MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF TOURISM[1]

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Guterson (1997) perceptively outlines the changing nature of relationships and methodologies found in some contemporary ethnographies. He describes how ethnographic research that "studies up,[2]" for example, relies less on participant observation and more on "polymorphous engagement":

> "Polymorphous engagement means interacting with informants across a number of dispersed sites, not just in local communities, and sometimes in virtual form; and it means collecting data electrically from a disparate array of sources in many different ways. [It also involves] an eclectic mix of other research techniques: formal interviews of the kind often done by journalists and political scientists, extensive reading of newspapers and official documents, and careful attention to popular culture, for example." (1997:116)

This type of multi-sited, multi-method engagement aptly describes how I approached my research project. My project takes multi-sited ethnographic and ethnohistorical approaches to the study of Native participation and experiences in Wild West shows through time. As my research progressed, I began to reflect on the methodological dilemmas I faced because of my choice of method. This paper addresses some of the methodological challenges I encountered in the course of conducting multi-sided fieldwork across Canada, the United States, and France from June 2004 to August 2005. I discuss my attempts to juggle short time frames at the various locations, to establish contacts and arrange interviews, and to manage a vast range of sources. The logistics of conducting multi-sited ethnography also led to some ethical concerns about permissions and protocols, which I discuss in the last section.

MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is the quintessential marker of anthropological research. The traditional method encompasses participant observation and interviews occurring over a long period of time, perhaps a year or two, after living and sharing everyday life with some far away group of people to gain insight on their understandings (Amit 2000:2). In anthropology and other disciplines, however, changing notions of place, culture and nation (Appadurai 1996, Anderson 1991, Gupta and Ferguson 1997a,b, Kearney 2004) have led researchers to refocus their 'object' and 'site' of study. Scholars have recognized the changing nature of the field in response to an increasingly global, mobile, transnational world (Appadurai 1990, Hendry 2003, Hannerz 2003, 2002, Marcus 1995). Marcus (1995:96) identifies a new mode of ethnographic research that

> "…moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation."

He elaborates by stating that multi-sited fieldwork consists of "mapping strategies" or pathways where connections are formed that traverse localities: following the people, the object, the metaphor, the story, the biography, or the conflict (Marcus 1995:95, 105).[3] Appadurai (1990) similarly suggests we study these pathways or "flows" as a series of "-scapes" in which people, technology, capital, media, and ideas circulate.

The crux of my research depended on a multi-sited ethnographic approach to explore Native experiences, perspectives, and representations. However, I had a few concerns. Which sites should I visit? How do I coordinate multiple locations and time schedules with limited funding? How do I enter "the field" and build relationships in a short time frame? Technology such as e-mail made part of this possible, but can technology replace face-to-face relationships, observations, and exchanges? Are there advantages to multiple short visits in comparison to "deep hanging out"? How will my method affect my data? And was I still doing ethnography? My fieldwork experience tested the limits of ethnography and presented challenges to ethnographic research in terms of i) our conception of locality; ii) relationships with informants; iii) the type of data produced; and iv) ethics procedures.[4]

Staying Local?

Should ethnographic research be linked to a specific locality? Hannerz admits that multi-sited research cannot have an "ethnographic grasp of the entire field" for each linked locality (2003:207). Rather, this type of research tends to examine movement or processes that *traverse* localities. Accordingly, the selection of sites depends on research design and questions as well as opportunities for comparison (Hannerz 2003:207). Following Marcus (1995) and Appadurai (1990), my research pathway is a phenomenon – Native participation in Wild West shows – which cuts across different locations and Native groups. It is also a process – the construction, performance, and circulation of Nativeness. My field site selection was guided by my interest in examining the politics of representation at contemporary Wild West shows. Once I received approval from Eurodisney, the selection of additional contemporary Wild West shows and reenactments to substantiate my investigation was based on the opportunity for comparison and access to historical materials.[5] These field sites connect like hypertext; they are linked intra-textually rather than hierarchically (Kearney 2004:229). They are connected in such a way that the relationships between the sites are just as important as relationships within a site (Hannerz 2003:206). The comparative nature of multi-sited research, therefore, also differs from classical comparisons of localities (Hannerz 2003:206).

My fieldwork "location" is the phenomenon itself and does not focus on a particular Native group.[6] Because my research focuses on Native participation and experience in wild west shows, it made more sense to include as many sites as possible rather than investigate Native experiences at one site. While budget, distance, and time constraints limited the number of sites I could visit, my selection provides an interesting comparison on the representation and performance of Nativeness between European and American productions. The data produced from this type of fieldwork also provides a broad perspective on the experience of Native participation in Wild West shows and reveals the variation in their experiences. If I conducted research at just one site, for example Eurodisney, and followed Native performers' experiences, this would have been a very different ethnography.

