

Cwynar, Chris, University of Wisconsin-Madison. "NFB.ca: The Digital Archive as National Place in the Virtual World"

In January of 2009, the National Film Board of Canada/Office National du Film du Canada introduced its online viewing portal at NFB.ca/ONF.ca. This site is an interactive digital archive of sorts, which allows users to consume more than 1500 NFB films along with a wealth of paratextual content. Its success raises a number of questions about the state and role of the archive in an era of increasing digitization and information accessibility in the virtual realm. In fact, NFB.ca seems to exemplify a trend wherein existing national mass media institutions are carving out spaces for their brands in this international context. In this case, the construction of a virtual NFB structure organized by 'genre', 'decade', 'director', and 'keywords' provides users with the means to experience the institution in a tangible fashion in a new context. Users can also write their own narratives of Canadian film through their interactions with the site, which has potential implications for the development of institutional and national film histories. The fact that these processes occur both in an international environment, and through a medium that actively promotes intertextual consumption and textual integration, further complicates this dynamic.

This paper addresses these issues through an examination of the manner in which this public archive functions, the ways in which the NFB speaks to Canadian and International users through this archive, the ways in which those users construct narratives about Canadian culture (and the NFB) through the archive's contents and formal attributes, and the ways in which the site structures these endeavors. Finally, I consider the implications of NFB.ca for the institution itself and for Canadian film culture, and attempt to draw some preliminary conclusions about what this case study might suggest about the state of the archive in the digital era.

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