

Goldsmiths Research Online

*Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO)
is the institutional research repository for
Goldsmiths, University of London*

Citation

Ruppert, Evelyn. 2009. Becoming Peoples: "Counting Heads in Northern Wilds". *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 2(1/2), pp. 11-31. ISSN 1753-0350 [Article]

Persistent URL

<http://research.gold.ac.uk/7958/>

Versions

The version presented here may differ from the published, performed or presented work. Please go to the persistent GRO record above for more information.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Goldsmiths, University of London via the following email address: gro@gold.ac.uk.

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated. For more information, please contact the GRO team: gro@gold.ac.uk

Becoming Peoples: 'Counting Heads in Northern Wilds'¹

Dr Evelyn Ruppert, The Open University

2009. Journal of Cultural Economy, Special Issue. Vol. 2. No. ½, pp. 11-31

Abstract

While the census is sometimes understood to be an objectifying practice that constructs and makes up a population, in this paper I am concerned with how it is necessary to produce census subjects in order to construct population. By drawing on formulations by Latour, Deleuze and Law, I conceive of census taking as a practice performed by heterogeneous socio-technical arrangements of actors—humans, paper forms, categories, concepts, definitions, topography, geography—whose mediations, interactions and encounters produce census subjects. It is through the relays and interactions between varying and never fixed technological, natural and cultural actors that census taking is performed. I analyse these arrangements as constituting *agencements*, which focuses our attention on how agency and action are configured by and contingent upon the socio-technical arrangements that make them up. Agencements assume different socio-technical configurations and thus construct different social realities and populations that cannot be captured in a single account.

The argument is advanced through an account of the taking of what was declared the first 'scientific' enumeration of 'Indians' and 'Eskimos,' the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Canadian Far North in 1911. I argue that the agencements were not able to bring forth the subjectivities necessary to construct population in the Far North. Not able to find subjects then, census taking could not produce nor construct a population in the Far North and the practice of census taking ended up creating a record of a census 'other' —an indeterminate multitude that could not identify and could not be identified as part of the population.

Keywords: census, subjectification, agencement, identification, Canada, Aboriginal people

Introduction

The understanding that the contemporary census is a technique for discovering population has been durable despite several decades of scholarship that has challenged the consistency and facticity of census data. Social constructionists have argued that once reported censuses conceal processes of construction such as the political interests and aspirations of various groups or social actors that influence census officials and both the questions and acceptable answers (e.g., Curtis 2001; Iacovetta and Mitchinson 1998; Kertzer and Arel 2001). However, researchers have by and large remained committed to the data value of censuses and have continued to focus on debates about their accuracy towards better grasping empirical questions. Thus there are innumerable studies that use census data but few studies about how the data is constructed. Political and administrative uses of the census are also well studied and documented as are technical disputes about the accuracy of data and the classification and measurement of particular population characteristics. The accounts do not deny political influence and the engagement of numerous actors, but when acknowledging this there is a tendency to be realist: that through better construction and through the inclusion of different interests and voices, censuses will better approximate the 'real' population. Census taking is thus usually described as a standardised, centrally organised and orchestrated administrative practice of counting and knowing 'a' population exercised by a centralised and powerful state.

The two streams of research have tended to reinforce that there is a division between the real and the constructed population. In several papers I have been developing an alternative interpretation of censuses and the populations they construct (Author 2007, 2008). While agreeing that the population is something that is *constructed* rather than discovered and made possible through objectifying techniques such as establishing conventions of equivalence between bodies, what has generally been overlooked is that population is also *produced*. Censuses are part of myriad identification practices that need to produce subjects who are able to identify themselves and others in relation to categories of the population. As Foucault argued, technologies do not simply reveal subjects as already formed and unchanging but create them and the particular capacities and agencies required for the technology to operate. To be a subject is not to be subjected (connoting disciplinary power and domination) but to be subjectified, that is, a person who is capable of reflection and self-formation (Foucault, 1983).

To be a census subject then is to be an agent with the capacity to identify as a body equivalent to many others and as a member and part of a population. It is a capacity that is produced through the practice of *census taking*, which requires subjects to reflect both on the practice and their identification with census categories. Such capacity also includes the ability to categorise others (in ones household, family or institution). For while some individuals are not subjectified through census taking, their inclusion requires a subject who can mediate their identification and indeed this mediation is required and facilitated by the technology.¹ This capacity is perhaps most visible when subjects refuse to identify with or assert different categories than those circulated by the state. Subjects can and do mediate their identification with categories, which are co-constructed by census authorities *and* subjects and not simply state constructed and imposed (Bowker and Star, 1999). Processes of co-construction thus involve two sides—of constructing and producing population—which constitute what I call double identification (state-citizen). It is through double identification that census categories come into existence, become facts that can in turn not only be measured, analysed and

assembled (objectification) but also be identified with (subjectification) (Author 2007). That is, it is necessary to produce census subjects in order to construct population.

The focus of this paper is on the practice of *census taking* and the specific agencies, arrangements and technologies involved in subjectifying people. By drawing on formulations by Latour (2005), Deleuze (1987) and Law (2004) census taking is analysed as a practice performed by a heterogeneous actors—of humans, paper forms, categories, concepts, definitions, topography, geography—whose particular mediations, interactions and encounters produce census subjects. The action and agency of all actors (or actants) is dynamically composed and contingent upon the specific composition and arrangement of which they form a part. In particular, producing census subjects is so configured and for this reason I deploy the concept of *agencement*, the French version of assemblage. As advanced by different researchers the concept is useful for focusing attention on how agency and action are configured by and contingent upon the socio-technical arrangements that make them up.² Rather than actors being understood as either individuals with inherent characteristics or as beings embedded in institutions, contexts or relations, actors are made-up by agencements (Hardie and MacKenzie, 2007). The concept is drawn from Deleuze and involves a deliberate word-play:

'Agencer is to arrange or to fit together: in one sense, *un agencement* is thus an assemblage, arrangement, configuration or lay-out.....The other side of the word-play in the term *agencement* is *agence*, agency. We retain the French 'agencement' because this word-play does not carry over into its usual English rendering as 'assemblage', which thus has somewhat too passive a connotation (Hardie and MacKenzie, 2007: 58).

