LIBRARY IN THE MAKING: Digitization in Librarians' Practice

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Abstract

The proliferation of digital technologies within everyday life of contemporary societies has often been accompanied by trying to come to terms with the question of 'the digital' by emphasis of its *difference* and transformative potential. The question of identity, and difference of the digital is of particular interest to the academic field of library and information studies, and its practical application, librarianship and the information professions. Concerned with the theoretical and practical customs the logistical administration of information artifacts, and the bureaucracy of knowledge entails, the métier of collecting, ordering, providing, and preserving documentary heritage increasingly finds itself entangled within the transformative dynamics of the so-called 'information age'; and the socio-material reconfigurations being attended by the digital paradigm of storing information.

Recent trajectories within science and technology studies (STS) to probe 'ontological' matters in empirical terms promise to speak to such rearrangements, and in doing so to renew the question of the status of objects, and their capacities in the making of the social. Co-opting this frame of reference, the thesis at hand will, by ethnographic inquiry into a large scale digitization project, explore how objects are enacted in concrete practices of librarianship, asking, "How do librarians actually do digitization work, and how do such practices relate to 'documentary heritage' objects?" By describing the manifold ways through which information professionals relate to their objects of care, it will try to give an empirical account how 'documentary heritage' is indeed *done,* and open up the various associations through which activities, procedures, tools, buildings, and bodies are mobilized in a digitization endeavor.

Doing so however reveals an abundant 'thickness' and 'hardness' of the social within the complex organizational arrangement of a public-private partnership; and furthermore the 'multiple realities' of doing documentary heritage being not solely findings and deliberations of the analyst, but also an integral part of members' own reasoning towards their practices. The study will consequently try to establish the particular digitization project in question as an instance wherein 're-assembling the social' is not only a possible research strategy for professional sociology, but an observable and describable *members' concern*, an endemic practice of librarians in organizing, stabilizing, and making sense of digitization work. Along these lines, the thesis at hand will attempt to argue for shifting the basis of the study of the 'social' status of (digital) objects within librarians' practice from a distinctive ontology of multiplied realities as an analytical postulate towards empirical investigations of 'ontological topics' bound to the digital as made relevant *within* such settings itself.