously concerned about such things. As mentioned, Blake is not a cowboy, he works in an office, is what one could call well-set, lives in a house in the upper-class part of one of the larger cities in Texas, have an white-collar job, and seemed concerned by material things in his own life, like a good car, a beautiful house, and being well dressed. When arriving at the ranch I sensed that he was very concerned about being a cowboy. He talked with Nick about the plans for the next day, he asked who would be there, and I got the

impression that he knew most of the cowboys personally. The stories from previous round-ups he had attended emerged, and he sort of built up an anticipation and tension for the next day.

The next morning Blake was very excited, and the energy level kept at high the whole day through, until the episode when he got in the way and was yelled at. He probably had a feeling of loosing his face. I had noticed that he did not mingle very much with the cowboys during the day, but rather with Nick and Bill, and some of the elder cowboys, who he knew from before. This was contrary to the impression I got the previous evening - that he knew most of the cowboys personally. I got a very strong feeling that Blake was attracted to the cowboy identity and the cowboy masculinity, and that he would like to be one in this setting, or at least be accepted and get his work at the round-up acknowledged by the cowboys. He knew about the risks he exposed himself to, of getting his cowboy identity and masculinity rejected by the other men (Amit and Dyck 2006). In Goffmans (1992) terms he was executing impression management and playing a role, one of a cowboy, but the surroundings did not agree with him in his choice of role. There was not congruence between his status and the role he tried to play, and the surroundings reacted by sanctioning his efforts, in this situation by yelling at him, making him feel uncomfortable. I observed that the cowboys did ignore Blake, they did not try to approach him, rather avoided him, like a tension was building up. The climax was reached with the yelling. After that, Blake kept mostly to Cindy and Bill and me, constantly trying to explain to himself and us why they yelled at him.

Buying an identity

Later in the evening after the first day at the round-up, I went with Cindy and Blake to the nearest town, about 45 minutes drive from the headquarter, to buy Blake a new cowboy hat, because he said that his old hat was worn out, and needed to be replaced. The small village has about 10-12 stores of different kinds, including a grocery store/gas station, art galleries, souvenir-shops, cafes, and a Hat maker with a reputation of making the best hats in Texas. When buying a cowboy hat, the buyer decides what kind of shape the top of the hat is going to have, and the bending of the brim. Before preparation and steaming, all the hats have a round top and a straight brim. Blake picked out a beaver fur hat, chose the color, and got to

see a chart of the different shapes they were able to make, and that was not few, there were hundreds of combinations. We looked at the chart, and Blake recognized many of the shapes the men at the round-up had. I had not noticed this, I didn't pay much attention to the men's hats, I observed that they were different and that they had a practical value, but I did not know before now that every hat is deliberately picked and chosen by the wearer. No two hats are identical, and the hat can be a personal signature of the owner. Like Ralph. His hat has a very distinct shape with a large top, which is easily recognizable on a distance. Even an untrained eye like mine could recognize him by his hat when he was too far away to see his face. I got to know that the hats have another function besides protecting the wearer from sun and rain. They were also tools for personal identification, a kind of business card.

Blake could not decide what shape he wanted on his hat. He discussed with himself and with Cindy for more than an hour before he finally were ready to order. I noticed that he stressed the point that he wanted a hat that was much like Eric's hat, one of the cowboys at the round-up, which was said to be one of the best men at this gathering.

I shall not comment the reason why Blake wanted a new hat. What I find interesting is how much time and effort he laid in the choosing of the hats' shape, so that it would look like the hat of one of the men at the round-up. Blake had done this before, so he knew that the hats were all distinct and could function as identification marks. He knew that he was not going to be mistaken for any of the cowboys though, due to his bodily complexion (all the working cowboys I observed had a slender complexion), and the fact that he was not compatible to the cowboys when it comes to practical cowboying skills. But he wanted to look as much alike the cowboys as he possibly could, by among other things having the same hat. He also wore chaps over his jeans, a shirt, cowboy boots, spurs, had a lasso attached to his decorated saddle. Blake used these tools and practical gadgets as symbols to express an identity he wanted to relate to. Some of the apparel did have a practical function for him too, like the brimmed hat, the chaps and the spurs, but it was something about the way he wore them. Like unused jogging shoes, they are too white, and express that they are not used very often. Blake was too engaged in his apparel, they were not natural to him, and using them as symbols for a cowboy identity, he again failed to convince his surroundings.