The relevance of agencements for subjectification is evident in the great lengths to which census authorities (and social scientists) go to mobilise the agency of subjects to identify through the census—from the training of enumerators, the formatting of questionnaires to how questions are posed and the categories included. It is generally understood that the way a subject will identify is contingent upon these as well as other characteristics of the sociotechnical arrangements in operation. That is, different results (identifications) often follow from different questions, categories, or whether a subject is interviewed or self-enumerated. The difference at work is that the agency and action of the subject is configured by the specific sociotechnical arrangement of which she forms a part.

Understood as agencement then, census taking can be conceived as a contingent, transitory and momentary performance rather than a structure imposed to discover an already and always there population. And so too is the subject and her identification with a population a performance mobilised by a temporary field force consisting of encounters and extended relations between humans, technologies and environments. In contrast, constructing population is always about what is past and indeed this has been a 'fact' of the census that many researchers have disparaged. What the census captures, however understood and defined, is long past by the time the results of its construction are known. However, producing census subjects is about what is present and active when various actors are mobilised and *census taking* is performed. It is that agencement and performance that I account for in this paper and in doing so bring back to life the associations and mediations of various actors. For it is through the relays and interactions between varying and never fixed technological, natural and cultural actors that population is constructed.

The account that follows is of a particular socio-technical arrangement involved in taking what was declared as the first 'scientific' enumeration of 'Indians' and 'Eskimos,' the

Aboriginal inhabitants of the Canadian Far North in 1911. An agencement of human actors (e.g., the mounted police, interpreters, the Aboriginal people), technological actors (e.g., 'special' population schedules, steamships, trading posts) and natural actants (e.g., ice, snow, seals) performed census taking in the Far North. However, this socio-technical configuration was not able to bring forth the subjectivities and agencies necessary to produce census subjects. Lacking subjects, enumerators drew upon different forms of social expertise, from anthropological methods to the social survey techniques of urban investigators to construct what in some cases were idiosyncratic accounts that could not be translated into population.

Not able to find census subjects then, census taking could not produce nor construct a population in the Far North but only a record of a census 'other' —an indeterminate multitude that could not identify and could not be identified as part of the population (double identification). Aboriginal people were thus a becoming population on the edge and margins, not yet population for they could not identify and see themselves as part of the whole. Thus, they could not be classified, identified, nor could corresponding relations be established between them and others in the Canadian population.

'Scientific' Census Taking in Canada: The centralisation and standardisation of enumeration

The first censuses taken in pre-Confederation Canada (1841 - 1867) were relatively haphazard; enumerators exercised considerable discretion and often provided their own narrative accounts full of interpretive idiosyncrasies. Census taking was based on 'unregulated observational protocols applied to ill-defined objects' and thus relied on the interpretations and understandings of investigators (Curtis 1998: 314). Lacking other forms of expertise, 'respectability was often a criterion.' However, by 1871 an administrative infrastructure had been significantly advanced to overcome the difficulties of assembling population from inconsistent sets of observations, which stood in the way of the political project of governing from the centre. The infrastructure provided a far more regularised system that included standardised observation protocols (Curtis 2001). This dramatically stabilised observations and banished discursive accounts of matters that were deemed 'local' and not 'of leading importance to the whole Dominion' (Ibid.: 275). When 'local' accounts did make their way into manuscript returns they were translated and transformed by compilers to fit the state's preformatted classification system. It is on the basis of this standardisation that Curtis (2001) declares the census of 1871 to be the first truly 'scientific' and modern census of Canada. It transformed a loosely disciplined set of practices into centrally organised and conducted census making that disciplined social relations into authoritative categories and statistical forms.

Be that as it may, the rationalised practice did not completely banish other forms of knowledge and interpretations. Curtis for one notes how the religious and political interests of the Deputy Minister of the Department of Agriculture and Statistics at the time, Joseph-Charles Taché (1864 to 1888), influenced the shaping and making of the census. Census making is interpreted by Curtis as also a feudal science guided by Taché's political strategy to construct and reinforce a Franco-Catholic nationality. Additionally, enumerators continued to record unauthorised accounts and compilers variously corrected entries and often undertook detailed examination to correct schedules so that entries would fit the classification grid and they often did so inconsistently. Yet, once the returns were in the hands of officials in the central offices and tabulated all of these translations were black-boxed and marginalised: there was no mention of corrections and changes or statement of political considerations, thus creating a scientific image of the results (Curtis 2001).

However, if we return to the original manuscript returns of the late and early twentieth century many of the ‘local’ and discursive accounts of other actors involved in census taking can be recovered. Indeed, what they reveal in 1911, some 40 years after the implementation of the first scientific census, are numerous ‘local’ accounts, alternative categories, and idiosyncratic observations. So while significantly standardising accounts the scientific census did not fully conquer interpretive and conceptual difficulties; enumerators still worked as interpreters, understood instructions in a variety of ways, and were varied in the skills they applied to the task. In other words, the variations on census manuscript returns challenge the account that the centre successfully controlled and disciplined census making and banished ‘local’ accounts. Manuscript returns from across the country reveal these variations and translations but not as dramatically as those created in the Far North.

