Introduction

I

This book crosses philosophical ontology and documentary ontology, trying to understand different genres, technologies, modes of inscription, and innate powers of expression by which something comes to appearance as what is. Instead of approaching information ontologically ("what is information?") it approaches ontology informationally, asking how something becomes evident and is taken as evidence of what is. It is a story of some of the inscriptional means for this, which will become clear by the end of the book, are not only information and knowledge technologies, but in the last resort, also *technologies of judgment*. What are judged are entities as to their identities, qualities, and actions, not just descriptively, but prescriptively.

I call the philosophy of evidence "documentarity," and I am interested in how this philosophy of evidence constitutes Western (cultural and disciplinary) philosophy as the Western metaphysical tradition,[1] largely understood as a representational tradition in its epistemology, ontology, aesthetics, and politics. Documentarity is the philosophy of what comes into presence and makes itself evident, foremost in representation. The purpose of this book is to describe documentary evidence, and so, documentation, within a tradition of Western metaphysics, and so, largely, representation (though to do so I have traced the outer limits and contrary epistemologies and ontologies of such, as well). The study of documentarity is the study of technologies of judgment at the level of ontology—in this case, what and how what is appears to us as such.

This book discusses the expression of beings or entities as evidence of what is, from ancient categories to medieval figures to modern documentation and modern literature to sublime and dispositional expressive powers,

and finally, to social networks and machine learning. Documentarity is the philosophical basis of the practice and theory of documentation; it is traditionally understood as "representational" in various manners. Documentation is the foundation for much of what we call "information," today, and its philosophical commitments shape our understanding of all manners of expression, from institutional documents to published opinion and even to literature and the other arts, too. Seen from a contemporary perspective, therefore, this is a book about information as truth and how this evolves within a tradition—documentation and its originary philosophy of documentarity—where truth is seen in the appearance of what is, through inscription, and foremost through, and as, representation.

As I will show, the range of types, genres, and modes of evidence for what is varies across different discursive fields and seems to follow a general historical trajectory from Ancient works until today along a course from ideal reference (which I call "strong documentarity") to phenomenological and linguistic sense (which I call "weak documentarity"). The transition from strong documentarity to weak documentarity traces the greater role that semiotic and empirical senses are given to creating and stabilizing reference. In strong documentarity, reference is seen as a product of categories (as in Plato's philosophy, or in traditional documentation techniques). In weak documentarity (which may end up being strongly representational, however), empirical particulars play a stronger role, either as innate dispositional powers or through empirical research. This is a more Aristotelian perspective, where categories of being are results of descriptions of the expressive powers of particulars.

I hope that this book shows that there are not only theoretical concerns that belong to a philosophy of evidence, but also practical and political concerns and aesthetic forms of such. Documentarity and, today, "information," have not only epistemic, but also political and aesthetic, qualities that should be taken account of. The philosophy of evidence not only governs knowledge institutions, but has also governed political institutions and has managed the role of knowledge in colonialism and the spread of "the West" and its notions of literacy and their importance. It has also colored the notion of what modern literature is (and more generally, the arts are) as realism and sometimes as formalism. "Information," understood as a substantive, also has an aesthetic form, namely of organic representation.

Too little attention has been paid to the aesthetics of information, and how this involves epistemic and practical concerns.

II

This is my third book on information as metaphysics. In *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power* (2001), I looked at the then contemporary conception of information, within its twentieth-century Western European and North American contexts, as a trope for the metaphysical notion of "presence" (using this term in a Derridean sense). In *Indexing It All: The Subject in the Age of Documentation, Information, and Data* (2014), I examined information according to the information-seeking and retrieval paradigm in information science: persons and documents as dialectically constructed subjects and objects—what I called the *modern documentary tradition*. This present book takes the story of the metaphysics of information back to ancient Greek philosophy and encompasses the Western metaphysical tradition more broadly than the previous books.

This book, however, continues a meditation upon the meaning of the figure of the antelope that begins Suzanne Briet's 1951 book *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?* (translated in 2006 as *What Is Documentation?*). It is an attempt to theoretically think the particular antelope both before and after the processes of its capture and being made evidence by means of traditional documentation techniques and institutions. I asked myself: What is forgotten when a particular being—an antelope—is understood as being a universal type (a species type), that is, when an entity is read in terms of its class "essence" (e.g., as a new type of antelope)? What is forgotten about particular beings when they are subject to (or subjects of) the representation of being, understood as essential universal types (i.e., as class members)? How do such class types appear through *a priori* and through *a posteriori* methods, and through different genres of writing? How have we thought of beings in the Western tradition as evidence of truth, and how have beings been made to conform to this by the theoretical and practical powers of inscriptions and documentary institutions? How do entities represent themselves as evidence?[2] And, also, how does the category of "literature" or art evolve in modernity as both a reaction to "factual" documentation and also as an intensification of such?