Even though Blake knows he is not fully accepted as a cowboy, he might have some of the cowboy identity in him, in his Self. He might value some of the virtues, and have them as his

own, at the same time as he keeps other virtues from other masculinities, and this constitutes his own personal Self. An individual is more complex than just existing in the present situation. He takes with him experiences and memories from previous situations, and he is constantly in a position where his masculinity can be bent and stretched in several directions without losing its form. There are several forces that work at the same time to shape and maintain an individual's personal masculinity and Self, and the memory and values derived from previous experiences or learned from others, is always a part of the individual, no matter where he/she might find himself/herself. Archetti (1999) speaks of masculine hybridity, and how the sources of identity stem from different places and experiences of a person's life, and from the society's historical tradition. There is not one way of being masculine for a person, his personal masculinity has several manifestations, several ways of expressing itself, and this is why I consider manliness being multiple manifestations of personal masculinity.

Cowboy – a hegemonic masculinity?

Kimmel (2006) argues that for American men, the most important others when it comes to asserting masculinity, is other men. It is in these men-to-men relations that they judge and prove each other's masculinities, and this is where they draw most of their masculine identity.

Masculinity is a theme highly actual when it comes to the discussion of the cowboy, since the Imagined cowboy is such a masculine figure, and may for many still be the hegemonic way of manhood in the United States today. The masculinity we see in the cowboy myths is distinctively and pervasive, and is characteristically rigid. There is one type of maleness for the Imagined cowboy, independent of the situation he is in. He is usually of few words, keeping to himself, mysterious, rugged, silent, tough, has stamina, not concerned with domestic things, kind of a simple soul. We don't experience the Imagined cowboy in many different contexts. Usually we see him out riding doing his job, in a bar drinking and fighting, in a shootout defeating the villains, around the campfire telling jokes, robbing a train, or in the arms of a woman. We never meet the Imagined cowboy at the grocery store buying his beans and bacon, never meet him in a queue in a saddle shop, waiting to be expedited by the clerk to pay for his lasso, we never see him in bed with a running nose after

being out in the freezing cold, or with a head-ace and upset stomach after the pleasures at the bar the previous night. (If we see this, it is in parodies of the Imagined cowboy.) Any individual live in a more complex reality than we get the impression that the Imagined cowboy does, and this could be a dilemma, not only for the Performing cowboys, but for everybody, cowboy or not, when confronted with diverging roles in a situation. Everybody have expectations to live up to, or at least has to take them into consideration. That is an aspect of living in a social world.

I consider the hegemonic masculinity- term to be useful to communicate that there are certain ways to be a man that are valued higher than others in a culture, that there are a general perception among the people within the social group of what is a successful way of being a man, a 'real' man.

“(...) in both his actual and his Imagined life the cowboy has become a popular hallmark for defining what it means to be a “real” American male. Perceived as tough, mobile, and independent outdoorsman, he has become a symbolic yardstick against which modern men might measure their own manhood” (Carlson 2000a).

This social context could be a whole culture, but it could also be subcultures and social groups based on gender, race, class, religion, interests, sexual preferences, age, and so on. And I consider the boundaries between what is qualifying for hegemonic and what is not, to be flexible. There may also be more than one expression of masculinity that may be considered successful in a culture. And the content of the expression varies, depending on where you are, who you ask and when you ask him.