Building Relationships: Networks

Another concern I had was the quality of relationships as a result of short time frames for my field visits. Would I be able to establish contacts and conduct interviews during these visits? In multi-sited research, the ethnographer is placed in a "translocal network of relationships" rather that developing relationships at a *single* locality (Hannerez 2003:209). In my research, I established relationships and became immersed in a network of people connected to Wild West spectacles. People in this network were dispersed geographically yet connected by their experience and participation in Wild West shows.

The changing nature of relationships in the field reflects the globalized nature of our world, the mobile nature of informants, and how networks and experiences connect people. For

example, employees from the Oklahoma Historical Society perform in Pawnee Bill's Wild West show and other reenactments. I met performers in France from my home province of Alberta, one of them participated in a Wild West show in Alberta, and I interviewed the Native recruiter for Euro Disney who lives in Hobbema, Alberta. The Museum Director at BBMG, Steve Friesen, assisted with the research of Euro Disney's Wild West exhibit. I met a Native performer from Sheridan's BBD at the Calgary Stampede Indian Village powwow.[7] Performers from Euro Disney and Sheridan also worked in other Wild West shows like the *Great American Wild West show*, which incidentally produced the show in Sheridan Wyoming in 2003.

I became situated within this network through my multi-sited research plan. The fact that many of the performers, producers, sites, shows, and informants were connected in such a way assured me that I indeed had a broad yet interrelated view of the phenomenon while still being focused on a network of people who shared in this experience. Ethnographic research should be flexible enough to accommodate these forms of relationships and connections. Relationships are also about building networks, not just time depth at a specific field site. Significantly, relationships built over the span of my entire fieldwork year, independent of how long I was at a *specific* location.

Not only did relationships develop as a series of connections or networks, they were also of a different nature. 'Virtual relationships' were formed before I even arrived to (and after I left) my sites. My multi-sited research required extensive preparatory work throughout the year for each site. It was important to establish contacts well in advance because I would be visiting many sites for varying lengths of time. I conducted 'fieldwork' by phone, by e-mail, through regular mail, and on the web. This virtual fieldwork served to establish contacts in advance, and was crucial to this success of this project. Moreover, the informal conversations and communications that ensued also became additional data for my multi-sited ethnography. As stand alone data, virtual fieldwork may be limited. But together with the observational data and interviews collected at the field sites, virtual fieldwork establishes a time depth in terms of data and relationships similar to that of an extended stay in one location.

Such a tightly organized fieldwork agenda does have its downside. Because travel arrangements and meetings etc. were arranged in advance, I was not able to accommodate last minute opportunity and leads. This was as much a financial issue as a practical one.

I have maintained relationships throughout the research period as much as possible via such technologies. Relationships were also maintained through the feedback process. Interview transcripts have been given to all participants, keeping the line of communication open. Return visits to Eurodisney and Kahnawake provided opportunities to conduct follow up interviews, update participants on my research, and receive feedback. The degree of feedback varied with the individual, but the opportunity was there for those who wished to take a more active role in the research and writing process itself. In this way, I would say that relationships are on going, though not always face to face.

Data Sources: Observations, Interviews, Multimedia

One of the main debates about multi-sited fieldwork is whether this type of approach produces the same quality of data and the question of breadth over depth. I argue that the multi-sited research may produce just as lucid a picture as single-sited ethnography, although to do so I used multiple methods and a variety of sources.[8] There were some differences in terms of the type of data generated from multi-sited in comparison to traditional single-site ethnographic research, but not in terms of the quality of data.

Hannerz suggests that multi-sited research depends more on interviews and informants than on participant observation and also must combine various kinds of sources (2003:211).

While I agree that participant observation is abbreviated in multi-sited research, the opportunity for observation still occurs. In my own project, I engaged in participant observation while establishing contacts, attending various events, and analyzing cultural displays.[9]

For example, I observed the Wild West show at Euro Disney on two separate trips, September 2004 and August 2005. Euro Disney presents its 90-minute Wild West dinner-show twice a day five times a week during the winter months and everyday during the summer tourist season. I was welcome to watch as many performances as I choose. Seeing that I was only there for 1 week on each trip, I went to a show almost every night. I recorded observations and impressions of the show in my fieldnotes. Since management permitted photography and video, I also recorded snapshots of the show for research purposes. Before, in between, and after the 6:30 and 9:30 p.m. shows, I spent time backstage and spoke informally with the performers. This proved to be an important process for identifying key informants and arranging interviews. I also acquired data through these informal conversations and by observing the dynamics and relationships between performers backstage.

