

Robyn Green
HUMA 5105
Supervisor: Paul Colilli Ph. D.

Abstract

Identity Sickness: Archive Fever at the National Archives of Canada

The purpose of the National Archives of Canada is to protect the public and private history of Canada while simultaneously providing the Canadian citizenry with a democratic vehicle for governmental transparency. The physical preservation of primary source material is important, but essentially, the Archives' contribution to Canadian identity is its most prominent commission. The establishment of Canadian identity is a difficult task because it must balance voices from different cultural backgrounds and time periods. This paper will attempt to clarify issues surrounding Public Memory and Canadian Identity and their relationship to the archive. The theoretical framework of this paper engages the text *Archive Fever* by Jacques Derrida. This text provides a comprehensive portrait of the archive and its interaction with the discipline of hermeneutics. Outlined in this paper is the methodology which was used to examine and understand the inner workings of this organization and will provide several observations that are connected to Canada's archival policy and the history within the National Archives. These observations are linked to an "identity sickness" found within the National Archives, which elaborates on the organization's attempt to find their own identity whilst at the same time fulfilling a mandate to find and maintain Canada's cultural and social identity. Several observations collected from my practicum experience at the National Archives will be discussed including the "unofficial" acquisition hierarchy, the schism between French and English employees and the difficulty with preserving conservator skills.