The social constructionist view of masculinity emphasize how men actively constructs masculinity within a social and historical context and discourse, related to race, class and sexuality, and different men constructs different versions of masculinity (Kimmel&Messner 1998). Being a successful man in modern US is normatively considered being tough, independent, having a relaxed attitude toward life, but at the same time be successful in business, have stamina and courage (Wright 2001, Mosse 1996). Connell (2005) argues that the hegemonic masculinity embraces traits that enforce power onto other groups in the society, not only women, but also men. He underlines that there are few men that actually fit into this category of masculinity, and he argues that the hegemonic masculinity is not a rigid

and decisive way of manliness, but is flexible and may be called a “historically mobile construction” (ibid:77). Although what defines a society’s hegemonic masculinity differs from culture to culture, from groups to groups, he recognizes these traits as overarching in most cultures, considered to be the conventional way of being a man. The Imagined cowboy fits well into America’s leading discursion of manliness on several points. As we have seen, the Performed cowboys’ identities are influenced by the myths of the Imagined cowboys, and the stereotypes derived from these myths, and therefore their masculinities too.

This stereotype of man became normative, through patterns of morality and behavior :”(…) typical and acceptable ways of behaving and acting within the social settings (…)” (Mosse 1996:4). All other masculinities and femininities would thus according to Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity, be considered inferior to this leading masculinity (Connell 2005). I am reserved to label individual men into this group, because such groups could only include stereotypes. The categorization of masculinities and placing individual men in their respective categories does not correspond to the flexibility I argue that most men have to a certain degree when it comes to identity and masculinity. Connell has received critique on this point (Lorentzen 2006); that the categories he offers are too rigid. I understand that Connell’s categories are not ment to reflect individual men, but rather groups of masculinities, which individual men relate to. These categories show a structure or a tendency in the society to group men according to a leading discourse of how a man should be. The post-modern researches on masculinity has problematized the notion of hegemonic masculinity, and direct a lot of their attention to marginal or minority groups of men in the society, like homosexuals and black men. These studies are often executed with a perspective we see in feministic research, and they ask questions concerning men’s frustrations and the challenges they meet in the modern world²⁶. By doing this, they recognize that there exist a discourse in every social relation of how to be a man, but they want to focus on the other masculinities, to show that it is necessary to pay attention to all kinds of masculinities.

²⁶ *Men’s Lives*, edited by Michael S.Kimmel and Michael A.Messner , Boston: Allyn and Bacon (1998) is a collection of works that includes such aspects of masculinity

There might be general notions of masculinity-types in a culture, such as “machos” and “sissies”, but my informants show that the individual man are not bound to one or two types of masculinities, but show a degree of flexibility contingent on time, place, setting and situation, and also inner feelings and sentiments. They may prefer to project one or two masculinities, and the more they deliberately display this, people may perceive it as an identifying and inseparable part of that persons identity, and thus enforce the persons practice of showing that masculinity/masculinities. The masculinity is a part of the persons identity and Self, and the man have to take this into consideration in certain situations, the context and relation the person is in at the moment plays an important role, but is not totally decisive, in how he is a man. He might deliberately want to show a certain masculinity in a certain context, or he might undeliberately communicate such a masculinity, without intending to do so. Some men possess and required the skills of showing many different ways of being a man, while others possess and show few, across situations. To use a cowboy as an example, he may show one aspect of masculinity together with the other cowboys by being a good rider and a good roper, while he may show another masculinity together with his non-cowboy friends at the bar by drinking heavily without seeming too intoxicated. He expresses another masculinity in church with his in-laws Sunday morning, and together with his wife he may be masculine by being the bread-winner and a handyman in the house. There are endless variations of these examples.

