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Abstract: Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to advance document ontology and epistemology by proposing a framework for analysing documents from multiple perspectives of research and practice. Design/methodology/approach – Understanding is positioned as an epistemic aim of documents, which can be approached through phenomenology. Findings – A phenomenological framework for document analysis is articulated. **Neki Boldovan Neki Italic** Key concepts in this framework are include intrinsic information, extrinsic information, abtrinsic information, **Neki 2 Boldovan Neki 2 Italic** and adtrinsic information. Information and meaning are distinguished. Finally, documents are positioned as part of a structural framework, which includes individual documents, parts of documents (docemes and docs), and systems of documents. Research limitations/implications – Scholarship is extended with an eye toward holism; still, it is possible that important aspects of documents are overlooked. This framework serves as a stepping-stone along the continual refinement of methods for understanding documents. Practical implications – Both scholars and practitioners can consider documents through this framework. This will lead to further co-understanding and collaboration, as well as better education and a deeper understanding of all manner of document experiences. Originality/value – This paper fills a need for a common way to conceptualise documents that respects the numerous ways in which documents exist and are used and examined. Such coherence is vital for the advancement of document scholarship and is the promotion of document literacy in society, which is becoming increasingly important.

Key Words: Keywords Phenomenology, Document analysis, Document experience, Document handling, Document systems, Properties of documentary practice

1. Introduction

Do documents exist? Or, perhaps more to the point: how do documents exist?

Questions about existence are, of course, not unique to documents, as **Neki Boldovan Neki Italic** evidenced by the sprawling literature in ontological philosophy. **Neki2 Boldovan Neki 2Italic** Yet,

as Heidegger (1927/2010) pointed out, most of this inquiry assumes existence as a *fait accompli* and is more interested in questions regarding, for instance, classification. In Heidegger's terms, traditional ontology asks questions about beings, not about being.

With documents, assuming existence as self-evident – failing to ask about being – raises a host of issues. If a document is taken to be anything that furnishes evidence or proof of something (Buckland, 1997), how is it that objects become documents? And why do some things become documents while others do not? How can we account for, to give Meyriat's (1981) example, Napoleon's letters, which furnished one sort of proof in the days of their progenitor but today furnish a different one altogether? Academic interest in documents has mostly sidestepped these questions, but the emerging neo-documentalist tradition (see Lund and Buckland, 2009) offers the opportunity to explore documental being and becoming.

As reviewed by Lund (2009), document scholars historically focused on the material aspects of documents; more recently, the academic focus has turned toward the social and perceptual aspects of documents. In this latter vein it is, by now, well accepted that documents only exist in the presence of a human actor. For instance, Meyriat (1981) described the document as:

[...] not inherent, but rather the product of will, either to inform or to be informed – the second, at least, being always necessary. If this will doesn't garner a response from the beholder, the information remains only potential. The object on which the information is written or inscribed is not yet a document. It becomes one when a question is asked of it and its information is activated (p. 54, translation ours).

[1]

1.1.What is holistic analysis?

Analysis is a detailed examination of the elements or structure of something. It is a way to break something into its parts to make the appreciation of it more manageable. At its best, analysis should be done with the constant self-reminder that the parts belong to a whole. This recalls Hegel's (1807/2005) ideal view of scientific development as the cycle of first breaking down concepts into ever-smaller categories, and then putting them back together to gain a holistic understanding.

This vision notwithstanding, sometimes analysis loses the forest for the trees. We use the term holistic analysis to serve as a reminder that all parts that are analysed should be considered not only in and of themselves, but also in relation to each other as parts of an interconnected whole. Moreover, as will be seen further on, entities that may seem "whole" in themselves can, in turn, be seen as parts of progressively more complex wholes.

2.Act One: documental becoming

A document is only truly a document when an information object is perceived by an agent in a particular context. With no agent, the “document” – what Couzinet (2015) called a “dormant document” – is merely an information object. In the most typical case of a document, the information object is a physical object, and the agent is a human being. Thus, in this paper we use “person” and “object” as a kind of shorthand, not denying that other types of documents exist (e.g. animal-object, person-person).

When the person and the object come together (in present reality, in memory, or in imagination), a transaction occurs (Wood and Latham, 2014). This transaction entails the momentary “fusion” of two whole beings: the person and the object. Thus, in this framework, the object of analysis is always person plus object. The documental transaction has been viewed as the individual’s “experience” of the document (Latham, 2014). The term experience here is drawn from Dewey’s (1934/2005) aesthetics. For Dewey, “an experience” is singular and meaningful, marked off from the banal procession of everyday experience. Dewey used the term transaction to describe such marked experiences; we extend the use of this term to characterize the coming together of person and object in all documents. Latham (2014) offered a framework for dissecting document experiences, in the form of a continuum of possible experiences with a document that range from efferent (cognitive, logical, intellectual) on one end and aesthetic (emotional, spiritual, holistic) on the other end. Here we add further nuance to that characterization.

Below, we describe the four types of information that contribute to documental meaning. In short, the object furnishes intrinsic information (physical properties) and extrinsic information (attributed properties); the person furnishes abtrinsic information (e.g. related to their psychological state) and adtrinsic information (e.g. memories). These informations are processed by the person; as a result, the four types of information become documental meaning (see Figure 1). As discussed below, meaning is made by humans (individually and socially); it does not exist apart from the person.



Phenomenological structure of documental becoming

3.Making meaning from information

Buckland (1997) described documents as being made from the human processing of objects. The first part of this processing is the ascertaining of information through the senses and memory, as described above. Immediately and simultaneously, this ascertaining gives way to meaning-making: the construction of meaning from information. It is accepted that information is different from meaning, but how it is different is a matter of discussion. To shed light on this distinction, we draw on Bates' (2006, p. 1042) definitions of two levels of information:

Information 1: the pattern of organization of matter and energy (recalling Shannon and Weaver, 1949).

Information 2: some pattern of organization of matter and energy given meaning by a living being (or its constituent parts).

H1	H2	H3
R1C1	R1C2	R1C3
R2C1	R2C2	R2C3

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