There are numerous writings on the definition, scope, and nature of ''documentation,'' much of it concerned with the relationships between documentation, bibliography, and librarianship. Unfortunately, much of this literature, like much of the later discussion of information science and librarianship, is undermined by the authors' attempts to create or amplify distinctions where the differences are not really fundamental but, rather, a matter of emphasis.

Loosjes (1962, pp. 1–8) explained documentation in historical terms: Systematic access to written texts, he wrote, became more difficult after the invention of printing resulted in the proliferation of texts; scholars were increasingly obliged to delegate tasks to specialists; assembling and maintaining collections was the field of librarianship; bibliography was concerned with the descriptions of documents; the delegated task of creating access for scholars to the topical contents of documents, especially of parts within printed documents and without limitation to particular collections, was documentation.

After about 1950, more elaborate terminology, such as ''information science,'' ''information storage and retrieval,'' and ''information management,'' increasing replaced the word ''documentation.''

From Documentation Back to "Document"

The problems created by the increase in printed documents led to development of the techniques of documentation. However, the rise of documentation led, in turn, to a new and intriguing question that received little direct attention then or since.

Documentation was a set of techniques developed to manage significant (or potentially significant) documents, meaning, in practice, printed texts. But there was (and is) no theoretical reason why documentation should be limited to *texts*, let alone *printed* texts. There are many other kinds of signifying objects in addition to printed texts. And if documentation can deal with texts that are not printed, could it not also deal with documents that are *not* texts at all? How extensively could documentation be applied? Stated differently, if the term ''document'' were used in a specialized meaning as the technical term to denote the objects to which the techniques of documentation could be applied, how far could the scope of documentation be extended. What could (or could not) be a document? The question was, however, rarely formulated in these terms.

An early development was to extend the notion of document beyond written texts, a usage to be found in major English and French dictionaries. [For historical background on ''document,'' see also Sagredo Fernández & Izquierdo Arroyo (1982)]. ''Any expression of human thought'' was a frequently used definition of ''document'' among documentalists. In the U.S.A., the phrases ''the graphic record'' and ''the generic book'' were widely used. This was convenient for extending the scope of the field to include pictures and other graphic and audio-visual materials. Paul Otlet (1868–1944), is known for his observation that documents could be three-dimensional, which enabled the inclusion of sculpture. From 1928, museum objects were likely to be included by documentalists within definitions of ''document'' (e.g., Dupuy-Briet, 1933).

The overwhelming practical concern of documentalists was with printed documents, so the question of how far the definition of ''document'' could be extended received little direct attention. Nevertheless, the occasional thoughtful writer would touch on the topic, perhaps because interested in some novel form of signifying object, such as educational toys, or because of a desire to generalize.

Paul Otlet: Objects as Documents

Otlet extended the definition of ''document'' halfway through his *Traité de documentation* of 1934. Graphic and written records are representations of ideas or of objects, he wrote, but the *objects themselves* can be regarded as ''documents'' if you are informed by observation of them. As examples of such ''documents,'' Otlet cites natural objects, artifacts, objects bearing traces of human activity (such as archaeological finds), explanatory models, educational games, and works of art (Otlet, 1934, p. 217; also Otlet 1990, pp. 153, 197, and Izquierdo Arroyo, 1995).

In 1935, Walter Schürmeyer wrote: ''Nowadays one understands as a document any material basis for extending our knowledge which is available for study or comparison'' [''Man versteht heute unter einem Dokument jede materielle Unterlage zur Erweiterung unserer Kenntnisse, die einem Studium oder Vergleich zugänglich ist'']. (Schürmeyer, 1935, p. 537.)

Similarly, the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation, an agency of the League of Nations, developed, in collaboration with Union Français des Organismes de Documentation, technical definitions of ''document'' and related technical terms in English, French, and German versions and adopted:

Document: Toute base de connaissance, fixée matériellement, susceptible d'être utilisée pour consultation, étude ou preuve. Exemples: manuscrits, imprimés, représentations graphiques ou figurés, objets de collections, etc.

Document: Any source of information, in material form, capable of being used for reference or study or as an authority. Examples: manuscripts, printed matter, illustrations, diagrams, museum specimens, etc.

Dokument: Dokument is jeder Gegenstand, der zur Belehrung, zum Studium oder sur Beweisführung dienen kann, z.B. Handschriften, Drucke, graphische oder bildliche Darstellungen, usw. (Anonymous, 1937, p. 234)