I have argued that the cowboy myths contain a certain way of being a man. Again, I have to underscore that this concerns the imagery, not the individual man. Every man has several masculinities which he will constantly be moving between, just like he has several identities he relates to, as Nick told me when I asked him if he considered himself a cowboy or a rancher. Masculinity is not a rigid element of a man, it is rather fluent, and shifts from context to context, from relation to relation, mood to mood, and is constantly influenced and processed by other factors in his life, like age, status, health, and so on (Whitehead 2002)

I would in this connection like to discuss the notion of *hegemonic masculinity* in a narrower sense; to the ranch cowboy – in this respect not to say that the ranch cowboy way of being a man is considered hegemonic in the society at large, but that there is a certain way of being a man among the ranch cowboys that is considered hegemonic, that is, to consider the ranch

cowboy tradition/group in isolation, and say something about their own normative way of being a cowboy. What this hegemonic cowboy masculinity contains is partly derived from the Imagined cowboy, and partly from a practical perspective. It may also be influenced by other ways of being a man that is normative in the society in general, since no cowboy today is isolated from society.

Men to Men

Masculinity is a social and cultural construct that is attached primarily to men, but could also be relevant in discussion of women, or even objects. Masculinity is a factor others may use to judge a persons identity by; if the masculinity showed is not appropriate to the identity he claims, his identity might be weakened, like a cowboy who wimps when he gets thrown from a horse, referring to the episode described in the previous chapter (this man did *not* cry). Or his identity may be fortified if his personal masculinity is congruent, again referring to the cowboy that got thrown, and who did not say a word, just smiled, and in that way got the chance to prove his masculinity.

'Manliness' and 'masculinity' has been inconsistently used throughout this paper, which reflects the use of the notions in recent scientific studies of men (Lorentzen 2006). In using the notion of manliness, the discussion of *unmanliness* has been paid attention, and researchers have focused on unmanliness to say something about manliness. Lorentzen refers to Liliequists study published in 1999: "*Från niding til sprätt: En studie i det svenska omanlighetsbegreppets historia från vikingatid till sent 1700-tal*" when saying that "(...) the manliness is most evident when it is problematized, or threatened by the possibility of being made unmanly" (ibid.:129, my translation). I believe this applies well to the discussed incidents with Blake and the cowboy that got thrown, both had their manliness and Self laid bare, and had a chance of restoring it, which they responded to differently. According to the discourse, being unmanly is not what a cowboy wants to be. I consider unmanliness not to be feminine, but rather lacking manliness, or discursive masculine features in a context/situation where this is expected. Blake is not necessarily viewed feminine, but is not displaying the (again: discursive) proper manly traits, that are needed to build up a cowboy identity in this situation.

Masks and mirrors

Archetti (1999) analyzes moralities and narratives in search of a masculine imagery demonstrated in tango, football and polo in Argentina, and says that these arenas (football, tango, polo) are mirrors and masks of identity. This is arenas where a man can observe, take in and/or express an identity. Could the cowboy arena function in the same way? As a mirror and model for identity in general and masculinity in particular? I would say that my empirical observances support this assumption. The round-up is a perfect setting for such an inquiry. We have a heterogeneous group of men with their respectively diverging incentives and morals, but with some points of common interest and a degree of shared symbolic universe which at some times can function both as a group identity and personal identification. This is a masculine context, were the relevant others are other men, not women (Archetti 1999). These men are gathered in a group, and we have seen that their masculinity will be judged by the others, according to their respective standards. Blake got sanctioned because he did not succeed in mastering his cowboy masculinity. In this instance the others functioned as a mirror to Blake, he got a response that told him that this was not performed good enough; he did not bear his mask of cowboy masculinity well enough. He could, as well as all the others, at the same setting observe the other men and get an impression of how their masculinities were internalized.

