

NEGOTIATING VERNACULAR COMMUNITY: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC
ARCHIVE OF MÉTIS ACTIVIST JAMES P. BRADY

by

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Abstract

The Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta houses an archive containing over one thousand photographs and over four thousand paper documents from the estate of Métis activist James Patrick Brady. The photographs remain separate from the rest of the documents in the Brady fonds, and are thus prevented from participating in the same kind of work that the thousands of other documents are thought to do. This thesis examines a series of photographs Brady took between 1949 and 1951 of individuals living and working in Cumberland House, Saskatchewan as a case study for considering the potential for vernacular photography to negotiate a type of unofficial citizenship to community on the social and political periphery.

In *The Inoperative Community*, theorist Jean-Luc Nancy points to an inherent contradiction in the prevailing definition of communities as enclosed entities to the exclusion of what is outside; he argues there always remain social and political interactions at the limits of communities. Métis communities have historically been denied inclusion in official political and constitutional legislation by way of their exclusion from officially recognized First Nations and non-Aboriginal groups. But here is where Nancy notes a contradiction: is not an official unrecognition in effect an unofficial recognition? I suggest that the portraits at Cumberland House thus represent and negotiate this unofficial recognition, and constitute an unofficial or vernacular community.

Art historian Geoffrey Batchen argues in *Each Wild Idea* that a vernacular photograph's "idiosyncratic morphologies refuse to comply with the coherent progression of styles and technical innovations demanded by masters and transcendent aesthetic achievements, and disrupt its smooth Euro-American prejudice." It is this disruption that Batchen identifies in the nature of vernacular photographs that coincides with the disruption of the "smooth Euro-American"

prescription and negation of the identities and rights of Aboriginal and specifically Métis communities that is reflected, negotiated and enacted in and by Brady's photographs.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Laura Dickson.

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* All images were removed because copyright permissions were not granted.

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Introduction

In 1967, Métis activist James Patrick Brady disappeared on a uranium-prospecting trip in Northern Saskatchewan and was never seen or heard from again. Along with his legacy of Métis and Native activism and political involvement, Brady also left behind hundreds of photographs that are now located in the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, Alberta. This thesis examines a selection of portrait photographs that Brady took between 1948 and 1951 in the Cumberland House area of Northern Saskatchewan, and considers the possibility for the vernacular photograph, as both an act and an object, to negotiate a type of unofficial citizenship to community, and to disrupt the official archival record from which that community is historically excluded.

Without a legally recognized political identity in Canada until Section 35 of the Constitution act was written in 1982, Métis peoples were excluded from both “white” and “native” historical narratives. Officially, the archives document Métis names only in scrip records – the remains of the government scheme by which both “native” and “white” identities were systematically removed from Métis individuals. Chapter one of this thesis considers these excluded identities in the context of Northern Saskatchewan in the mid-twentieth century, where T. C. Douglas and the newly elected Co-operative Commonwealth Federation provincial government were seeking to capitalize on resource extraction and speed up modernization, and ultimately, where assimilation became the *modus operandi* for conducting these initiatives.

Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, was one of several locations in which the provincial Department of Natural Resources, acting as the governing body in the North on behalf of the

CCF, led development initiatives such as the Cumberland House community farm. The agricultural projects (here and elsewhere in the North) were supposed to create jobs, economic stability, and urbanization among the Northern communities, but their efficacy was inhibited by the CCF's disregard for cultural difference, and by racial paradigms that discouraged the long-term employment of Aboriginal people. Brady, employed by the DNR, was stationed in Cumberland House and as someone also invested in Métis and Native activism he had a hand in each pot, which was likely problematic as well as advantageous for members of the community.

This conflicted environment provides the setting for the Cumberland House portraits, which I argue disrupt the official archival records, opening up a space for the photographs to negotiate an unofficial community in a location where the notion of community was officially formulated. Drawing on Gregory Batchen's and Elizabeth Edwards' discussions of vernacular photography, and on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the archive, chapter two contends that Brady's portraits present an incursion in the historical use of photography as a tool of colonization that currently permeates the visual archives of North America. Visually, this history is typically represented in the archive as images of (usually unnamed) First Nations and Métis individuals shown as curiosities, criminals, and dominated subjects. I argue that Brady's portraits evidence an important amount of self-fashioning and agency that directly contends with these colonial images.

Rather than reducing the disproportionate number of women in the series strictly to objectification, I draw on first hand and ancestral narratives from Métis women in the area in order to relocate both the images and the photographic acts as subversive and empowered spaces

for the women to position themselves within the drastically changing environment in the North. The chapter closes with a small and necessarily fragmented account of the incomplete histories of some of the people pictured in the portraits in an effort to resituate the photographic archive within its historical context, beyond existing as simply the personal ephemera of a man recognized for other pursuits.

Chapter three draws from philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's formulation of community in *The Inoperative Community*, in which community is not constituted through an exclusive immanence or transcendent shared quality (from which some must necessarily be excluded), but rather exposed at the limits of difference.¹ The CCF's assimilation initiatives seemed to assert a kind of immanence in denying the fact that their blanket initiatives were not going to be successful for both Northern and Southern Saskatchewan. If Métis identities have historically been excluded from governmental policy, from formulations of 'native' and 'white,' and from official representation in the archive, this could arguably constitute an unofficial inclusion. According to Nancy, exclusion, limits, and difference necessarily reveal the shared, communal state of *being*. Each person in each portrait then, named and shown to exist next to the others, is revealed to share this common state.

This formulation of community is in some ways a passive one, and this is where I suggest Nancy's theory falls short. Using Ariella Azoulay's discussion of the photographic act as an event I argue that the portraits work to restore an unofficial citizenship to a community by

¹ Jean Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, Simona Sawhney (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1991), xxxvii; xxxix.

implicating the photographer, the photographed, and the spectator.

Chapter 1: Politics and place

1.1 A brief history of Métis politics

Brady's portrait photographs, and for the purposes of this study, the series taken at Cumberland House in particular, give form to and negotiate a set of circumstances that are rooted in a long history of land disputes and racial politics. These came to the fore in 1869, when the Canadian government purchased Rupert's Land, the large tract of land encircling Hudson's Bay and extending as far west as the Alberta-British Columbia, from the Hudson's Bay Company. The Métis of the Red River Colony, led by Riel, denied the government surveyors access and created their own provisional government.

After negotiations with the Canadian government, the Manitoba Act was passed in 1870 after the so-called Rebellion of 1869. The Act was based in part on the Métis' list of rights and was supposed to acknowledge Métis title to 1.4 million acres of land by way of the scrip system, wherein each Métis would receive a plot of land or a dollar amount equal to the value of the land. However, as Métis scholar Jennifer Adese argues,

Ultimately, the expansion of the scrip served to aid the government's attempts to establish clear, manageable categories for controlling people in the age of colonial expansion. The logic followed that those who accepted Half-breed scrip would no longer be eligible to lay claim to an Indian identity, and as such, the Canadian government bore no responsibility for ensuring fair and equitable dealings as it developed its nation.²

For Adese, the scrip process was a system of prescribing (or denying) identity. She continues, "changes in policy regarding Métis peoples can be understood as reflecting an ongoing and

² Jennifer Adese, "R is for Métis: Contradictions in Scrip and Census in the Construction of a Colonial Métis Identity," *Topica* 5 (Spring 2011): 205.

adapting agenda driven in the interests of ‘whiteness’—a whiteness that was explicitly linked with Anglo-Canadian notions of race, progress, modernity and civility.”³ It follows, then, that the scrip system ultimately failed the Métis, who by accepting scrip simultaneously declared themselves “not white.” The process of securing the scrip and then the land (or money) would take months or even a year, relocation was often necessary, and land speculators would fraudulently buy scrip certificates from Métis holders at much less than face value. From 1870 to the 1920’s any aboriginal title to the land that the Métis held was effectively extinguished, and they became the only aboriginal group in Canada not to have a homeland. Many were forced into financial destitution and took to squatting on Crown land or road allowance – the space of sixty or so feet beside roads owned by the Crown.

