An Exercise in Futility – Reflecting on the Breakdown of Indigenous Identity in Canada Hall

Anna Hoque
AN EXERCISE IN FUTILITY – REFLECTING ON THE BREAKDOWN OF INDIGENOUS IDENTITY IN CANADA HALL

CAPSTONE SEMINAR SERIES (Re)Negotiating Artifacts of Canadian Narratives of Identity, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2014.

Managing Editor
Dr. Anne Trépanier

Desktop publishing
Shermeen Nizami

Proofreading and final edit
Emma Gooch and Ryan Lux

Editorial Board
Dr. Daniel MacFarlane, Amanda Murphy, Sarah Spear, Ryan Lux, Greer, Jessica Helps, Martha Attridge Bufton, Paula Chinkiwsky, Sarah Baker, Heather Leroux, Victoria Ellis, Stephanie Elliot, Emma Gooch, Cassandra Joyce, Brittany Collier, Tiffany Douglas, Anne Trépanier.

Guest Editor
Dr. Daniel MacFarlane

Special thanks
Patrick Lyons and Andrew Barrett

Copyright Notice
© Anna Hoque, April 2014

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy, or transmission of this publication, or part thereof in excess of one paragraph (other than as a PDF file at the discretion of School of Canadian Studies at Carleton University) may be made without the written permission of the author. To quote this article refer to: — Anna Hoque, An Exercise in Futility – Reflecting on the Breakdown of Indigenous Identity in Canada Hall, Capstone Seminar Series, (Re)Negotiating Artifacts of Canadian Narratives of Identity, Volume 4, number 1, Spring 2014, page number and date of accession to this website: http://capstoneseminarseries.wordpress.com
An Exercise in Futility – Reflecting on the Breakdown of Indigenous Identity in Canada Hall

Anna Hoque

ABSTRACT

The Canadian Museum of History is a powerful disseminator of national narratives and the building of Canadian identity. Within the museum, Canada Hall specifically portrays Canadian identity that elevates the status of settler narratives and downplays or excludes Indigenous representations allowing for a space that prioritizes the modernity of settlers against the stagnancy of Indigenous peoples. The deliberate cut of Indigenous representation and the hierarchy of powers established through the physical manifestation of the museum sends the audience a very strong message: the lack portrayal of Indigenous peoples in Canada Hall and the messages of profit through development of land pushes for the emergence of an image that Canada is a nation that is built and maintained by a successful settler society that is separate from the intersections with its Indigenous communities. Three major themes are explored in this paper: (1) Using the rationale behind Massey Commission and the establishment of the Museums Act of 1990 as well as the 2013 Amendments to the Museums Act to help to establish the legitimacy of the museum as a cultural institution and how the backing of the State has helped to impart knowledge in ways that benefit the hegemonic institutionalized powers politically and economically (2) Presenting Harold Innis’ (1972) time/space biased media theory to establish how museums are a physical embodiment of nation-building and denying the equal representation of Indigenous knowledg-making processes serve to only re-iterate the lack of Indigenous identity within the Canadian national narrative (3) Emphasizing how now is an opportune time to re-evaluate what dominant messages and ideas expressed through exhibits in Canada Hall about the stagnancy of Indigenous identities and transform the relations between settler and Indigenous representations in order to tease out the links that exist between Indigenous peoples, settler societies, and neo-liberal values of development. In conclusion, the visual disconnect of Indigenous peoples entrenches the hierarchical agenda that the Canadian government has pursued in neo-liberal policy-making and separates the realities of Indigenous communities from settler groups, nothing happens in isolation so to deliberately separate the two, offers a fragmented presentation of the Canadian narrative and does not properly address the need to have a Canadian identity that is more representative of the culmination of the intersections of realities. These interruptions in the dialogue of Canadian national identity end up contributing to the breakdown of a democratic public sphere and the cultivation of a space where citizens can become active agents within the nation-state. The land cannot only be portrayed as a site for exploitation and development; the missing narratives are doing a disservice in how Canada is appearing to the masses.

