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Book review:

Introduction to Documentation Studies

Lund, Nils Windfeld (2024). Introduction to documentation studies: complementary studies of documentation, communication and information. London: Facet Publishing, ISBN 9781783301898

That I had the opportunity to review this book pleases me. Those familiar with my research might find it somewhat surprising that I have taken on this task. My research is primarily located in the field, which I choose to call information practices research, a subfield of library and information studies. Am I then the right person to comment on a book about documentation studies? Maybe, maybe not. My readers will be my judges.

Over the past, roughly, 15 years, I have indeed been interested in the concept of the document, although not in a structured manner such that I have meticulously and systematically followed the literature in the field. It has more been a matter of encountering texts that sparked my interest, leading me to explore the document track mostly out of pleasure and curiosity. Memorable encounters along the way have included texts by Otlet and Briet (naturally), Brown and Duguid (1996), and of course Buckland (1997) and Frohmann (2004); plus many other pleasant acquaintances, particularly those where I have perceived that my usual path has intersected with the document path through questions focusing on the relationship between documents and people: what do people do with documents? And what do documents do to people? How do they play into sociomaterial practices? These are the kinds of questions that have thus far interested me the most, which also means that the concept that has been central for me is *documentary practices* (see, for example, Pilerot and Maurin Söderholm, 2019). But to be able to say something about such practices, one needs a reasonably well-thought-out understanding of how a document can be said to be constituted. It is on this matter that I have greatly benefited over the years from the works of Niels Windfeld Lund, not least his idea of documentation in a complementary perspective (2004). In short, this idea means that documents can simultaneously be seen as 100% material, since they necessarily have physical qualities as material objects, 100% social, as they contribute to linking and coordinating human

activity, and, finally, 100% cognitive (which I deliberately choose to say, rather than mental), in the sense that what we usually mean when we talk about a particular document, such as a book, is its content, which we necessarily have to access through cognitive processes.

These were my starting points when I began tackling "Introduction to Documentation Studies". In the following, I will present an overview of the book's content. After that, I will offer a concluding, more evaluative, discussion of the book as a whole.

I note that the book, as is customary for this type of research monograph, begins with no fewer than nine highly positive endorsements. That they are positive is, of course, no surprise; it comes with the genre. Referring to this feature, I would now, using Lund's own terminology, call them *docemes* – specific parts or components of a document. Let us return to the concept of doceme later, when we discuss Lund's way of defining or suggesting how a document should or can be understood. And we will briefly revisit these endorsements as we come to the end of this text.

The book is divided into three parts and consists of eleven chapters. Part 1 deals with documentation theory, Part 2 with documentation in practice, and Part 3 with documentation in theory and practice. Part 1 is preceded by a short introduction, where a crucial indication for the entire presentation is made right under the first subheading. There, it is asserted that when a newborn baby cries for the first time, its first document is created. Lund's understanding of what constitutes a document is thus very inclusive. In his own words, it involves an "all-embracing definition of documentation, covering all kinds of human communication" (p. 136).

The introduction also launches another central premise for the book, namely that documentation must necessarily be understood from the complementary perspective that the author introduced in 2004. Here, as I perceive it, the idea is slightly tweaked. Whereas the 2004 chapter discussed the different qualities or functions of a document – material, social, and cognitive – it is now rather the situation within which the documentation takes place that is attributed these dimensions. These three dimensions are simultaneously found in a process of communication, information, and documentation. All three are necessary and dependent on each other. And, as the author notes, through this complementary process "come documents which play an essential role in human life. That is what this book is about – why and how all these processes and documents work" (p. xxvi). Throughout the book, documentation is presented as a general dimension of human life, occurring whenever people interact with each other.

Part 1 (chapters 1-3) constitutes a theoretical foundation for the case studies presented in Part 2 (chapters 4-9). In this first part, the initial discussion revolves around the starting points for the "Complementary Theory of Documentation". A theory which is elaborated in Chapter 2. Lund works extensively etymologically and shows that the terms documentation, communication, and information have "a more or less shared meaning" (p. 3). If communication is about making something common and sharing it, then the concept of information highlights how this something is given form. A central meaning in the concept of the document is that of demonstrating and showing. Both the concepts of communication and information are integrated into the theory of documentation, even though the concept of the document remains the primary focus.