But it was not just the issue of land, nor conflict with the Crown and later the Canadian government that posed difficulties for Métis communities; their legal status also caused tension with status-holding First Nation communities who *did* possess title to land. While the First Nations resented the Métis for trying to access the privileges that they already had, the Métis begrudged the First Nations who they saw as relations but who had those rights and privileges to which they wanted access.⁴ Thus the Métis were subject to a double exclusion that both determined and was shaped by their legal (and social, economic and political) status.

In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben brings our attention to the inherent contradiction and exclusion in the formulation of Western “law” – that which decides and creates law, and states

³ Adese, 205-206.

⁴ Julia Harrison, *Métis: People between two worlds* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985), 79.

that nothing is outside the law, is itself outside the law.⁵ The law is thus structured around a state of exception and exclusion. Agamben argues that

the sovereign exception is the fundamental localization (Ortung), which does not limit itself to distinguishing what is inside from what is outside but instead traces a threshold (the state of exception) between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible.⁶

The figure of *homo sacer* is excluded from the sovereign but, owing to and permitting these “threshold” relations, is still under the auspices of the “law” of the sovereign and is in fact crucial to proving the authority of the law.

It would be problematic to draw a simple connection between *homo sacer* and the legal formulation of *Métis*⁷ without acknowledging some important complications: For Agamben (and according to the Greco-Roman tradition on which his text draws), an important aspect is that anyone may kill *homo sacer* without punishment; however, for the purposes of this paper, death and the act of killing that characterize the notion of *homo sacer* are less pertinent than the figure’s simultaneous exclusion from sovereignty and citizenship and inclusion within the law.⁸ Additionally, Agamben’s *homo sacer* is devoid of agency, thus such a comparison endangers what I will argue are certain amounts of self-fashioning, self-representation, and autonomy pictured in and produced by Brady’s portraits. It remains, however, an important theory to this

⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 18.

⁶ Agamben, 19.

⁷ Here I refer to the legal formulation of *Métis* up until the 1985 Constitution amendment.

⁸ Elsewhere, Kevin Bruyneel has convincingly used Agamben’s text to consider the connections between *homo sacer*, the execution of Louis Riel, and the formation of Canadian sovereignty. See Kevin Bruyneel, “Exiled, Executed, Exalted: Louis Riel, Homo Sacer and the Production of Canadian Sovereignty,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 43.3 (September 2010): 711-732.

paper in productively characterizing the legal and political spaces many Métis, including those living at Cumberland House in the 1940's and 1950's, were navigating.

1.2 James Patrick Brady: champion of the Métis Liberation Movement

Because the nature of this paper insists on a consideration of the photographs in question as vernacular, a brief biographical outline of Brady will be useful to sketch out the context in which these photographs were taken and in which they produced meaning. My aim here is thus not to draw conclusions based on biographical facts of the photographer's life, but to draw out the particular circumstances of production at an important physical and temporal site of the collision of local (Métis and Native),⁹ provincial and federal politics, initiatives, and desires.

Born in 1908 in St. Paul, Alberta, to middle class parents Brady' enjoyed a rather privileged upbringing. St. Paul des Métis was an exclusively Métis settlement established after 1885 (although it was set up by the French Catholic church in an effort to spread Catholicism as far wide and West as possible, rather than in the interest of protecting the Métis people).¹⁰ Brady's upbringing removed him somewhat from the struggles faced by other Métis community members, but his interest in socialist thinkers like Marx led him to eschew his economic and

⁹ While today the term *Métis* denotes the distinct groups of people who emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, for the Métis Associations of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and for the purposes of this paper, which takes up the political and physical spaces in which the ideas of these Associations were circulating, Métis often denoted anyone with mixed First Nation and European heritage, and also non-treaty First Nation people who, for whatever reason, were/are not in a treaty (this includes those who became enfranchised and women who lost status by marrying non-First Nation men). Throughout this paper I will use the most specific language possible.

¹⁰ Murray Dobbin, *The One-and-a-Half Men: The Story of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris Métis Patriots of the 20th Century* (Vancouver: New Star Books), 1981, 42-43. Murray Dobbin's study is an exhaustive biography of Brady and Norris and their roles in the Métis activist movement in the mid twentieth century, and is a compilation of interviews with relatives, friends and colleagues of Brady and Norris, and some archival research.

educational privilege in favor of the life of a common laborer.¹¹ Brady's ability to make this choice, the kind of choice echoed later in life in his position with the Department of Natural Resources in Saskatchewan (the department that would bring less-than-consistently positive change to Métis and Native people of Northern Saskatchewan), will be important to consider later in terms of the context of the production of the portraits and a consideration of the agency of the subjects and the power relations between subject and photographer.

Perhaps the most crucial biographical note is Brady's central role in the Métis Liberation Movement with which I argue the photographs have a particular (but in no way straight-forward) relationship. In 1932, several decades after the Rebellion and the ensuing losses of land and rights, the Métis national liberation movement was revived in Alberta when James Brady, Malcolm Norris, and Joseph Dion founded the Métis Association of Alberta. This organization would lobby the government on behalf of Métis and non-status Native people to improve social and economic conditions.¹² The movement responded to the government's increasing regulation of resources, disregard for squatter's rights, a lack of social services, and generally bad economic conditions, and the Métis Association's objective was explicitly stated: "to see that adequate provision is made for our homeless and destitute families [...] to see that proper provision is made for the education of our children [and] also provision of a better system of medical attention."¹³

¹¹ Dobbin, 48.

¹² Ibid., 56-57.

¹³ Ibid., 63.

The Association had some success in the 1930's: in 1934 it pressed the Alberta government to create the Ewing Commission, which was to investigate Métis conditions.¹⁴ In 1936 the Commission recommended that crown land be used to establish colonies exclusively for Métis use, and based on this, in 1938, Alberta passed the *Métis Population Betterment Act*.¹⁵ Brady was involved – he was supervisor of the Wolf Lake colony where he began taking portraits that closely resemble the later serial portraits at Cumberland House, Deschambeault Lake, and Stanley Mission.

During this time Brady also became actively involved in the Communist Party of Canada and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the leftist (and, for many, the socialist-leaning) party formed in 1932. This affiliation would become crucial the following decade to his involvement in the politics of Northern populations in Saskatchewan where the CCF was elected to provincial government from 1944-1961.

By the time Brady joined the war effort overseas in 1945, the Métis Association of Alberta had lost momentum and its members were otherwise occupied. Malcolm Norris had taken a position with the CCF government in Northern Saskatchewan. Upon Brady's return to Canada, he relocated to the Métis settlement of Deschambeault Lake, Saskatchewan, where he took over Norris' position acting as a field officer at the government trading post and supervising local

¹⁴ This was known at the time as the 'Half-Breed Commission.'