Goffman demonstrates that individuals may present a deceptive appearance by playing a role that does not fit their status. He remarks that it is natural for the audience to evaluate the specific action as false or real according to this, and the audience will look for revelations in situations where action not easily can be manipulated (Goffman 1992). Embodied actions are per definition not manipulateable in this way, since they are actions that are unreflectively executed (Bourdieu 2005), and I argue that Blake is considered as a pretender because his actions are not habituated, and it is his personal self and masculinity that disclosed his *false* identity (Goffman 1975). A real cowboy would act different, his reactions would be habituated, or at least look like they are. Goffman also argues that the closer a false or pretended action comes to the real, the more the real will feel threatened, because a clever executed performance by a impostor might weaken our belief that there is a relation between the right to play a role and the ability to do so (Goffman 1992:56). Which is why I have

argued that it is in the cowboys' interest to uncover Blake's identity, and prove him to be a pretender, or an executor of false identity.

Negotiations concerning identity and masculinity

I have demonstrated that the cowboy myths are influential for the Performing cowboys, in their formation of identity. They meet pressure in the shape of expectations from outside world, of how to dress and how to behave and how to be a man, and this pressure comes also from within the cowboy tradition. The ranch cowboys are part of a discursion and have to follow if wanting to be perceived as a cowboy from the outside, not only from within the tradition.

One example of this is the horse and the cattle. The cowboy is immediately related to these animals. There are few, if any, Western movies without cattle, and even more unimaginable would be a western movie without a horse. The horse completes the cowboy; a cowboy without a horse is not able to do much of his designated work in a satisfying manner. "Take the horse away from a cowboy and he is not very useful"... "I do nothing I can't do from a horses' back"... "A cowboy set on ground is less than half the man he is on a horse's back"... are examples of phrases repeated everywhere in western literature, poetry, songs and especially in jokes and the like, and several of my informants who called themselves a cowboy told me such things, more or less jokingly, but still with a underlying meaning. I understood that the horse is a mean to communicate identity, both in speech and in practice, besides being a 'tool'. What importance does the horse and other symbols have for the cowboy at the round-up?

Spurmaker - manmaker

I noticed that the younger men kept to themselves, somewhat away from the others when gathering around the camp fire at meal-time. They did not intermingle with the other men, and certainly not with Liz, Cindy or me.

“Behavior decides how the individual utilize his/her appearance within the frames of everyday life – that means, how the body is being mobilized according to the daily life constituting conventions” (Giddens 1996: 120, my translation). Because masculinity and identity is constantly negotiated, the younger cowboys may have felt a degree of insecurity in this specific situation: their most powerful symbols for a cowboy identity were taken away from them, the horse, the saddle, the cattle, the rope, and their repertoire of essential symbols for identification was reduced. They were not as secure in their roles as cowboys and men as the older men, who naturally were more trained in this role across contexts, and they felt safer when keeping to themselves in a group, negotiating identity between peers. Their identities were laid bare, they had not the symbols to help them, which may have created a sentiment to prove that they were cowboys, and a strategy of avoiding this was to keep to themselves. Maybe not of the fear that they would fail in being considered cowboys or men, but maybe to avoid using energy on proving this. Interest may also be a factor, the younger cowboys had no interest in comparing themselves to the elder cowboys, who they may consider being inferior when it comes to capability to execute cowboy tasks (which they also were, due to age, less endurance, and the fact that several of the older men were not working ranch cowboys) the important thing is to challenge comparable persons, and that’s why they kept to themselves. It may also very well be a reason that the younger boys actually were good friends, had things in common to talk about, and enjoyed spending time together.

At one point, Cindy walks over to the group of younger men to ask Woody, who we were told by Ben that is a clever spur-maker, if he could make her a pair of custom made spurs. The reaction of the group of younger men is rather astounding; they giggle, they tease Woody, who blushes and is obviously intimidated by the situation.

I had met a couple of these young men before, in a totally different context. A couple of months earlier I was invited by George to come with him and some of the cowboys I had at that time not yet met, to the local bar. I accepted and said it would be great, and George answer made me a little curious: “It’ll at least be an experience for you, that’s for sure!! Ha-Ha!” When the night came George couldn’t come after all, but two of the younger cowboys met me at the bar. They were already quite drunk, and bought me beer and wanted us to play

pool. One of them was not very talkative, so I spoke mostly with the other one while playing and waiting for turns at the pool-table. I asked him about being a cowboy and that sort of things, and he willingly told me about his life. He is one of 4-5 cowboys that work full-time for Nick. He flirted with other girls and with me, and was obviously not intimidated at all by women at that time, in that situation.

