

53. These three terms are in English in the original.
54. (1902–1981). Director of the Library of Congress (1945–1954).
55. Institut International de Bibliographie.
56. Jaime Torres-Bodet (1902–1974). Director of UNESCO (1948–1952).
57. In 1950, a group of Danish students came to Valognes library, which is famous for its books dating from the Middle Ages, and which had been damaged in the last year of World War II. On a UNESCO mission, they helped recreate the library catalog.
58. International Council of Museums (UNESCO).
59. Paul Perrier (1886–1965). Colleague of Briet's at the Bibliothèque Nationale, author of *L'Unité Humaine, Histoire de la Civilisation et de l'Esprit Humain* [Human Unity, History of Civilization and of Human Spirit] (Paris: F. Alcan, 1931) and of *L'Unification Humaine* [Human Unification] (Paris, Albin Michel, 1948).
60. The French social and political review *La Revue des Deux Mondes*.
61. The French original is unclear in this sentence: "En effet, plus les masses innombrables et incultes venues de tous les champs de la liberté sont appelées à monter en ligne, plus il est nécessaire de les instruire, de les éclairer, de les assister culturellement."
62. "Quel siècle à mains!" Arthur Rimbaud, *Une Saison en Enfer*. "J'ai horreur de tous les métiers. Maîtres et ouvriers, tous paysans, ignobles. La main à plume vaut la main à charrue. —Quel siècle à mains !—"

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“A Necessity of Our Time”: Documentation as “Cultural Technique” in *What Is Documentation?*

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The “Cultural or Functional Specialization” of Documentation

Suzanne Briet's small book, *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?* (*What Is Documentation?*), is not only of historical interest, but also of theoretical interest. My own background is neither that of a historian, per se, nor that of a biographer. For a biographical introduction to Briet, we have included in this volume Michael Buckland's brief biography. For a history of French documentation and its European context, the English reader will have to read in French or await a translation of Sylvie Fayet-Scribe's *Histoire de la Documentation en France: Culture, Science et Technologie de l'Information: 1895–1937*¹ or a similar work. For a combination biography and documentary history, Mary Niles Maack's article “The Lady and the Antelope: Suzanne Briet's Contribution to the French Documentation Movement”² is recommended. In this essay, however, I would like to pull together several theoretical issues from Briet's work, largely concentrating on the notion of “culture,” and I will end by discussing the importance of one of Briet's particular understandings of the term “culture” for the future of libraries as a particular type of documentation agency. With this reading I wouldn't claim to exhaust the very admirable complexity and subtlety of Briet's book, which I have indicated in the preface to this volume, but rather I want to simply emphasize a certain reading of her work, focusing upon the meaning of “culture” within it. Such an

exploration also involves, however, coming to terms with her understanding of the epistemology of documents, a question which we will first engage.

Michael Buckland's article "What Is a Document?"³ brought Briet's works to historical and critical consciousness in the library and information science community in its discussion of the first few important pages of Briet's *What Is Documentation?* In this article, Buckland poses the question of what constitutes a "document." Briet's *What Is Documentation?* first suggests, citing the definition of "document" from the French Union of Documentation Organizations (UFOD), that documents can be defined as "all bases of materially fixed knowledge, and capable of being used for consultation, study, and proof." From this beginning, Buckland in his article examines documents from the aspect of their being evidence in any physical form.

In her book, though, Briet immediately "counters" this initial definition of documents as evidence, offering another one that less opposes and more amends the first definition, one which, as she writes, has been suggested by "linguists" and "philosophers": "any concrete or symbolic indexical sign [*indice*], preserved or recorded toward the ends of representing, of reconstituting, or of proving a physical or intellectual phenomenon." In the pages immediately following this statement, Briet provides a range of examples demonstrating how and in what social and discursive contexts documents are indexical signs. Documents are shown to be examples—or "evidence"—of things or larger groupings of things: a star is not a document, but a photograph of a star is; a pebble isn't a document, but a pebble in a mineralogical collection is; a wild animal isn't a document, but an animal in a zoo is. A document is evidence insofar as it is an example. Buckland's emphasis, from Briet's initial definition, of documents being any physical form or format remains in this latter definition, but the notion of evidence is developed and begins with intensional, rather than extensional, reference, and it starts with constellations of referencé, rather than the self-announcing "fact."