¹⁵ Dobbin, 86-106. As Dobbin notes, however, in many ways this commission was a dismal failure; the terms 'Métis' and 'half-breed,' according to the commissioners, applied only to those of mixed blood who lived as "indigents" – who had not been assimilated into (non-Native) society. As such, the report recommended colonies to be used only for those "indigents" not making a fair living even by hunting or trapping (see 106-107).

fishermen.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that Brady took several portraits of residents and possibly colleagues at Deschambeault Lake; however, these are dated July 1951, years after his station there and coincide with the time he left Cumberland House.

1.3 The CCF and the Northern Saskatchewan issue

A discussion of the CCF government and its often-contradictory initiatives is crucial to understanding how the photographs navigate what was ultimately the government's very un-socialist treatment of the Northern Métis and First Nations populations, and specifically the Métis of Cumberland House. Headed by T.C. Douglas, the CCF party wanted the entire province to enter the twentieth century with the rest of the country, with an emphasis on economic development and stability after the Depression. As historian David Quiring argues, it is important to note that what is considered socialism in the CCF era is much different than what it is today; socialists of the day were most concerned with economic order that was believed to have a trickle-down effect to social areas as well, such as health and education.¹⁷ Although the CCF party did not initially consider itself to be a socialist party, they were supported by many of these socialists and over time they began to refer to their platform as "social democratic" thus blurring the lines between their socialist and more capitalist interests, and increasing their voting base in Southern and Northern Saskatchewan.¹⁸

¹⁶ F. Laurie Barron, *Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 235.

¹⁷ David M. Quiring, *CCF colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: battling parish priests, bootleggers, and fur sharks* (UBC Press: Vancouver, 2004), 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

The mandate of the CCF was multi-sided: to widen and stabilize Saskatchewan's economic base beyond agriculture, to increase government revenue for their health and social programs, to separate church and state, and to release the monopoly that the Hudson's Bay Company still held on the northern economy. They believed that province-wide progress could not be achieved with what they considered to be outdated and ineffective modes of social, economic, and labour organization in northern Aboriginal communities. As such, another major part of the CCF's mandate was assimilation, and as Quiring notes, the socialist class model that curtailed the preservation of racial and cultural boundaries backed this initiative.¹⁹

The CCF thus rhetorically situated itself between socialist equality and a colonial-tinted program of racial discrimination. They applied socialist programs in the South while maintaining capitalist economy (based on resource extraction from the north), while in north the opposite was true – there was a lack of programs put in place for social and economic welfare (because they thought Aboriginal people would simply take advantage of these) but a socialist economy put in place. In essence, despite the CCF's platform to foster a cohesive province-wide community, it remained split based on notions of racial inferiority.²⁰ Even where economy and job stimulus programs were put in place, Cumberland House among these locations, Aboriginal people were only employed on a temporary basis (if at all).²¹

Also on the CCF's list was to put an end to the reserve system. Douglas wanted Saskatchewan to handle health, education, and welfare for status First Nation people, and would use the

¹⁹ Quiring., 41.

²⁰ Ibid., 187.

²¹ Ibid., 178.

Department of Natural Resources as the de facto government of the Métis in the north (just as the Department of Indian Affairs controlled the status First Nations populations).²² Using DNR officers, health workers, and teachers to implement assimilation, the CCF initiated a project that would move all remaining semi-nomadic and remote dwelling Aboriginal people into villages. It has been noted, however, that this was unsuccessful for at least two reasons: first, the instant switch to settled life was a shock for many, and the lack of educational and social resources to adapt to the new way of life lead quickly to poverty for many. Second, these imposed communities in some ways fostered Aboriginal culture and resisted complete assimilation.²³

1.4 Cumberland House

One of the enclaves under the administration of the CCF was Cumberland House, a site that occupies a particular place in the history of Canadian colonialism. It was established by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1744 as a trading post, and for the next two hundred years remained largely in the control of the HBC and the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.²⁴ The federal government, focused on the war and the Depression for the first half of the twentieth century, largely ignored the Métis and Native populations in the North who remained unconnected by a lack of infrastructure. In 1944 the CCF turned its attention to the North.

A substantial portion of the DNR effort went to establishing a community farm at Cumberland House, a project that lasted from 1947 to mid-1952. The project was prompted by the particularly dire economic and social conditions in the area, and by the new socialist

²² Quiring, 28.

²³ Ibid., 48-9.

²⁴ Ibid., 9-10.

government's mandate to bring change to the north. According to a memorandum Brady compiled for the CCF Clubs in October 1952, the government was incited by two conditions they found to be contributing to the struggles faced by the Native and Métis people at Cumberland House: unsustainable fur trapping practices and the continued monopoly of the HBC Fur Lease, and the complete lack of an agricultural element.²⁵ Their stated purpose was threefold: to prove the area's agricultural suitability for farming operations, to create an agricultural "nucleus" by training unskilled farm laborers, and to ensure a sustainable program of food accessibility for the local community.²⁶

Brady was for a time affiliated with what has been called the "colonial structure" of the CCF,²⁷ working for the provincial Department of Natural Resources as a conservation officer. When he arrived at Cumberland House in 1948, these ties were not entirely unproblematic for the Métis and Native people living there, since he was working with the same government that was bringing change to the north at an expedited pace. In addition to his conservation duties, Brady was to establish co-operative enterprises among the local population; he established Sturgeon Lake Fishing Co-op, and later a credit union, co-op store and timber co-op. As a conservation officer with the DNR, his duties included providing law and order, interpreting conservation laws, administering municipal and social aid matters, acting as counselor, controlling tools and equipment, regulating access to jobs, and promoting government policies.

²⁵ James P. Brady, "Memorandum to C.C.F. Clubs, Re: Cumberland House Farm" (October 2, 1952): 1.

²⁶ Brady, 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 35.

But during Brady's four years at Cumberland House he was also involved in the organization of councils and assemblies centered on discussions about how to overcome the struggles posed by encroaching government policies.²⁸ Ultimately, the Cumberland House farm project was unsuccessful, and his report to the CCF Clubs suggests he was acutely aware of the conditions that lead to its failure. According to Brady, the CCF ended the community farm project when they felt it had served its purpose, and the government then intended to sell or lease the land that was in fact considered communal property by the residents of Cumberland House.²⁹ Listing several reasons why the project was ineffective, Brady writes,

The failure to develop an agricultural nucleus has been due to the lack of a clearly defined [*sic*] and workable program [...] the Cumberland House native has barely emerged from a semi-nomadic background due to the isolation of the past, and is emotionally at variance with the concepts and usages of a strictly sedentary mode of life.³⁰

Thus while Brady was certainly involved on the frontlines of the CCF project, he was also invested in the consequences for the community. I suggest his portraits give form to and negotiate the tensions between the government initiatives in assimilation and resource management, and these more anti-colonial community development initiatives.

²⁸ Dobbin, 173.

²⁹ Brady, 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

Chapter 2: (Un)Official archives

2.1 Interrogating the archive

The photographs in the Brady fonds at the Glenbow Archives are classified separately, organized in boxes by date, from the rest of the documents, diaries, correspondence, newspapers, reports, and pamphlets on Métis Association business, World War II, nuclear disarmament, and the Communist party of Canada.

Derrida suggests in *Archive Fever* that the archive occurs in the “domiciliation” that marks the “passage from private to public.” But where he argues that the archive functions authoritatively by “coordinating a *single* corpus [...] in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration,”³¹ it seems to me that the physical separation of Brady’s photographs from his political voice relegates them to a permanent position in the public archive as apolitical and perhaps, by extension, less useful; the particular configuration of the Brady archives’ “domiciliation” into *more than one* single corpus is how authority is given to the textual documents in the archive.

