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Is the World After All Just a Dream?

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Documents and Documentation

Library and information science (LIS) is the discipline that seeks to understand the nature of documents, alongside the processes of their creation and communication, or documentation. The origins of the discipline stem from the earliest signs and symbols that subsequently evolved into writing, over 5,500 years ago, but in the short timespan of the past 50 years, the nature and number of documents has changed significantly. Our understanding of what is meant by a document has moved from its traditional physical manifestation, to digital, to multimedia, and then to networked entities, and now includes datasets, social media entries, streaming data, games, generative works, virtual worlds and software.

The conceptual understanding of what is, and what is not, a document has longstanding representation in the literature. See, for example, Briet (2006), Buckland (1997), Frohman (2009), Lund (2009), Lund and Skare (2010), Latham (2012), and Gorichanaz and Latham (2016). These authors have written on the nature of documents and have contributed to the body of knowledge known as document theory.

The term 'document' is often used interchangeably, or without clarification, with the term 'information'. From the perspective of the LIS discipline, Bawden and Robinson (2012) have considered that that information is instantiated within documents, and that documents in the widest sense are containers for information.

Over the last half century, global development in information and communication technologies has led humankind to a world in which the amount of information that we need to manage goes beyond anything we can usefully imagine, and which continues to expand at an ever-increasing rate. Whilst it is still interesting to measure information in terms such as 'miles of books' acquired by a library per year, more usual estimates relate the production or amount of information to quantifiers associated with digital data files; see for example, Desjardins (2018). Alongside books and papers, LIS has always interpreted the digital files that represent numbers, text, images, videos or audio recordings as documents, entities that fall under its remit.

Today, the majority of new documents are born-digital entities, and extensive digitization programmes attempt to render what remains of the world's analogue heritage into digital format. We are the last generation that will have experienced a non-digital world (Floridi. 2018).

Interactive, Participatory and Immersive Documents

More recent advances in technology including 360° recording, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), binaural sound, haptic interfaces, multisensory internet, pervasive computing and the internet of things, have further revolutionised the content of digital documents, affording new creative approaches which allow for participation and interaction by the reader. We can create unreal digital worlds that render as increasingly real. The phrase 'being immersed in a good book' takes on a new meaning as we create VR versions of not only books, but also films, games, historical events, news, documentaries and performances.

These technologies allow us to create new types of documents, and at the same time provide us with new methods of documentation; new ways to record, archive, preserve, access, replay and re-experience documents (in the widest sense), whether physical or digital. New technologies allow us to record and archive events such as performance in increasingly realistic detail, moving beyond what we have previously achieved with simple video and sound.

The concept of documenting performance is not new, although the concept of performance *as* a document is less widely discussed. From the LIS perspective, a performance can certainly be considered as a document, and the documentary processes associated with describing, archiving and preserving performance are of interest to those of us within the LIS discipline.

The act of archiving or recording may also be considered an act of creation, as the archival version is in itself, another document. The subsequent re-mixing and re-interpretation of works which archiving makes feasible, furnishes us with yet more new documents.

Interactive and participatory documents are often described within the literature, as 'immersive'. The term immersive is used loosely, but usually implies the experience of some kind of sensory impact beyond that of the seeing associated with reading a book, or looking at a picture, or of hearing associated with listening to a recording, or the seeing and hearing involved in watching and listening to a movie, for example.

Robinson (2014) defined immersive documents as those that offer the reader an engagement with a scripted unreality which is indistinguishable from reality. It is important to note that at the current time, this type of immersive document remains conceptual, although developments in computer games, interactive video, interactive fiction, films or VR journalism are moving rapidly closer to providing us with the experience of reality.

For fully immersive documents to exist, there is a need for technology that allows the reader (a user/player) to have complete presence and agency within the unreal world, and for scripting (programming) which renders the unreal as a believable environment. Full body presence in virtual worlds, alongside full

agency, is challenging technologically, but it is reasonable to assume that the goal is attainable with time, and that LIS should consider the addition of immersive documents to its realm.

Documents described as partial or semi-immersive, Robinson (2016), already exist in number. In this editorial, we also suggest the term 'proto-immersive' to describe documents that offer semblances of reality.

To date, LIS has made little comment on the nature of immersive or proto-immersive documents, or about how the processes of documentation should adapt to handle them. Importantly, we need also to consider whether new types of documents bring new ethical concerns.

There are many ways, then, in which we could imagine using immersive documents: for entertainment, learning, training, observing, understanding, exploring, and notably for experiencing or re-experiencing events, such as performance.

