

## Martin Heidegger's Critique of Informational Modernity

Ronald E. Day  
Indiana University, USA

### INTRODUCTION

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was a German phenomenologist, one of the best-known philosophers of the 20th century. His work was strongly engaged by, and in many ways influenced, the work of Jacques Derrida and allied French thinkers such as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, the French literary theorist and novelist Maurice Blanchot,<sup>1</sup> the Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben, and the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, as well as American theorists, such as Avital Ronell, who wrote one of the earliest contemporary engagements of technology by critical theory (Ronell 1989). He was embraced by Sartre as an existentialist, a position that is repudiated in his “Letter on Humanism” (Heidegger 1977c) and, more broadly, by the division between the ontic and the ontological in his work, beginning with his first published work, *Being and Time*. His works’ consideration of method and historical tradition were originally expanded upon by his student, Hans-Georg Gadamer. While Heidegger’s work has been maligned by many in the popular press, and even in academe, particularly in the United States, for his assumption of the rectorship at the University of Freiburg during 1933–34 and for statements in his writings during that time regarding the role of the German university in the Nazi state, many of these attacks selectively overemphasize, and even factually distort (that is, the work of Victor Farías), particulars of Heidegger’s work and life during this period.<sup>2</sup> However much Heidegger’s work at one time gave a conservative turn to the Nietzschean destruction of the metaphysical tradition in philosophy and society, his total oeuvre constitutes a monumental social critique of modernity and philosophy’s role in it. Heidegger’s explicit call for the destruction of metaphysics in his earliest full-length work, *Being and Time* (1927 [1962]), was a call to move philosophically back to, and beyond, ancient Greek philosophy and its ensuing tradition (particularly as interpreted and destined through Latin philosophy), toward an analysis of human beings that is ontologically prior to the Western philosophical tradition’s privileged concepts of subjectivity and representation. His work challenged and still challenges the emerging

modern social sciences of his time and today, particularly what he termed their "thesis of the precedence of method," reasserting the need for foundational critical thought prior to the fallacious appropriation of epistemologies and methods borrowed from the physical sciences. The general critical effect of his work is to call into question many popular modes of discussion (e.g., journalism and mass communication), psychology (e.g., ego-centered clinical psychoanalysis and psychiatry and much experimental psychology), and social sciences epistemologies (e.g., the model of causation taken by psychology and sociology from physics) and methods (e.g., the privilege of statistics).

By beginning with "the question of being," Heidegger's work asks, What does it mean to be a being known as a human being in the midst of other beings? His work addresses the most important question of modernity and today: the relation between human knowledge and the existence of all beings, not least of all, the human. The difficulty, as well as both the successes and failures of his rhetorical strategies and politics, must be seen in light of his attempt to critically distance the very social and cultural traditions—and language—that shape our modes of understanding.

In Library and Information Science (LIS) proper, there has been little extended discussion of his work, other than in the works of the present author and Rafael Capurro. There have been use of concepts from *Being and Time* in critiques of artificial intelligence and human computer interaction by Terry Winograd, Phil Agre, Paul Dourish, and others.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I will not be covering much of this secondary literature, which makes fragmentary use of Heidegger's vast oeuvre. Instead, I will be concentrating on the issues of language, technology, identity, and community within the context of Heidegger's critique of the Western metaphysical tradition and modernity in an attempt to show the importance of Heidegger's work as a whole to LIS and to discourses on "the information society." I propose that Heidegger's work has profound and broad implications for LIS and societies now thought of as information societies, both directly and through the work of Derrida and others mentioned above, and that this is best seen by an analysis of some of his central concepts.

