

Bibliodiversity's Documentation: A Conceptual Exploration of Documents, Practices, and Information

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- The *International Declaration of Independent Publishers 2014* describes bibliodiversity as “**a complex self-sustaining system of storytelling, writing, publishing and other kinds of production of oral and written literature**” (International Alliance of Independent Publishers 2014, 4).
- Documents and practices with them – that is, **documentation** – plays a foundational role in **materializing** and making possible the diverse kinds of content, stories, and information that bibliodiversity contributes to thriving cultures and healthy eco-social systems.



A documentary approach helps shift focus (back) to information's materiality, (re)contextualizes information, transverses disciplinary boundaries, and emphasizes the practices with documents involved in and with information.

It illuminates four main directions for research and exploration:

- information's materiality
- information's contextualization
- the traversing of disciplinary boundaries
- showing the practices involved with and afforded by documents.

But What is a Document?

“A document allows for the **materialization of information**, helping transform it from something that is intangible into something that is **tangible** that, in turn, can be used by many different actors for various purposes in diverse settings” (Kosciejew 2017, 98-99).

A document is “any **physical** or symbolic sign, **preserved or recorded, intended to represent, to reconstruct, or to demonstrate** a physical or conceptual phenomenon” (Briet quoted in Buckland 1998).

- Documentation should not be viewed as being concerned only with texts but instead with access to **evidence**.
- Evidence is not only **textual** but comes in many forms including **digital, aural/audio, visual, imagery, pictorial, statuary**, and so on.

Thus, documents necessarily exist in a **material form or format**. They are objects that **instantiate and furnish evidence**, that is, information.

But What is a Document?

Focusing on these important material aspects of documents is further extended when examinations of **practices** are included, such as looking at the practices afforded, enabled, required, and conversely prohibited by the documents.

An object can therefore be considered as a document if it somehow instructs, proves, or serves as evidence of something; or, put differently, an object can be a document if it furnishes some kind of information.

The following discussion is arranged into three broad sections.

1. The first section discusses the materiality of information.
2. The second section distinguishes between information and documentation.
3. The third section argues for a materialist orientation, specifically a documentary-materialist approach, to and for bibliodiversity specifically and information generally.

The Materiality of Information

Information's materiality often tends to be either ignored or taken for granted.



Many people tend to focus on the content, stories, or information instead of their instantiations.



“For the most part we take...materiality for granted, or we assume that there is little of interest to say about it” (Coole and Frost 2010, 1).

Many explorations of information often take for granted its materiality.

It is usually assumed that there is little of interest to say about it; consequently, there is little examination of its actual materiality: that is, its documentation.

The Materiality of Information

Focusing on documentation “cuts across the dual oppositions of document and information, giving special attention to matter by examining the materiality of documentation and the practices, processes, and assemblages involved in the materialization of information” (Kosciejew 2017, 98).

In other words, a focus on documentation foregrounds the materiality of information to help (re)configure understandings and uses of it as something, not immaterial or intangible, but as something material and tangible.

Information- as-Thing

Buckland presents the concept of “information-as-thing” to better understand the distinction, and relation, between these two terms.

This concept denotes bits, bytes, books, and other physical media and technologies, including any material object or action perceived as signifying something.

- He states that, in this sense, information becomes synonymous with a broad view of document.
- A document is a material object that materializes information; in other words, **a document is an object whilst information is instantiated in or by that object.**

Distinctions between Information and Documentation

First, while many considerations of information usually privilege the concept of information, documentation reorients the focus to the material objects in which information is instantiated.

It examines the kinds of documents and their associated practices and, in turn, their various implications and effects.

It reorients the focus to **document types**, the different kinds of **practices** with them, and their diverse constitutive **effects** (primarily the materializing of the information).

Distinctions between Information and Documentation

Second, while the concept of information tends to be decontextualized, lacking any real foundation while maintaining a seemingly 'universal' application regardless of its context, documentation is specifically rooted in **contextual contingencies**.

Documentation illuminates how documents and their associated practices are neither 'universal' nor decontextualized; instead, documentation takes into account the contexts involved with and surrounding the documents in order to provide a better understanding of information.

Distinctions between Information and Documentation

Third, while the concept of information does not belong exclusively to LIS, documentation is uniquely related to the discipline whilst extending its scope and **transversing other disciplines**.