KEYWORDS

Canadian Museum of History + CMH, Indigenous, identity, culture, Canada
Museums are a powerful cultural and social enforcer that have the ability to disseminate information that can equally reinforce dominant ideologies or challenge the status quo. While the museum may be advertised as a neutral party offering an objective viewpoint of Canadian history, I propose that the Canadian Museum of History (CMH) is actually a powerful institution that defines peoples’ relationships to the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Within the context of this paper, Canada is referred to as the geographic, economic, political, and social space that has emerged Post-Confederation of 1867. This paper will reflect on ways the CMH uses texts\(^1\) in exhibits within the museum space, specifically, Canada Hall, to carve out a Canadian national identity that serves to support the actions of dominant political and economic bodies, rather than act as a space that accurately represents the members of its society. These representations can act as deterrents to the development of a democratic public sphere, free from the involvement of the State and the market economy. The mandate for the CMH has recently been amended in 2012/2013, which reflects the changing rationale behind messages imparted through the CMH. Linking the portrayal of Indigenous peoples in Canada Hall and the messages of profit through development of land pushes for the emergence of an image that Canada is a nation that is built and maintained by a successful settler society that is separate from the intersections with its Indigenous communities.

Three central arguments will be made to support the idea that the CMH is projecting a skewed image of Indigeneity to the visiting public. First, I will look at the

---

\(^1\) In semiotics and cultural theory, any set of signs which can be read for meaning: this can include films, television and radio programmes, advertisements, paintings, and photographs (see also textual analysis). To some structuralists, the world is social text. Although the term appears to privilege written texts (seeming graphocentric and logocentric), it applies to any form (including images, sounds, gestures and so on). Communicative texts are constructed and interpreted with reference to the codes and conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication. Texts are the product of signifying practices and processes of representation and position both their makers and their readers. (Chandler, and Munday)
historic implementation of museums in Canada rooted through inquiries such as The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences AKA Massey Commission (1951) and the Canada Council for the Arts, and how it has established a precedence of creating and cultivating a cohesive, homogenous national culture. Thus, solidifying the notion of museums as legitimate cultural oracles. Also, analyzing the emerging relationship between audiences and museums is rather crucial in understanding the intent behind the messages that are conveyed through the narratives in Canada Hall, especially because museums often become sites of hyperreality, where created spaces takeover the original ideas, events, or symbols. Second, I will use Harold Innis’ (1972) time/space bias as a framework in which the physical embodiment of museums and exhibits within can act as a means to ground Canadian culture, while downplaying or rejecting other modes of knowledge-making processes. I would like to examine the tactics that establish settler societies as experts of the land and distance land from Indigenous identities, thus putting land under the purview of Canadian ‘settler’ powers. Third, while an argument can be made that the CMH attempts to represent Indigenous communities through spaces like Grand Hall and First Peoples Hall, the deliberate absence of active Indigenous identity within Canada Hall appear to outweigh these attempts at fair representations. I would like to note that there is a window of opportunity for ‘fair representation’ to be factored into the Canada hall due to the recent amendment of the Museums Act and the renovations being planned for Canada Hall. However, this window cannot be considered without understanding the symbols and messages that imbue the current narrative of settler development and the stagnancy of Aborignals in Canada Hall. These dominant ideas ground the notion of Eurocentric modes of economic development, such as fur trade that ‘saved’ and sustained the Aboriginals and further cementing the notion that Indigenous peoples need to be looked after and rationalizes
current State involvement with Indigenous communities. This model helps to rationalize the legitimacy of a highly politicized national identity with an emphasis on economic development.