In thinking of the relationship between Heidegger's vast work and that of information science and information culture in such a short discussion, we must severely reduce his work to several major issues. In this chapter, I have decided to address the following major themes in his work: (1) Heidegger's project of destroying the metaphysical tradition and his bracketing of the privilege of the subject in such and how this project affects mentalistic and user-centered studies of information in LIS, (2) Heidegger's writings on technology and their relationship to, and critique of, information as a form of epistemic presence, (3) Heidegger's concept of naming in poetics, and (4) Heidegger's conception of being in terms of *Mitsein* (explicitly so in *Being and Time*), and the relation of such to a politics of communication and freedom. In all these themes, I would like to suggest that Heidegger's work poses a massive challenge to LIS to rigorously account for its psychological and technocratic positioning of human knowing and its representational understandings of information, points that, in the busyness of its scientific methods, there have been heretofore few critical engagements.

### THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SUBJECT AND THE END OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE TASK OF THINKING

While some have strongly stressed the linguistic turn or *Kehre* in Heidegger's work, marking a distinction between, on the one hand, the ontological analysis of human being



as a particular type of being (namely one concerned about its manner of being in terms of existence [human being as *Dasein*<sup>4</sup>]), its relation to other types of beings, and, foremost, its relation to death, and on the other, an analysis of language as the "house of being," there is a social critique of modernity that pervades both these major concerns in Heidegger's work, namely, the problem of technology—the shape of human beings' skillful designs and activities in the world. To arrive at this analysis of technology, however, it is helpful to consider what, for Heidegger, constitutes the metaphysical subject and why it needs to be decentered, and in fact, destroyed, as a social, cultural, and philosophical concept.

Heidegger's task of the destruction of metaphysics and subjectivity is a task inherited from Nietzsche. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's overturning of metaphysics failed because it replaced a metaphysics of being with a metaphysics of becoming. Against the backdrop of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness, Heidegger's work attempted a phenomenology that always begins with a step back from consciousness, psychologism, and subjectivity. Phenomenology requires that we start by describing relations of existence. For Heidegger, the study of the nature of being requires that we start by examining the relations of human beings, as he does in *Being and Time*. (In works after *Being and Time*, Heidegger engages language as the primary frame for all human relations.) Heidegger's understanding of human being is primarily concerned with the ontological and only the ontic within that. For example, when intentions are discussed, as in *Being and Time*, they are discussed in terms of relations between beings, that is, as "concerns" with other beings, as well as *Dasein*'s concern for itself. Similarly, as well, in *Being and Time* Heidegger doesn't write about normal and abnormal states of mind, or pathologies, but rather, moods (*Stimmung*)—a word that is etymologically and conceptually related to "attunement" (*Gestimmtheit*) in *Being and Time*. The importance of moods in Heidegger is that they are psychological states that one inhabits, rather than that one "has." The Heideggerian conception of moods suggests a psychology that is based on understanding the relation of beings to their own fears and hopes in regard to their being in the world, rather than in terms of inner states and faculties.

For Heidegger, human beings are singular amidst other beings, as a particular type of being (*Dasein*). *Dasein* is a type of being that is primarily concerned within its own nature of being. Ontologically, *Dasein* is distinctive in that it encounters its own existence as a question and engages its historical and sociocultural configurations as narratives and themes in order to choose future actions. Appropriating a concept of radical temporality from Nietzsche<sup>5</sup> and the concept of historical breaks or "caesuras" from the poetics of Friedrich Hölderlin, Heidegger views history in terms of historical traditions punctuated by moments of radical, transfiguring breaks that open history up to other historical possibilities. Such breaks open history and *Dasein* to freedom, understood as a space of action and historical redirection in the midst of what previously was seen as necessary and inevitable. Such breaks reassert the authenticity of *Dasein* as a being for whom its own historicity is important. (The occurrence of these breaks can be assisted by philosophical-historiographic critiques [such as those offered by Heidegger's own works].)