In Sheridan Wyoming, I accompanied Edre Maier, the Executive Director of the Sheridan Heritage Center Inc. (SHC), as she prepared for the *Buffalo Bill Days* (BBD) celebrations. Edre and I ran errands together, decorated the arena, and talked about the planning and purpose of the show. Not only did Edre take me under her wing (and bring me to a Rotary Club luncheon), but many community members from the town of Sheridan also welcomed me; I felt like part of the community even though I was only there for a short time.[10] Chairman of the SHC and former Mayor Della Herbst gave me a tour and history of the Sheridan Inn. A local brought me to Fort Fetterman, site of one of the battles reenacted in the BBWW show.[11] All these activities were an orientation period that nonetheless generated data. More direct participant observation occurred when I attended the BBD events, including the historical ball, parade, pony express reenactment, birthday celebrations, and of course the Wild West show.[12] I met the Native performers at the parade and spoke with them informally. Later I interviewed them at the Wild West shows.

Other sites of cultural display included in my study were museums exhibits, such as the *Buffalo Bill Exhibit* at BBHC, the *Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave* in Golden, the *Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum* (Oklahoma Historical Society affiliate) in Pawnee OK, the new BBWW show exhibit on site at Euro Disney, and, to a lesser extent, the *National Cowboy and Western History Museum* in Oklahoma City and the *Kings Museum* in Sheridan. I also documented details of Wild West events and performances. The PBRM produces a Wild West show every year, and the BBMG holds annual events to memorialize Buffalo Bill - a birthday celebration in February and a reenactment of his burial commemoration on Western Heritage Day in June. These too were rich sources of observational data I recorded through fieldnotes, photography, and on occasion video.[13]

This processes of building rapport and establishing contacts is similar to single-site fieldwork, albeit in abbreviated form. My observations and fieldnotes of displays and performances at museums, Eurodisney, and Sheridan reflect the nature of my chosen object of study: Native experiences in Wild West shows and the performance of Nativeness through time. As Hannerz observes, the multi-sited field tends to be *temporary spaces* such meetings, festivals, and exhibits (Hannerz 2003:210). This was the case in my project. While Euro Disney's show continued year round, other sites of Wild West reenactments only occurred annually. Thus, multi-sited research tends to be about "scenes and spaces" rather than "sites or places" (Muir 2004:210). This "spatial and temporal ephemerality" characterizes multi-sited research (Muir 2004:207), and certainly this project.

Although my research included observational fieldnotes, it did depend on interviews and a variety of sources rather than *participant* observation. Since the goal of my research is to gain insight on Native experiences, quality in-depth interviews with a few key informants was essential. I conducted semi-structured and open interviews with Native performers from the United States and Canada at two main sites: the *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show* at Eurodisney and at the *Buffalo Bills Days* in Sheridan Wyoming (US). I also interviewed other performers, managers, producers, and organizers at Eurodisney, Sheridan, and at the other American Wild West historical reenactments. Depending on a few key informants does not vary considerably from traditional single-site ethnographic research.[14] Interviews and observations generated data on the construction of Westernness and Nativeness in contemporary Wild West shows and performances. Interviews also provided data on Native experiences and on what representations and performances mean for the Native participants themselves.

In addition, I used a variety of media as sources as data for my analysis. I evaluated the contents and discourses of brochures, web pages, advertisements, and media releases for contemporary tourist sites in terms of tropes of Nativeness and Westernness. The media I examined are mainly marketing and advertising tools used to sell a product. The inherent bias of these media as sources is that they are designed with a specific audience in mind, in the present case to encourage a non-Native audience to consume representations and performances of *authentic* Native culture or American Western heritage. In addition to my own analyses of these materials, I asked producers of Wild West shows about the forms of media they used and questioned the performers about their thoughts on this type of publicity. I believe the inclusion of a variety of media in this project provides a more complete picture of the Wild West show phenomenon. The anthropology study of tourism and media draw on such material and is enriched by it (c.f. Ginsburg et al 2002, Blundell 1994). I suggest that researchers who use a multi-sited approach, therefore, consider widening their data base and the types of sources they use.