In *What Is Documentation?*, Briet then develops the notions of "initial," or primary, and "secondary" documents. Initial documents are the initially cataloged thing. Secondary documents are all that follow from this. Briet's privileged example is that of a newly discovered antelope. It is a primary document insofar as it is cataloged as an antelope. From then on, the animal is taken up in various other discourses and activities and, in the words of the philosopher Raymond Bayer, whom Briet quotes, "immediately becomes weighted down under a 'vestment of documents' [*vêtture de documents*]." The documentary "fertility" of the original "fact" is, from its discovery through its continuous unfolding in social and cultural spaces, dependent upon these discourses, their differences, and their powers for its initial and secondary

identities. We may call the primary system of discourse that cultural field which first defines the object as some type of object or initial or primary document (zoology is the field in the case of Briet's antelope), and we may call the secondary system of discourse those cultural fields which make use of an initial cataloging or classification. These secondary systems, for Briet, cover a wide variety of scholarly and popular arenas.

For example, as Briet shows, there are the documentary systems of the popular media, of the cinema, of the academic lecture hall, and many others. These "documentary systems" are, at least in some cases, what we would now call in some disciplines "discursive systems." However, the common documentary element of these discourses and their accompanying social networks is that of naming objects according to institutionally or socially normative systems. In cataloging, objects are placed in relation to other objects based on shared and essential properties and, so, the objects are named accordingly. In formal systems, such as library catalogues, indexes, and so on, these names are composed out of formal classes. The relation of the catalogued name to the object is descriptive within classes. In brief, the naming of an object within Briet's notion of *indice* has a double indexical relationship: the name points to the object and the name reflects the networks in which the object first appears as a named thing, that is, as an example of something (for example, as an example of a new type within the class "antelope").

Surely, given the time and place of Briet's writing (Paris, probably slightly before 1951) and given the epistemology of documents presented, we may suggest that structuralism and semiotics were the "philosophy" and "linguistics" that Briet writes led her to a definition of documents as *indice*. With this latter definition the earlier definition of documents given in the book is not left behind, but rather, it is developed away from a positivist understanding. For Briet, "facts" are rich in meaning through their appearance in multiple forms and series of documents.

As I have pointed out elsewhere,⁴ such an extensive network model of scientific and documentary production, such as Briet's text suggests, would not be conceived again until Actor Network Theory nearly 50 years after the publication of *What Is Documentation?* As I noted, the rhetorical similarity between Briet's narrative of the discovery of an antelope and its portrayal in various discursive structures, and Latour's account of the capture and representation of exotic fauna in one of his texts,⁵ is striking. We may suppose that Briet's development of a type of network analysis based on the indexical nature of signs and collections of signs originated not only from her familiarity with the "philosophy" and "linguistics" of her day, but also from her background in librarianship and documentation, which involved the practical

understanding of naming in library and documentary cataloging and classification systems in relation to specific cultures of scientific and professional practices.

In *What Is Documentation?* Briet's theoretical differences with earlier documentation and with librarianship are clearly presented. The most cutting of Briet's observations in *What Is Documentation?* must be in regard to the dream and the attempt of the father of European Documentation, Paul Otlet, to assemble a universal bibliography. Both praising Otlet's leadership in international bibliography and also marking a substantial break between what we might see as Otlet's first generation documentation and Briet's second generation documentation, Briet writes:

Little by little, the theory of documentation has grown since the great period of the typographical explosion that began in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, which corresponds to the development of the historical sciences as the progress of technique. OTLET had been its magus, the international leader, with his Institute of Bibliography in Brussels, his universal decimal classification system, his Council of Scientific Unions, and his *Mundaneum*. Others, less ambitious—or, more prudent—plowed the furrows of a culture that failed, in Otlet's circle, to descend from the clouds. *Documentology* lost nothing in alleviating itself of a Universal Bibliographic Catalog [Répertoire Bibliographique Universel—RBU], which everyone had considered a dream and which did not offer a comparable attraction to the most localized of union catalogues.