Museums, within the Canadian context, have served as a public education tool for teaching Canadians and non-Canadians the ideal traits, values, and identities to help them navigate through the framework of Canadian identity. For example, the rationale behind the Massey Commission (1951) was to investigate ways to promote ‘Canadian’ values of Arts & Culture to the Canadian society as a reaction to the encroaching medias from the United States (Edwardson 12). The Commission opened the avenue for the Government of Canada to intervene in the production and regulation of cultural products through platforms like the Canada Council for the Arts. As a result, government funding of cultural activities has meant that the acting State now has the capacity to regulate and support content that would fit within its mandates. While the government funding has ensured the fostering of Canadian-based talents, it has also created a space where culture is now in the domain of the State rather than the citizens. This direction towards State-involved cultural production is rather problematic since it infringes upon the democratic powers of the individual. This is a rather crucial part in the sustenance of democracy; an idealized public sphere “…[is] a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body” (Habermas 49), and it can only exist when it is free from the influence of the State and market economy (Habermas 53).

A second part to the drawing in the State to the management of culture is the Museums Act of 1990 that entailed “…[the] establishment of 4 independent crown corporations, each with a board of directors. They did not cease thereby to be influenced by government policy…also expected to seek funds from the private sector--a notion called "partnership"--which meant that their location in the relatively restricted Ottawa region was effectively a handicap” (Canadian Encyclopedia n.d.). I think that understanding the Museums Act is even more critical in the contemporary setting because of the amendments that have been implemented in 2013. Prior to amendment,

[t]he purpose of the Canadian Museum of Civilization [was]…to increase, throughout Canada and internationally, interest in, knowledge and critical understanding of and appreciation and respect for human cultural achievements and human behaviour by establishing, maintaining and developing for research and posterity a collection of objects of historical or cultural interest, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, and by demonstrating those achievements and behaviour, the knowledge derived from them and the understanding they represent. (Bill C-49 2012 3)

With the amendment, “[t]he purpose of the Canadian Museum of History is to enhance Canadians’ knowledge, understanding and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada’s history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures” (Bill C-49 3). The amendments displace the purpose of the museum by completely excluding the dissemination of knowledge to non-Canadians from the original “throughout Canada and internationally” to just “Canadians” (Bill C-49 3); it resituates itself from increasing “interest in, knowledge and critical understanding of and appreciation and respect for human cultural achievements and human behaviour” to enhancing “knowledge, understanding…that reflect and have shaped Canada’s history and identity…to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures” (Bill C-49 3) as well as removing any mention of the actual function or purpose of the museum itself.
The CMH then becomes a site of controversy because not only is it under the protection of the State through mechanisms like the Museums Act, but as a result of this relationship with the State, it serves to present information in ways that institutionalizes culture and through its exhibits presents information that ultimately reflects the values and opinions of the dominant political and economic structures. So on one hand, while the State is operating on an “arm’s length” (Edwardson 65) approach, it is also helping to oversee what dominant images and ideologies are being broadcasted.

More importantly, because the museum is under the folds of the State, it receives support - not just in terms of funding, but also rather in being deemed ‘legitimate’ by institutionalized powers governing Canada. Now this connection is key in understanding how and why critical examinations of Canada Hall come into play, as the CMH is seen as a reliable source of information, the messages that are imparted in Canada Hall subsequently become State-sanctioned truths. Del Muise’s (2008) study on “Canadians and their pasts” revealed that people have a tendency to trust their national cultural institutions as reliable sources for history and the truth. This relationship between the audience and the CMH then has a strong correlation between what the audience sees and understands about Canada through the exhibits constructed by the museum. These truths evolve and co-ordinate with the changes in government and economic conditions, for instance, neo-liberalism, “…a political economic ideology that prioritizes private market functions and advocates a reduced regulatory role for state institutions…” (Blad 30) acts as the backbone of the current Harper government’s decision-making process advocating decentralization. This is vastly different from past governments including Trudeau’s federalist policies that
relayed heavily on the centralization of the State in the production of national culture.³ “The fundamental codes of culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man [person] from the very first, the empirical orders with which he [she] will be dealing and within which he [she] will be at home.” (Foucault xx in Allen, and Anson 61). As a result, the underlying messages in Canada Hall very much echo the principle interests of Canada’s political and economic culture packaged within the CMH as a national Canadian culture and identity. To a greater extent, this decentralized approach has opened up the museum to market interests, further muddying up the possibility of it ever being a democratic public sphere.