The 1911 enumeration of the Far North was declared ‘the first time an attempt has been made to secure anything like an accurate estimate of the population, previous estimates being based merely on unreliable reports of missionaries, trappers, and other casual explorers of the northern wilds.’³ While ‘scientific’ census taking had already been well established, by the early twentieth century, the Dominion had still not fully asserted sovereignty over all of its territory and incorporated all inhabitants into the census population. The Far North and its Aboriginal inhabitants had to this point remained outside census taking or making.⁴ This situation was not problematic when the prevalent notion was that ‘the Indian [was] gradually disappearing’ as was claimed to be the case ‘in any country where the Indians have passed through that period of exhaustion that must be met by any aboriginal race in contact with civilization.’⁵ However, leading up to the 1911 enumeration the ‘facts’ revealed that this was not the case and that the ‘population [was] either stable or on the increase’ as ‘the tide began to turn and around 1911 signs of recovery started to appear.’⁶

The difficulties of enumerating nomadic Aboriginal people were well noted prior to 1911. Tying Aboriginal people to a ‘normal’ residence, even when settled on reservations, proved difficult, and consequently the questions and understandings of social relations represented in census manuscripts were often only partially applied to them (Curtis 2001). Some census commissioners were even unsure if they were ‘part of the Canadian population.’ However, there was no question that their activities were part of ‘colonial resources’ and should be counted as part of the country’s wealth. Thus, in 1911, the hitherto neglected Far North, the last of the Canadian hinterland, became subject to scientific techniques to render its population knowable and to count ‘every bit of Canadian territory.’⁷

Of distance, seals and ice: ‘To cover accurately every bit of Canadian territory where human life is known to exist.’⁸

Even Nichequon has been reached, which is the most secluded spot in the entire country.⁹

Enumerators were appointed throughout the Dominion a few weeks prior to the first of June census day. However, in the Far North, the great distances to be covered and the difficulties of distributing instructions and receiving reports necessitated that special officers be appointed in 1910 and in early 1911. While commissioners and enumerators elsewhere were generally drawn from the middle classes, the appointees for the Far North consisted of officials from trading posts, missions, RCMP detachments and government steamships. The appointees included the Fur Trade Commissioner of the Hudson’s Bay Company, agents of the Indian Department, an Archdeacon (Renison) and Reverend, the Commissioner of Customs and Superintendent of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (Starnes), and a historiographer on board a Canadian government steamship (Vanasse). Many of the

appointees also commissioned on a number of assistants (e.g., a medical doctor (Marcellus), police sergeant (Borden)).¹⁰

Each enumerator was assigned a territory, which proved to be difficult to delineate in the vast space of the Far North. While the Canadian territory to the south had long been organised into census administrative divisions and subdivisions, the Far North was a relatively 'unorganised' part of the Dominion and was not amenable to being divided up into such an administrative grid. In 1911, two territories constituted the 'Far North': the Yukon and the Northwest Territories (NWT). The latter, which is the basis of this account, included the majority of land currently part of the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec and the islands north to the Beaufort Sea, an indeterminate zone as the space was not yet territorialized by census administration (Map 1).¹¹ Consequently, the space had to be described with imprecise and rough approximations. Instructions designated areas such as that 'from Mackenzie River eastward to the Labrador boundary,' and 'the region west and northwest of Fort Churchill.'¹² Enumerator reports reflected this imprecision, noting their territory as that 'taking in all the district extending from the entrance of Hudson Straits up to Kings Cape on the North Side of the Straits,'¹³ or 'the country north of Churchill to Ranken Inlet, along the west shore of Hudson Bay.'¹⁴

Enumerators thus did not have an administrative grid to follow and instead their canvassing was determined by their negotiations with and the mediation of a number of natural and technological actors. A foremost negotiation was with the distance that had to be travelled. For Borden, a police sergeant, canvassing the vicinity of Fort Churchill by dog sled 'necessitated traveling 750 miles which took 38 days...33 of which were actual travelling; the other five were taken up by three days resting and two days stormbound.'¹⁵ For Marcellus, a medical doctor, the canvass took 12 days and covered about 120 miles west and northwest of Churchill.¹⁶ The distance they could feasibly travel by dog sled in the time allotted to their task often mediated the extent and coverage of their canvassing.

Distance was overcome and mediated in some instances by the presence of seals. Hunting expeditions and the annual seal hunt intervened in the counts overseen by Starnes. The seal hunt brought 'natives south' and thus they were included in the count of Sabeljay Lake. Seals also brought the natives to the mouth of the Churchill River enabling Starnes to include them in his count at that location. However, in the case of Egg Island, the 'natives' were absent on hunting trips when Starnes visited and since they did not have a permanent camp it was impossible to determine where and when they might return. In this case the presence of seals resulted in some Aboriginal people being excluded from his count. Having 'no settled camps' they moved 'about according to where they can best find their food'¹⁷ and had 'no fixed places, but build snow houses wherever their hunting takes them.'¹⁸ If their movements and nomadic ways were organised around hunting seals then so too was census taking.

Ice was yet another intervening actor and due to its presence one enumerator was unable to visit many villages located on Baffin Island and several other small islands in its vicinity. Vanasse notes that while he was able to 'see' these villages 'on account of the ice' he was unable to visit them. However, he was able to gather information from some unidentified sources at a nearby village and based on this estimated their population 'at about one hundred souls.' He further identified a 'dozen of such villages on the southern coast along the straits of the Hudson, on some of the islands along the coast.' Both the ice and scattered camps meant that 'One man alone could not, unless he spent three years in those regions, take the census of all these camps on the coasts of Baffin island and the islands which border their

coasts.’¹⁹ Unable to obtain the required information he was left to conclude that ‘on the whole however I do not think that the total population of Baffin Island is over 1,200 souls.’

Of trails, police patrols, steamships, and trading posts: ‘The Eskimo hunter is essentially nomadic, he having no special domicile.’²⁰

In addition to the challenges of the vast territory and sparsely settled land, the constant movement of Aboriginal people necessitated the use of technologies that could follow them. Canvassing was commonly arranged in relation to the locations of colonial outposts such as missions, forts and trading posts or the routes followed by RCMP patrols and the voyages of steamships. These represented points of concentration and junctions between colonial technologies and the nomadic Aboriginal people.

