Rethinking Archival Appraisal: Macroappraisal as a Technology for Cities

by Cynthia Kent

This thesis draws inspiration from the work of the Canadian scientist and humanitarian, Ursula M. Franklin, and from the relevant archival theoretical literature, to explore the implications of recasting the theory and practice of archives as technology. Focusing specifically on the archival task of appraisal, the thesis reviews the evolution of modern thinking on establishing archival value and conducting appraisal in the English-speaking world and attempts to understand the dynamics of appraisal as a facet of Franklin's expansive notion of technology. The thesis also explores the premise that Canadian concept and practice of macroappraisal is an enabler of change and an appropriate technology for sustaining democratic society.

A special focus is also given to cities as engines of both economic and cultural life in the twenty-first century and a case study of archives of the City of Winnipeg. Within this context, the thesis reviews the inception, growth, decline and renewal of a modern Canadian city and of its archives and recordkeeping systems. Drawing further inspiration from the work of urban planning theorist Jane Jacobs, the thesis considers macroappraisal within an urban setting and explores its theoretical relevance for modern accountable democracies beyond its origins as a concept and method for appraising records. The thesis explores how macroappraisal has been applied to better understand the unique "problem that a city is," and how the common values or the broader features of macroappraisal can be meshed with the specific values and challenges that make cities - and the role and function of their archives - so unique. It concludes by suggesting that within the present political, social and economic context, macroappraisal is a redemptive technology for rethinking our cities' futures as much as their past.