This packaged identity, which is imbued with political, economic, and social ideologies, then speaks specifically to how visitors to Canada Hall conceptualize their understanding of Canada. The CMH’s relationship to its audience is the primary concern behind this paper, especially in relation to the understanding of Indigenous representations within Canada Hall. As a legitimate transmitter of information, Canada Hall presents the construction of the past as absolute using supporting images, documents, and events to rationalize a timeline that creates a hierarchical narrative of Canada. Through the use of its authoritative power as a recognized cultural institution (Del Muise 2008), CMH then projects knowledge to its audience, with the expectation that the audience will absorb the intended meanings behind the exhibit with no room for objections. As a result, “…culture as ideology IS the project of modernity, for the culture is the intended standardization of largely Western attitudes imposed on humanity, willing or not.” (Allen, and Anson 61).

³ Key Policies, see "Pierre Elliott Trudeau"

CAPSTONE SEMINAR SERIES (Re)Negotiating Artifacts of Canadian Narratives of Identity, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2014.
The creation of such spaces and stories eventually become sites of hyperreality, “…an artificially created copy that is perceived as somehow more real than the real thing, or too real to be real…” (Chandler, and Munday). For many visitors, this may be the only opportunity to ‘see and understand’ what is Canadian identity. Canada Hall’s exhibits, which only portray settler narratives, emphasize the objectification of land, and its subsequent ‘taming’, as being a necessary formula to describe ‘Canadianness’, presenting a distorted view of Canadian identity since it neglects to show the continuing intersections with Indigenous identities. This absence is not visible to the visitors who are unexposed or uninformed about the parallel existence of Indigenous identities within the Canadian identity but it has repercussions in how people understand Indigeneity in relation to Canada. This refined or severely edited version of Canada helps to drive home the conclusive image of Canada as “…a country whose natural endowments and technological achievements have allowed it to provide its citizens with an enviable standard of living; as a country whose history and public policy have created a society that values diversity; as a country that has used its intellectual leadership to address global problems…” (Potter 6). However, what is exclusively excluded within Canada Hall is how these progressive elements of Canadian history co-exist in relation to Indigenous peoples in Canada. Mackey (1998) indicates that within the defining of Canadian identity is the implicit belief of Canadians often in direct contrast to rhetoric that implies that Canada has treated its Indigenous peoples better than the United States. This framing helps to elevate the status of Canadian settler societies as being more civilized than its wild counterpart down South. However, it establishes the settling of a nation directly to that of the settlers occupying the space and taking away the autonomy of the Indigenous populations.

Thus, it is possible to confidently tie in how nation-states like Canada utilize physical spaces like museums to legitimize codes of behaviour and impart messages about ideal citizenry to visitors. Bridging from the rationale of the CMH as a reputable distributor of knowledge is the argument that museum exhibits such as Canada Hall are a physical embodiment of texts (symbols, images, words, values) that are critical to the functionality of Canadian national identity. Innis’ time/space bias is centred on the idea of empire building and the means by which knowledge is dispersed into the consciousness. Now Innis was speaking specifically to the nature of communication technologies but it is an argument that can easily be applied to the construction of knowledge within the tangible space of a museum. The primary settler narratives in Canada Hall tell a story of

...Canada coming of age and finding its true self, a fragile youth coming into adulthood among trials and tribulations...yet this simplification and even fictionalization says little about the country as a post-colonial project, one that took shape with the confederation...A global decline of empires spanning the nineteen and twentieth centuries and a desire among some to offload colonial expenses ushered in not only a new age of federations and states (which are political entities) but, and quite crucially, ideas of nationhood. As empires and colonies were restructured into countries and subjects that were converted into citizens...humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government...(Edwardson 6).