Trails that organised police patrols were also contact points that organised enumeration. Negotiated by dog teams, trails lead enumerators to Aboriginal people and also brought them to enumerators. An RCMP sergeant working for Starnes stated that his count was made in relation to his police patrol route along the coast of Hudson Bay from Churchill. His count then was of ‘natives that were in the line of travel, which is near the coast.’²¹ Another enumerator reported that his canvass was based on ‘...one patrol from Fullerton to Wager Inlet, one from Fullerton to near Baker Lake and one to Ranken Inlet.’²²

For Vanasse, a ‘historiographer of the Arctic,’ the taking of the census of Baffin Island was organised by the patrol route of the Canadian government steamship the *Arctic*.²³ Access to and identification of Aboriginal people was not only mediated by the ship’s route but the steamship itself attracted and brought the Aboriginal people to Vanasse. He reported that when the *Arctic* harboured for the winter in September of 1910 at Arctic Bay a camp of seven hunters was identified with a total population of ‘19 souls.’ However, by the end of December 1910 the population increased to ‘over 100 souls.’ The sudden increase was the result of the migration of Aboriginal people from villages scattered along the eastern, western, and south-western coasts of Baffin island and from as far away as three hundred miles. Vanasse wrote that

these hunters had heard of the wintering of the Government ship at Arctic Bay, and they had come bag and baggage to our quarters for trading purposes. I took the census of Arctic Bay. I did not think that I could distinguish between the new comers and those found on our arrival. After all, the latter had only been there themselves since the month of August 1910. At the present moment this population is perhaps scattered all over the different points of the coast of Baffin Island.

Trading posts also brought Aboriginal people to enumerators. One missionary, writing from the post at Fort George, based his report on the numbers visiting a trading post of the Hudson’s Bay Company during a particular period of time. He wrote that he ‘thought there are altogether 600 Eskimos living on the east coast of Hudson’s Bay [but based on the number visiting the trading post], I have only managed to get 542 names. It would be impossible to make a complete census unless one spent four or five years on the work, since those people [Inuit] do not visit the trading posts as regularly as the Indians.’²⁴

Of manuscript forms and categories: 'It was not always easy to obtain the information asked for by the census schedules.'²⁵

Owing to the nomadic character of these natives in that part of the country it was useless to try and fill up the regular census forms, and a statement was made as accurately as possible from information obtained.²⁶

The nominal census manuscript form was the principle technology through which the census was taken in 1911, a paper technology that assembled population by assigning individual names to general 'every person identifiers' (census categories).²⁷ (Figure 2) In 1911 it consisted of a grid of columns covering each question or classification of the population (name, address, age, sex, marital status, nationality, etc.) and of rows for categorising individuals in relation to each classification or question (e.g., male, female, single, married) and their social relation to the 'head' of a household (e.g., wife, son, niece). It was a blank grid that represented a social space within which each individual was to be identified. It also designated a spatial hierarchy of buildings, dwellings, households, streets, towns, cities, townships, and counties within which each individual was to be located. In sum, it was a structuring template that circulated the state's administrative classification of the population.

While the census is often described as the 'counting of noses,' or 'taking stock' and knowing 'how many' it is with categories of this preformatted classification grid that individuals were identified in relation to others. It was through categories or classes of equivalence that individuals passed from their singularity to a generality (Desrosières 1998). Categories are 'conventions of equivalence, encoding, and classification, [that] precede statistical objectification' and are the 'bonds that make the whole of things and people hold together' (236). The form thus directed and shaped messy, imprecise and individual narratives into a classification system so that individuals could be assembled into a population.

Over 140,000 copies of the census manuscript form, which was also called the A schedule, travelled across the country and were completed by some 9700 enumerators. However, for the Far North a special schedule 'A1' was designed for the approximately 100 enumerators responsible for the 'unorganised regions' inhabited principally by Aboriginal people. (Figure 3) The main difference between the two schedules was that the A1 excluded several classifications of the population. Significantly, it was not organised according to a *different* classification grid but an *abbreviated* version of the A schedule used elsewhere. The difference of the inhabitants of the Far North was thus not of a *kind* but of a *lack*: Aboriginal people were identified in relation to the classification of the majority and thus understood to be part of the population but only in part for they lacked certain identifications. In other words, their bodies were not fully equivalent to all others for they lacked certain identifications. In this regard the A1 schedule assembled and materialised numerous other actors that could be traced: government policies (e.g., residential schools) and legislation (e.g., Indian Act), which defined Aboriginal people as lacking particular qualities of a civilised race. They were policies and laws that sought to 'civilise' and assimilate Aboriginal people 'and their eventual disappearance as a distinct people as they were absorbed' into the population.²⁸ The A1 schedule was part of this larger governmental arrangement that enacted the Aboriginal person as a body that was part of but not yet fully 'absorbed' and equivalent to others. The A1 form thus pre-empted the classification of Aboriginal people by imposing an order based on what was anticipated and already known about the inhabitants of the Far North.²⁹

The identifications that the ‘uncivilised’ Aboriginal person did not occupy were a place of habitation, occupation, and nationality. A ‘place of habitation’ was generally defined as a residence, which in the case of a city, town or incorporated village, consisted of a house number and street name, and in the case of rural districts a township, lot, parish or cadastral number. Given that the Aboriginal people of the Far North were nomadic and domiciled in temporary shelters of igloos, tents and wigwams and the space of the north was ‘unorganised,’ a column for ‘place of habitation’ was excluded. Only columns for numbering dwellings and households ‘in the order of visitation’ were included though some enumerators indicated a dwelling type (e.g., tent) and not simply a number.

The numerous classifications of occupation (13) were also excluded. The occupations and economic activity of Aboriginal people in the Far North were explained in the published volumes as being of an insignificant magnitude and ‘so limited as not to constitute a disturbing factor [and would] not disturb the percentages established in the tables for Canada.’³⁰ However, compilers after-the-fact assigned occupation codes to all and only male adults indicating that they were self-employed in the primary industry of hunting and fishing. Compilers did not have to enumerate Aboriginal people in order to categorise the males as hunters and fishermen and indeed this may signify one of the rationales for excluding the classification. Nonetheless, this occupational data was not included in the reported statistics.