Lund states that, while it remains an important part of LIS, “**the very diversity of the projects** [nevertheless] demonstrates that the field of [documentation] may not be defined as a specific empirical field, but rather by taking a **special perspective upon the world**, viewing human life from a documentation perspective” (Lund 2007, 19).

There must be an awareness “**of the complexity of documentation and that a document can never be completely isolated and considered to be essentially about one specific issue; instead, it must be viewed within a certain environment and how it has turned into a document to be analyzed**” (Lund 2007, 19).

Documentation’s complexity and diversity not only demands a **diverse application**, but, simultaneously, **expands areas of research and possibilities of information**.

Distinctions between Information and Documentation

Fourth, analyzing the **practices** associated with documents sheds light on how it is documents that are researched, consulted, and used, first and foremost, before any analyses of their information.

Research, for instance, necessarily involves searching for, accessing, and retrieving documents.

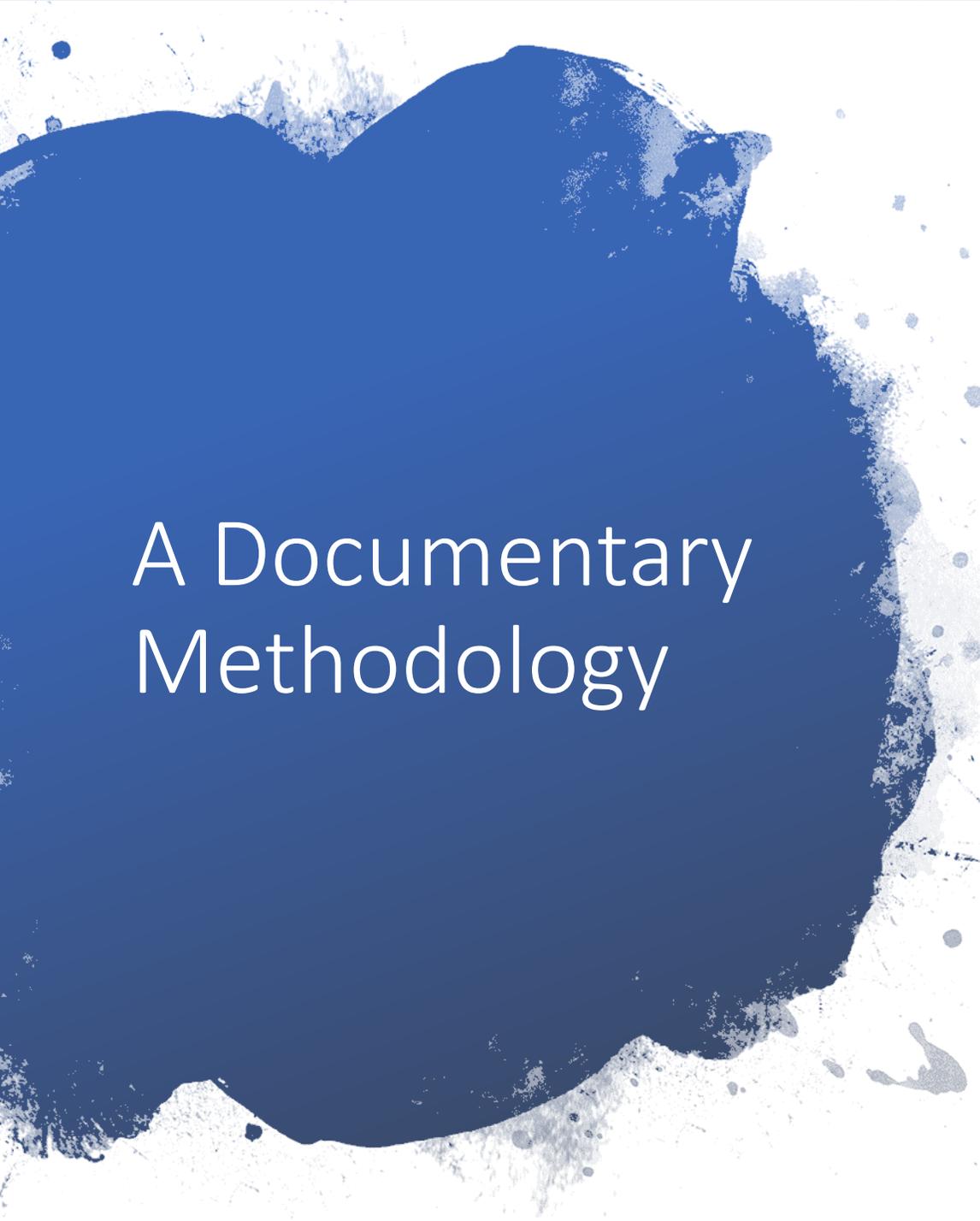
- Is everything that one retrieves, seeks, or searches for, information? It is arguably more helpful to reorient focus from information retrieval to documentation retrieval because what is of interest when it comes to this practice is the retrieval of documents.