It can then be argued that museums are the perfect vehicles in a changing global climate to act as markers to stamp onto the physical landscape, a visible reminder of the nation and deliver its dominant ideologies to the masses. “The process of ‘inventing’ nations...[create an opportunity] for a select part of the population [, the dominant powers,] to consolidate positions of leadership and control by centralizing and streamlining political, economic, and social systems in accordance with its own interests.” (Edwardson 6). As a result, myths behind nation-building practices retain a form and come to life within Canada Hall. For instance, the emphasis on Eurocentric
systems of civil society is shown as a necessary tool for the apparent success of Canada; however, Indigenous modes of self-government prior to and concurrently with settler occupation are not represented within Canada Hall. In fact, visitors are impressed upon the surety of settler expertise in ‘managing and civilizing’ the land so that it benefited all inhabitants of Canada. Further complicating this relationship of expertise of the land by settler communities is the lack of tying Indigenous identity to land or reflecting Indigenous knowledge-making processes such as oral-history practices. Canada Hall is curiously absent of the intersections between settlers and the Indigenous peoples, the only mention coming in the form of settler males taking critical survival-skill tips from Indigenous communities in order to get a better grasp of taking control of the out-of-control Canadian landscape. Using that rhetoric and emphasizing settler peoples’ identities through the use of dioramas, photos, re-enactments and other didactic devises work within the Canada Hall as markers of empire building but in its current context more likened to nation-building. Innis (1971) states,

The concepts of time and space reflect the significance of media to civilization. Media that emphasize time are those that are durable in character, such as...stone. The heavy materials suited to the development of architecture and sculpture. Media that emphasize space are apt to be less durable and light in character, such as paper...Materials that emphasize time favour decentralization and hierarchical types of institutions, while those that emphasize space favour centralization and systems of government less hierarchal in character. Large-scale political organizations such as empires [nations] must be considered from the standpoint of two-dimensions, those of space and time, and persist by overcoming the bias of media which over-emphasize either dimension. They have tended to flourish under conditions in which civilization reflects the influence of more than one medium and in which the bias one medium toward decentralization is offset by the bias of another medium towards centralization (Innes 7).

Think for example, the validity of text in Western society versus the weight of oral narrations and how society perceives one to be more legitimate than the other.
For the majority of nations that have been formed as a result of colonialism, there is a greater dependency on the ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’ of the written word rather than the reliance on oral narrations. Canada Hall is then able to take the core fundamentals of the Canadian nation-state and enact within its space values that further the desires of the nation, rather than provide an avenue for Indigenous identity to be represented through alternative representations, i.e. Indigenous record-keeping methodology, Indigenous pedagogical approaches to identity etc. To further demonstrate the use of tangible exhibits with the absence of active Indigenous identities is to draw attention to how settler methods of organizing society is shown as more rational through emphasis on Canadian political history, rather than allowing for a space that would show an accurate representation of the processes that took place that has assured the complacency of the Indigenous peoples by the restraints placed on them by the State. Canada Hall acts, in the end, as a shrine to settler accomplishments and further promotes the message of the museum space as a permanent space necessary in the enforcement of ideal citizenship. Adding to the previous argument of the use of museum spaces as national culture disseminators, is a demonstration how in an ever-increasing global economy where nations are in constant competition with one another, the museum acts as ‘a graffiti tag on the global landscape’, a visual and physical reminder of Canada’s prowess as a successful nation-state and substantiates its place within the parameters of neoliberalism as a very worthy contender, exceeding other competitors.