Man's historicity is offered in such moments, which constitute genuine "events," distinct from the expected moments in normal times. Like *Dasein*'s encounter with death, in the event<sup>6</sup> the unique ontological character of human being, not covered up by historicism nor by soothing everyday (*Alltäglichkeit*) chitchat, appears. We may say that such authentic historicity is a manner of being responsible (in the sense of being attuned and

responding) in an attuned manner to *Dasein's* being in the world. Historiographic, and moreover, historiological criticality is for Heidegger, thus, part of *Dasein's* authentic mode of being, as a being not only in time, but *constitutive of time* (see, for example, *Being and Time* section I.6). Such a critical imperative constitutes the heart of the ethics and the politics of Heideggerian philosophy—both in Heidegger's writings and in the writings of Derrida and others influenced by Heidegger.

For Heidegger, the experience of time as temporality is specific to *Dasein's* mode of being. Time is experienced by *Dasein* as an issue, foremost as an issue of finitude. Through its awareness of finitude, *Dasein* knows both the "ek-static" or "thrown" nature of being and the fear of its own extinction in death. But death, for *Dasein*, can only be known by another's death. This concern for itself through another leads to the very important concept of *Mitsein* (being-with) in *Being and Time*. While the existential analytic of *Dasein's* relation to its own death makes for compelling reading in *Being and Time*, arguably it is the concept of *Mitsein* that underlies it and contributes to much of Heidegger's analysis and approach in later work, even if, like *Dasein* the term isn't used after *Being and Time*. The concept of *Mitsein* has, also, been extended to analyzing animals or the universe as a whole by Derrida, Agamben, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, and others, sometimes under the concept of the "in-common." Both *Dasein* and *Mitsein* signify essential properties that are *given* to human beings by the very fact of their being.<sup>7</sup>

The implications of Heidegger's ontic-ontological divide is immense for Library and Information Science (LIS). First of all, the psychological basis for user studies is situated by the Heideggerian analysis as being part of the metaphysical tradition. Cognitivist notions, particularly those of older cognitive psychology as used in Belkin and Brookes' writings in LIS, would be seen as metaphysical expressions since they work within a idealist and Cartesian framework. Critiques of such have previously appeared in LIS (Frohmann 2004; Day 2007), but they remain much in the minority in the field. As a whole, the field contains few explicit critiques of the cognitivist epistemological and psychological assumptions and its metaphysical models in Belkin's very influential ASK model.

Second, as we shall see, below, the modern conception of the term *information* and of information science belongs to a metaphysical understanding of knowledge as representation. This understanding is particularly onerous for Heidegger in its characterization of knowledge as "ready-to-hand" (*zuhanden*) (*Being and Time*).<sup>8</sup> Entities that are ready-to-hand are characterized as objects that are present or have "presence" in the sense that Hegel used the term, as an entity that is "objective" in the sense of being dialectically opposite (*Gegenstand*) man as the thinking subject.<sup>9</sup> For Heidegger, modern science, as part of what he terms the "onto-theological tradition" of Western metaphysics, sees beings as distinct *objects* to be understood and managed by *objective* methods. Particularly in terms of human beings, Heidegger sees this as problematic, not only in the social sciences, but in modern technocratic institutions, treating humans and other beings according to principles and practices of "human management" and "resource management."

In brief, information as a form of presence that is ready-to-hand constitutes, for Heidegger, the fullest extension of metaphysics into the realm of knowledge and, today, social life (and, most astoundingly, into the realm of art [Heidegger 1977b; see Day 2001, 2008]). From this point of view, information in its social, professional, and technical uses as a sense of metaphysical presence requires rigorous critical analysis, and this critical project may be seen as a central task in the destruction of the metaphysical tradition today. In so far as this task is taken up, today, as a discursive-textual mode of critical



analysis, we may say that it constitutes (naming such after Derrida's project, which, though, in certain manners redirects and sometimes challenges Heidegger's critique), a task of deconstructing the modern conception of "information." The deconstruction of "information," coming from the Heideggerian "Destruktion" of metaphysics (*Being and Time*), constitutes a very specific type of textual-historical-cultural task for critical information theory, distinct from any looser use of the term "deconstruction" (Day 2001).<sup>10</sup> It is a task that depends upon an understanding of a metaphysical tradition in Western society and culture, epitomized in certain philosophical texts, but also invested throughout Western culture, society, politics, and particularly, in and through the mass media.<sup>11</sup>