Borrowing Freud’s notion of the “death drive,” Derrida argues that the urge to destroy, to return to *before*, is what incites us to archive and thus counteract this urge – the death drive causes the archive. He defines archive fever as “a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.”³² Derrida insists on the impossibility of ever truly returning to the

³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10.

³² *Ibid.*, 57.

origin and of ever knowing what has been left out;³³ indeed, it is impossible to know whether Brady kept the photographs divided himself, or if it was the later work of relatives, friends, executors or archivists. But whose work this was is ultimately of no consequence. The photographs remain separate, prevented from participating in the same kind of work that the thousands of other documents are thought to do.

If there are two “archives” in question here – the first being that which is actually pictured in Brady’s photographs and the second being the location of the photographic objects in the museum, then there are also multiple archival impulses at work: the impulse to photographically capture and remember the people at Cumberland House, the impulse to preserve the photographic objects in a museum in a certain way (distinct from the textual archive), and an impulse that is inseparable from this study and which must be acknowledged here: to return to the origin of the original archive and to resituate it within the social and political dialogues that characterized Cumberland House at the time.

“Origin” is undoubtedly a contentious term to use in an explication of my methodology that is at least in part a critique of the archive. My return to the origin of Brady’s archive, before it was placed in the Glenbow Archives is thus not an attempt to redefine some true or originary purpose or meaning, but rather to open up the archive at the point of the objects’ origin to other possibilities – to destabilize the current authoritative “truth” of the objects as simply the ephemera of personal desire and to posit additional possibilities contingent on several implicit contextual factors.

³³ Ibid., 100.

2.2 Unofficial archives, vernacular histories

The photographs do indeed appear at first more personal than the explicitly political nature of the other documents, and they read like a visual diary of nearly every place and person Brady had encountered between 1928 and 1967. Portraits, landscapes, and notable buildings are typical subjects, and many are captioned with locations, names, dates, and the family history of the people in the images. Other photographs appear to have been given to Brady from family, friends and lovers; turning certain photographs over to read captions like “Taken a week ago, Love Alice” or “Just to remind you of my knees, eh, -Anne” makes it clear that we are looking in on Brady’s private life [figures 1-4].

Perhaps this accounts for why, despite a significant amount of scholarship dealing with Brady’s political life and leadership, there is virtually no critical discussion of these photographs.

Moreover, his lack of training is often apparent and while I do think he had an eye for composition his snapshots are not artistically groundbreaking. They seem to exemplify, to borrow from Geoffrey Batchen’s definition of vernacular photographs, “photography’s *parrergon*: the part of its history that has been pushed to the margins (or beyond them to oblivion) precisely in order to delimit what is and is not proper to this history’s enterprise.”³⁴

Batchen argues that “vernacular photographies demand the invention of suitably vernacular histories”;³⁵ while he is interested in reconsidering histories of photographies as varied and multiple, this statement may also be used to consider how vernacular photographies engage with, record, or produce “vernacular” histories of the people and events that were deemed important enough to be captured.

³⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning With Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 58.

³⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 59.

To say a photograph is vernacular is to necessarily make a judgment or assumption about how the photo was taken and about who took it. Vernacular photographs are not typically commissioned, they are not aesthetic masterpieces, and they exist in an unofficial realm. They are usually taken by anonymous, often working class amateurs,³⁶ and like tourist photographs and family albums, are frequently incited by the photographer's personal desire to capture and remember personal moments. This is most likely the case with Brady's photographs, too. But to say a photograph is personal is not to suggest that it does not have political implications; indeed I argue exactly the opposite and suggest that many of the photographs in Brady's archive work against the dominant political and social notions of Métis communities and identities at the time.

Batchen argues that vernacular photographs "refuse to comply with the coherent progression of styles [...] demanded by masters and transcendent aesthetic achievements, and disrupt its smooth Euro-American prejudice."³⁷ This "disruption" coincides with a disruption enacted and negotiated in Brady's photographs of the prescribed (or denied) identities and rights of Métis communities.

Curator and anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards has warned against the tendency to "absorb" vernacular photography into the established photographic discourse, suggesting instead that the photograph should be considered for what it can tell us about the context of its production and its social use.³⁸ It is from a similar perspective that I view Brady's photographs, in particular the

³⁶ Batchen., 57.

³⁷ Ibid., 57-58.

³⁸ Elizabeth Edwards, "Vernacular Photographies: Responses to a Questionnaire," *History of Photography* 24.3 (Autumn 2000): 231.

somewhat serial group of portraits he began taking in 1949 of people living and working around the predominantly Aboriginal settlement of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, as a case study for considering the potential for vernacular photography – both the act and the snapshot itself – to document and generate community. It is not my intention to posit what Brady intended to do with the photographs, nor to suggest that they were or were not meant to be a part of his political project. What he did with them is unknown, but the moment they took their place in the archives, they assumed the potential to produce and inform us of histories and of social relations at play.

2.3 The portraits

Always squinting into what appears to be a mid-afternoon sun, Brady's subjects cast long dark shadows behind them. The sun here plays a central role – not only does it provide adequate lighting that one might find elsewhere in a portrait studio, but it also draws attention to the very vernacularity of the photographs. They are most certainly not studio portraits, but snapshots taken with whatever materials were available at hand; here, sunlight, a field, and the occasional building act as the studio lights and backdrops [figures 5-9].

But is it always sunny and warm in Cumberland House? Or perhaps many of these portraits were taken consecutively, on the same day. Always outdoors, some subjects occupy the same place indicated by a common object in the background, like the tree behind Rosalie and Margaret Cadotte [figures 5 and 6]. Were these pictures spontaneous; did Brady randomly take snapshots of whoever was around? Or were they planned? (There always seems to have been a conversation that took place – each subject looks at the camera, at the viewer, having seemingly

given permission for their photograph to be taken, and many, like Rosalie, certainly appear to be happy to have their picture taken.) Many of the portraits of women are taken in fields, in front of trees or hedges – they often stand in the grass rather than on roads or well-trodden paths. This seems deliberate, especially given their clothing, which usually appears more formal than what one might wear to perform outdoor work [figures 7-9]. The men are usually shown in work clothes or uniforms, suggesting they have been pictured while on the job; Cyril Chaboyer and Arther Goulet, for example, seem to be captured in the middle of working [figures 10-15].

Two of the portraits depict more than one person, suggesting that the subjects – certainly here but likely many of the others as well – would have been permitted an amount of self-fashioning despite what was very clearly Brady’s preferred system [figures 16 and 17].

I refer to these images as portraits, which are by their nature expositions of the individuals portrayed. But regarding the specific history of images of Aboriginal people, Gerald Vizenor notes that, “photographic representations became the evidence of a vanishing race, the assurance of dominance and victimry.”³⁹ Vizenor deploys the notion of the “interimage” – that is, an image that lacks a connection with the real. It is composed of a series of signifiers, and yet is purported to function as evidentiary, and this becomes the way by which viewers come to understand the notion of “native.”⁴⁰ His concern is specifically with images of Native Americans, but the concept of the interimage might also be useful in considering images such as O.B. Buell’s “Métis Prisoners in Courtyard” (1885) from the post-Riel Rebellion trial, in which several Métis men

³⁹ Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

are captured – by the camera and by the law [figure 18]. This “interimage” provides viewers with evidence of criminality, of dominance, and of the law in action. Photographs taken by members of the government organized Half-Breed Commission, such as Narcisse-Omer Cote’s “Group of Half Breeds at Grand Rapids, Manitoba” (1900) and “A Sitting of the Commission” (1900), function similarly, marking the successful extinguishment of Métis title to any land and show them as new wards of the government [figures 19-20].