People in power exercise control over most decisions that are made...by controlling the premises under which decision making occurs...Thus the powerful are able to preserve their positions, prerogatives...and even their own interpretations of experience...The less powerful are denied voice...Powerlessness thus persists, allowing the powerful not just to retain their own power and privileges, but also to perpetuate the self-delusions that power is reasonably distributed...(Donnelon, and Kolb in Allen, and Anson 91).

CAPSTONE SEMINAR SERIES (Re)Negotiating Artifacts of Canadian Narratives of Identity, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2014.
What Canada Hall has done through its deliberate cut of Indigenous intersections is cement the notion of Indigenous as ‘Other’, and it is not ‘Other’ as portrayed as an intelligent body, but rather that logic and organization rests in the realm of the settler societies. Thus, the myths of Canada gain a stronger foothold within the Canadian and international front through the seemingly rationalized narratives that are an outpour within Canada Hall.

Canada Hall’s main objective, it appears, is to distract the visitor with the narrative of successful settler occupancy and the accompanying economic development that was cultivated as a consequence of colonization. “If we do not have the factual perceptions needed at our disposal to understand a culture, that culture will…remain ‘perpetually inaccessible…” (Allen, and Anson 10). In the rare mentions of Indigenous societies in Canada Hall, is the presentation of Indigenous realities as having improved primarily through technologies and Eurocentric ideals passed via settler knowledge holders. What it ultimately does is displace the existence and value of Indigenous knowledge-formations. For instance, Canada Hall is a celebration of a sequential political timeline of the implementation of Eurocentric models of governance that eschews existing Indigenous forms of government at the time of First Contact. While notably celebrating Indigenous cultures within the space of the CMH through spaces like Grand Hall and First Peoples Hall, there is less tying Indigenous identities to physical representations of land, which is the opposite in Canada Hall. Settler societies in Canada Hall are indelibly linked to the physical presence of land and the land is shown as a vital source of survival but only through the reshaped forms due to settler intervention through economic development of land to maximize its use. Indigenous cultures are reduced to inanimate objects like bowls, jewelry, etc.
either cordoned off by ropes or caged inside glass cases with a complete absence of human representation in direct contrast to the over-representation of land and settlers in Canada Hall. To sum up a present and vibrant community through the sum of their products, which can be purchased for a price, seems like a disservice as well as further objectifying an entire group of people. Indigenous life is shown as something that is relegated to the past and does not successfully project Indigeneity in current times. This is problematic because it places the position of Indigenous people as a group who exists only in the past, and does not transition to the realities of the continuing contributions of Indigenous groups and individuals. For international visitors who are either unfamiliar with Indigenous communities, or domestic visitors who have a gaping hole in their education in realizing the diversity and richness of Indigenous’s history, past and present, this carefully frozen presentation does not adequately tie the past to the present.

As Phillips (2011) makes clear, museum archives and collections have predominantly been built around the framework of Western ideology and does not allow for a space where Aboriginal peoples are accurately represented, but are in fact reduced to essentialized objects that attempt to categorize them and capture their identities within the conceptualization of settler understanding. Canada Hall is particularly guilty of doing this within the CMH because it uses objects like fur samples and learned skills of tempering the wilderness from Indigenous communities in combatting the natural environment as the only ways of displaying Indigenous identity within the exhibit. There is a message imbued within this settler narrative of Indigenous peoples not using the land the right way and reasserting settler authoritativeness. This is important to note because it perpetuates the idea that Indigenous peoples need the guidance of the State in order to make informed choices, and additionally need the guidance of a paternalistic figure. In this sense, the museum
acts as a venue to further re-colonize Indigenous communities because it assumes to have expertise over what is relevant to Indigenous identities, specifically in Canada Hall. To take it one step further, it can be argued that the physical separation of Canada and Indigenous, through the lack of active Indigenous representations in Canada Hall, gives the visitors the impression that Indigenous is a thing of the past that is only existing through the very-distant past and not related to the current present. The name Canada Hall and the presentation of settler societies as ‘Canadians’ seem to emphasize that Canada first and foremost exists within the framework of the white man and places Indigenous in the exotic ‘Other’ rhetoric.