For Otlet, documentation would be successful insofar as it provided a universal bibliography, centralized in a world library in a world city. From this storehouse of knowledge, users could be served, one day using television screens to deliver the information to the user who could view it from his or her workstation or armchair.⁶ Briet, however, rejects this model as idealistic. The reason for her rejection is central and is illustrated not only in the first few pages, but throughout her book. For Briet there is no need for a centralized universal bibliography; a universal bibliography is better served by a network model of multiple documentary organizations or agencies. Through standardized training (Briet helped found the National Institute of Documentary Techniques [l'Institut National des Techniques de la Documentation (INTD)], which is still part of the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts [Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers—the Parisian technical university]), universal bibliography could be achieved much more efficiently than with a bibliographical center. Local agencies of documentation must serve their user population not only by warehousing documents but also by

"prospecting" the boundaries of known fields. The documentalist must not only be the "milkmaid" of science, retrieving new documents for the scholar, but as Briet puts it elsewhere, documentalists must be like the "dog on the hunt, in advance of the researcher, guided, guiding."⁷ This role of not only professional service but also expert prospecting, within and at the edges of a given "cultural field" of science, is an important attribute that we will soon return to.

Briet's break with Otlet's vision of documentation occurs not only in regard to the centralization of bibliography and the "cultural" expertise of the documentalist but also in regard to the role of the documentalist in relation to the users of documentary services. This is where the user emphasis of the American library tradition, and in particular, the special library tradition, comes into conflict with the European library tradition stressing collection building and closed stacks. Briet, as we may recall, was the founder of the *Salle des Catalogues et Bibliographies*—the reference room—at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*. For Briet, the documentalist must locate him- or herself intellectually, and even institutionally, beside the researcher. The reasons for this are several. First, there is the need for expertise in the technical or academic field in which the documentalist works (this is an important part of what Briet means when she stresses that documentation must have a cultural specialization). Second, there is the need for the documentalist to find new materials at the cutting edge of research in the field and as the field overlaps with other fields. Third is the importance that Briet places upon documentation as part of scientific research. Since prospecting for information is part of the documentalist's job, Briet views the documentalist as integral to discovery and communication in science and in scholarship as a whole.

This division between the first (Otlet) and the second (Briet) generation of documentation runs parallel to the difference between librarianship and documentation that Briet marks in *What Is Documentation?* The difference here is that documentation is involved not simply with subject specialization, particularly in regard to the privileged form of the book; instead, documentation is a "cultural" specialization from which the material and aesthetic form of the document issues. For Briet, the "human sciences" (and with them, libraries) are largely concerned with the value of accumulated materials. The traditional form of this accumulation is the entity of the book. The sciences, on the other hand, are "revolutionary." For Briet, the sciences function by advancing or overturning past work, and so they neither are limited to nor do they privilege books, and with them, libraries. Whereas "the book" for Otlet was the privileged material object, as well as a trope that stood for all forms of documentation, the practice of documentation, and the whole of

human knowledge, for Briet, the book is largely a relic of an earlier type of scholarship that lingers in the human sciences, and its form has since become dispersed in other documentary forms more suited to more networked and “revolutionary” types of intellectual production. The documentation agency sees books as but one—a historically specific and important, but isolated—form of document.

Since Briet sees prospecting and the documentary diffusion of materials as central to the documentalist’s work, the documentalist, claims Briet, has both a central role and a creative role in the development of knowledge across “multi-formed documents.” This claim marks a strong difference with the traditional library task of building collections of largely paper-based and bound materials. The gravitational center of libraries is books and book collections, and the central orientation of librarians, even today, is toward these forms. The gravitational center of documentation centers is the social or professional network that is serviced and the various types of materials of any physical type or form that may be used therein. Whereas the library ethos precludes performing scholarly work for the scholar, Briet argues that documentalists may be involved with reading and abstracting materials for the scholars they serve as well as with the “creative” tasks of juxtaposing and likewise arranging materials to produce new insights. The documentalist is focused upon the “cultural” or “functional” networks (inclusive of discourses) and tasks of a specialization. This, what Briet terms cultural “orientation,” or what we may call “attunement,” is central for the documentalist profession:

Thus, we now perceive two tendencies: with librarians, the concern is that of producing card catalogs, and consequently increasingly vast, almost universal union catalogs which are able to respond to the question: where can one find a particular work, a rare edition?—without respect to the subject involved. On the other side, with documentalists, there is an effort to prospect and divulge the very diverse means of access to multi-form documents, with the means specific to each discipline. These two tendencies correspond to the specialty of the professions: the former is essentially related to the form of documents, the latter is centered on the cultural or functional specialization. The researchers and scholars find their rewards in these two enterprises of current awareness and orientation.