Brady’s portraits resist this history of Métis representation fraught with signifiers of criminality and colonial dominance, working against such “interimages” that employ the Métis body as a signifier for a colonial narrative to be read by the colonial viewer. Here, each person is always named, often right below their image, date and place are recorded and birthplaces are sometimes given on the reverse; they are each given visual and textual representation.

This is significant, considering most Métis in this community and elsewhere in general were given only a very specific form of representation in an official capacity. While some, like Charles Fosseneuve who was a veteran of World War II and a Special Constable in the RCMP, could be found in the official records along with his fellow veterans and colleagues,⁴¹ many of the others are remembered and represented in official records only by their family names that appear in governmental scrip records, which list parents, spouses, children, dates and places of birth, and addresses. By listing much of the same information for many of the portrait subjects, Brady’s photographs thus constitute a new archive, contending with the official one that documents the scrip process and the systemic removal of land, culture, and in effect, identity, from Métis communities.

⁴¹ He is notably pictured twice in Brady’s archive, in PA-2218-415 and PA-2218-407.

Scholars frequently note the connection between photography and power; Allan Sekula and John Tagg, for example, both remind us that since the mid-nineteenth century photographs of the body have served panoptic functions in both institutional and social contexts.⁴² While Tagg rejects the “regime of photographic truth” that is essential to the relationship of photography and power,⁴³ I do not entirely reject this regime here and argue that it is crucial to how Brady’s portraits function. His archive relies on its conceptual proximity to previous archives, such as those “interimages” discussed above, which utilized and produced unequal power relations between colonizers and Métis subjects. While certain tenuous power relations are still at play between the subjects and Brady as photographer and as such, the panoptic gaze in some ways persists, the archive reorients the “truths” previously asserted by archives representing Métis communities with a similar evidentiary thrust. It thus presents the viewer with a vernacular or unofficial community in a way that mimics this very official or lawful mode.

2.4 Gender trouble in the archive?

The photographs do some work to insert themselves, and the individuals they represent, into a tangible, visible, and undeniable history, to be sure, but it must also be remembered that the photographs comprise an archive in itself. To return to Derrida, the photographs in the Brady fonds might be said to constitute a single corpus articulating the “ideal unity” of their configuration; in the absence of much other visual representation of Métis individuals in the

⁴² Jonathan Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 85. Alan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64.

⁴³ Tagg, 95.

years immediately following WWII, Brady's portraits may thus be thought to represent the *entirety* of Métis life in northern Saskatchewan during those years.

But of course this is not the case, and here I will consider what scholars often point to as the *frame of representation* in order to bring into focus what lies beyond the image (and what is thus also an integral component of the image). Scholars frequently cite the frame of a photograph as a complex site of critical investigation, and regard the frame as a discursive device determining how a photograph is taken and how it is viewed and talked about, and also as a boundary between what is pictured and what is omitted from the image.⁴⁴ For some, this discursive frame is a necessary consideration in interrogating the constructed-ness of a photograph that masquerades as truth, and in disentangling the complicated and often problematic web of context, representation, interpretation and dissemination.⁴⁵ However, I would like to consider the notion of the frame here not to destabilize the image/context/interpretation relationship, but instead to argue for its contribution to this archive's manipulation/mimicry of the regime of photographic truth.

It is tempting (and possibly appropriate) to read at least a partial element of desire and objectification that frames the disproportionate number of portraits of women, especially considering the aforementioned photographs young women gave Brady inscribed with short love notes. It is also notable, however, that written under many of these women's images are their married names, with family names are written on the back. The photographs are thus in many

⁴⁴ For example, see Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁴⁵ See Butler, 73-75.

ways objects that one might place in a family album, to be viewed by future generations, and to be physically handled and turned over to read the words carefully written on the reverse.

If this is so, then why do these photographs reside in the institutional archive (and on the internet), to be viewed potentially by just anyone who might stumble across them, and not in personal family albums of the relatives of the individuals pictured? The Brady photographs, as they sit in the archives, are not readily available to family members to look at and see something of themselves in, some possibility of a truth of their family history. (Although most of them are available online on the Glenbow Archives website, there is something ultra personal about being able to hold the object in one's hands, turn it over, place it in a frame on living room wall, and have a connection with the object and the subject/its referent in one's daily life). I suggest, however, that although the photos have not been repatriated, there is a space to examine them more critically outside of their capacity as family objects.

These portraits are also discursively framed by a complex set of gender, familial, and community relations unique to Cumberland House at this time. It remains important, then, that overall there are significantly more women than men pictured in the portraits taken at Cumberland House. Of the forty-eight known portraits, twenty-nine of them are of women, and two of these are portraits of two women together.⁴⁶ By contrast, twenty-eight of the portraits

⁴⁶ At least forty-eight; these are the ones that made it to the Glenbow Archives, and it is possible that there are others elsewhere (such as personal collections). Additionally, some portraits that were taken during the time Brady was officially stationed at Cumberland House are unlabeled with locations, and he did travel around a lot a lot. For the purposes of this study, portraits taken at Cumberland house do not include those that were taken at nearby sites, such as Pemmican Portage, 4 km south of Cumberland House, as they are of different (although inevitably connected) communities.

Brady took elsewhere at Nistowiak Lake are of men, while only five are of women. Nistowiak Lake was the site of the La Ronge Uranium Mines where Brady worked after he left Cumberland House, and so this ratio reflects what would likely have been a significantly greater number of men working at this site.

Simplistically, the disproportionate number of women may reflect the population of Cumberland House during this time. In *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine*, author Kim Anderson compiles first hand knowledge, memories, and histories from First Nations and Métis “historian participants” (most of them women). Elle Sanderson (Cree/Métis, b. 1943), one of the historian participants from Cumberland House, remembers that while entire communities would go out to traplines in the spring, often it was only the men who would go out at other times during the year.⁴⁷ Then women (including Sanderson’s mother) would work in the fish plant or help out with farm work to ensure the community continued to function in the absence of a good portion of the labour force.⁴⁸ Cecilia Dorion, for example, is remembered by her daughters Elsie Sanderson and Isabelle Impey “as being one of the best trappers in Cumberland House” and the community recognized her as one of the best skiners and butchers [figure 21].⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Kim Anderson and Maria Campbell, *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 35. This is a valuable resource, since others who have conducted research on this period in Northern Saskatchewan and Cumberland House in particular, such as Murray Dobbin, tended to contact and consider only the men who lived in the area.

⁴⁸ Anderson and Campbell, 105.

⁴⁹ Leah Marie Dorion, “Opinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” (master’s thesis, Athabasca University, 2010), 83.

Thus the women pictured in Brady's photographs are inseparable from this seasonal system.