But perhaps most significantly nationality (citizenship) was excluded, as well as ‘year of immigration’ and ‘year of naturalisation,’ and only ‘place of birth’ and ‘tribal origin’ were identified. Government policy in relation to Aboriginal groups at the time was based on assimilation and granted enfranchisement and full Canadian citizenship rights only after the relinquishing of an Indian status.³¹ Aboriginal people were not citizens of Canada or any other nation for that matter and so this identification was a priori determined to be irrelevant.

The Aboriginal person was thus a nomad in two senses: her scattered existence and physical movement kept her outside of the census and it was only through the mediation, interaction and negotiation between a variety of natural and technological actors that she could be enumerated. But so too did her identification escape capture by the state’s classification grid and it was only through the mediation of a particular paper technology, the A1 form, that her identification could be attempted.

If this is how the manuscript was preformatted then what role did it play in producing census subjects in the Far North? Was it a disciplinary technology or a liberal technology that materialised a mode of indirect rule through a process of subjectification? The manuscript returns for the Far North reveal that rather than simply exercising centralised state power, the manuscript form also confounded the intentions of its human designers in the way that other material agents often do (Otter 2007). For when the A1 schedule hit the field as it were and the census was taken, many Aboriginal people could not be categorised according to the abbreviated classification grid, most notably in relation to names, age, month of birth or conjugal status. The census schedule was unable to find the subjects it wanted and needed, subjects who had the capacity to recognise themselves and others in its classification grid. Thus, while the A1 form constructed Aboriginal people as a different population it was not able to produce census subjects in the Far North.

Of enumerators, interpreters and subjects: 'The interpreter is alongside of you.'³²

Naturally this brave man, the sage of the village, has no idea of what constitutes a census. I had to make him understand at first the questions I had to put to the head of the iglo [sic]. There are English and French words which have no equivalent in the language of the Eskimo. Thus, for example, the words 'years,' 'months,' 'days,' 'hours' are denominations of time absolutely ignored by the natives. These are so many mysteries to them.³³

As in the case of the A schedule categories did not appear on the A1 schedule, however, enumerator instructions provided examples of expected and accepted answers. Thus enumerators were key actors who mediated the interaction between the state and Aboriginal people, and in the Far North, this role was of greater significance given that the form was written in English and French.³⁴ But it was a role that was further complicated by the necessity of yet another mediator, the interpreter, who in most cases was described as a 'halfbreed' who could not possibly have known the numerous Aboriginal languages. Furthermore, as the quote above notes, translation did not only involve language. Cultural concepts for representing divisions of time and social relations also intervened, shaped and confounded enumeration. Vanasse reported that he had to 'enter into a conversation, carried on much more by gestures than by the voice, with the interpreter, in order to make him understand my question.' Problems of interpretation and translation were also noted by Starnes who wrote that 'proper' interpreters were not obtainable and that 'when it comes to figures, time, or anything out of the everyday things it was not possible to make ourselves understood.' Thus the difficulty went beyond language and rested with a weakness in the force of the state's classification system. As a consequence, enumerators were unable to record answers for many of the classifications and an even more abbreviated population than that of the A1 schedule was enacted. For example, a report prepared for Starnes included a count of the 'Padlimuit Eskimo' that was compiled by an interpreter who created his own handwritten version of the A1 schedule. (Figure 4) While seeming to reproduce the format of the A1 schedule the entries reveal a representation of the population that is not translatable into the state's classification grid. Consequently, the report submitted to Starnes only referenced the estimated total number of 'Eskimos' he counted on the handwritten schedule.

Notwithstanding all of these uncertainties and complexities the handwritten entries on many manuscript returns do appear as straightforward recordings of individuals and their identification with the categories of the census. However, for many, and far too many to ignore, there are variations, missing entries, notes in the margins, changes, and erasures that alone reveal a world in which the enumerated and enumerator entered into a classification and interpretive struggle. Also, some enumerators gave up on the manuscript form altogether. The manuscript returns and enumerator reports reveal how individuals were not simply counted but the classification and categories of the census often resulted in problematic, unexpected and unrecognisable responses. Thus even the pre-emptive classification grid of the A1 schedule was unable to subjectify Aboriginal people.

Of age, social relations and economic activity: 'These people have no idea whatever of their age.'³⁵

For the enumerators, determining 'the ages would be pure guesswork.'³⁶ Superintendent Starnes reported that 'These people have no idea whatever of their age. Old and young is as near as they can get at it, and of course they know nothing of our divisions of time.' Vanasse also recounted the difficulties of determining the age of Aboriginal people. Age could only be

ascertained through a ‘conversation, carried on much more by gestures than by the voice with the interpreter’ who would engage Aboriginal people in endless calculations: ‘It was a review of all the important events in the country from as far back as the hunter could remember, and the farthest away event was used as a basis to determine as near as possible the date of his birth.’ As for the month of birth, he reported that

It is a mystery to themselves, they don’t know this subdivision of the year. In reality there are only two seasons for the Eskimo—‘summer’ and the ice season—‘winter.’ As the winter lasts nine or ten months of the year the greater number of births is in the winter.

The difficulties encountered are revealed on the manuscript returns where the month of birth is often missing or indicated as ‘not known.’ Indeed for the returns submitted by Archdeacon Renison months were not recorded at all in his enumeration of Ungava. Similar difficulties were encountered when enumerators attempted to determine the conjugal status of members of a household or estimate the quantity and value of furs and fisheries. Just as concepts for representing divisions of time were incommensurable so too were concepts for quantities of resources.

The enumerator’s encounter with the Aboriginal person was thus complexifying and confounding since he could not be generalised and held together by the census categories. There were ways of being and experiences that could not be generalised on the A1 schedule. Consequently some returns were accompanied by narrative accounts, some enumerators were creative and produced their own versions of the form and yet others simply gave up on the form altogether and submitted their reports in entirely narrative format. One enumerator symbolically pasted his narrative on top of the manuscript form.³⁷ (Figure 5) Subjects thus had to be combined or put together in ‘other’ ways.