“A New Cultural Technique”

Given this “cultural or functional specialization” within a practice, Briet’s concept of the “cultural necessity” of documentation might, however, also be

read as having a grander, more historical, referent than that of specific sets of practices and discourses in science or scholarship: “Culture,” with a capital “C,” as we might write. There is some evidence of this in her writing. Here, one must closely examine the rhetorical structure of her texts that marks a particular form of historicity, that of progress and development: “efficiency,” “dynamism,” “inevitability,” “necessity,” “our time.” For example, Briet states in her article, “Bibliothécaires et documentalistes”:

It is necessary to return to [Robert] Pagès. His message has not had, at the moment or when he made his statements, all the discussion that is merited, because it lacked an audience prepared to receive it. This is why, two years later [in *What Is Documentation?*], we attempted to explain those things, which, in our eyes, were documentation: a technique of intellectual work, a new profession, a need of our *time*. Pagès’ dialectics and axioms are irrefutable. They may be summarized through some phrases pulled from his text and placed end to end: the crisis of definition which we suffer from is only a symptom of an organizational crisis and a division of cultural work; an inevitable industrialization of intellectual work has produced the machinery (organizations and tools) that make the evolution of a new cultural technique necessary, a technique which will soon be socially decisive. Documentation is a segment of culture, but it includes the domain of librarians: the librarian is a particular case of the documentalist—both are distributors of culture. The duties of the librarian, in fact, aren’t fulfilled until she learns general documentary technique.⁸

“Homo documentator,” Briet states in the beginning of the second chapter of *What Is Documentation?* is “born out of new conditions of research and of technology (*technique*).” Here, the French word *technique* could just as well be translated with both the English words “technology” and “technique.” Throughout *Qu’est-ce que la documentation?* there exists for the English reader an ambiguity in the French word *technique*. The word can mean the equivalent of either “technique” or “technology.” The cultural conditions that Briet sees documentation being born within are those of industrial modernity and its means of production through techniques, tools, and various combinations of these. For Briet, technique and technology—production by means of “the brain” and “the hand”—run parallel to one another and converge in modern production:

The moment has arrived to prove that the exercise of documentation, with all its possibilities and all of its perfected means effectively constitutes a *new cultural technique*. Documentation is becoming more and more technical, as a specialized skill. M. Le ROLLAND has told us that the hand provides for thought,

just as a task that is partly manual serves culture, that is to say, it enriches man. He cites Julian HUXLEY: "The hands receive a precise tactile image from the materials they handle, the eyes receive a precise image from what they see. . . . The most complete definition of objects by conceptual thought has been followed by their most complete mastery by means of tools and machines." The hand has served the mind; the tool has developed the brain. The brain in turn guides the hand. Such is the omnipresence of intelligence. "Documentation is to culture as the machine is to industry" (PAGÈS).

The blending of technology and technique and intellectual and mechanical tools in documentation leads Briet to praise the work being done at MIT in cybernetics:

The progress of cybernetics, especially at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, links the complicated precision of an already old automatism to the flashy quickness of more effective electro-technical applications. The documentalist will be more and more dependent upon tools whose technicality increases with great rapidity.

But beyond the technical/technological character of documentation, there are other cultural elements that make it "a necessity for our time." Briet's book clearly spells these out: it is documentation's "dynamism" and "efficiency" that give to it a certain "rhythm." This rhythm is a sympathetic response to the more general information and communication technologies that have affected scholarship and which documentation, too, incorporates within itself:

Still, the tools of intellectual work have deeply transformed the attitude of the scholar, whatever his specialty may be. The factors of space and time intervene much more than in the past. The hourly calendar, the telephone, the microfilm reader, the typewriter, the Dictaphone, and the teletype give to intellectual work a *different rhythm*.

This observation may be Briet's most important, at least in terms of cultural theory, and it underpins her book's attempt to argue that documentation is not *just* a "cultural technique" (in terms of its fitting into particular cultural modes of production), but that it is an *exemplary* and *necessary* technique of cultural modernity as a whole. Information and communication technologies may introduce a "new rhythm" to society and culture, but they themselves are a "symptom" of Western social development. Technique and technology are, thus, two historically specific social and cultural symptoms to

which documentation responds, not only by incorporating them, but also by incorporating Western modernity's opposite trend toward global expansion. Thus, the double "rhythm" of documentation tends toward both analytical specialization and global expansion. Since Briet's task is not to question, but to "adapt" and, indeed, to grasp and control this new rhythm through documentary techniques and technology, she doesn't seem to see the cultural and social narrowness of this orientation toward simultaneous specialization and global expansion. Specifically, the "new humanism" she speaks of seems very much that of a culture, namely, what she sometimes identifies as the Western "modern":

