

Keynote: 'Storing Stuff, Structuring Stories. The power of digital archives in contemporary historiography' by Helle Strandgaard Jensen, Associate Professor, Department of History and Classical Studies, Aarhus University

Abstract: Understanding how archives work has always been key to the historical profession. For centuries, historians have worked on refining their knowledge about archives and developed complex guides about their creation, content, and use. Even the most rebellious post-structural deconstructivists, who vigorously criticize the priorities of traditional archives, see knowledge about their structures as central to challenging their power. But what about digital archives? How relevant is knowledge of traditional archives in the digital age? And what use might we make of it in the broader context of digital humanities? In my talk, I explore the power exercised by digital archives in contemporary historiography. I argue that the creation, use, and content of digital archives are profoundly different from the analogue, but the critical skills used to decode the power of analogue archives are as valuable as ever. I pose two questions: Whether the production of digital archives will lead to a re-canonization of historical research, and if specific digital structures suppress particular historiographical traditions. In considering these questions, I demonstrate how the critical skills that historians have obtained in order to understand the power of analogue archives are vital, if we want to unearth the power that their digital counterparts exert in shaping our understanding of the past, present, and future.

Bio: Helle Strandgaard Jensen is Associate Professor in contemporary cultural history at Aarhus University. Her research focuses on contemporary media and childhood history in Scandinavia, Western Europe, and the US after 1945. She combines historical methods with theoretical approaches from cultural studies and media studies. One part of her research investigates how uses of digital media – in particular digital archives, sources, and research tools – influence the discipline of history. The other is concerned with media productions as historical objects. Jensen received her PhD from the European University Institute in 2013. She has previously been employed as assistant professor in film and media studies at University of Copenhagen and held a number of visiting fellowships in the US and UK. She is the author of *Superman to Social Realism: Children's media and Scandinavian childhood* (2017) as well as many articles and book chapters on childhood history, children's media culture, and digital archives' impact on historiography.