This means that not only were there probably more women than men in Cumberland House in the summertime, but a few of the women do appear dressed as though they are ready for or were performing some sort of outdoor work. Mrs. Francis Fosseneuve wears a torn dress with what appear to be pants and boots (or moccasin rubbers) underneath, while Elsie Dorion and Lillian Ballandine wear pants that might have been suitable for labour [figures 22-24]. This is especially interesting for Lillian who appears to be in her thirties – a number of years younger than Mrs. Fosseneuve. Kim Anderson also finds that:

[T]he value placed on their community-centered work meant that women had their own circles or 'jurisdictions' in which they were in charge of not only the material resources but also the social relations of the community.[...] In other areas of power and jurisdiction, women in their childbearing age were also considered so strong that they needed to stay away from the tools of men's labour, lest they 'tangle' with the powers that men held.⁵⁰

For these women, especially Lillian, to represent themselves in a position to potentially threaten the "power" of men would thus possibly have been a subtly subversive act.

The majority of the women, however, wear dresses and skirts that imply either that they had been working indoors and stepped out for a portrait, or were enjoying some form of leisure activity. Whether or not the latter was a reality, since self-fashioning is evident in many of the portraits (such as those that show two women who evidently wished to be shown together), it is possible that many of the women wished to show themselves as well-dressed and with the means to have leisure time. This is especially interesting in the larger context of the shifting socio-economic climate in the north; not only were women crucial to the functioning of the family and of the larger community, they also took on new roles in response to the modernization brought

⁵⁰ Anderson and Campbell, 164.

by the government. Because of the government's push for "nucleation" (the formation of "micro-urban villages") family dynamics and gender roles quickly changed. According to David Quiring, "women received federal family allowance payments and often also the family's welfare payments. They frequently had a larger cash income than did their husbands, which increased women's status while decreasing that of men." Interestingly, Quiring suggests this led to a decreased sense of self and esteem for and in men. Furthermore, fewer people were getting married and thus the notion of the family became less socially dominant.⁵¹

Irene Morin (nee Cook), Anne Dorion, Alma McKay, and Louise Sicotte (nee Witowski) are among the several of the women pictured wearing somewhat formal dress, and thus demonstrate these new roles and changes in status that they were experiencing [figures 9, 25-27]. While, as Quiring suggests, this might have been seen as problematic to family and community dynamics and threatening to the men's positions, it is crucial to note that these women and most of the women pictured appear to be young and of child-bearing age. The portraits thus give form to various forces present in the community: the CCF's push for nucleation and modernization, the dissolution of the family structure, and women's agency, leadership and new financial status. Simultaneously, however, they visually assert the continued vitality of the community by picturing these women of child-bearing age and negotiate the new conditions imposed by the CCF. I do not intend to suggest that in doing so they negate the newfound status of women (which was a result of the CCF's initiatives) or their agency in self-representation, but rather that the portraits make tangible the continued importance of women to the community and reclaim a possibility for the familial structure through the potential of childbirth.

⁵¹ Quiring, 47-48.

Here I would like to briefly return to the appearance of a few elderly women in this archive, as it is also significant in the context of these changing familial structures and modernization. If elderly women were thought to uphold and protect life with their wisdom and authority,⁵² then their inclusion alongside these younger women who were possibly taking on new roles in this era of change is not only a reassertion of their continued value to the community, but also a suggestion that the community of Cumberland House is both vital and changing, and retains its traditional and cultural specificity.

The dominance of women in this archive must thus be considered beyond notions of desire and objectification. They simultaneously demonstrate the changing roles of women in the community, while also asserting the vibrancy and vitality of a community under the new pressures of the CCF's modernizing imperatives. Furthermore, the archive of portraits posits itself in dialogue with a historical narrative from which it has conventionally been excluded.

It is not so difficult finding many of the men pictured in the historical archives elsewhere, especially those whose position and rank Brady took the time to note, or those whom he photographed in uniform. It helps, too, that Murray Dobbin interviewed several members of the community who knew or had worked with Brady in some capacity, and these interviews are all available online. The men are frequently pictured in uniform, giving away their status, social and economic standing, and establishing themselves within a historical narrative. Indeed, some of these names are not difficult to locate in the historical archives:

⁵² Anderson and Campbell, 154.

Charles Fosseneuve [figure 15]: Served with the Canadian 13th Field Regiment in the Europe and the United Kingdom from 1942-1946. During this time, he was awarded several medals for his service including the Canadian Volunteer and Service Medal.⁵³

Thomas Leia [figure 28]: First manager of DNR farm at Cumberland House.⁵⁴

Tom Settee [figure 29]: Chief of the Cumberland House band. As the chief, he built a school from logs on the Pine Bluff reserve without any payment or support from the government.⁵⁵ He also worked as a deckhand on the HBC York boats and although he was promised insurance and a pension when he stopped working, he never received it.⁵⁶

Pierre Carriere [figure 30]: Joined the war effort at 25, and was one of several Métis veterans responsible for setting up the first Native-run Legion in the community.⁵⁷ He was also a member of Local Council of Cumberland House.⁵⁸

That Brady did not note the occupation of most of the women he photographed is not without problematic implications, and does little to ensure their memorialization and continued representation as members in the community once the images find their “domiciliation” in the

⁵³ Gabriel Dumont Institute, *Remembrances: Interviews with Métis Veterans* (Regina: Gabriel Dumont Institute: 1997), 47-51.

⁵⁴ Quiring, 150.

⁵⁵ Pine Bluff reserve is one of a few reserves designated for the Cumberland House Cree Nation.

⁵⁶ Chief Thomas Settee, interview by Michael Tymchak, December 11, 1974, transcript, Northern Saskatchewan Archives, 33-34; 10-11. <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/solr?query=ID:28616&start=0&rows=10&mode=results>

⁵⁷ Dobbin, 177.

⁵⁸ Quiring, 88.

archive. Further, while much information can be obtained in Dobbin's interviews online, he notably did not interview any women during the course of his research (at least not in any published interviews).

Much has been said about the systemic absence of women from archives, and feminist scholars frequently embark on projects to fill in the missing information about these absent women in history. The means by which this must be done is often unconventional, and requires the researcher or author to "reconstruct women's experiences by weaving many partial and fragmented sources together in unique ways."⁵⁹ Below is a set of necessarily incomplete histories of only a handful of the women pictured at Cumberland House, gleaned from fragments of information found scattered through various sources:

Irene Morin (nee Cook) [figure 25]: Worked several jobs and trapped in the spring and fall in order to provide for four children while her husband was overseas at war.⁶⁰

Josephine Carriere [figure 7]: Contributing elder to a research action project in Cumberland House.⁶¹ She also made beadwork items that can be found in the Gabriel Dumont Institute Museum.

⁵⁹ Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), xviii.

⁶⁰ Kathy Hodgson-Smith, "An Interview with Irene Morin," *New Breed Magazine* (July-August 2002): 30.

⁶¹ Lily McKay-Carriere, "Elders and Teachers Are Cree-Ative Collaborators!" *Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research Into Teaching*, Project no. 186 (Saskatoon, October 2009): 5, 23.