This last question itself refers back, as well, to the very mixed genre of Briet's *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?* as both an historical-literary manifesto for documentation and as a technical manual. In Briet's book, this shows in the formal construction of the book: the very persuasive and literary first part, and the more technical second and the even more technical third parts. In Briet's total oeuvre, however, this question also conversely appears in the starker division between her professional works on documentation and her works on the oeuvre of the poet Arthur Rimbaud, both without any traces of the other. In this present book, I cross these genres in order to show how traditional documentation, literature, and art intersect within the metaphysics of documentarity.

III

This book has the topology of a "U" in its duration. Overall, though with shifts and changes within the chapters and overviews in the first chapter, it begins with a discussion of entities as belonging within types or classes of representation and it progresses to discussing them as inscriptions and dispositional powers, eventually being represented through predictive algorithms in machine learning. The middle of the book discusses the works of the avant-garde narrative writer Carla Harryman and the poet Barrett Watten, and these constitute a sort of "near-zero" point in representation, where, following the modern avant-garde tradition, techniques of inscription come to the fore.

IV

For some of the more complex chapters, I start with an italicized leading sentence in order to suggest to the reader what is contained therein.

The chapters of this book may be summarized as follows:

Chapter 1: The Philosophical Perspective
This chapter addresses the topic of the book in terms of the Western philosophical tradition, reaching back to Plato's understandings of entities in terms of their being evidence of some class or idea, and for Aristotle, as their being essential sets of expressive powers. The chapter begins with Martin

Heidegger's return to these issues in terms of the question of being and of inscription (*poiesis*), including the inscriptionality of *techne* and modern technology. It then continues in providing an overview of the entire contents of this book from a philosophical perspective, reaching forward in time to Bruno Latour's notion of inscriptions and ontological modalities, and then to Rom Harré's epistemology of dispositions and affordances as the basis for an expressionist theory of entities, which we will return to at the end of the book.

Chapter 2: Documentarity in the Works of Paul Otlet and Georges Bataille: Two Competing Notions of "Document"

This chapter examines opposed metaphysical notions of what documents are and do in the works of the early twentieth-century thinkers and librarians, Paul Otlet and Georges Bataille, the first of a positivist origin and the other of a materialist origin that is grounded, in part, in early twentieth-century French ethnology and the modern artistic and literary avantgarde. We see here a contrast in notions of evidence, collections, and truth between a positivist documentation tradition and a modern anthropological one grounded in performance and experience. The difference inscribes two views of documentarity in regard to documents: representational metaphysics and a Nietzschean type of overturning of such. However, I argue that this particular "overturning" of ideal *reference* by phenomenological *sense* is also metaphysical.

Chapter 3: Figuring Documentarity

This chapter begins by engaging John A. Walsh's (2012) work on the documentary index as a process of figuration in medieval iconography and allegory. The chapter then returns to Suzanne Briet's *What Is Documentation?* (1951, 2006), to examine the ontological and epistemic importance of the documentary index in what she sees as modern science. We turn to the medieval tradition in order to examine art and literature as genres, where the documentary index has metonymical and allegorical figuration, in order to demonstrate an experiential indexicality, though one grounded in theological semiotics. Much later, Briet's documentation theory prioritizes scientific explanations, but this epistemology of science is one grounded in bibliographic traditions of classification and ontology, and so I will argue

that it, too, is colored in a semiotic manner with revelatory figuration playing a major role in both the theory and the practice of naming an entity as evidence of a genus or species of being. As we will see more broadly throughout the book, documentarity has both static (classification) and revelatory (algorithmic) forms for making evident, blocking out competing psychologies of time and experience.

Chapter 4: Documentarity and the Modern Category of "Literature"

This chapter examines modern literature and art in two cases: first, a dialectical relation to strong documentarity in nineteenth-century French Realism; and second, the twentieth and into the twenty-first-century literary and aesthetic avant-garde's critique of representation. The nineteenth-century French realist novel genre critiqued, but also intensified, documentary realism by creating characters with intense and subtle emotional range and internal mental dialogue, situated within, and responsive to, modern social conditions (not least, created by mass media). Like today's "information," it collapsed the space between the reader and itself as document, inscribing the reader in the world of its own senses, leaving the reader to enact interpretive reading in the analogical application of its "content." Reference was intensified by means of complexities of sense, both in regard to the internal states of the characters and the world around them. In contrast, the modern avant-garde, particularly in the early twentieth century, pushed toward a counterform of evidence rooted in sensation and in the creation of new forms out of semantic materials. It aimed toward a reality distinct from documentary realism.

Chapter 5: Displaced Reference for Information: Jokes, Trauma, and Fables

In this chapter, we look at performative genres where the expression of powerful particulars is indirect and mediated by literary devices. Evidence appears through representational performances, but those performances are means for human powerful particulars themselves to appear as witty or as traumatized or as actualized meaning. The "I" appears as a powerful particular, not representationally framed, but as inflected through, performative literary devices and forms. The empirical particular is exemplified, but still through mediating literary devices (even in psychological diagnosis and therapeutics, per historiographic frames and devices).