Vanasse for one submitted an entirely narrative and ‘local’ account. His enumeration consisted only of the total number of ‘souls’ and a narrative of their living conditions and social arrangements that was more about his fascination than categorisation, and more anthropological than administrative. He described his encounters with such interest that his visit to the igloo, which ‘is not what one may think,’ made it into his official report:

To get in one must at first get on his knees, then lie flat on his stomach and slide in, snakelike, for a distance of about ten or twelve feet in this tube of the same dimension as the door.... Once in the igloo you are asked to sit on a block of snow, which is covered with a deerskin. In less than five minutes you are covered with the white hairs of this fur. But after a few visits to the domicile one does not notice these small details.

The narrative brings to light how standardised procedures, instructions and classifications of the census manuscript form could not subjectify Aboriginal people. Lacking subjects, Vanasse and other enumerators drew upon different forms of social expertise, from anthropological methods to the social survey techniques of urban investigators. Observing, interviewing, conducting surveys, recording information and the like, were all techniques developed in the nineteenth century through which cities and territories were administratively ordered, categorised and then known. From house-to-house visits and the detailed recordings of the character and characteristics of inhabitants, Vanasse’s narrative echoes those of urban investigators such as the Booths, Webbs, and Rowntrees or the home visits and books of the ‘army of collecting agents’ detailed by McFall (this issue). Indeed, census-taking techniques are very similar to the investigatory techniques introduced in the nineteenth century, from the structure and organisation of manuscript forms to the practice of exhaustively surveying a

territory. Enumerators also turned to the territorial and administrative knowledge of the mounted police and missionaries and the expertise of commercial actors like the fur traders of the Hudson's Bay Company. Together with other human, natural and technical actors, these administrative, commercial and scientific forms of expertise were part of the particular socio-technical arrangement out of which action and agency were put into motion. As such census taking was not a singular practice or technical knowledge copied and applied uniformly across the Far North (or the rest of the Dominion for that matter) for different versions of enumeration were enacted and consequently different social realities constructed.

The foregoing account reveals that neither enumerators nor subjects were privileged actors and instead their agencies and actions were contingent and dynamically constituted in relation to all other actors that performed census taking, from the human, technological to the natural. The relations between all of these actors were contingent, distributed and dynamic in the effort to mobilise the agency of Aboriginal people to identify with the census. But it was this agency that the agencements could not summon up. Even when the Aboriginal person could be located in the territory of the Far North, census taking could not subjectify her and make her a census subject. She could not recognise herself as a body equivalent to others and as a member of the population. Objectification was thus only partial for all the reasons elaborated above. Indeed, Vanasse's narrative was an account perhaps of an 'experience prior to subjects and objects' (Rajchman 2000:17), an encounter with an absolute other whose body could only be numbered and narrated but not categorised and objectified.

If we trace the manuscript returns and the enumerator reports to the published tables and accounts of the census, the 'otherness' of the Aboriginal people is reaffirmed. The constructed population of Canada was narratively described as the 'origins of the people' (as well as ages, birthplace, and so on 'of the people'). It was a narrative that did not mention 'Indians' or 'Eskimos' but did speak of the relatively smaller numbers of Belgians, Dutch, Chinese, Hindus as 'of the people.' Mentioning of Aboriginal people (the sixth largest population group) was confined to the statistical tables under the heading 'Indian' and the details of their enumeration in the Far North relegated to an appendix.³⁸

If the census only involved making or constructing population then it would have been an easier endeavour in the Far North. Indeed, the state and its agents could have simply categorised bodies encountered onto the A1 schedule, which in some cases appears to have occurred. Enumerators would not have experienced frustration and confusion as they tried to engage Aboriginal people in the categorisation of their existence. However, the state needed to and wanted to find subjects that could identify with its categories, it needed subjects to tell the truth about themselves, and it needed to affirm that they could recognise themselves as part of the population. If she could not be part of the population then she could not be accounted for as 'of the people' in the published tables and accounts of the census. In that case, the practice perhaps confirmed what was already known, that she was an 'other' people and yet to become part of 'the people.' And so too the state was also a becoming for it could never fully colonise all bodies through the census. It could never definitively say, 'here are all my people,' for despite its efforts and insistence to know its very methods always create illusive others, always produces indeterminate zones.³⁹ The same can be said about other colonial mappings. As Simpson (2008) argues, Indigenous people who do not act as subjects and consent to colonial laws, practices or territorial mappings represent episodes of failure in a settler states assertion of sovereignty and containment of Aboriginal bodies.

John Lie (2004) suggests that the idea and making of modern peoplehood involved state practices that sought to transform a population (an administrative category) into a people (a self-conscious and reflexive identity). State institutions such as education, the judiciary, military and welfare simultaneously constituted, integrated and ‘transformed people in itself (population) to people for itself (peoplehood).’ That is, amongst other things, various state practices have sought first to construct a population and through this cultivate a self-conscious awareness of national peoplehood. I would suggest that census taking and making can be considered part of such state techniques that have not only enumerated but also contributed to the cultivation of an awareness of being part of a becoming Canadian people.

Let me state this in a different way and in relation to Aboriginality. Chris Andersen (2008) has recently argued that throughout the history of the Canadian census the state sought to define a Métis population according to racial rather than indigenous national constructions. In this way, the census was part of explicit state policies to define and then manage segments of ‘its’ indigenous ‘population.’ Andersen interprets this symbolic and administrative ordering as a move ‘from nation to population.’ In my words, the Canadian state did not recognise the nationhood of Métis people and sought to turn a self-reflexive awareness of a people for itself into a population. Together with myriad administrative orderings such as those discussed by Lie, once Aboriginal people were made part of the Canadian population they then could become part of the Canadian people. Or as Andersen suggests, the racialised administrative category was crucial to the inclusion of Métis ‘as Canadian citizens and the associated reproduction of Canadian nationalism at the cost of the meaningful cultivation of the Métis Nation’s’ (361).