It is not too much to speak of a new *humanism* in this regard. A different breed of researchers "is in the making." It springs from the reconciliation of the machine and the mind. Modern man cannot repudiate any aspect of his heritage. Relying on the rich experiences of the past that have been passed on to him, he resolutely turns toward the world of tomorrow. The constant development of humanity requires that the masses and the individual adapt. Here, technology [*technique*] is the symptom of a social need. "One characteristic of modern documentation is that of the coordination" of diverse "sectors in the same organization."

Thus, documentation appears as the *corrective* to ever advancing *specialization*. Closed within the more or less spacious limits of his specialty, the researcher needs to be guided through the frontier regions of his particular domain. Orientation along the margins of a subject, prospecting some of the sources in an area of research, determining expertise—these are the many requirements involved in the coordination of diverse activities.

Techniques and technologies are expressions of culture for Briet, and this "heritage" of culture, according to Briet, cannot be refused. In terms of scholarly writing and publishing and in terms of documentary production and use, Briet saw her culture undergoing a radical historical change. The change was from a medieval and early modern manner for the composition and production of knowledge, based on personal understanding, small personal libraries, and, later, books and book distribution to a modern scientific manner of knowledge production, based on cultural, social, and documentary networks for knowledge production and multiple documentary forms for its embodiment and distribution. The medieval *intellectus* (the universe as contemplated by the intellect, substantiated in, and signified as "the book") is replaced by multiple authorship and the social accumulation of knowledge; the book as the container and the trope for knowledge (Otlet) is replaced by networks of multiple documentary-form objects. Equally, this new emphasis

upon networks of knowledge rather than a centralized “book” or site of knowledge means a new importance given to “bibliography” (using the “pre-documentalist” term) as not only a documentary event but also a cultural and social event. The essence of networks as cultural grounds lie in the “references” that run through them, as their rhizomic “roots.” In the mode of documentation, even libraries are seen to rest on these rhizomic roots of “references”:

During the reorganization of the internal services and stacks of the Bibliothèque National [sic], Paris, in 1934, a separate place was found for the Catalogues and Bibliographies Room: —it was installed in the basement. Subterranean, cryptic, with its roots running in every direction through the substructure of knowledge, bibliography can be fairly said to fit into the foundation of library science. Without it there can be no scholarly research, no positive identifications, no enlightened acquisitions, no guides to reading. It is, at the same time, the source and nourishment of the intellectual life of our time. Napoleon once said something like this, “Give me your references and I can do without your report.”⁹

In Briet’s modernity—the modernity of “documentation”—knowledge is explicitly *embedded* and *emergent* in cultural and social production. The documentalist is located in specialized centers, working with, but also in a sense, ahead of, the scientist or scholar. Documentation doesn’t serve personal understanding as we sit in our armchairs in each of our own personal studies, but instead, documentation is part of public spaces of production—social networks and cultural forms. Knowledge, for Briet, is primarily social and cultural, and the production of documents is part of the social and cultural production of knowledge. Briet’s lengthy description at the beginning of her book of all the networks through which the newly discovered antelope is embodied suggests both the constituting power of social-discursive networks and cultural forms in giving value to an object and the power of the object to shuttle across discursive boundaries and to create relationships—quite literally, worlds—where none existed previously:

In our age of multiple and accelerated broadcasts, the least event, scientific or political, once it has been brought into public knowledge immediately becomes weighted down under a “vestment of documents” (Raymond Bayer). Let us admire the documentary fertility of a simple originary fact: for example, an antelope of a new kind has been encountered in Africa by an explorer who has succeeded in capturing an individual that is then brought back to Europe for our Botanical Garden [Jardin des Plantes]. A press release makes the event

known by newspaper, by radio, and by newsreels. The discovery becomes the topic of an announcement at the Academy of Sciences. A professor of the Museum discusses it in his courses. The living animal is placed in a cage and cataloged (zoological garden). Once it is dead, it will be stuffed and preserved (in the Museum). It is loaned to an Exposition. It is played on a soundtrack at the cinema. Its voice is recorded on a disk. The first monograph serves to establish part of a treatise with plates, then a special encyclopedia (zoological), then a general encyclopedia. The works are cataloged in a library, after having been announced at publication (publisher catalogues and Bibliography of France). The documents are recopied (drawings, watercolors, paintings, statues, photos, films, microfilms), then selected, analyzed, described, translated (documentary productions). The documents that relate to this event are the object of a scientific classifying (fauna) and of an ideologic [*idéologique*] classifying (classification). Their ultimate conservation and utilization are determined by some general techniques and by methods that apply to all documents—methods that are studied in national associations and at international Congresses.