Documenting Performance

The emergence of interactive and participatory documents brings further into view the existing convergence of library and information services with the work of galleries, museums and archives, as each of these institutions and practices are concerned with the use of digital files to store, represent, and preserve material and born-digital items, especially those pertaining to cultural heritage, and including those whose nature is intangible or transient, such as performance.

Let us examine the re-experiencing of an intangible event through the lens of documentation. We might consider that we re-experience a book by re-reading it, a song by listening to it again, but what about the re-experience of a performance by going to see it again? Here we can see that whilst the book, the song and the performance may all be considered as documents, they possess different characteristics, and their diverse natures are reflected in the differing requirements for their respective documentation. What is needed to document a book or a song, compared to what is needed to document a play, or other type of performance? Whilst acknowledging the documentation of intangible events via their associated artefacts, we are left with the issue of temporality; the book and the song change in different ways when being re-experienced, to that of a performance. A performance has an arguably higher dependency on temporality than a book or a song. At the current time, it is not possible to return to a given time, to see the exact performance again.

We may think then, that documentation can only ever allow us to partially re-experience transient events, but as our understanding of, and interaction with documents evolves, and as technology improves, our ability to document an event may move ever closer to a process by which we can recreate the actual event

occurrence. We need certainly, to pay more attention to what is meant and understood by temporality. Buckland (1991) considers how events may be seen as a document, but although he writes that they are 'informative phenomena', he concedes that it is representations of the events which are stored and retrieved. The concept of temporality is not explored further, at this point in time.

It is important to note that many authors from other disciplines have written on the documentation of performance. Phelan (1993) famously suggested:

> Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.

Other writers, such as Dunne (2015), have suggested a different perspective:

> Instead of focusing on the impermanence of live, embodied acts, it is far more useful to think of the live and the recorded as mediums that facilitate communication between spectators and performers; both of these groups oscillate between the roles of receivers and transmitters of information over the duration of a performance.

Indeed, the temporal axis, depicting the time at which an event occurred, presents the most difficult obstacle for the most ardent archivist in the recording and reproduction of a performance. Although travelling in time is for now unsolvable, the issue of 'place' is perhaps more manageable, as it is possible to re-enact a battle at the site of the original, and so forth.

The questions raised by the seemingly simple desire to document a temporal event such as a performance are interesting and challenging intellectually. They are worth our consideration, however, as much of our heritage resides in such transient documents, including dance, music, theatre, performance art, information art, internet art and burn art.

Leaving temporality aside for the moment, when we experience performance, we can also use the criteria of participation and immersion as descriptive elements to aid the processes of documentation; the former implies the degree of agency experienced, from merely observing, through creating, to fully performing or participating in how events play out, whilst the latter is the extent to which unreality is perceived as reality.

From what we have considered so far, it should now be possible to extend existing document theory to derive a model which allows for the documentation of temporal events, including axes for levels of participation and immersion. Ideally, the model will be backwards compatible, so that we can also use it to document more traditional, material documents, and less complex digital files.

A New Theory of Documents

As noted above, a relatively small, but respectable body of work exists around document theory. In their 2010 paper, Lund and Skare put forward three dimensions of documents: technical, social and mental. Buckland (2014) takes a different perspective with his three views of documents: the conventional, material view, the functional view, and the semiotic view.

In the same 2014 paper, however, Buckland suggests that information can become a synonym for documents, broadly defined. He is writing in the context of his 1991 paper 'Information as Thing', in which Buckland gives three views of information, which are very similar to Lund and Skare's aspects of documents: information as knowledge (knowledge imparted through communication), information as process (of being informed), and information as thing (denoting bits, bytes, books and other physical media).

The connection reflects the difficulty in defining precisely the concept of information in relation to document, although see the view of Bawden and Robinson referred to earlier.

Robinson (2016) has previously suggested four dimensions by which documents may be characterised: physicality, temporality, participation, and immersion, although the exact criteria for each dimension are a work in progress. It should be possible, however, to describe any type of document – from a book, to a virtual world – some kind of values (qualitative or quantitative to be decided) along each dimensional axis.

The values assigned to each of the four axes describing any given document would be different according to whose viewpoint was being considered; for example, that of the author, the reader, the viewers, the audience, the illustrator. Thus, in theory, we can record multiple representations for the same document, and it is possible to imagine an algorithm that could summarise this data, to create a more authentic record of not just the physical properties of the document, but aspects of how it was encountered and understood by one or more readers. This might also allow us to move closer to being able to represent and recreate temporal events more accurately.