Ethics: Access, Permissions, and Gatekeepers

A major challenge of multi-sited research is ethical and logistic in nature - arranging and coordinating consents, permissions and access. The tension between community and individual consent was further intensified in this multi-sited, multi-Nations research because while my focus is on individuals across borders, they still 'belong' to communities, but in this case, they come from different communities. Advance planning and contact is necessary to meet the proper protocols at the various sites in an ethical matter. I considered the dynamics of each community before entering the field, and kept in mind the range of protocols within each community. The most important step was to follow the local protocol, and I obtained both individual and community (when appropriate and feasible) consent. Ethical guidelines from anthropology and research boards likewise apply to multi-sited research and provide direction for the researcher.

Informal or formal, consent and access were complicated by the multi-sitedness of my project. My research involved interviews with individuals from various First Nations and Native American tribes. When research involves multiple Nations, do I prioritize permissions from individuals or communities? The University ethics board advised that I attain approval through the local ethics board for two of the First Nations communities included in my original research proposal. Six Nations of the Grand River at Brantford, Ontario had a formal ethics review process through the Band Council, for which I presented my research plan and received approval.[15] Kahnawake did not have a formal research review board for social science research.[16] Mindful of issues of representation, authority, ownership, and ethics, I sought out other local processes in place to review my research plan. Since I would be working through the

community's Cultural Center (KOR), I contacted them about access and permission. Although they had no formal review process in place, I submitted my research proposal, interview questions, consent form, and letter of information to KOR's board for permission and for the evaluation of cultural sensitivity. After I received approval, we attempted to coordinate an informal open house at KOR where people from the community could come and meet me and learn about the project. But this was delayed and eventually cancelled on both visits due to staff shortages, change of the Director, and a physical move of the Cultural Center itself.

The protocol developed for contacting community members in Kahnawake was simple. I identified possible informants through photographs, and KOR provided me with the names and information. Kara (the librarian at the time) made the initial contact, told potential informants about my project, and arranged the first meeting. Other times I was told to call or visit them. After contact was established, I was left to my own devices to arrange subsequent meetings and interviews. Sometimes, unexpected visitors would come to KOR. For example, when Frank Marquis returned from his hunting trip, he stopped by KOR one day and simply said, "I'm Frank Marquis, I hear you want to talk to me."

After almost a month in the area, I felt a little more confident, so I attempted to contact a potential informant on my own. I phoned a contact that I got from "Kay," who I spoke to about pictures of her family. I randomly choose one of Kay's relatives from the list she gave me, "Laura."[17] I identified myself, explained the project, and asked her if she knew anything about her grandmother's experiences that she would be willing to share. She said she did not remember much, and that I should try contacting her other relatives. The conversation then turned to the question of ethics review. Laura challenged me about the approval process I went through. At first she did not seem satisfied with my explanation of the protocols that I had followed, but she later conceded. This was all very upsetting and frustrating because I felt that I followed proper protocol. Not sure about whether a return trip was welcomed, I spoke with some of the staff at KOR for advice. One person wisely suggested that this confrontation was more about a power struggle than my research project; maybe she was just sensitive because she perceived me as "flying under the radar." Even if one takes the necessary steps in good faith, it is not always possible to predict reactions from the various gatekeepers as communities are not homogenous entities. In every community, protocols vary, and various gatekeepers perceive research differently.

In the end, KOR welcomed my return and confirmed that initial contact should be made through them. For my second visit in October 2005, I asked Kara to compose a short information article about my research project for the local newspaper inviting community members to come to KOR to meet me and engage in discussion. Lance Delisle from local radio station K103 interviewed me about my research. I felt that it was important to inform the community at large of my research and offer opportunities for discussion despite the lack of a formal Council ethics board. I also hoped that this would deter future misunderstandings.

In both Six Nations and Kahnawake, community consent was the priority. However, in terms of interviewing Native performers at Euro Disney, the University ethics board was not concerned with Band or Council consent because they were acting "off the reserve." Here, individual consent was sufficient. I had hoped to interview past Euro Disney performers in Alberta. At first, my contact there said that it would be no problem and that he would provide names. I returned several times to Edmonton with this intention, but interviews never materialized. It appears that perhaps for this gatekeeper, individual consent was not sufficient after all.