Modernity, for Briet, involves the growth of networks of knowledge within the progress of “civilization.” Thus, as Briet states in the conclusion to her book, documentation is an essential mechanism of the “growing society” that she sees as a fact around her, one that spreads to the colonies and the “hinterlands.” Quoting Paul Perrier, the ideals of Enlightenment Europe, particularly after the Second World War—“universal suffrage, compulsory schooling, the battle against epidemics, the progress of feminism, social laws, the organization of work, constitutions and political parties,” spread through both “imitation” as well as “economic necessity.” The world grows toward unity, following the global diffusion and establishment of ideals, values, associations, and materials.

For Briet, documentation is part of the spread and diffusion of “science” and Western modernity, in general. For Briet, what she sees as “science” and “development” are worldwide cultural events that are brought to postcolonial countries, following in the wake of “the United Nations flag.” The following needs to be quoted in full, for it is a powerful rhetorical passage that demonstrates the historical, social, and cultural destiny that Briet sees in documentation:

Since the Second World War, UNESCO has played the chief role in assembling and energizing experts and organizations in the educational and cultural field. Its Division of Libraries, under the direction of Edw. CARTER, has systematically pursued, in relation to other sections of UNESCO, a cultural policy that guarantees that its current results will be passed onto the future. “The

living republic of minds" (J. TORRES-BODET) is being created through a subterranean evolution with the United Nations as the temporary perhaps, but useful, frame. Some outposts of scientific cooperation (Manila, Delhi, Cairo, Montevideo) are points of departure for missionaries of a new type, charged with the cultural development of the more or less uncultured masses and with multiplying contacts with scholars. The technical assistants of UNESCO, in fact, have available a sometimes immense "hinterland" to explore and organize. It is through reciprocal actions and reactions that these outposts spread out and are scientifically informed. The battle against illiteracy, the organization of a reading public, of librarianship, and of documentation in all its forms, comes in the wake of this exploration vessel flying the United Nations flag.

The "cultural technique" of documentation issues both from particular occupational cultures in Western modernity and from Western modernity as a whole. To our eyes, today, Briet's faith in the inevitable and necessary spread of Western modern science and knowledge may be perplexing. Equally striking, in a different manner though, is the difference between Briet's vision of documentation's globalism and that of Otlet's. Otlet saw all the cultures of the world centrally assembled—bibliographically, diplomatically, educationally—in European institutions and cities. European soil and the European Enlightenment would be the literal and intellectual grounds for world culture. Briet's vision of globalism is, however, that of postwar Western internationalism and "development": the necessary and active diffusion of Western ideals into other cultural, social, and geographical spaces. For Briet, Western scientific and Enlightenment values are the seeds through which the world as a whole grows together.

Cultures and the Collapse of the Meaning of "Culture"

One area where differences in culture can be immediately grasped, particularly in a documentary domain, is that of language. For Briet, on the one hand, linguistic multiplicity allows a work to be read in multiple languages. On the other, however, the "Babel" of languages hinders the diffusion of documents and ideas. Whereas Otlet and other internationalists of his generation took hope in an artificially created language (Esperanto) in order to mediate global linguistic Babel, Briet's internationalist vision, instead, poses three privileged languages (English, French, and Spanish) as documentary intermediaries to other languages. Here, once again, we can view Briet's understanding of documentation against that of Otlet's: for Briet, documentation is founded on key institutions and standards as routes for connecting

cultures (in the senses of both organizational and national cultures). In the ideology of postwar development, European culture provided these standards and its history of Western colonialism provided their conduits. However, by sort of a reverse capture, so too, the words, concepts, attitudes, and other cultural materials of "the West" are appropriated by its "others," not only outside, but also within, the geographical boundaries of what we think of as Europe and the Americas. Though Briet's book doesn't explicitly mark this reverse appropriation, its valorization of local cultures as originary sites for documentary meaning and production logically lead to this concept.