So why was he intimidated at the round-up? It might be because he was embarrassed that he got so drunk and persistently flirted with me the time I went with him to the bar, but why would he act the same way with Cindy, who was not with us then? And why does it seem like the other cowboys were intimidated too? And why did not the older men seem intimidated?

By asking for spurs, Cindy is taking away one of the most powerful symbols of cowboy masculinity they had left, making it not exclusively a cowboy or masculine symbol. Woody was probably also proud to be asked, because that means that somebody must have appreciated his good handiwork and told Cindy that he is a clever spur-maker, and he is probably flattered by the request. He experiences a dilemma. He wants to have a reputation of being a good spur-maker, but at the same time it was a woman asking for it and by doing that she also penetrated into his masculine area and challenged it in a way.

Their reaction to Cindy's approach may be because of surprise; there is a possibility that they had been taken 'off guard', invaded by a female in a male-to-male relation, where other standards of masculinity is important. Their role as cowboys in an exclusively male group is different from being a male toward a female, and especially toward a female that challenges their masculine symbols (spurs) in this way. One of their dilemmas was between performing masculinity toward Cindy, and performing masculinity toward the group of men. These two performances do not necessarily have to be excluding to each other, the older men managed to combine this. But these young cowboys did not have the same 'baggage' as the older men when it comes to life experience, and the thing they handled the best in this situation, was to be cowboys. They did not succeed in combining this. They started to giggle, blush, and tease Woody. Not very masculine, not very cowboyish.

Men of few words

The fact that I felt it easier to talk to the younger cowboys while we were riding, contributes to the idea that the younger men are more insecure about their authenticity as cowboys and their masculinities without their horse and cattle, their symbols, than the older men. While horseback, they came loping towards me, asking if I had a good time and to check that I was doing all right. I could see a change in their behavior. They now had their horse and their apparel, and their skills were obvious. They were in the right context, doing the things they knew the best, and looking after me, like men should look after women in the wilderness. The cowboy gear is not just equipment for making the job easier, but also symbols important for the cowboys' identity, even if they find themselves in a context that in itself contributes to say something about their identity.

The older men were not ashamed to reveal to me that they were tired after the long ride, and that their backs and knees hurt. They were not intimidated by the presence of the women. They acted the same way horseback as on the ground, maybe even more easy to reach and talk to at the campfire than on horseback. The young cowboys are not restrained by declining health, they were young and strong and the hard physical work was less demanding on their bodies. The older men had been like them before, but years of riding rough country, enduring everything that were thrown at them, had left marks in their physical health. Their bad knees and backs told everybody that they once had been as tough as these young men. Some of them had lost a finger or two, or an eye, getting the fingers stuck between the rope and the saddle when roping a steer, or from a snapping rope that hit him in the eye. Those kinds of scars tell of a rough life as a cowboy more forcefully than any words. These specific injuries are not unusual for a cowboy; they are regarded 'occupational injuries'. To be one of the older men and have a handicap like that, told the surroundings that he has been through everything a cowboy may. He doesn't have to tell everybody or to show off his masculinity or authenticity as a cowboy. His body tells it for him.