A Documentary Approach for Bibliodiversity

- A documentary approach does not aim to introduce a new phenomena to bibliodiversity but instead to present another important way of studying and understanding it.
- Lund explains that such an approach **“is not supposed to provide a framework for a new kind of object not dealt with in other disciplines...[instead] it is more a framework for making an analysis of the same empirical field, but from a different perspective and thus actually not focusing on the exact same objects”**.
- While the term document is not new, a documentary methodology provides a fresh way in which to view documents and information.

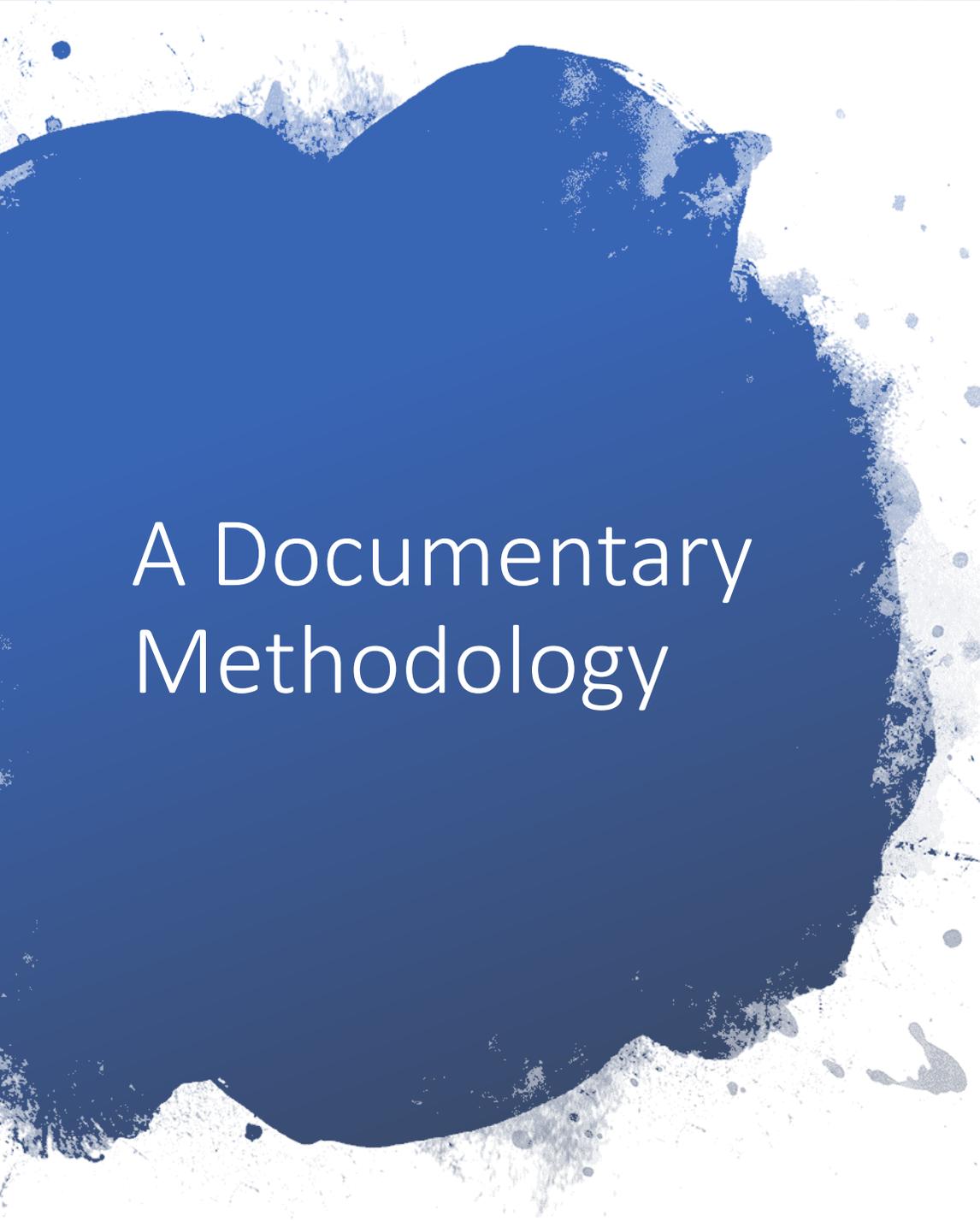
A Material- Documentary Literacy Framework

