Abstract

Mass-digitization of cultural-heritage archives has become increasingly pervasive. From Google Books to Europeana, bounded material is converted into ephemeral data on an unprecedented scale, promising to provide mankind with readily accessible and enduring reservoirs of knowledge. Interrogating this phenomenon, this dissertation asks how mass digitization affects the politics of cultural heritage. Its central argument is that mass digitization of cultural heritage is neither a neutral technical process, nor a transposition of the politics of analogue cultural heritage to the digital realm on a 1:1 scale. Rather, it should be understood as distinct sub-political processes that bring together a multiplicity of interests and actors hitherto foreign to the field of cultural heritage archives. Mass digitization is thus upheaving the disciplinary enclosures of cultural heritage and gives rise to new territorial constellations of knowledge circulation and regulation. Through the theoretical notions of "assemblage", "sub-politics" and "network power" the dissertation discusses the political implications of these transformations focusing on three levels, or aspects, of mass-digitized archives: macro-political orderings, cultural political configurations and modes of subjectification. Doing so, it further links these processes to issues of globalization, commercialization, cultural memory, the public sphere, privacy and freedom.