Some of the dominant images that emerge from Canada Hall are ideas of power, strength, productivity, patriarchy, and capitalistic philosophy. Visually the placement of Canada Hall, located on the 3rd floor of the Canadian Museum of History, automatically creates an implied hierarchy between what is considered ‘authentic’ Canadian history and the importance of Indigenous people within the national agenda. Placing an exhibit, which articulates Canada’s interest in neo-liberal capitalistic values two floors on top of the First Peoples’ Hall and Grand Hall, seems like it was sending a very particular message about where national identity stands in relation to Indigenous identity. The fact that there is such extreme separation between the two is problematic because Canada is a result of a series of processes that has had significant intersections between the two. Separating ‘settler Canada’ from ‘Indigenous Canada’ appears to be a very forceful means by which to separate the experiences felt by Indigenous communities who were displaced by the introduction of settlers within the Canadian landscape. Canadian identity needs to include both Indigenous and settler facets in order to better understand not only the historical legacy of colonization, but also to help educate the public in making connections as to the current state of affairs in the pursuit of economic, political, and environmental policies. While this particular
cultural institution’s goal is to present an objective portrayal of history, reality reveals that nothing is without some form of bias.

There are some recurring themes that are used in the exhibits to promote Canada as a country to be reckoned with on a global scale, such as tolerance, social services, economic strength, objectification of land such as Canada’s land is owned by its government, military prowess, and the hardiness of the settlers who have built Canada and conquered the fierce landscape. All these themes work together to create a constructed image of what is means to be ‘Canadian’ and presents requirements an individual must have in order to fit into Canadian society. But these themes are intrinsically tied to white settler societies, not Indigenous communities. The underlying premise is the assumption that Canadian identity is tied to promoting economic solidarity. In its entirety, Canada Hall fails to present a realistic representation of the intersections that take place in the actualization of the Canadian nation-state. It offers a singular vision of what it is to be Canadian and raises the question about what version of Canadian identity is unilaterally being highlighted and enhanced and whose identities are being extinguished. Why does this even matter? Presenting skewed versions of reality with one side being shown as more favourable does great disservice to individual autonomy to understand the complex relationships that are happening as a result of the interactions with both blatant and subtle messages imparted through Canada Hall.

Meaning is...heavily tied to perception...in examining and evaluating theories (whether philosophical or psychological) of perception it is essential to distinguish between fact perception and object perception...Fact perception, involving, as it does, knowledge (and, hence, belief) brings into play the entire cognitive system (memory, concepts etc.) in a way the latter does not...Perception of objects does not depend on, and is therefore not relative to, the observer’s linguistic, conceptual, cognitive, and scientific assets or shortcomings... Though it does not make objects invisible, ignorance does tend to make facts perceptually inaccessible (Allen, and Anson 10).

CAPSTONE SEMINAR SERIES (Re)Negotiating Artifacts of Canadian Narratives of Identity, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2014.
Hence, when the perception is that development is the answer to a stable Canadian identity, it completely negates the presence of land within Indigenous identity. While the connotation of land to Indigenous identity can signify the spiritual link to land, it can also be extrapolated to tie Indigenous identity to physical spaces; i.e. reservations and the government policies rationalizing development without analyzing the long-term ramifications of development projects. Indigenous communities in Canada have a long history with fighting to preserve their inherent right to land and culture against the settler notions of ownership and exploitation. There has been a constant need to justify upholding Indigenous values while trying to navigate through the oppressive forces of capitalism and common law governance systems. It is a source of tension for Indigenous communities because it means having to negotiate with the government on the government’s turf, rather than be able to simply state the obvious - which is that Indigenous lives are being systematically disrupted and in many scenarios, dismantled by these decisions. There is not very much room for compromises when discussions of resolutions are contemplated. Even when willing to be receptive to settler negotiation terms, it becomes a battle to ensure that terms agreed upon actually come to be in effect. Neither the alternative narratives of resistance, nor the tensions that exist between land, development, Indigenous communities, and post-colonial societies are allowed an avenue to emerge as a cognizant thought within the realm of Canada Hall. It seems to implicate the museum as re-colonizers of Indigenous cultures through the displacement of the rights of Indigenous peoples to land, much like circumstances that Indigenous communities were exposed to with initial settler negotiations, such as trade agreements that favoured the side of settlers rather than offering fair terms to Indigenous communities. Canada Hall seems to reiterate the root motivations behind colonization and the subsequent exploitation of Indigenous communities through “…the forced, rapid reshaping of indigenous existence
during...process of colonial-capitalist expansion and consolidation which is the most important aspect of the colonial experience for Indigenous peoples themselves – every aspect of their lives...[being] reshaped in the interests of capitalism and to ensure the opportunity and profit potential of the white population recently settled in their homelands” (Alfred, 597-614).

