Conclusion

Cultural Production in the Present with Reference to the Past and Directed at the Future

This book has dealt with digital archives as collections of photographs and objects from the past that have been disseminated online in one form or another. It has shown that creating a digital archive brings the concepts of museums and archives closer together, as online output also comprises a form of publicizing, exhibiting and curating. The examples also demonstrated that digital archives deal with the past and engage with what we can call heritage, but that they do not take heritage as stable entities, but rather (re)construct and (co)produce what cultural heritage can entail. Digital archivists digitize existing collections and hence challenge ideas of originality and copying by pouring objects into new forms, or they create and arrange digital objects from scratch and thus introduce new entities that co-constitute the heritage corpus. Digital archives showcase what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995) emphasized more than two decades ago: that heritage is not a finished, stable object from some distant past. It is rather the result of a constant process of negotiations; it creates something new in the present with recourse to the past (ibid.: 369). Creating and maintaining heritage requires constant renewal and reaffirmation. It is a form of cultural production, and it is one in which new forms and new actors have entered a scene that has so far been occupied by established museum institutions and archives.

The actors involved in digital archives and related heritage production employ scripts of access, void and necessity, resort to postcolonial ideals, operate at the fringes of IT hubs and make salient use of social media, negotiating the introduction and architecture of improvements. They are contained in cultural production through digital means. Pierre Bourdieu's (1996, 2004) theorizing on cultural production, which he developed with reference to art and around the same time as

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, still proves valid and can be employed in understanding digital archives. Bourdieu demonstrated that cultural production is not the result of some magical powers of the individual creator, but that it is intertwined with power regimes and market logics – or, in Bourdieu's terms, with economic and cultural capital. Cultural capital is what decision makers and professionals working in museums, archives and research utilize when functioning as gatekeepers for digital archives. They determine how already heritagized material is digitized or how new material (in the process of being included in a digital archive) consequently becomes part of a heritage corpus. In other words, these gatekeepers' cultural (and economic) capital determines how digital archives take shape, what architectural form the databases rely on and what technical standards constitute a canon.

Digital archives that have been developed in established institutions correspond to what Bourdieu defined as the subfield of large-scale cultural production, and Richard Peterson and N. Anand (2004: 316) identified as highly bureaucratized, vertically integrated 'oligarchal' organizations. Such big players usually have larger market shares and 'are better at exploiting the commercial potential of predictable routines' (ibid.). Translated into (less market-oriented) cultural production in/for museums and archives, this means that established institutions have the capacity to develop and set standards, producing extensive databases. They are often centrally involved in developing digitization standards that potentially allow for the largest amount of data to be coded. CIDOC CRM exemplifies this point, as this reference model is supposedly able to display all possible relationships of cultural heritage items in listed triples of subject, predicate and object.

However, this is not to imply that large-scale bodies necessarily also pursue digitization and online dissemination.[1] In cultural production, rather 'small and simple structures tend to foster entrepreneurial leadership and informal interaction that allow for the rapid decision making and rich communication required to facilitate innovative production' (Peterson and Anand 2004: 316). For digital archives, this means that this field leaves room for what I have described as programming alternatives. Community-based archives that do not have institutional backing enter the scene and establish digital archives, which allows them to designate both form and content. We hence see a scrutinizing of and attempts to break up ordering principles and archival power structures through a digital archive's architecture (Christen 2015), but also an acceptance of and building on existing CMSs.

Such small actors (Peterson and Anand 2004) have also been termed enthusiasts, professional-amateurs (pro-ams, see Dallas 2016; Terras

2010) or rogues (see De Kosnik 2016). The related rise of the citizen archivist (Cox 2009) is not a new phenomenon, but developed some decades ago as one facet of oral history production (Charlton et al. 2006). The internet, however, provided citizen archivists with new modes of output and outreach, and provided the technological framework to foster prosuming. Digitalization and the internet hence boosted cultural production as regards contributing to historiography or commemorative practices.