The four axes can be seen as an extension of the properties of documents suggested by Buckland and by Lund and Skare, and it would be interesting, although beyond the scope of this editorial, to consider in detail the relationships between these and indeed other theories of documentation. For now, suffice to say that physicality seems essentially the same as that of materiality or technicality, suggested by Buckland and Lund and Skare respectively. Values eventually assigned to the axes of temporality, participation and immersion may prove to be related to the personal or social aspects of existing document theory.

Transition to the Infosphere

This new conception of the nature of documents would also seem to fit with Floridi's (2014) concept of the infosphere, which includes all informational objects, and indeed with his popularisation of onlife – where we life both online and offline as a seamless experience. Robinson (2018) has suggested that the work of keeping the record, from whichever sector, has now moved into the new paradigm afforded by the digital realm.

DocPerform

The DocPerform project was established in 2016, with the aim of understanding and developing the documentation of performance, and the ways in which performance may be regarded as a document, from a multi and interdisciplinary perspective. It is hoped that the four-dimensional theory of documents described above will in some ways prove helpful in our research within this arena.

In order to gain and ideas and insight into current thinking, documentation practice and areas for further research, we convened two symposia. We were delighted with the response to our first invitation in 2016, when we brought together for the first time, members of both the theatre and performance, and library and information science disciplines, all of whom had an interest in documentation. Our call for presentations, under the wide theme of "The Future of Documents" resulted in 12 presentations selected from 27 submissions. The papers considered approaches to documentation of performance via descriptive databases of events and related items, as well as more conceptual thoughts as to how to document performance art, the values associated with choosing what is archived, and how to document light and darkness.

The success of the initial one-day symposium led us to convene a second, two-day event, a year later. This time, our call focused on new technologies, and how they might enhance our understanding of performance as a document, and the documentation of performance. This time we scheduled 22 presentations, 11 of which have become full papers and are included in this special issue. The second symposium invited submissions to five themes: technologies for concepts, creation, documentation, the audience, and imagination.

As can be seen from the representative papers, progress in documentation is moving more slowly than the possibilities afforded by technologies. To begin with, Debbie Lee's paper explores the limits of current conceptual modules within LIS for the documentation of performance, in this case with reference to FRBR/LRM.

Marc Kosciejew's text stays with the conceptual approach, considering the continuing relevance of material literacy in the representation of performance. Andre Deridder explores current challenges in capturing the performing arts on film, and Giselle Garcia suggests the walking dramaturg as a method of documentation. Marine Theunissen explores the capture of collective interaction between individuals in performance, and Erin Lee outlines how the National Theatre Archive currently approaches documentation of process and the use of its collections by internal and external stakeholders.

A glance at our programme will show that dance-related research is at the forefront in innovative documentation of performance. In this special issue we present papers including Sarah Rubidge's exploration of how to record and recreate concepts of immersion and participation in the archiving of experiential, performance-generating, choreographic installations, and Gregory Sporton's focus on temporality in his recreation of a dance using the same performers at different life stages. Adelaide Robinson examines how technology, particularly social media, has changed the way in which we document live ballet performance, and John Taylor and Defne Erdur describe their project on the documentation of contemporary dance education. Sarah Whatley introduces an online toolkit for a curated repository of performance documents and related film material; an 'accidental archive' of processes towards the performance, rather than the performance *per se*. Sarah asks what value these process documents hold.

What Next?

Our initial wandering through various aspects of the documentation of performance has shown that there are many questions still to be considered, and that the rapid rate of technological development for creation, archiving and preservation of our cultural heritage is not matched by our conceptual understanding, frameworks or processes. The enthusiasm of our multidisciplinary response to DocPerform has shown that this area is considered important, interesting and likely to provide us with news ways to record more of our world for the benefit of all. We hope to continue our work in this project, and we are in the early days of planning for DocPerform 3.

The emergence of the infosphere has brought about a new paradigm for LIS (Robinson, 2018), and indeed for documentation considered from other disciplinary perspectives. We need to think about the boundaries between reality and unreality, as our move to onlife exposes us to more scripted unrealities. This is not a new philosophical debate, and it is perhaps useful to conclude with reference to Rafael Capurro's 1999 paper 'Beyond the Digital', referenced in the title, wherein we find an early mention of reality vs. unreality, in relation to our informational world. Capurro suggests:

> What cannot be digitized *is not (real). ...* Physical things are neither (no longer) the basis nor the paradigm for answering the question: What things are real?
>
> Is the world after all just a dream? … Digital technology has a major impact on it. Ghostly technology is dreaming us.

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