Participating at the round-up implies that you are a man, and you don't have to show your masculinity off to any girls. Their negotiation about masculinity and identity is executed

between men, and not between men and women, because there usually are no women present. And if they are, they are the wife or sister or daughter-in-law of the ranch owner or the manager, and usually sit by the fire or in a car, somewhat away from the cowboys, not interrupting their sphere, but observing. They are seldom participating in the work, but exceptions do occur. Young, unknown women at the round-up is not common at all, if they do occur, they usually are girlfriends or daughters of some of the riders, and therefore with a known relation. Or they are paying guests at a 'dude ranch' or a 'working ranch', where they pay to get a 'real' cowboy experience. My presence was a different one, a young female, totally unknown, and even from an unknown country. This was not a 'dude ranch' or a 'working ranch', but a private and regular ranch. My mission at the ranch probably also had an influence. Most of the men knew I was there for gathering information for my thesis about cowboys. They would not know what I would write about them, and even if they knew I would leave in a couple of days and they would never see me again, they were not sure they would ever get rid of me, because I would write something about them, and that put me in a position with a kind of power. Maybe all these factors contributed to the distance between the younger men and me at the campfire. But Cindy felt the same. And she was not a totally stranger. She had come to the round-up once before. Her reason for being there was recreation, and having a good time together with her friends. She did certainly not try to be a cowboy. She wore a t-shirt and English riding boots, and was not embarrassed to use her polo-gloves when riding, "they look stupid but they're practical" she said. She told me that she felt it hard to talk to the younger cowboys, and that they were intimidated by her. At that time the questions remained unanswered, but they lingered in my mind, and I have here tried to analyze the episodes in relation to the contexts and the circumstances. I believe I have found a dialogue between the Performing cowboys, the myths, and the template, which have been seized, and is outplayed in practice.

Summing up

The round-up is by all means a male area. The cowboys perform in a masculine way: the hollering at the cows, the roping, the rough riding, the hard physical work. This is

traditionally a mans' work, and one have to be physically strong to endure the hardships. This reflects the basics of the imagery of the cowboy: A man.

When this manliness is put to the line, the man gets the chance to prove that he deserves his identity of being a man, in this instance a cowboy. He might succeed, and strengthen his identity as a cowboy, or he might fail, and reduce or limit his chances of getting acceptance of his identity. Identity is flexible, and so is masculinity. The men at the round-up mastered this in their own ways, and most often without serious problems. And if problems did occur, like being thrown from a horse, their immediate response to this differed. In such situations the men get the chance to show that their behavior is habituated, which is decisive when estimating authenticity in relation to claimed identity.

Chapter XI. Round'n up

To try to say something about the cowboy identity and masculinity requires a thorough look at US' history, the role the cowboy played, and what he has come to be for the Americans. This is reflected in films and stories, art, literature, style, and so on. I have divided the cowboy into three analytical 'categories'; the Factual cowboy, the Imagined cowboy and the Performed cowboy, to ease the discussion about him, and to show that the cowboy character is not one-dimensional.

The cowboy figure is used as a metaphor in varying situations. The reason for utilizing the cowboy in this way is an expectation that it will provoke a sentiment among the audience, and link the product they want to sell to a certain morality, which the buyers would want to be associated with, or that appeals to them in one way or another. This will contribute to maintenance and continuation of the hegemonic cowboy discursion, the mass popular culture industry will contribute to strengthen the hyper-real notion the consumers have about the cowboy. The ranch cowboys are also among the consumers of mass popular culture, and have to consider the picture painted of the cowboy, the Imagined cowboy, that are broadcasted to the society. The ranch cowboys are in a somewhat peculiar situation; the notion of the cowboy is deeply embedded in the minds of most Americans, a notion that more often than not is grounded on a stereotype derived from fiction, and has become cowboy imagery. They know that they will meet certain expectations from outsiders when it comes to behavior, values and appearance. Some of these expectations are irreconcilable with the expectations from other cowboys, or even possible to implement in real life. They are individuals with their own sentiments, agendas and concerns, just like everybody else; it seems like we tend to forget that.

There is no doubt that the cowboy has an ability to fascinate us, and not just when we were kids. Grown men and women throughout the world think that this character has got something special. That is evident through the widespread notions about him. He is successful as a commercial salesman, he appeals to us, and he makes us buy the things he sells. Whether it is a car or a pair of jeans, or a political standpoint.