Lily McAuley [figure 8]: The first Métis chief of visitor services for Parks Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites in Northern Manitoba.⁶² McAuley also spoke on her Métis identity at the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference in 1994:

[W]here I grew up in northern Saskatchewan, to say that I am half-breed was not to put myself down, but rather to explain to anyone who wanted to listen that I was part Scottish and part Cree. To us the Métis were part French and part Indian and that was not what we were. Although I had one ancestor that was French, we always considered ourselves as half-breed. It was only about twenty years ago that our government legislated us all Métis. It's for easy identification purposes. So now we are known as Métis. When I tick off Métis on the census form I have the irresistible urge to add, 'but I'm not part French!' Not that I have anything against the French, but that's not what I feel I am. Because we were half-breed, we were fortunate in that we did not have to be herded onto reservations when the treaties were signed, because we were not part of the treaties, we continued to live more like the Indians than the Indian's did.⁶³

Compiled here are just fragments of the lives of only three of the women Brady pictured at Cumberland House, gathered from community pamphlets and newsletters, interviews, obituaries, and conference proceedings. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to compile a more exhaustive account of the personal histories of each photographed person in Brady's archive, my own experience in compiling the partial lists of these men and women reveal the substantial archival gaps that inhabit the histories of the Métis women in Cumberland House. While several of the men's names are attached to well known events in war and politics, the women's names are found in much less known and readily available texts or materials. Their named appearance

⁶² From her *Free Press* obituary, quoted in: University of Winnipeg, *Rupert's Land Research Centre Newsletter* 10.5 (1992): 5.

⁶³ Lily McAuley, "Memories of a Trapper's Daughter: Banquet Address of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference," in *Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac Island, Michigan*, by Jennifer S. Brown (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 11-13.

in this archive, along with the men, thus constitutes a vernacular or unofficial archive that contends with the official one that often leaves many of these names out.

Chapter 3: Vernacular community

I have stated the portraits represent and recognize individuals who, in the official record, have not been officially represented. And yet, in a simultaneous contradiction to their certain portrait-like nature, their seriality and formal continuities recall typological photographs: the subjects are almost always shown from head to toe, standing just far enough away to be entirely captured within the frame. This kind of serial documentary portraiture was not entirely new. In Germany, August Sander had already been working since 1910 on his typological project *People of the Twentieth Century* in which he envisioned an archive that represented the entire German population organized into social categories. Closer to home, of course, is the long history of ethnographic and typological-style sketches and photographs in which subjects were rarely named and more attention was given to visual markers of cultural difference. In the only existing discussion of Brady's photographs, art historian Sherry Farrell Racette briefly posits his images taken at Cumberland house in a post-colonial discourse of the reversal of the colonial lens.⁶⁴ I agree; Brady's numerous portraits do indeed seem to redirect the gaze of the camera that for so long had been aimed at Native and Métis people rather than by them.

But the photographs also seem to navigate a space between portraits and typologies of people living and working at Cumberland House. A portrait functions not only to describe an individual, but also to mark social identity, and this dual nature is especially important in a consideration of the seriality of these portraits.⁶⁵ Viewed individually, each image represents

⁶⁴ Sherry Farrell Racette, "Returning the Fire, Pointing the Canon: Aboriginal Photography as Resistance," in *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada*, edited by Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2011) 77-78.

⁶⁵ Tagg, 37.

only its subject, but viewed together, each subject becomes part of a larger (yet, as I argue, never complete and never static) community. While the community that they give form to is one entangled in government mandated colonial projects and racial exclusion, I suggest that the photographs also negotiate the political and social statuses of Native and Métis members by bringing them into representation in a collectivity.

3.1 Community at the limits of difference

It might be said that historically, and arguably still today, Métis communities have been constituted by what they are not: not groups of individuals who granted Native treaty rights, and not non-Aboriginal people. The scrip policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries epitomize the government's production of this community's identity by negation. Theorist Jean Luc Nancy has argued that community is constituted or exposed at the limits of difference. That is, community does not simply exist because its members ascribe to or acquire a commonality with each other; it exists always in relation to what is beyond it. Nancy states:

the separation itself must be enclosed, the closure must not only close around a territory [...] but also, ... around the enclosure itself. The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not be at all. In other words: to be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone-and this of course is contradictory. The logic of the absolute violates the absolute.⁶⁶

Here Nancy points to an inherent contradiction in the definition of communities as enclosed to the exclusion of the outside; he argues there always remain social and political interactions at the limits of communities. Métis communities have historically been denied inclusion in official political and constitutional legislature by way of their exclusion from officially recognized First Nations and non-Aboriginal groups. But here is where Nancy's "logic of the absolute" reveals a

⁶⁶ Nancy, 4.

contradiction: is not an official denial also an unofficial recognition? The portraits at Cumberland House, then, represent and negotiate this unofficial recognition, and give form to an unofficial or vernacular community. I suggest the portraits assert what Nancy argues is the inevitable fact of human existence that ultimately exposes community: being-in-common. It is not some transcendent or acquired commonality that permits one to be in a community, it is the simple fact of *being* that makes community happen. Difference merely reveals that most basic shared state of *being*. Several Métis women, at least one Cree chief, Department of Natural Resources employees, an RCMP officer, an Oblate Catholic priest, Brady's fellow Métis World War II veterans – the photographs are certainly not exclusive in any way, and they give form to a specific colonial moment in Cumberland House when the CCF government was attempting to apply blanket strategies of social and economic reform to the very different circumstances in northern and southern Saskatchewan. This required a process of racial assimilation that did not take into account different modes of life that were often incompatible with these strategies. But despite the CCF's schematic disregard for cultural difference, racial discrimination was routine at ground-level. Thus, the portraits navigate these tensions between the colonial nature of the CCF initiatives and the anti-colonial thrust of the Métis liberation movement that was picking up speed in Saskatchewan.

For Nancy, *immanence* is the notion that there is some transcendent quality that human beings share, and he suggests that this is a problematic and detrimental way to conceive of community.⁶⁷ For him, the only and the most important commonality is being – that we are all inherently being-in-common. The CCF's assimilation initiatives seemed to purport such an

⁶⁷ Nancy, 3.

immanence – denying or forgetting the fact that the North was different from the South, and blanket initiatives were not going to be successful for both.

A consideration of the term of “vernacular” as it relates to community is perhaps useful here. Scholars have pointed to *cultural syncretism* as an important feature of vernacular communities, which involves affirming various cultural practices while resisting others, particularly those constructed by the dominant culture.⁶⁸ This implies a constant movement and instability within and between communities both dominant and vernacular, and it destabilizes a linear division between ‘margin’ and ‘center’, or vernacular and hegemony. This is precisely how “exposure” functions in Nancy’s concept of community: the discursive limits of separation are never really limits that fully separate one community from another. For Nancy this is an existing condition that must be *discursively* recognized. I suggest that Brady’s portraits recognize, enact and produce this destabilizing of separateness – not necessarily as a unanimously sought after political ideal, nor one with an absolute positive outcome, but as a rejection of the discursive separation between margin and centre. While each subject is adamantly represented as an individual, together the photographs also insist that each individual is *Being-in-common*, *with* one another.

3.2 Exposing community and the fault of the archive

So what is to be made of the archive, and its place in a discussion of community? Derrida argues,

⁶⁸ Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, “The Critique of Vernacular Discourse,” *Communication Monographs* 62 (March 1995): 21-22.

The archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory. *There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority, No archive without outside [...]* The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself.⁶⁹

I have argued that Brady's Cumberland House portraits present an incursion into the conventional historical archive of Métis and Native representation, in which nameless bodies are repeatedly criminalized, marginalized, and historicized. The portraits draw attention to, and even operate as, the *exteriority* – separate from the history of visual Métis representation, and separate from the archival documents of the rest of the Brady archive. Essentially, the portraits are that which expose the very fault of the “archive.”

