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Introduction to Documentation Studies

Review of Windfeld Lund, N. (2024). *Introduction to Documentation Studies*.
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Introduction and book summary

For those acquainted with other introductory volumes published by Facet Publishing – for instance, Bawden and Robinson (2012) – the title of Niels Windfeld Lund's (2024) book may be seen as indicating an attempt to summarize the scholarly movements engaged with documents and documentation, including their concepts, applications, and historical turns. When delving into the book, however, it quickly becomes clear that Windfeld Lund (2024) sets out with aims that go beyond summarizing this (generally recognized) long century of scholarly discussions. This historical and theoretical background is covered relatively briefly in the book, and for the most part dealt with in David Bawden's and Lyn Robinson's foreword, Windfeld Lund's own introduction, and chapter 1, together encompassing some 20 of the book's roughly 150 pages. From chapter 2 and onward, the centre stage is instead given to Windfeld Lund's 'general' (p. 20) and 'complementary' (p. 20) theory of documents and documentation. Departing from the original Latin forms *doceo* + *-mentum* (together roughly meaning to teach, inform, perform, or demonstrate, according to Windfeld Lund) the proposed theory adopts a widely inclusive view of the concept of document, entailing basically any human action that can be said to prove a person's existence in the world. While earlier conceptualisations of document (such as those conceived by Paul Otlet and Suzanne Briet) emphasized qualifiers such as *materiality* and *intentionality* (see Buckland 1997), Windfeld Lund's view allows documents to be largely immaterial, and possibly unintentional. The book's first example of a document, raised already in the Introduction chapter, is a newborn infant's first scream. While the scream can be reasonably assumed to be instinctual rather than intentional, and lasts only momentarily, it qualifies as a document in that it informs, proves or demonstrates the baby's life, presence, and identity as a human being in the world. Persistence is thus not a qualifier in Windfeld Lund's conception, as a document may last for a moment only, as well as for many years or decades.

Furthermore, Windfeld Lund's theory departs from a view where documents may be studied complementarily from their physical, mental and social presences. In summary, the theory (non-exclusively) assumes that documents exist simultaneously, equally and respectively in a mental, a physical and a social dimension. In the model, each document is a discrete, recognizable entity, and exists in a number of indefinite *subsystems* on the mental, physical and social level. In connection to the identified documents may be found complexes of *agents*, *means* and *modes*, i.e. actors participating in the documentary process, the activities that take place in this process, and the modes that shape the result. These entities may, in turn, also be sorted into categories corresponding to their physical, social and mental properties. In addition, documents typically exist in relation to other documents, thus establishing what Windfeld Lund refers to as a *document complex*. Documents may be analysed either *synchronically* or *diachronically* (or shift between the two during the same analytical process), meaning that the analysis may either focus on a discrete situation in time, or seek to unravel a documentary process by examining multiple documents in a more or less extended period. They may be categorized into document *forms* or *genres*, and broken

down into *docemes*, i.e. document components, observable in one or more of the three complementary dimensions.

In extension to this proposed theory, Windfeld Lund suggests an analytical model or framework for identifying, unpacking and connecting entities as described above. This model is demonstrated by a series of six case studies, in which Windfeld Lund walks the reader through analyses of six chosen documents (and document complexes), elaborating on the notions introduced in the introductory chapters. The documents studied in these case studies include a work of music (more specifically, Mozart's *Requiem*), a work of literature (Ernest Hemingway's short story *Indian Camp*), a work of art (Munch's *The Girls on the Bridge*), a scholarly document complex (*The Danish Revolution, 1500–1800*, a dissertation in history and its defence), a political march (The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963), and documents identifying individual humans (more specifically personal names, and social security cards as issued in the United States). After these ventures – which form the spatial majority of the book – follows a chapter containing a comparative summary of common features among the identified documents (and document complexes). Here, Windfeld Lund summarizes the findings and conclusions from his proposed theory and analytical endeavour, arguing (among other things) that documents are characterised by entity-relationships as described above, that communication presupposes documentation, and that documents need not be persistent to qualify as documents. The concluding chapter consists of a proposal for a new scholarly discipline, based on the general theory and complementary perspectives presented in the book – *Documentation, Information, and Communication studies*, abbreviated into *DIC studies*. The chapter ends with reasonings of how such a discipline might come into realization, including its position in relation to neighbouring disciplines such as LIS and communication studies, and its potential place as common ground or 'a meeting place for the disciplines of the three general scientific areas, natural sciences/engineering, social sciences, and humanities' (p. 147).