Moreover, community-based digital collectors spend a lot of time updating their digital archives. They actively and effectively engage with their material and ensure continuous preoccupation with it. It hence differs from 'the "scan and dump" digitization typical of many projects within the cultural heritage domain' (Dallas 2016: 433). Or, to put it differently, solely or predominately digital archives necessarily need to periodically, if not permanently, update their archives in order to persist. Unlike museums and archives that can relegate to the analogue collection, continuous engagement is an intrinsic characteristic of digital-only archives in order for them to contribute to cultural production. The need to constantly engage with one's own archive in order to keep it 'alive' leads to 'the pro-amateur community [being] much better at interacting with online audiences than memory institutions are (Terras 2010)' (ibid.: 433).

The examples from India that this book has drawn upon emphasize that the forms of this engagement are manifold. They reach from adding intuitive metadata to curatorial practices, and creating empathy at a distance. It is, next to an inclusive front-end design and a consistency in maintaining social relations, a focus group-oriented emotional involvement that contributes to online archives having an impact. While this impact is not always expressed online, but can be traced in stories of impact (Marsh et al. 2016), the Indian examples support Terras' 2010 statement of community-based online archives being more successful in engaging *online* audiences. They thus not only contribute to online cultural production, but further online archives' establishment as a valid format for cultural production.

Community-based digital archives are thus situated between becoming relevant actors in cultural production and introducing or advancing new forms of doing so. This leads to a questioning of the division between established and alternative archives and heritage custodians and the related distinction between history and memory. Nora (1989) introduced *lieux de mémoire* some thirty years ago to formulate a critique of comparatively static institutions that store and preserve traces or proofs of the past. *Lieux de mémoire*, according to Nora, are storage facilities,

places to accumulate signs of the past. Museums, archives and monuments are prime examples, providing traces of the past to be mediated as history. In other words, if a *lieu de mémoire* is recognized and approved as being a place that preserves documents and other traces of the past, they serve as the basis for historical construction. Institutions and their staff regulate access to material and/or communicate on stored material as history in writing, fixing particular versions of the past, which then become official accounts of bygone events. Collective remembering is replaced with organized history making.

Nora's understanding of *lieux de mémoire* has, since its introduction, been subject to critique and demand for improvement. In consequence, *lieux de mémoire* are no longer necessarily perceived as being as static and immobile as Nora depicts them. They are subject to the changing cultural context in which they are embedded. Their stakeholders are able to decide what becomes 'canon' as actively circulated memory that keeps the past present, and what will be the 'archive' as passively stored memory (Assmann 2008). While Nora might discharge this as another instance of history production, the individual reactions, mediations and changing cultural contexts of history cannot be ignored as influencing factors in commemorative processes. They intermingle to create different individual appropriations, taking root in the concrete or objects, as well as in relations between things (Nora 1989: 9). The cultural context becomes even more relevant in in-depth analyses of archival material, as Stoler (2009) showed regarding the reappropriation of historical documents, which can be read against or along the archival grain, therefore producing different stories about the same material. Archives and other *lieux de mémoire* have the potential to serve as tools for creating conditions for intercultural dialogue and communication (Zeitlyn 2012), even if they often fail to do so.

Digital archives enhance this critique of a divide between history and memory. They blur the distinct lines that Nora drew between the two, as they incorporate both active memory making and the construction of canonical ideas about the past. The context for young professionals and volunteers creating the archives is informed by a new media ecology, where individual memory making is shaped by digital technology. Citizen historians and story scholars set out to collect personal memories, large numbers of portraits, post interview summaries and circulate visual narratives – impressive assemblies of individual voices that have a wide span across the subcontinent and beyond, as well as across social strata, religion, class and caste. Creating digital archives in interview situations or retellings of photographic readings constitutes instances of remembering. The conversations and exchanges happening online

on the basis of these accounts are likewise commemorative practices evolving through and in interaction with these digital archives, making digital archives instances of remembering and possibly even a real contact zone.

At the same time, the impetus of history making also remains strong in digital archives. It becomes evident in the public statements of the initiators or directors of digital archives and in the archives' self-portraits. It is also revealed in the motivation of the crowd to join in. It crystallizes in the processes taking place on the ground in these archives' everyday work, and is expressed in editing processes as part of a choreographed curatorial process. In digital archives, distinct moral and political agendas taken from conventional archival work still loom large, making digital archives anything but a neutral assemblage of statements. Rather than being grassroots, democratic instances of internet empowerment, digital archives apply rules and regulations and undertake intricate editing and dissemination processes, which brings them into the proximity of traditional archival order and power relations. Digital archives share characteristics with *lieux de mémoire* when they control the circulation of information. They do so not in accordance with governmental guidelines and long-established hierarchies, but in line with the moral ideals around initiative and the rules and regulations of digital media. They make the best use of social media to keep the archive running and financial and human capital flowing; they mediate information in accordance with the acceleration of the digital era. Digital archives adhere to the implicit and explicit rules of social network sites in order to be successful, which includes continuous communication and hence an active crowd collectively remembering the past, based around an archive they themselves created.

Digital archives hence oscillate between history and remembering, or, in other words, between an archival and a lived past. They comprise aspects of both, and thereby dissolve the clear distinction between memory as lived experience and history as stored and archived memory. This line is blurred, if not suspended altogether (Haskins 2007). Digital archives, actively involving the online crowd and its extended networks, become models for a commemorative culture that combines lived and archived memory with the help of a virtual space, and consequently contribute to the historical canon, or what people regard as cultural heritage.

Thus, power relations regarding history and cultural production change with community-based digital archives, but are not abrogated altogether. As Abigail De Kosnik (2016: 3) states: 'The rogues of digital archiving have effectuated cultural memory's escape from the state;

memory will never again be wholly, or even mostly, under the control of the state or state-approved capitalists. Having fallen under the sway of rogues, cultural memory has become more democratic'. While in this book I have shown that the process of democratization through online archives is certainly subject to debate, and not at all something that follows automatically from digital options, I do agree with De Kosnik that these rogues disrupt conventional memory institutions. Community-based digital archives set debates, engage people, and hence co-define culturally relevant themes. The 1947 Partition Archive, for example, pushed the traumatic topic of partition into the (urban) Indian mainstream, which now finds expression both online and offline. One result of the 1947PA's almost decade-long engagement with partition via an online audiovisual archive has been the opening of a museum on partition in Amritsar in 2016. This Partition Museum physically manifests the fact that the topic has become part of the regional, if not national public memory, as its inauguration (with the Chief Minister of Punjab and a minister of state present) demonstrated. The Partition Museum is, unlike the 1947 Partition Archive, a brick-and-mortar building, which thematically, practically and linguistically bears strong similarities to the 1947PA.[2]

Community-based digital archivists influence societal standards as regards the relevance of historical topics. Through providing access to information carriers that have not (or at least not in this form) been previously available, they promote engagement with topics they deem relevant. Like the fan archives that De Kosnik (2016) describes, Indian Memory Project, the 1947PA and India Photo Archive (alongside numerous other online repositories of graphic art, maps, photographs, movie posters and thematically focused stories) engage with mnemonically relevant, but so far socially under-represented aspects of the past. They make an entrance into the production of history from the fringes of the heritage sector.

This book has also shown that newly emerging actors in the realm of digital archives operate at the fringes of the IT sector, and that they – in the examples analysed here – stem in large part from an urban, new Indian middle class. As opposed to De Kosnik's observations in the US, these are by no means the underdogs of cultural production, but originate from higher strata of society. In the context of strong digital divides, grave economic disparities and an only recently announced electrification of the country,[3] creating and even engaging with digital archives remains a privilege for those who have the infrastructural, economic and cultural resources to do so. This is not to undermine the efforts of archives such as SPARROW (Sound and Picture Archives for

Research on Women) or Tasveer Ghar,[4] or to negate the struggles that community-based archives face when trying to establish themselves in an environment dominated by larger institutions. But it is by and large the better-off sections of Indian society (sometimes in partnership with Western experts) that can cross the 'wild frontier' (Dallas 2016) of curating digital archives online and forming the core of community-based digital archivists.

Nonetheless, we witness the influence of digital archivists in two directions: into established institutions and into society. For the latter, as mentioned, they set new topics and pierce established matrices of professional and amateur in relation to history and memory. For the former, it has become evident that community-based digital archives change the way museums and archives work. Such digital archivists cannot claim to have introduced digital preservation and curation into museums and archives, as it was largely 'digital preservation research and professional work on the one hand and e-science data management and systems specification considerations on the other' that did so at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Dallas 2016: 424). Community-based digital archivists do not necessarily strive for canonization of technical parameters or the development of generalizable metadata. It was in the hands of a 'community of research and professional practice: a prime mover towards the development of large-scale trusted data repositories, and of standards, methodologies, and research agendas aimed to ensure the trustworthiness, sustainability and quality of such repositories, and the authenticity and integrity of research data they are entrusted with in the long term' (ibid.: 428). But amateurs-turned-professionals do push the institutions by demonstrating what can be done in this field. They creatively and enthusiastically put technical possibilities and theoretical considerations into practice.

However, the positive impetus of digitization and the new digital archives should not prevent us from 'pay[ing] attention to the specific contexts, as well as materialities, of digital objects and that digital media in museums exist in a longstanding continuum or process of mediation, technological mimesis and objectification', as Geismar (2018: 11) urges us to do. Assumptions about the digital, especially in museums and archives, are not detached from the past, but develop from existing archival and curatorial structures. The human–computer interface relates to visual conventions and human–object correlations, and museums and archives (with their analogue social, political and cultural settings) determine how digital archives are constructed and perceived. The object lessons of the twentieth century should inform those of the digital age, as they allow us to better understand

digital objects rather than seeing them as something magically created through new technological means (ibid.). Museums and archives as institutions that preserve information about the past should also refer to experiences made and principles developed in treating objects and documents when handling digital objects. In reverse, thinking through the prism of the digital, as cultural production guided by interpretation and meaning making, allows us to better understand archives and museums in their analogue form.

With a better understanding of how digitization is carried out in the present with entities referring to the past, the question remains what this might entail for the future. Digital archives require constant work. While at one point they were envisioned as a tool for long-term preservation and a rescue option for the information captured in crumbling photographs, destroyed monuments or decaying objects made of natural materials, digital archives – or digitization projects focusing on one object – very soon proved to be one of the most time-intensive forms of preservation. Other than nitrate film and cellulose acetate film, which last up to 40 or 150 years, respectively, digital photographs or film need to be migrated more often, in accordance with the technical developments of readable and common file formats. If accessible online, the websites hosting digital archives also need regular technical updates in order to correctly display the data populated into the databases. Furthermore, one has to constantly work to prevent a digital archive from stagnating or shutting down, if it is envisioned as a site of online encounters. Digital archives generally draw their significance from active mnemonic processes, from contributions of prosuming audiences. Keeping digital archives alive thus requires perpetual engagement, renewals and extensions, even more than the technical side of data migration demands. Under these circumstances, many of today's digital archives will not survive into the next century. Many online repositories, bringing together digital photographs or scans and metadata in lists or other forms will not be maintained. Not all digital archivists will continue to update their archives; migrating data to new formats will not in all cases be feasible or desired. A clear sign of this fact, as well as an obstacle to its overcoming, is legacy production in museum or book form, that is, the (re)materializing of digital content.

However, the methods and means of digital archivists will outlast current digital archives. They have actuated a scrutinizing of common ordering systems and power relations that do not question archives and museums as such, but require a reassessment of the standard practices that regulate access to and circulation of knowledge about the past. Using digital technologies, resetting the standards of who writes what

into (and about) archives, curating content and – perhaps most importantly – involving larger parts of society in the processes of thinking the past, has fundamentally changed cultural production, and will continue to do so in the future. The methods and means of digital archivists will influence who and what defines relevance in the future of historical production and memory making. They will become new common practice for museums and archives.

Notes

1. Numbers indicate otherwise (see Institut für Museumsforschung 2017; Nauta et al. 2017).
2. The museum also draws on eyewitness accounts, and has even started to create a digital – albeit not yet online – archive of audiovisual accounts of partition survivors. Its self-description reads: 'The Partition of India was one of the most defining events in the history of the subcontinent. It remains till date the largest mass migration in human history. Yet, despite the extensive loss to life and property, almost 70 years later there existed a severe lacuna that no museum or memorial existed anywhere in the world to remember all those millions. In early 2015, a small dedicated group of people came together with the resolve to fill this lacuna' (https://www.partitionmuseum.org/about-us/, accessed 16 May 2020).
3. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in 2018 that 100% of India's villages have been electrified. But for a village to be labelled electrified, only 10% of its households need to be connected to the grid. Furthermore, 'electrification' is not a guarantee of constant or stable power supply, and power cuts and voltage fluctuations remain a problem (https://thewire.in/government/narendra-modi-government-rural-electrification-power, accessed 16 May 2020).
4. Who archive thematically also on masculinity, gender or religious minorities.

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