For permission to interview current performers at Eurodisney, I contacted the Head of Public Relations for Disney in the UK, who put me in contact with Karine (Press Relations and Communications at Disney Village in France). Acquiring permission to conduct research here was less complicated; I sent a letter of information, asked Karine for assistance from the staff at the Wild West show, and requested permission to conduct research, which they granted. A letter of information was posted on site before my arrival. Each performer was informed in more detail about the project and their rights as participants on site; participants also signed consent forms.[18] Given Disney's reputation for keeping their backstage activities secret, I expected negotiating permissions to interview performers at Eurodisney to be difficult, when in fact access was quite simple. Instead, navigating through the multi-National field was more complex and involved a series of permissions and protocols.

SUMMARY

My dissertation research project employed a multi-sited, multi-method approach to the investigation of Native experiences in Wild West shows, resulting in an analysis that traversed space and time. In sum, my research experience counters the critique that multi-sited fieldwork is incompatible with ethnographic research. By expanding the framework of ethnographic research and employing multiple methods, the challenges that emerged related to locality, short time frames, informant relationships, data quality, and access and ethics, were not insurmountable. The use of multiple methods and sources, such as interviews, observations, media material, and archival sources, provides both breadth and depth, and can produce as lucid a picture of a phenomenon or experience as a single-site project.[19] Moreover, multi-sited fieldwork is nonetheless conducted through an anthropological lens, informed by anthropological theories and perspectives that have been modified to address new research contexts.

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[1] This paper is based on a chapter for my dissertation "Spectacular Native Performances: From the Wild West to the tourist site, 19th century to the present" at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. Thanks to my supervisor Dr. Trudy Nicks for her comments on the chapter.

[2] "Studying up" refers to research that focuses on studying institutions, governments, and other organizations, often in one's own home or in the West.

[3] Examples of multi-sited fieldwork that "follows the people" may be found in diaspora, migration, globalization and transnationalism studies; that follow the object in studies on material culture (Myers); follow the metaphor include studies on discourse analysis, signs and symbols (Haraway); the story and biography include studies on narrative and social memory; or the conflict (Ginsburg).

[4] See Amit (2000), Hannerz (2003), and Hume and Mulcock (2004) who also address some of these concerns.

[5] Oklahoma, Wyoming, and Colorado, being the home of Wild West entrepreneurs such as the Miller Brothers, Major Gordon Lillie, and Colonel William F. Cody, held large collections of archival materials, and being places of 'historical significance,' also had contemporary reenactments and museums related to the Wild West and their shows.

[6] Native performers at Eurodisney were Crow, Navajo, Nakota, Chipewyan, Blackfoot, for example, while those at Sheridan were from the Ho-Chuck Nation and Navajo. The descendants of Native performers that I interviewed in Kahnawake were Mohawk. Scholars suggest that the experience of performing in wild west shows was mainly a Lakota experience; however, various tribes and Nations across the US and Canada participated in a range of wild west shows, exhibitions, fairs, pageants, and a variety of other forms of public performance.

[7] Lane won first prize in the Fancy Dance category.

[8] Although I do not discuss it in this paper, ethnohistorical research provided a time depth to the project that balances the multi-sited short time frames. I documented oral histories from descendants of Native performers who participated in Wild West shows and a variety of exhibitions from the 1800s to early 1900s in Kahnawake. I also conducted archival research on Native participation in historic Wild West shows.

[9] Cultural displays include museum exhibits, historical sites, Wild West reenactments, special events and other popular displays of the "Wild West."

[10] My Sheridan ambassadors included Della, secretary, Diane, Edre and Steve, Tammy and the Custer Battlefield Trading Post store, and the Rotary Club. Thanks to you all!

[11] Known as the Fetterman Massacre of 1866, Fort Phil Kearney, under Lieutenant Colonel William Fetterman, was destroyed by Oglala Lakota (see Moses 1996:4, 283).

[12] Most of the BBD events took place in and around the historical Sheridan Inn; the Wild West show was at the Sheridan Fairgrounds.

[13] The analysis of display at museums enriched my examination of contemporary representations of Nativeness in Wild West reenactments. As historical sources, they provided additional visual information even though they often lacked provenance.

[14] Thanks again to research participants Alex, Barbara, Billy, Silvia, Conway, Morgan, Cristel, Kave, Ferlyn, Wiley, Tim, William, Earnest, Jimeno, Edre, Tammy, Brian, Lane, Ronnie and Erin, Jeff, and Steve.

[15] I conducted archival research at the Woodland Cultural Center and followed up on some possible leads for interviews with elders who participated in Wild West shows and public entertainment.

[16] They did have an ethics board that reviewed scientific (i.e. medical) research, so I later found out.

[17] Names have been changed for anonymity.

[18] On two occasions, oral consent was given.

[19] See also Kurotani 2004 and Scarangella 2005