The same argument can be advanced in relation to other ethnic or racial identifications and the making of a Canadian people. Through censuses and other administrative practices the Canadian state has always classified the ‘origins’ of the population in racial or ethnic categories. Indeed, along with other practices, censuses have reinforced an understanding of Canada as a hierarchical and racially and ethnically differentiated population, an understanding that has been central to the state’s symbolic and political ordering. But at the same time it is an ordering that has perhaps contributed to the assertion of a Canadian ethnic identification and of a people of no origin other than Canadian. Indeed, throughout the history of the Canadian census some individuals have insisted on identifying their ethnic as Canadian (Ruppert, 2007). Through this and other state policies administrative meaning making was then perhaps also part of inculcating the reflexive awareness of another people for itself, the Canadian people.

Conclusion: ‘The Census is rising up to the challenges of distance, remoteness and cultural differences.’⁴⁰

A government report in the 1970s argued that Aboriginal people were an obstacle to accurate census statistics on ‘the Indian population’ in the early part of the twentieth century. Their ‘nomadic way of life’ and ‘low level of literacy’ were the ‘obstacles to accurate enumeration.’⁴¹ During this period, census officials identified numerous challenges involved in the enumeration of Aboriginal groups and disparaged the lack of reliable estimates of their numbers (Hamilton, 2007). Some 30 years later another government report wrote that the enumeration of

...more than a thousand tiny communities lost in the vastness of Canada’s North will certainly always be daunting, but by working together with those communities and their representatives, the Census is rising up to the challenges of distance, remoteness and cultural

differences. Working with First Nations, we are building their capacity for statistical activities of every type, from collection to analysis (Lavin and Gauthier 2001: 6).

Throughout the twentieth century then, Aboriginal people moved from the margins of census taking practices to the centre through various liberal technologies that tamed their becoming into being population. Beginning in the last century, there has been a movement from the unilateral imposition of state census categories 'onto' Aboriginal people to a partnership and collaboration with Aboriginal people in the practice of census taking (Andersen, 2008). In this way census taking has worked within a broader assemblage of state practices aimed at taming and assimilating the Aboriginal other. However, subjectification has also become a strategy. As Rouse (this issue) argues while censuses and statistical techniques have been implicated in the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, those same techniques have been mobilised by Aboriginal researchers in the latter part of the twentieth century to calculate their prospects as a 'race' or 'civilisation' and to devise programs of recovery. From the definition of 'Aborigine' to the measurement of particular socio-economic characteristics, Australian Aboriginal researchers have actively participated in the construction and interpretation of censuses and statistics. A similar account can be written about Aboriginal people in Canada who have turned their subjectification into a political strategy and basis of rights claims (Andersen, 2008). Aboriginal groups both participate in the making of census categories, their interpretation and political mobilisation. However, while perhaps now subjectified and administratively incorporated into the Canadian population, for many Aboriginal people this has not meant being of the Canadian people. Indeed, in many cases, Aboriginal peoplehood is ever more being asserted. As Caplan and Torpey (2001) remind us, to what extent the documentary apparatuses of identification drive the history of categories and collectivities is indeed an open question. But part of that open question I would argue is a consequence of the contingency of census taking agencements and the people it will summon into being. That is, while the sociotechnical arrangement of census taking in the Far North was exceptional in some ways, it was because of this that the often taken-for-granted processes of subjectification and the contingency of the populations that are brought into being can be made more vivid.

Notes

¹ Census taking practices include provisions for subjects to identify others but only those with whom they share a social relation in a family, household or institution.

² *Agencement* is advanced as an alternative to the English translation 'assemblage' for emphasizing agency and the uncertainty rather than fixity of socio-technical arrangements. See (Law and Urry, 2004) and discussion by McFall and Verran (this issue).

³ 'Counting Heads in the Northern Wilds', *Winnipeg Tribune*, 29 May 1911, 4.

⁴ Statistics on the Aboriginal population were, however, compiled by Indian agents. Also, beginning in 1871, Aboriginal groups living on Indian Reserves had been included in the target population of the census although the 'success at enumerating these people prior to the mid-twentieth century is difficult to estimate' (Lavin and Gauthier 2001).

⁵ 'Figures Indicate Increase in Canada's Indian Population,' *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 Nov 1911, 7. See also (MacInnes 1946).

⁶ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1970, *The Canadian Indian: A Statistical Profile*. Ottawa: Census Division (unpublished report).

⁷ 'First Census Return is in: Northwest Mounted Police Did the Hudson Bay' in *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 May 1911, 1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Report of Rev. R. J. Renison of Moose Fort, Archdeacon of Moosonee, 8 May 1911. *Appendix: Census of Canada 1911*. Further references to his report noted as Renison.

¹⁰ There were many more of course but these are the enumerators whose manuscript returns and accounts I have compiled and reference in this paper. I provide their surnames here as a summary list of the returns cited.

¹¹ According to the 1911 federal census, the total population of the Northwest Territories was about 18,500 of which about 17,720 were categorized as 'Indian.' The total population of Canada was reported at approximately 7,207,000 and of this approximately 105,000 were categorised as 'Indian.'

¹² *Appendix: Census of Canada 1911*.

¹³ Report of Robt. Kinnes. 31 May 1911, Letter to Chief Officer, Census and Statistics Office, Ottawa, Canada. Census manuscript return 1911. Further references to his report noted as Kinnes.

¹⁴ Letter from Sergeant A. F. Borden to Courtlandt Starnes Esqr., Commissioner of Customs, Churchill, 13 March 1911. Census manuscript return 1911. Further references to his report noted as Borden.

¹⁵ Report of Courtlandt Starnes, Superintendent of the RCMP and Commissioner of Customs, Churchill, 18 March 1911. *Appendix: Census of Canada 1911*. Further references to his report noted as Starnes. Also noted in Borden.

