Abstract: I draw on scholarship concerning the documentation of performance art to explore the tangled relationship between documentation and temporality. I investigate how documentary practices regulate distinct temporalities by examining conceptualizations of the performance document alongside definitions of the document in the history of information science. Résumé:

In *Deflating Information*, Bernd Frohmann (2004a) identifies a relationship between documentation and temporality in the context of scientific practices. He contrasts the temporalities of scientific and shamanistic knowledge; the former extends into the future, whereas the latter immediately recedes into the past, forever remaining site- and time-specific (Frohmann, 2004a, p. 134). Documents are key agents in the production of scientific knowledge for the future; they function as “material kinds of temporally and spatially situated bundles of inscriptions” that enable the standardization and reproducibility of experiments (Frohmann, 2004a, p. 137). Frohmann (2004a) argues that the conception of scientific knowledge as fixed and universal emerges from such documentary practices. However, knowledge is never “wholly present,” fully represented by and intrinsic to individual inscriptions; rather, it is “temporally diffused or deferred,” and legitimated as truth only under particular conditions (Frohmann, 2004a p. 135-6). Sets of documentary practices shape processes of becoming informed and acquiring “true” knowledge.

Unlike Frohmann, Michael Buckland (1991; 1997; 2012) sharply distinguishes informative documents and events from the durational process of becoming informed; he categorizes the former as information-as-thing, and the latter as information-as-process. Events arguably collapse Buckland’s distinction between thing and process, but he does not explore how the kinds of information in his typology overlap and entwine beyond noting that both information-as-thing and information-as-process are situational (Buckland, 1991, pgs. 356-7). Lund’s (2010) recent definition of “document” centers on time-based acts such as telling, teaching, and demonstrating; however, with his affirmation that “we may talk about documentation processes resulting in documents” (p. 74), he not only maintains Buckland’s distinction between process and thing, but also implies that a sequential relationship ties the former to the latter. In contrast, Frohmann (2008) questions the very need for definitions. He argues that an approach to documentation as sets of practices would reveal the functions of documents, that is, how they perform and what they enact within specific institutional, social, and cultural contexts as opposed to what they essentially are (Frohmann, 2004a; 2004b; 2007; 2008b). In addition, I would add, such an approach would facilitate an investigation of how sets of documentary practices generate distinct temporalities. Indeed, Frohmann, Buckland, Lund’s contributions raise a host of questions: How does information-as-thing act on information-as-process? How do different sets of documentary practices, for instance, practices related to digital documents, shape the temporal conditions of “presence,” and “permanence”? If documentation regulates distinct temporalities, how does it impact the construction of subjectivity? Or, to articulate these questions in relation to the CAIS...
conference theme, how do documentary practices that exhibit different temporalities shape the narratives that we craft about ourselves?

In my full paper, I draw on literature concerning the documentation of performance art to explore these questions. Scholars in the field of performance studies consistently address ephemerality, presence, duration, and liveness in relation to documentation of performance events. They do not divorce descriptions of documentation from concerns related to the temporality of events. Moreover, as Jose Esteban Munoz (1996) writes, “performance studies, as a modality of inquiry, can surpass […] the limits of epistemology and open new ground by focusing on what acts and objects do in a social matrix rather than what they might possibly mean” (p. 12). As if in response to Frohmann’s (2008b) plea, scholars who work within the discipline of performance studies rarely seek definitions for terms such as “document” or “documentation.” Instead, they characterize performance documents according to their perceived use and function in the historiography of performance art.

Over the course of my paper, I examine these distinct conceptualizations of the performance art document alongside definitions of the document in the history of information studies. Specifically, I compare the theories of performance studies scholars Peggy Phelan (1993), Amelia Jones (1997), Philip Auslander (1997, 2006, 2008, 2010), and Rebecca Schneider (2011) with the unique definitions of “document” that Paul Otlet (1932), Suzanne Briet (2006), Buckland (1991, 1997, 2012), and N. Katherine Hayles (2003) propose. I argue that the ways in which performance studies scholars write about the documentation of performance art events indicate shifting conceptions of presence, permanence, and authorship. I show that these scholars’ views are tied to sets of documentary practices that bring distinct temporalities into being, and link each of these temporalities, in turn, to distinct notions of the “work” of performance art and to views on authorship; I tie the technologies that condition documentary practices to concepts embedded in historical narratives of performance art, and explore the implications information science research.

Indeed, in the wake of the recent institutionalization of performance art - Tate Modern, the Museum of Modern Art, and Centre Georges Pompidou have all devoted departments to the form in the past decade - documents of performance art are increasingly accessible via online databases and archives. In the online environment, archivists, scholars, and artists may manage, arrange, describe, codify, disseminate, and use performance documents in ways that material records do not permit. If, as Frohmann (2008b) argues, the kinds of practices associated with documents determine their meaning, then the digitization of the performance art archive will transform both the historiography and the history of performance art. In my paper, I amplify these ideas by also investigating the temporalities that these practices exhibit.

References:


