

Digitized Cultural Works and Cultural Public Sphere in Terms of Intimacy: The Case of Google's Digitizing Project

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Digitized cultural works have widely been considered 'good supplement' for existing cultural Institute by its great accessibility and low maintenance cost. Therefore more and more books or art works are being digitized and enjoyed in digital environment. However, even though digitized works are now believed to be 'good' for enriching existing cultural public sphere across cultural institutions like art museum and library, enough examination on the meaning or implication of digitizing cultural works has not been done. What is worse, public agents like cultural institutions seem to accept quite well the given frame of digitization without further scrutiny.

According to them, digitized works are said 'contents' which once happened to be physical formats like books or artworks and which can be transformed to digital format without any loss of information or value. Under this 'content-centered approach', books, artworks or other cultural works are simply 'consumable contents' which can be valued without any necessity of further considerations about relations between local community and cultural institute, or between digitized cultural works and existing cultural public sphere.

The case of Google, a giant Internet company, and its projects, 'Google Book Project' and 'Google Art Project', which digitize books and artworks, raise possible question that 'Is digitizing cultural works really good things on existing cultural public sphere?' Because Google has established universal, standardized rule in processing digitized contents as private company which always pursuits interest and revenue by achieved certain ways like online advertisement sales. This universal criterion of Google might not be compatible with the way existing intimacy had been maintained.

For that reason, introducing the concept of intimacy is very valuable to explore the implication of digitizing cultural works on cultural public sphere. Intimacy can be conceived as accumulation of memory, experience, relations, editing, learning or even cultural taste within a community, civil society or state. The unique intimacy that every community has could be eroded or disconnected from the very community by external change on the characteristic of the public sphere. In this sense, the French government's action against Google's plan is a compelling example.

The French government refused to hail Google's digitization project and initiated its own digitizing system. It was because they recognized digitized works are not just 'contents' but their cultural heritage which is of much relevance to their community's value, intimacy, and context. And cultural institutions, which take part in maintaining public sphere, are not separated from the cultural

works by certain intimacy of cultural public sphere. Thus, the French case gives valuable discussion point about digitization in cultural public sphere.

The French case raises the possibility that Google-style digitized cultural works could lead to not just contents-centered transformation but transformation of cultural public sphere where contents are held, and of intimacy as well. From this stance this article argues that today's public understanding on digitized contents lacks important point about assessing cultural contents in terms of cultural public sphere. This could lead to another misunderstanding: existing function of social community and its related intimacy could be automatically passed down to a new digital cultural public sphere. But the chances are never known.