In his theorizing, Lund takes inspiration from Niels Bohr's concept of complementarity. The main idea is that what is studied must be viewed from different angles and that what emerges must be understood as a set of interrelated, interacting, and complementary qualities. While Bohr, being a physicist, saw time and space as two complementary perspectives, Lund focuses on materiality, mentality, and sociality in his study of documentation.

Following this initial introduction to the concept of complementarity, three other components of the theory are introduced. From an ontological perspective, it is noted that human life can be understood as "the continuous creation and change of three intertwined kinds of orders: an order of physical action, a social order, and an order of mental configuration" (p. 20). At this stage of the theoretical construction, Lund refers to Foucault's discussions on how a society can be said to be ordered. The other two components are drawn from the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre: the idea that modern society consists of a set of subsystems and the notion of human practice. With Lefebvre, it is also emphasised that practices over time form into dominant orders, established ways of doing things, and traditions, although these orders can also be broken.

It is interesting to note that Lund clearly positions his theory within what I would call a sociological tradition. One that focuses on human activity, rather than on what is traditionally meant by documents, (i.e., typically, informative material objects). This approach, combined with the all-embracing definition of documentation that Lund advocates, makes me think that it might be possible to replace the concept of documentation with the notion of sociomaterial practices. This is particularly evident when he provides the reader with an initial example of the components that can constitute a document. He describes a family dinner where he identifies several different *agents*, such as the person cooking the food, the person who did the shopping, and the person who takes care of the dishes, among others. He also identifies various *means* such as ingredients, kitchen equipment, tablecloth, plates, and cutlery. Additionally, there is some kind of *mode* according to which the dinner is conducted, which might involve whether it is an everyday meal or if there is a particular order in which the courses are to be eaten. He concludes this example by saying that "all this comes together in a family dinner document" (p. 26). It seems to me that what is being studied may not be documentation but rather what I would call a dinner practice. But I realise that Lund's concept of a document extends beyond what I think of as documented. It also includes the actual performance that results in the document. His own explicit definition, which is etymologically based, is briefly: "*doceo*, I show, plus *mentum*, by some means" (p. 133); for example, when a baby demands attention by crying. The longer version states that a document is "any results of human efforts to tell, instruct, demonstrate, teach, or to produce a play, in short to document, by using some means in some ways. In this way we can use human actions as documentative actions [...]" (p. 25).

In the previously cited dinner example, we could also observe that the theory encompasses a number of constitutive elements that form the complementary process: agents, means, and modes. Additionally, documents can also be understood as occurring on different levels: collections or complexes of documents, individual documents, as well as parts of individual documents, so-called "docemes". An example of the latter is a photograph that illustrates a newspaper article.

The first part of the book concludes with a short chapter (3) where an analytical model based on the complementary theory of documentation is presented. Different types of analytical approaches are discussed here – diachronic, synchronic, comparative, and experimental – all of which are built on the key concepts introduced in the previous chapter. The analysis aims to identify a complementary situation, subsystems, agents, means and modes, as well as different document complexes, individual documents, and docemes in what is being studied.

Armed with the theory of documentation, it is then time for the reader to delve into the case studies that make up the six chapters of the book's second part, "Documentation in Practice". Here, Lund demonstrates how he applies the theory by analysing, in turn and in separate chapters, the creation of, respectively, Mozart's Requiem, Hemingway's short story "Indian Camp", Edvard Munch's "The Girls on the Bridge" ("One Title Many Works"), and the Danish dissertation "The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800". These four initial case studies share the commonality of being examples that, even with

a decidedly narrower definition of the concept of a document, could pass as document studies. The case in the following chapter deals with a phenomenon that many might not think of as a case of documentation or as a document. Here, the reader gets to take part in an analysis of a political march, "The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963". A march that is described as "a temporal document which is primarily defined by time" (p. 118). The series of case studies then concludes with chapter 9, which offers an analysis of the process of obtaining a US social security card; "Identity Documentation: Name and Number". Throughout, the case study analyses focus on observations regarding subsystems (which often collide), various agents, means and modes, and different types and components of documents (documents, document complexes, and docemes).