¹⁶ Starnes.

¹⁷ Starnes.

¹⁸ Starnes.

¹⁹ Report of Fabien Vanasse. Montreal, October 24, 1911. *Appendix: Census of Canada 1911*. Further references to his report noted as Vanasse.

²⁰ Vanasse.

²¹ Borden.

²² Starnes.

²³ Fabien Vanasse was a member of parliament from 1879-1891 as well as a lawyer and journalist.

²⁴ Report of Rev. W.G. Walton, missionary of the Eskimos, Fort George, 31 August 1911. *Appendix: Census of Canada 1911*.

²⁵ Vanasse.

²⁶ Starnes.

²⁷ See (Caplan and Torpey 2001) for a discussion of how 'every person identifiers' enabled linking observable regularities to individuals.

²⁸ Alan C. Cairns, 'Aboriginal Canadians, Citizenship and the Constitution', in *Reconfigurations: Canadian Citizenship and Constitutional Change: Selected Essays by Alan C. Cairns*, Edited by Alan C. Douglas E. Williams, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995, 244; cited in (Kane 2000).

²⁹ In comparison, census taking of 'Indians' inhabiting reservations in the organized parts of Canada were enumerated using the A schedule.

³⁰ *Fifth Census of Canada 1911*. Volume VI. Occupations.

³¹ In the middle of the nineteenth century, in both pre- and post-Confederation Canada, government policy and practice focused on assimilation and the belief that the 'Indian race' was dying out. Enfranchising Indians and their acquisition of full Canadian citizenship was achieved through either voluntary means or more coercive approaches (Kane 2000). By the late nineteenth century voluntary enfranchisement was not proving to be very successful as very few Indians chose to give up their Indian status. More successful was non-voluntary enfranchisement though a variety of legal definitions that limited the entitlement to Indian status (such as regulations related to marriage). Towards the end of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, the government began to make greater use of compulsory enfranchisement through measures such as residential schools as a way of accelerating assimilation.

³² Vanasse.

³³ Vanasse.

³⁴ Language issues certainly also intervened in the enumerations of non-English/French speaking groups elsewhere in Canada.

³⁵ Starnes.

³⁶ Renison.

³⁷ Kinnes.

³⁸ For tables reporting on classifications not included on the A1 schedule such as nationality, the published volumes only stated that this information was not recorded for the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

³⁹ Law (2004) argues that assemblages always generate presences and absences and ‘Othering.’ Indeed, other indeterminacies were produced by census taking in 1911, for example, the enumeration of ‘Indians’ on reservations, ‘foreigners and aliens’ in inner city ‘slums’, and the unrecognised ethnic origin ‘Canadians’ as discussed in (Author 2007).

⁴⁰ (Lavin and Gauthier 2001: 6).

⁴¹ Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

References cited

- Andersen, Chris. 2008. From Nation to Population: The Racialisation of 'Métis' in the Canadian Census. *Nations and Nationalism* 14 (2): 347-368.
- Bellavance, Claude, France Normand, and Evelyn Ruppert. 2007. Census in Context: Documenting and Understanding the Making of 20th Century Canadian Censuses. *Historical Methods* 40 (2): 92-103.
- Bowker, G. C., and S. L. Star. 1999. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Boyd, Monica, and Doug Norris. 2001. Who Are The "Canadians"?: Changing Census Responses, 1986-1996. *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal* 33 (1): 1-26.
- Caplan, Jane, and John Torpey. 2001. Introduction. In *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, edited by J. Caplan and J. Torpey. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Curtis, Bruce. 1998. Administrative infrastructure and social enquiry: finding the facts about agriculture in Quebec. 1853-4. *Journal of Social History* 32 (2): 309-351.
- . 2001. *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840-1875*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Desrosières, Alain. 1998. *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning*. Translated by C. Naish. Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: Harvard University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1994. The Political Technology of Individuals. In *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, edited by J. Faubion. New York: The New Press.
- Hamilton, M. 2007. 'Anyone Not on the List Might as Well Be Dead:' Aboriginal Peoples and the Censuses of Canada, 1851-1916. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 57-79.
- Hardie, I., and D. Mackenzie. 2007. Assembling an Economic Actor: The Agencement of a Hedge Fund. *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1, pp. 57-80.
- Iacovetta, F. and Mitchinson, W. 1998. 'Introduction: Social History and Case Files Research' in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, (eds) F. Iacovetta and W. Mitchinson. University of Toronto Press: Toronto.
- Kane, Doug. 2000. *Aboriginal Citizenship in Transition*. Kingston, Canada: Queen's University. Unpublished manuscript.
- Kertzer, D.I., and Arel D. 2002. 'Censuses, identity formation, and the struggle for political power' in *Census and identity: the politics of race, ethnicity, and language in national*

censuses, (eds) D. I. Kertzer and D. Arel. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge/New York.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Lavin, Susan A., and Pierre Gauthier. 2001. Conducting a Census on American and Canadian Indian Reservations: Comparing Challenges and Solutions. Paper read at Annual Meeting of the American Statistical Association. August 5-9, 2001.

Law, John. 2004. *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. London: Routledge.

Law, John, and John Urry. 2004. Enacting the Social. *Economy and Society* 33 (3): 390-410.

Lie, John. 2004. *Modern Peoplehood*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press.

MacInnes, T. R. L. 1946. History of Indian Administration in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 12 (3): 387-394.

Otter, Chris. 2007. Making Liberal Objects. *Cultural Studies* 21 (4-5): 570-590.

Rajchman, John. 2000. *The Deleuze Connections*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press.

Ruppert, E. 2007. Producing Population. CRESC Working Paper Series, Paper No. 37. Milton Keynes, Open University. Available from <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/publications/papers.html>.

Simpson, A. 2008. Subjects of Sovereignty: Indigeneity, the Revenue Rule, and Juridics of Failed Consent. *Law & Contemporary Problems* 71(Summer): 191-215.