The book ends with an Epilogue, in which Windfeld Lund reflects broadly on the larger implications of a complementary perspective on life and the world, the prospect of documentation as common ground between craftspeople, artists and scholars, and lastly, the importance of reflecting on contingency, the open-endedness of life, and the potentials of alternate futures.

General impressions, praise and critique

In the beginning of this review, it was noted that the book title gave the initial impression of the book being a comprehensive summary of the scholarly discussions, concepts and paradigms surrounding documents and documentation. In this reviewer's opinion, such guidance would be welcome, since the literature surrounding documents and documentation is large, diverse, and spanning over more than a century (see, for instance, The Document Academy 2026). Such summaries do exist in the form of shorter publications, for instance in Buckland (1997), Windfeld Lund (2009) and Buckland (2018). It is, however, this reviewer's opinion that the documentation field would be well served by an extensive, comprehensive and introductory volume, perhaps with contributions by several of the authors who have shaped these discussions through the decades. In light of this, the direction taken by the reviewed book was somewhat surprising. Nevertheless, Windfeld Lund's complementary view of documents does seem highly valuable as a starting point, in particular as an operationalised framework for undertaking studies of documents and documentation from one or more of the three angles. Each in their own way, the presented case studies demonstrate that the analytical approach has the capacity to exhaustively unpack, disentangle and highlight relevant components of documents and documentary processes. A few questions do remain unanswered – for instance, where to draw the line as to this exhaustivity, although it is probably to be expected that such questions emerge in any qualitative analysis. In relation to this, the implications of components lost in history remains an open end, given that the theory does not consider persistence a qualifying factor.

Other, arguably more crucial, questions stand at the epistemological core of Windfeld Lund's conceptualisation of the document notion. As briefly touched upon earlier in this review, the notion presented in the book is heavily dependent on etymology, bringing the document concept back to its Latin roots. At present, the theory does not seem to take into account how the notion of document has evolved from these linguistic roots, not least the use of the term document in more contemporary digital discourse (see Levy 2001, 22). The proposed theory states that essentially any human action can be considered a document, regardless of intentionality, materiality, processes, form or persistence (Windfeld Lund 2024), properties which have been highlighted as important qualifiers by earlier documentalists (Otlet 1990; Briet et al. 2006; Buckland 1997). In connection to this statement, it would have been enriching to read Windfeld Lund's own reflections on this relatively considerable divergence from the documentalist tradition established from the end of the 19th century and onwards. The question remains what such an all-encompassing perspective of documents and documentation entails for this tradition, and furthermore, how it affects the distinctiveness of the document concept itself, as elaborated through the roughly century-spanning discussions surrounding it.

To summarize these impressions, Windfeld Lund's book provides a promising and potentially fruitful framework for undertaking analyses of documents and documentary processes, as well as a useful epistemological starting point for such studies in the form of the complementary, three-dimensional model. Concerning the questions raised regarding the widely general definition of document – and its divergence from 20th century documentalist tradition – it is to be hoped that such questions will be addressed through continued scholarly debate regarding the book's propositions. In connection to this, it will be intriguing to see how empirical studies will eventually develop from the book's framework, and also what the future holds for the proposed discipline of DIC studies. Time will tell what the future holds for these ideas, and in light of these proposals, the meaning of the book's title – *Introduction to Documentation Studies* – becomes clearer.

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