127 pages into the book, we reach its third and final part, "Documentation in Theory and Practice," which consists of chapters 10 and 11. In the first of these, the six case studies are compared, as I understand it, to identify common features in documentation across various subsystems. Among other things, it is stated through the succinct phrase "Naming is framing" (p. 129) that all documents are discrete entities. Likewise, it is noted that all documents have a history and that they are parts of document complexes. Especially with the help of the notion of doceme, it is further asserted that all documents have an element structure. It is also noted that all documents have been created by somebody and that they have come into being through certain means and in some mode. The idea that permeates the entire book reappears here, namely the assertion that all documents are complementary objects: "No document can exist only as a concept, only as a physical entity, or only in a social position" (p. 135). Based on these observations, the author arrives at what he calls "the principle of documentation". Although I initially said that I would save my evaluations for the end of the review, I must already interject here and state that this principle seems somewhat unclear. I note that the author again revisits the relationship between communication, information, and documentation. If I understand correctly, he sees these as complementary and giving rise to processes that are somehow intertwined. He says: "We can talk about documentative action, informative action, and communicative action – complementary actions, depending on each other, whenever a person is talking, writing, marching, composing, doing observations in nature, etc." (p. 137). Chapter 10 then concludes with a discussion about the fact that not all documents are preserved. In this context, he emphasises the importance of "liberating the definition of documents from being a matter of being recorded and preserved" (p. 137). Furthermore, and in dialogue with IFLA's library reference model, he notes that a work is not just ideas and that not all documentation is true for all, "[i]t depends on who you are, your life-world, [and] your subsystem" (p. 144).

In the final chapter, what must be considered a draft of a proposal for a new scientific discipline is presented, which is suggested to include the study of documentation, information, and communication under one and the same umbrella.

After the last chapter, there is a very short section of one and a half pages titled Epilogue. It sequentially discusses how the complementary worldview that Lund proposes has the potential to enrich our understanding of the present. This is followed by a brief paragraph, which I interpret as a call to unite "craftsmanship" and researchers from all types of scientific fields. Finally, there is a rather elusive short reflection on "the condition of contingency".

To begin my final, more evaluative discussion, I can start with the aforementioned epilogue, which I perceive as unfinished, a rather awkward and peculiar addition that should have either been excluded or further developed. In its current form, it perplexes more than it adds value. In fact, even the concluding chapter, which contains the proposal for a new discipline, would have needed more work to appear as something other than just a sketch, which, although imaginative, is not entirely easy to take seriously.

It has probably become apparent through my summary that I personally have issues with the extremely inclusive definition of documentation and the concept of a document, according to which virtually all human activity can be considered as a document. Marching, in my view, is not documenting; it is demonstrating. I will therefore continue to limit the category of documents to the kinds of material objects that I perceive as potentially informative for someone. Thus, I do not accept that the performative aspect, the very act of producing a document, if we put it that way, is meaningful to include in our understanding of what constitutes a document. However, with this said, I can simultaneously acknowledge that the three parts of the book (excluding chapter 11 and the epilogue) form a thought-provoking, coherent, and logical presentation, which I am happy to have spent time with for a few days.

I have particularly appreciated finding myself in the second part of the book with the case studies. It was entertaining to follow the stories of Mozart's requiem, Hemingway's short story, and the other cases. And I can conclude that the analytical model has been put to work according to the theory and model in chapters 2 and 3. The case studies are indeed analyses in the etymological sense of the word. It is about breaking down what is studied into its components and considering the relationships between them, but more than once during the reading, I have pondered the results of these analyses. The rather blunt question arises: what have we learned through these analyses? On the back of the book, I read that the model and method are relevant for a range of scientific and scholarly fields. However, I find somewhat unclear in what ways, more specifically, they are relevant. I would have wanted to read more about that.

I realise that I have now ended up in a rather dull way to conclude a review, somewhat in a minor key. But I cannot fully join the choir of endorsements.

References

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