- Applying this framework involves placing “**a specific document, or documents, at the center of observation, study, and analysis and thereby develops documentary dialogues about and for it, uses the document to better illuminate its context, and integrates the document in teaching and researching [and managing, publishing, etc.] information**” (Kosciejew 2017, 98-99).
 - This framework therefore foregrounds documentation for analysis:
 - It examines the **materials of the objects** or phenomena;
 - **identifies each object** or phenomena as a **kind of document**;
 - studies each one’s **associated practices**, including writing, production, publication, and uses;
 - and explores **what actors, both human and nonhuman, as well as institutions, infrastructures, and systems, are involved**.
 - It further analyzes the **affordances and effects** of documentation:
 - what information they materialize, present, and make possible;
 - what message, or messages, they enable;
 - what ideas they construct or deconstruct;
 - what possibilities they illuminate or darken;
 - and what opportunities they allow or forbid.



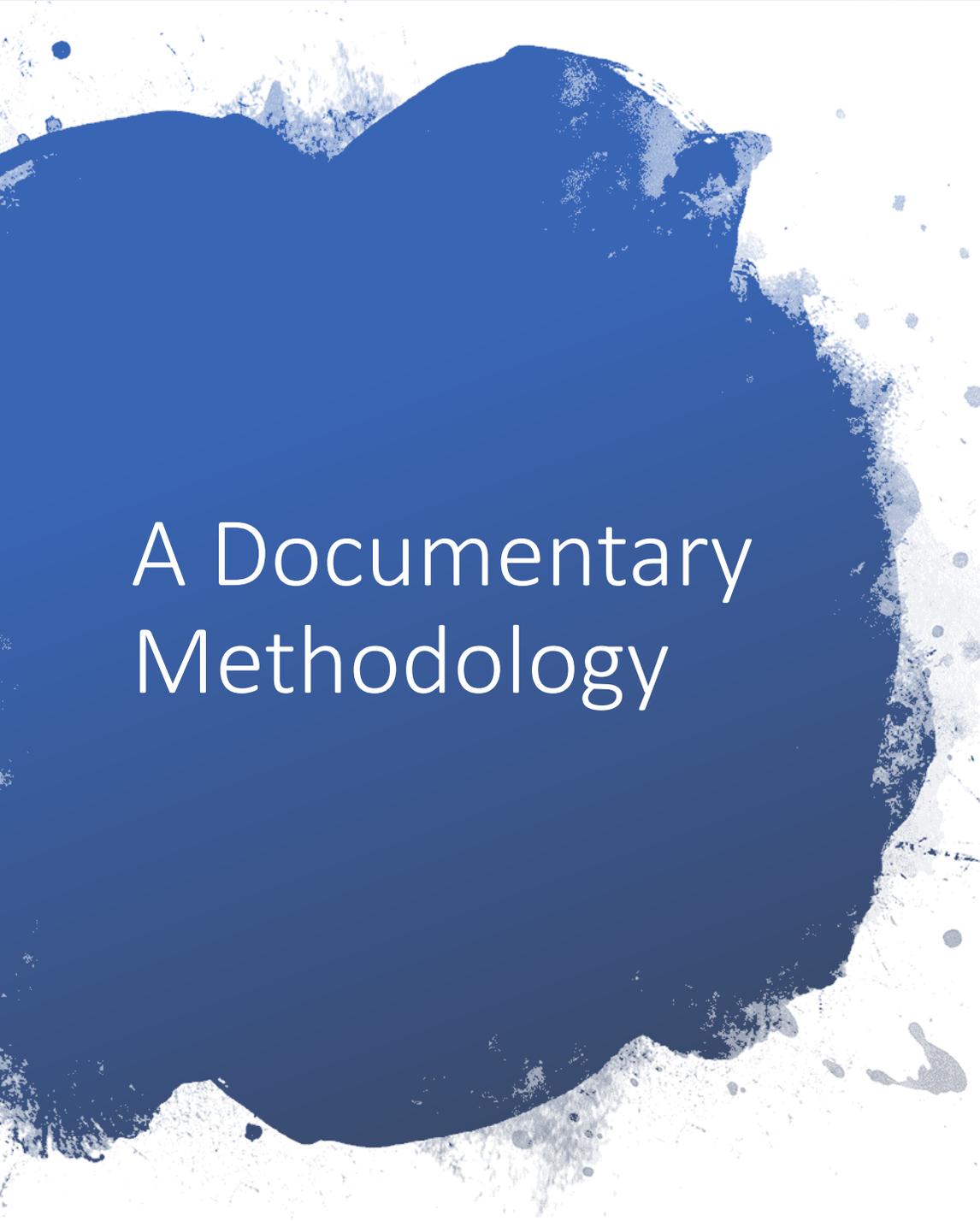
A Documentary Methodology

- Similarly, according to Buckland there are four main aspects of a documentary methodology that one can adopt:
 - human agency;
 - materials and technologies,
 - techniques and practices;
 - and effects, purposes, and outcomes.
- The first aspect, regarding **human agency**, examines **who created the document**.
 - Buckland observes how most documents “are **social productions, not the work of individuals**. A wide variety of people are involved in differing ways”.
 - Further “documents commonly have a series of lives, with different players involved in differing ways at successive stages”.