The extension of Western modernity—in a sense, the overextension and "implosion" of the meaning of "culture" in the West—may be seen as the limit to Briet's use of the term "culture" in the grander sense, that is, Western "Culture" with a capital "C." Briet depends upon the notion of Western modernist Culture in not only arguing for the "necessity" but also implying the historical inevitability of documentation. But what would happen to documentation if the notion of "culture," in the sense of "localized" or specialized cultures, were extended to the point that there was no Culture, *per se*, that one could point to as being the former sense's guiding and determining historical spirit? Analogously, one could ask today, which "English" is now spoken worldwide? What is the meaning of "democracy?" Is there a culture in Europe or North America today? Can we speak of "the West" in either a determined historical, geographical, or cultural sense, or must we see "the West," and along with it, "culture" (in both the larger and smaller senses of the word) as social networks and expressive affordances? Indeed, the practical service of documentation to *cultures* seems to promote the collapse of the concept of "Culture" as a concept upon which to dream the harmony of a single world, not to mention "Culture" as a historical spirit that determines the inevitability of documentation itself. And yet, in Briet's time and work, and as we have suggested, in a different way in Otlet's earlier time and work, the dream of world harmony was the very goal of documentation:

It has become commonplace, however, to affirm that humanity strives toward *unity*. The historical sketch that Paul PERRIER has given of this evolution over the centuries is striking. He insists on the ineluctability of the law of unification that he has discovered in his patient, historical work. He explains the success and failure of regressive or progressive human enterprises. He has put into perspective the role of international relations in our time

With this collapse of *Culture* by *cultures*, we are left with a question: what is the meaning of documentation without *Culture*? Where does documentation

issue from if not from Culture? One may be reminded here of Walter Benjamin's description of Baudelaire, imaginatively stabbing into the crowd with his pen in order to control the chaos into which the unique individual, as the basis for lyric poetry, had fallen, only to have "the crowd" send his lyrical self into the streets. If Benjamin was correct, that an older form of expression adjusts to new social rhythms that put inexorable pressures upon it by attempting to duplicate the opposing social rhythms in its own expressions, so today, in documentation, we now see an expansion of documentary forms far beyond writing, the explosion of scholarly fields into other fields (so much so that the notion of "fields" becomes problematic) and cultural fusions of many types. "Documentation" seems now to be less an expression of Western (modernist) Culture, less to be characterized by the tropes that were supposed to represent that culture (foremost in modernism, efficiency, and dynamism) and now to be more constituted by material necessity. It is material necessity that seems, today, to constitute the call of documentation, not Culture or at least, not any one culture. And where that material necessity leads, and what documentation expresses of it, will very much vary depending upon the people who use "documents." "Culture," in this sense, is not a unifying term (as in Otlet), nor is it a historical *Geist* or *Esprit*, and there is no particular "development" which documentation can ride in the wake of and claim as the origin of its own historical necessity. Rather, "cultures" may be seen in the expressions of various documents and documentary practices. This "open," "cultural" reading of "culture," as well as documentation, is the one that Briet's book suggests, even as it allies itself with the legacy of a historicist reading of "culture," seemingly for professional reasons.

The culture of documentation, as "a necessity of our time," is that of documentary *cultures* operating within, and as a product of, various types of other cultures, specific cultures that the documentalist must be familiar with and prospect at the edge of. Cultures give us whatever we may call, subsequently, "documents" and from this, documentalists. In this, Briet demonstrates herself an interesting theorist, not only of the library and the documentary professions, but also as a cultural theorist at large. Documentation is, for Briet, the way forward for "culture" but it is the way forward that will dissolve "culture" as a unifying term, at least in regard to what we call, "the West." Information and communication technologies and techniques are privileged in Briet's work as a force that collapses Culture into cultures, allowing the many cultures to disseminate and dissolve the metaphysical entity of "the West." What remains of "modernity" is precisely what Briet most emphasizes: technologies and techniques, now appropriated by those "other" cultures for whom "the West" remains somewhat more material than the term "culture"

suggests, and more pressing than a narrative of transcendental historical "necessity" allows. Such a vision stood opposed to Otlet's centralizing model, and it still stands opposed to some visions of the global future.