In a similar way, they operate as the exteriority of what Nancy determines is the ‘inoperative’ community:

Community is made of what retreats from it [...] The retreat opens, and continues to keep open, this strange being-the-one-with-the-other to which we are exposed [...] Community does not consist in the transcendence [...] of a being supposedly immanent to community. It consists on the contrary in the immanence of a transcendence—that of finite existence as such, which is to say, of its “exposition.”⁷⁰

Brady's portraits at Cumberland House present a series of subjects with no identifiable transcendent common quality; they expose, instead, the absence of this transcendence. The portraits reveal each person “being-the-one-with-the-other.”

⁶⁹ Derrida, 14.

⁷⁰ Nancy, xxxix.

3.3 The photographic act

For Nancy, community is not a long lost societal condition, it is not to be sought out, or worked towards. It is not an immanence or built around an essence. Instead, community is a matter of being; it is relational and it happens to people, rather than because of them. He argues, “A community is not a project of fusion, or in some general way a productive or operative project – nor is it a *project* at all”.⁷¹ It must be acknowledged, then, that Nancy’s conception of community is in many ways at odds with Brady’s politically formulated project. Brady was decidedly committed to the project of community building, especially in Cumberland House, and it is certainly possible that he wanted his portraits to play some kind of active role in this project.

Certainly, the portraits rely on this notion that community *already is*, in order to function as I argue they do. As photographic objects, his portraits reveal community as a condition of *being*, à la Nancy, in a passive manner separate from (yet still complementary to) the active project in which Brady was engaged. But it must also be remembered that posing for a portrait and taking a photograph are both very deliberate *acts*. Conceived of as photographic acts, rather than merely objects, the portraits assume an *active* role in the community building effort at Cumberland House.

To consider this, I turn from Nancy to Ariella Azoulay, who interrogates the photographic act as a possibility of relations between human beings, the production of a certain kind of citizenship, and by extension, the production of community. Where Jonathan Tagg (and many other

⁷¹ Nancy, 15.

scholars) direct attention to the regime of photographic truth and the power relations at play between photographer and subject, Azoulay argues that reducing photography to a question of ownership of the image between photographer and photographed is a limiting attitude. In what she calls the “citizenry of photography,” a contract into which everyone enters regardless of subject position, the photographic act has the potential restore the citizenship of someone who has been denied or stripped of it.⁷²

She argues that the “gap” between photography and the photograph, which is often disregarded in the conception of the photograph as simply “x,”

homogenizes the plurality out of which a photograph is made and unifies it into a stable image, giving the illusion that we are facing a closed unit of visual information. This gesture, frequent in so many domains, is part of an ongoing effort to suspend the civil power of being a spectator and neutralize the power of the civil contract of photography.⁷³

The photograph is thus an event that extends beyond just the moment imprinted on paper, and which involves not only the photographer and photographed but also the spectator of the photograph. We in the present, the arbiters of the historical archive, also participate in this event. We look at the photograph, and either relegate it to an archive labeled as the personal ephemera of a man recognized for other political pursuits, or we consider more closely the person in the image – in doing so we begin to take on the responsibility of being a spectator.

The contract of photography allows us to view and participate in relations between governed human beings, “in the framework of which the citizen aims to break away from his or her *status*

⁷² Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 102; 110.

⁷³ Ariella Azoulay, “The Ethic of the Spectator: The Citizenry of Photography,” *Afterimage* 33.2 (September/October 2005).

as citizen and *exercise* citizenship – that is, to turn citizenship into the arena of a constant becoming, together with other (non)citizens.”⁷⁴ In the mid-twentieth century, the objective of the Métis liberation movement (of which Brady was a major proponent) was to garner recognition of Métis individuals as lawful owners of the same basic rights and allowances as non-Métis individuals (Canadian citizens), and Cumberland House was a microcosm of this movement as it moved eastward from Alberta. These portraits of the people living in Cumberland House are thus photographic events that enact a sort of unofficial citizenship – of belonging to a community and to the historical record of a time and place, and negotiating their place within a complex new set of government policies, urbanizing initiatives, and cultural changes. Here, citizenship is an exercise in which the photographer and the photographed took part, and in which we as spectators necessarily continue to participate by viewing the photographs critically and in contention with conventional history.

⁷⁴ Azoulay, *Civil Contract*, 111.

Conclusion

Vernacular photographs, as Edwards reminds us, permit us to explore the vernacular histories in which they were taken. They present an incursion to the official archive and demand that we as active spectators observe and make space for these different histories. This thesis has attempted to open up the archives, specifically the Glenbow Archives in which the Brady photos reside, and present the portraits within the context of the politics of the Cumberland House community from which they have been thus far separated by current “domiciliation” in the archives.

Although the CCF deemed the agriculture project at Cumberland House a success, the people of the community, likely including many of those in the portraits, were less convinced. While among the ostensible aims of the initiative was to assist in the “eventual rehabilitation of the local community,”⁷⁵ it ultimately disregarded the voice of the community altogether by treating the land as government property. Brady states in his memorandum:

At the ratification of the Cumberland Treaty of 1889 the hay lands surrounding Cumberland House were by tacit agreement understood to be common lands accessible to both racial groups who shared in the extinguishment of the Indian Title. This constitutes an inalienable moral right as valid as that of the Hudson’s Bay Company who through superior comprehension, business acumen and predatory foresight acquired definable legal land rights surrounding every trading post.⁷⁶

This unspoken agreement and “moral right” went unrecognized by the government, who in their attempt to rehabilitate the Cumberland House community ultimately inscribed a limit (or closure, or absolute-ness) between communities. Here, the limit was drawn between Métis and

⁷⁵ Brady, 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Native, and Euro-American, and Nancy argues this is a sort of totalitarianism that restricts or disallows true community.⁷⁷

Nancy states that, “a community is not a project of fusion, or in some general way a productive or operative project—nor is it a project at all.”⁷⁸ Indeed, Brady’s portraits reveal the presence of community despite the exclusive government projects that troubled community’s existence. But the series was also most certainly a project, one that required a conscious effort over a period of time. As such, it must be conceived of a series of photographic *acts*, just as viewing each one is an act as well. Where Nancy insists that community is the discursive recognition of being-together, Azoulay insists that citizenship is a constant *becoming* together.⁷⁹ The function of the portraits requires both: they reveal the condition of being together as a community, but also require the participation of the photographer, photographed, and spectator to expose that belonging, or some type of citizenship, to community. Brady’s portraits present the possibility for the vernacular photographic act and object to negotiate belonging not only within a community, but also within the historical records. The photographic event extends long past the momentary click of the shutter and into the present; it implicates us as spectators and exposes to us the arbitrary limits of community and the archive.

⁷⁷ Nancy, 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁹ Azoulay, *Civil Contract*, 111.

Illustrations

Figure 1 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the following photograph: Unknown, Outdoor portrait of Alice in front of house, 1944. Original source: Glenbow Archives file number PA-2218-228.

Figure 2 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the reverse side of Outdoor portrait of Alice in front of house, 1944. Original source: Glenbow Archives file number PA-2218-228.

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Figure 27 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the following photograph: James P. Brady, portrait of Louise Sicotte (nee Witowski), 1949. Original source: Glenbow Archives file number PA-2218-363.

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Figure 29 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the following photograph: James P. Brady, portrait of Tom Settee, Chief of Cumberland House Band, Mossy River, Saskatchewan, 1949. Original source: Glenbow Archives file number PA-2218-383.

Figure 30 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the following photograph: James P. Brady, portrait of Pierre Carriere, Canadian Legion Branch President, 1949. Original source: Glenbow Archives file number PA-2218-387.

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