The Cowboy. We all know him, we recognize his appearance. We think we know what he is alike. He is rugged, of few words, strong, and has a great stamina. He loves action, but keeps to himself most of the time. He rides horses and tends cattle. And in previous times he did chase Indians. It might not be a great surprise that the Performed cowboys are not that homogenous. We think we know that too. But on the other hand, it seems like the contemporary cowboys are not really *real* cowboys, because they don't chase Indians, and they don't stray the range. Those men belonged to bygone times, they are history.

Through this paper I have directed the questions toward our general conception about the cowboy. What I have argued is that the cowboy we think we know, never actually has existed other than in myths and legends. He came into existence at a time when America was experiencing great changes, and he became a symbol of manliness and highly valued virtues, like freedom, courage and individuality. He was the perfect man, even though he often was involved in shady businesses. He has come to stand as a symbol for individualism, rationalism and progress. The brief time-period the Factual cowboys existed was significant in this process. But even more significant is the abstraction from history. The cowboy template is a structure that can be filled with almost anything by anybody, and because of this, he is a hero. What is important and undiscussable about the myth is its structure; the historical and performative substance can be discussed and contested (Leach 2001). Hollywood filled it with versions of what I have called the Imagined cowboy – a lone rider; rugged, independent and mystic. Hollywood's cowboy has changed with time, as have the society. There is a dialogical relationship between the cowboy image and the society, the narratives, and the practical performances, and one informs the other. This makes the cowboy tradition a viable tradition; it is not rigid.

The Performed cowboys do not meet our expectations when compared to Butch Cassidy, the Virginian, Shane, or Billy the Kid, or any other legendary cowboy we know. We tend to reject the contemporary cowboys' authenticity by comparing them to these legendary men. There are a lot of men calling themselves cowboys out there today, and this is not very surprising. What I find surprising is the power of the image we have of him. The discourse is so strong, that we actually doubt the authenticity of the ranch cowboys if they use cars instead of horses, branding-tables instead of lasso, and sell their cattle via internet or video-sales on

television. We embrace the general cowboy imagery, rather than adjusting our conceptions about him to be more suitable to the living cowboys.

Almost anybody can perform and claim a cowboy identity; to put on a cowboy hat communicates a relation to the cowboy identity. But few get acceptance for their cowboy identity solely by putting on a hat. In this paper I have tried to show how individual men plays out their cowboy performance in different ways, what their strategies are, and how identity is contested and bargained. Many succeed in being recognized as a cowboy, and many fail. I have argued that significant factors are knowledge of the practice, and habituation of performance.

To protect a personal cowboy identity is difficult when a man no longer finds support of this in his own life, like a retired cowboy who now works in an office. He has a nostalgic longing for previous times when he 'rode with the men', and he feels that he has a right to claim such an identity, because he knows the tradition; he used to be a cowboy. He finds his own strategies to justify his claim to a cowboy identity: "I'm a cowboy at heart" or "to be a cowboy is a state of mind more than being a lifestyle". They fight with every possible mean, and their strongest weapon is to utilize the template the cowboy offer, and fill it with a content that will justify their claims. It is also challenging to justify a deviance from the cowboy imagery: "The feed truck is good. I hate it", as Ringo told me. I have showed that modernization is a threat to the cowboy identity, unless the cowboy imaginary will go through a modernization process too.

This paper has concentrated on men. The cowboy area is a precarious masculine area, where females have marginal positions, and the relevant others are other men (Archetti 1999) It is in men-to-men relations these men contest each others' cowboy identity, and from where they draw their cowboy masculinity. The open landscape on the range offers more than mobility, individualism and progress, and the challenges are more than those given by angry bulls, bucking horses and blizzards. The real challenges are coming from the other men, what is at stake is his identity and masculinity, and to help him defend this he has got the angry bulls, the wild horses and the winter storms.

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