"Culture" and the Future of Libraries

Needless to add, "libraries" are often seen as the seat or heart of "culture." Libraries, as we know them today, are very specific to modernism, particularly to nineteenth-century modernism. Briet's vision of documentation as encompassing, but historically advancing beyond libraries and librarianship, points to the dispersal or dissolution of physical libraries, just as it points to the dissolution of Culture. The dispersal of the concept of the modern library and the dissolution of its physical presence is seen in our own time in the shift to digital libraries, which are beginning to follow the very decentralized model for collection and service that Briet's understandings of documentation centers and agencies and the roles of the documentalist point to. The term "bibliography" now covers the notion of citation across the entire Internet and across physical forms different from books. "Reference"—in its various meanings—constitutes part of bibliography, but also involves social networks, just as Briet suggested by her grounding of documentation in social networks and cultural forms. Indeed, Briet's understanding of documentation points to the end of libraries as we have known them as cornerstones or "centers" of Culture and toward "libraries"—in whatever institutional or noninstitutional form this term may be imagined in the present and future—as techniques and technologies of linkage between documents within "cultures." Briet's book seems to say, "Do you understand? Here is the future: libraries are no longer the center of documentation, but instead, we must now concentrate on techniques and technologies of documentation serving and being used by specific cultures across a broad range of documentary forms, social networks, and cultural means of expression. These will be our new 'libraries.'" Briet's "documentation centers" are, after all, founded through cultural productions, not before them. Instead of libraries as the cornerstone of Culture, documentation centers and other agencies embody particular techniques and technologies as services of and to *cultures*. The material form and the privileged trope of "the book" have been surpassed in numbers and kind by the document, of which the book is only one kind among a nonclosed set of kinds. There is no end to the physical forms or formats of documents since documents are products of cultures and, thus, there is no end to types of documentary centers and the techniques and technologies that they employ. The term "library" no longer simply refers to

a physical space that concentrates on the collection and lending of books, but now the term refers more generally to collections of data or documents of any type, organized to serve cultures of users.

Thus, Briet's *What Is Documentation?* remains a "necessity of our time" in that it points to the possibilities and limits of "culture" and with that, the possibilities and limits of any professional practice that seeks to justify itself on "cultural" grounds. On the one hand, the book marked the height of Culture (as Otlet proclaimed), and particularly what has been called "the culture of the book." On the other hand, Briet's understanding of documentation marks the importance of particular, more "localized" or specialized cultures in terms of their material needs, their specialized vocabularies, and the techniques and technologies needed to provide documentary services to these groups. It isn't that books will disappear, but rather, that books, and with them, libraries as the temple of books, are becoming specific cultural items, rather than an exemplar of Culture. These transformations will take some time, but they are already occurring and are inevitable. Cultural groups use and demand a potentially infinite array of types and forms of what may be called "documents." Thus, the notion of a "library" is expanded to such a degree that its modern cultural-institutional meaning becomes historically bracketed and historically specific, and its power is dispersed over a wider space. Just as Culture is transformed in cultures, so the Library is dispersed into documentary techniques and technologies. This is something that still needs to be seen and reckoned with in library education and in library institutions. Briet wrote of it a half century ago, and these changes have only increased since then.

Notes

1. Sylvie Fayet-Scribe, *Histoire de la documentation en France: culture, science et technologie de l'information: 1895-1937* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2000).
2. Mary Niles Maack, "The Lady and the Antelope: Suzanne Briet's Contribution to the French Documentation Movement," *Library Trends* 53 (Spring 2004): 719-47.
3. Michael K. Buckland, "What Is a Document?" *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* 48, no. 9 (Sept. 1997): 804-9.
4. Ronald E. Day, *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power* (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
5. Bruno Latour, "Ces réseaux que la raison ignore: laboratoires, bibliothèques, collections," *Le Pouvoir des Bibliothèques: la Mémoire des Livres en Occident* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), 23-46.

6. Paul Otlet, *Monde: Essai d'Universalisme: Connaissance du Monde, Sentiment du Monde, Action Organisée et Plan du Monde* (Brussels: Editiones Mundaneum, 1935).

7. Suzanne Briet, "Bibliothécaires et documentalistes," *Revue de la Documentation* 21 (1954): 43.

8. Suzanne Briet, "Bibliothécaires et documentalistes," *Revue de la Documentation* 21 (1954): 44.

9. Suzanne Briet, "Bibliography in the Basement," *Special Libraries*, February 1950: 52. I am grateful to Michael Buckland for finding this source and for pointing out this passage.