Chapter 6: Rights of Expression

This chapter examines self-evidence by expressive particulars, stretching from humans to ecological bodies, each read in term of the ontology of Rom Harré's notion of "powerful particulars" (Harré, 1995). The chapter examines such an ontology in modern rights discourse, particularly in the "rights drift" from natural rights to the international law principle of the right to truth to animal rights and then to rights of nature. This chapter views particular real entities as inherently ontologically expressive and with organic bodies having rights by virtue of their unique dispositional powers (rather than as, in the documentation tradition, having such by virtue of the representational classes or descriptive vocabulary to which they are assigned through ontologies and other cultural practices of identification, attribution, and relationship). Though mediated and expressed by nominal social and cultural affordances that shape the nature of rights and expressions, organic real entities are unique entities of powers that can assemble such nominal tools as tools of expression. They fold semiotic materials into dispositional tools, and they are singular no matter how much they "belong" to classes. Their "freedom" or "will" is both socioculturally constituted in experience and unique and radically singular by virtue of their developmental learning. While all entities, both organic and inorganic are unique at some level of their material being, rights are generally given to those whose uniqueness is displayed in ordinary human experiential worlds. "Freedom" and "will" are assigned to those entities and (and even to those classes of entities) that "push back" upon human *a priori* classification and standardized descriptions (e.g., the broadest class of that which pushes back upon classification is the class of entities that we call the natural world or nature).

Chapter 7: Post-Documentation Technologies

This chapter introduces the notion of "post-documentation" technologies, which include social media technologies and machine learning. Post-documentation technologies still remain part of the paradigm of documentarity, but they are largely *a posteriori*, rather than *a priori*, techniques and technologies for calculating sensible tendencies and directionalities for entities. (*A priori* techniques are used as parameters, initial ontologies, or heuristics, and appear as classes as the result of processing.) The "post" of

"post-documentation," signifies a break from traditional documentation that, however, doesn't escape the larger general economy of documentarity. (I have used "post-documentary" or similar terms, rather than "post-documentation," in previous writings, but for the purposes of this book I have chosen "post-documentation.") The parameters that reorganize empirical traces as essential qualities or predictive trends are not only technological, but also socioculturally "ideological" (in the general, as well as the politically specific, way that I will use this term in this book, namely as constellations or assemblages of ideas). Whereas older technologies of documentation, such as classification, had obvious and explicit *a priori* technologies for producing evidence, newer post-documentation technologies tend to function in real-time and as infrastructural technologies. Post-documentation technologies are what I call *computer-mediated judgments*. Computers, particularly as personally and socially embedded and mediating devices, are very powerful *technologies of judgment*.

IV

I will conclude this introduction by mentioning that every book has precedent works before it that have influenced it. For this book, the initial work that played this role was Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. From this perspective, this present book attempts to address inscriptional (broadly understood, "literary") representations in terms of evidence and documentation.

This book also attempts to address some of the theoretical issues of modal expression that I felt were incompletely analyzed in Bruno Latour's *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, most of all by contributing an epistemology of dispositions and affordances to the problem of explaining modalities of expression.

In addition, Maurizio Ferraris's book, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces*, also provided a gentle antagonist and a model in some aspects for this book. In his book, Ferraris understands documentality in terms of textuality, a relationship that I reverse in this one, giving metaphysics as a technology of evidence and evidence production a stronger role in structuring textuality. I have coined the term "documentarity" to distinguish this term and the approach of this book from Ferraris's notion of documentality, giving a stronger American "r" to the lightness

of Ferraris's textual "documentality," as it were. Following from my earlier book, *Indexing It All*, I view information technologies as indexing together documents and concepts with subjective agencies into being identities, attributes, dispositions, and powers, in other words, into the qualities and modalities of being. Through digital mediation, this being often takes the form of inscriptions, information flows, conduits of action, and recognitions and self-recognitions. I am interested in this book in the role of representational frames and devices in constructing these and their genres and modes of textuality.

And as will be obvious to the reader, I am also greatly indebted to Rom Harré's many works, his explanations of dispositional powers and affordances in many disciplines, and his attention to both inscription and the ontological powers of entities, from quantum particles to human beings.

Last, this book, like many of my works, contemplates the status of what it means to be a being in an age of evidentiary, particularly today digitally mediated, inscription; specifically, as a human being, of course, but also as any entity with powers of expression. And so, this work remains tied to the problematics of *techne* and *poiesis* in Martin Heidegger's works, to dispositional models of expression in Rom Harré's works, and as mentioned earlier and analyzed in my earlier books, to the problem of the relationship of technique and being in establishing identity, meaning, value, and truth for entities.

Each entity in the world is singular at some level of its ontology (Harré, 2018), in so far as its development is guided by uniquely historical and situational developments, and with higher-level organisms, learning from experiences and developing personal toolkits of expression from these. Each entity has intrinsic and, with organic beings, inherited or innate (from evolution and from learning) dispositions. So, we may ask, through what powers does an entity come to appear to us as being? Through what technologies of judgment and thought, and the enfolding of these in ancient and modern inscriptional machines (and the further forming of judgment and thought from these) does an entity become *evident* to us? What is the historical appearance and the historicity of such judgments, thoughts, and their inscriptional machines, and how do they manifest today as horizons for our and others' judgments and evidence? These are the questions that guide this book.