Remapping Archives: Cartographic Archives in Theory and Practice at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba
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Canadian map archival programmes have traditionally adopted a content-oriented approach to cartographic records, emphasizing the informational value and subject-matter of maps in core archival functions. Such an approach has not kept stride with the broader field of archival studies which has exercised a provenance-based, contextual approach in its theory and practice. Because of this, the archival perception of the mapping record has accentuated content over context, discrete over organic, practice over theory and product (published map) over process (map creation). While existing literature has played a legitimate and meaningful role in forming a body of practical cartographic knowledge, it is essential to probe the theory behind map archiving in order to understand maps as archival records.

Postmodernism, a major intellectual force in our times, can serve as a useful tool in the construction of a new framework for map archival theory. Modern society regards cartographic records as objective, scientific representations of a spatial reality. This modernist faith in the authority and accuracy of maps is derived from their technical origins. Maps have become naturalized in contemporary life, perceived as agents in their own right and held up as the source of their attributes. The subject content of cartographic records has often been incorrectly equated with their message. The challenge for the archival profession is to develop a more balanced approach to map archival theory, one which understands cartographic records not only as statements of technologies, but also as value-laden products of human activity with rich contextual information.

This thesis outlines general trends in the historical development of cartographic archives in Europe and North America which have influenced the content-based approach to Canadian map archives. It then suggests how postmodernism can reinterpret traditional assumptions about map archiving, particularly in regard to notions of the archival map as socio-cultural text, the relationship between author, audience and text and the role of the cartographic archivist as co-creator of the mapping record. Using the map programme at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba as a case study, the thesis concludes by examining how a postmodern perspective might influence the development of policy in the archival functions of appraisal, acquisition, arrangement/description and public service of a contemporary map archives.