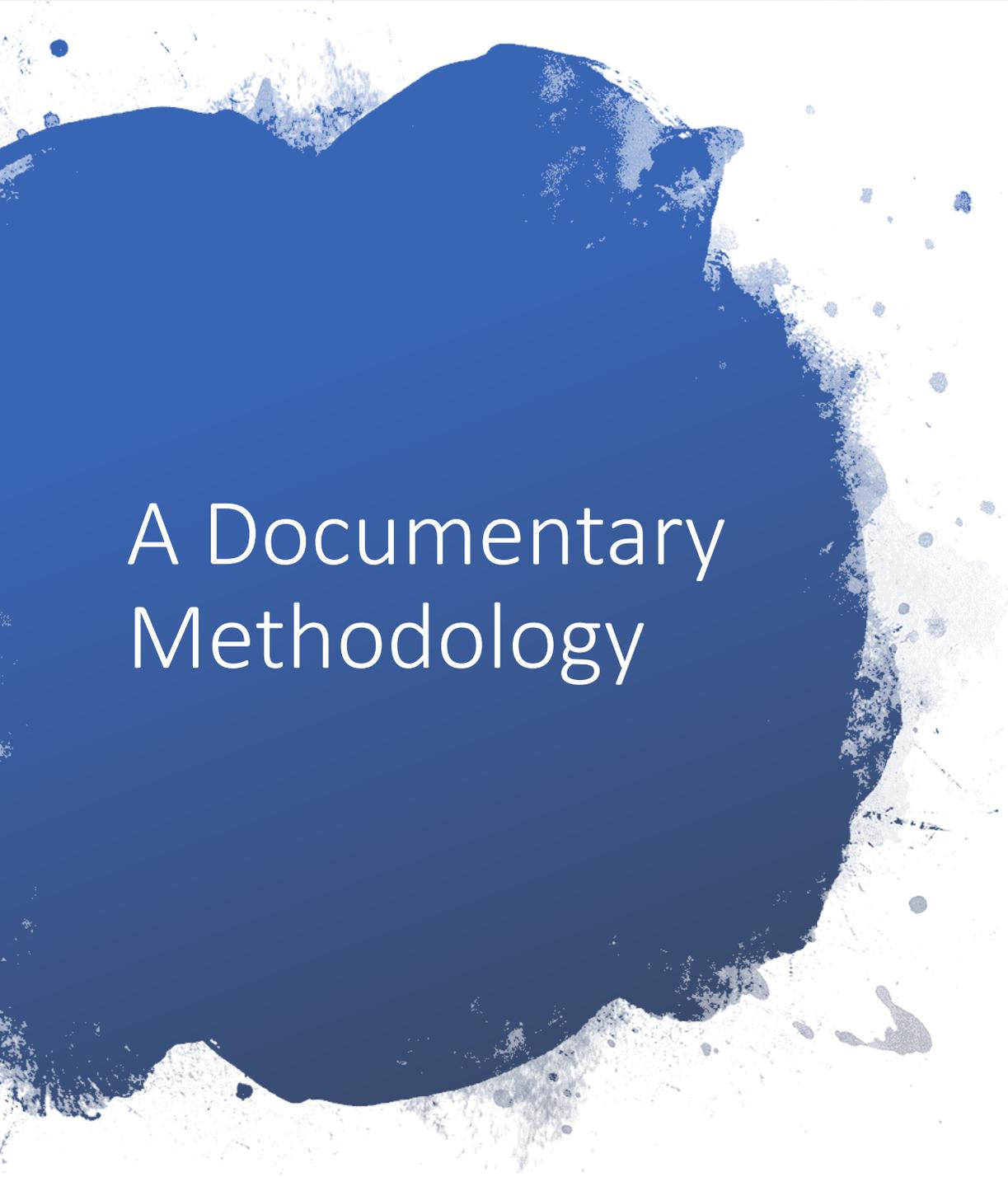
A Documentary Methodology

- Or, as Don Brenneis describes, documents have **histories and careers**.
- In his analysis of bureaucratic forms used in American federal funding agencies, he observes how these documents “are **embedded in multiple histories [at every institutional level]**”.
 - These multiple histories affect and shape the forms, formats, structure, and use of these documents.
- These histories, moreover, are intimately connected with the **careers** of these documents.
 - Brenneis states that “in order to understand these changes it is crucial to locate the forms in the specific annual administrative processes within which they figure, that is, to follow **their ‘careers’ – the ‘doings with documents’ in which they are routinely involved** – and to trace the subsequent events in which they take particular kinds of evaluative life”.
 - Richard Harper (1997) similarly observes how documents have a series of lives with different players involved in different ways at successive stages of their so-called careers.
 - **These doings with documents, in other words, are the practices associated with and afforded by different kinds of documents.**



A Documentary Methodology

- The second and third aspects of a documentary methodology examine **what materials and technologies are involved in the creation of and practices with documents.**
 - Buckland asks “what technologies were used? What resources exploited? ... What were the effects of innovation in the materials and technologies selected?”.
 - He further asks “what techniques were used? How were the technologies deployed? ... Innovation is commonly a case of existing materials and existing technologies being used in new and different ways”.
- The materials involved and used shape the object and determine the practices afforded by and with it.
 - A clay tablet involves different materials and affords different practices than a digital tablet.
 - A virtual reality story requires different equipment and infrastructures than its counterpart in a print book or even in an e-book.



A Documentary Methodology

- The fourth aspect examines the **effects** of documentation.
 - Buckland argues that “the central question “What does a document document?” has several aspects: **What was the purpose? What is revealed, often unintentionally, about the creators? More generally, how do different forms of document compare in different situations in their effectiveness for different purposes?”**.
- Frohmann argues “attention to [documents and] practices with documents reveals how it is that particular documents, at particular times and places and in particular areas of the social and cultural terrain, become informative”.
 - Documents and our practices with them are necessary not only for information’s materialization but also to **help make the document’s content, or information, informing.**

Conclusion

- A documentary perspective thus begins to show how one can conceptually approach bibliodiversity to more fully illuminate the centrality of documentation.
- The ultimate objective is placing documents, instead of information, at the centre of study or focus by analyzing their **materiality, practices, contexts, and effects** to illuminate their significance.
- Ultimately, a focus on documentation helps draw attention (back) to the important roles that documents, and their practices, play in the study and examination of bibliodiversity.

Thank you.