In the end, the Canadian Museum of History contributes in being a powerful disseminator of information to domestic and international visitors. Visitors are exposed to the mechanisms of political and economic institutions that are shaping the context of everyday realities through the exhibits in Canada Hall, which ultimately replicate complex ideological assumptions that govern the construction of Canadian identity. Specifically, what Canada Hall has done with great success is leave Indigenous identity in a ‘frozen state’, and allowed settler narrative to flourish, establish, and re-assert its superiority over Indigenous populations. Visitors to Canada Hall are submerged in exhibits that celebrate the technological, administrative, political, and economic advances brought to the political space of Canada by European settlers. What gives Canada Hall even greater legitimacy is the authority that it has been given by the State to be the distinctive purveyor of the ‘official incarnation of Canadian history’, a recognized oracle. Through historic reports like the Massey Commission and the implementation of the Museums Act, culture has been placed within the dominion of the State and opened it up for manipulation, both financially as well as on an organizational level. This manipulation has led to the decimation of the possibility of an idealized public sphere, with the introduction of State and the integration of neoliberal decentralized values has opened cultural institutions like the museum to both State and market interference; decreasing the likelihood of democratic values to be upheld since dominant discourses do not necessarily represent multiple realities but rather promote the values and ideals of the hegemonic
institutions. Canada Hall has also successfully presented a framework that has separated Indigenous intersections and interactions with settler society. Conveniently, leaving out the implications and outcomes that came about as a result of the trespassing by the colonial settlers. Canada Hall only heightens the importance of European values of record-keeping, i.e. text based, while disregarding the place of oral-history traditions practiced by Indigenous communities. The museum itself is a physical manifestation of what Innis refers to as the time/space bias; the permanent air that is associated with the establishment and regulation of the museum lends to the idea that it is the authoritative figure on Canadian identity while pushing aside values that would lend itself to a more egalitarian representation of Canadian identity; for instance, introducing Indigenous pathways of knowledge-production like oral history. While the Indigenous identity is brought up at times within Canada Hall, there is an implicit message that settlers were able to get sound advice to survive from Indigenous peoples but no-where in the story-telling does it delve into the extreme inequalities faced by Indigenous communities as a result of the forced interactions. The fur trade is mentioned, but what is left out is the negotiations which frequently served the interests of the settlers but not that of the Indigenous community and which in fact replicates the challenges faced by current Indigenous communities in terms of attaining the right to determine what is happening to their land and to be an equal partner in the negotiating of terms and conditions of projects that will irrevocably leave its mark on the communities. Ultimately, what becomes evident is that Canada Hall’s diligent planning to promote settler ideologies manages to successfully push aside the possibility of representing Indigenous identities in its entirety within its space and ends up becoming another form of re-colonization in the contemporary setting held in the grips of the dominant political and economic
institutions leading to a fractured understanding of Indigenous identity within the Canadian landscape.

Works Cited