Third, though there have been incorporations of Heidegger's work into LIS via hermeneutics, we need to remember that the discussion of hermeneutics in Heidegger's work was largely that of an ontological hermeneutics, not a textual one or, further, a psychological one. Traditional textual hermeneutics involves analyzing the relation of textual parts to the whole of texts and to their historical contexts. Hermeneutics, proper, is not a traditionally psychological investigation either since, as in the hermeneutic tradition, the personal agent (e.g., the reader) is analyzed as a product of historical context, not as an autonomous agent of cognition. This emphasis upon the historicity of personal agency is a central theme in both Heidegger and Gadamer's works. Heidegger's discussion of the hermeneutic circle in *Being and Time* (the term is conspicuously absent in work after *Being and Time*, even though after Heidegger's "turn" the being of Dasein was discussed almost exclusively in terms of language) is in regard to how Dasein's modes of ontic being obscures or opens up the question of being. (And so, the problem is how psychological investigation, for example, itself obscures a more fundamental ontological investigation into the relation of being and beings [and thus, into the investigation of other beings, other than Dasein, as well—see *Being and Time*, section 32]). In other words, Heidegger's project throughout his oeuvre was ontological—or to be more precise, it was a critique of ontology understood within the Western metaphysical tradition. Ontic discussions take place within the foundations of this project.

Fourth, by viewing "information" as one of the latest and most acute symptoms of the metaphysical tradition, not the least spread through ontic chitchat regarding the value of information in culture and society, the Heideggerian critique challenges the very grammatical blurring of the various meanings of information in information science and it challenges the institutional (both public and commercial) claims and profitability of information society and subsidiary discourses. The Heideggerian critique opens up a rhetorical/discursive critical analysis of the reification of the term *information* and it rejects a positivist philosophy of information (e.g., Floridi), demanding a critique of such in terms of its metaphysical assumptions.

Last, while we will return to the political implications of Heidegger's conception of *Mitsein* at the end of this essay, here it may be proposed that Dasein must always already be analyzed in the midst of its being among other beings. Such a view challenges a liberal-communicative conception of society as made up of individuals "communicating" their thoughts with one another "reasonably." The notion of a communicative society of reason is problematized in Heidegger's work by a conception of individuality that sees such as constructed by traditions of custom and language that are both blind and insightful toward phenomena. Individuals are historically, socially, and culturally constructed, in addition to their more fundamental ontological manners of being as human beings. Rationality in communication may be variously possible or impossible

depending on different social, cultural, and material conditions and on different life experiences. Further, concepts of rationality are products of cultural affordances and their traditions, and so it cannot be used as a transcendental measure for communicative success.

Individual actions resulting in events of freedom, for Heidegger, take place between necessity and potentiality, the latter made possible by rethinking historical traditions—made up of social and cultural forms—toward the founding and construction of the future. Ethical decisions (versus prescriptive moral actions) take place in decision spaces of indeterminate historical results. Such moments of indeterminacy have no certain outcome because normative ontic chains of action are what are being called into account at such moments. Ethics in philosophy takes the form of century-old questions regarding just actions that are replies to real situations and they are characterized most by a lack of answers that morality supplies. The consequences of this view for information ethics would be to place information—rethought as an uncertain form of knowledge (knowledge as “in-formation”)—at the center of ethics, rather than to take information ethics as a type of “practical” ethics involving information artifacts and technologies (see Day 2001). *In-formation*, as designated here, is the call to which we reply when the categories of knowledge are not yet adequate. The concept of information as the indeterminate call of being to which we respond outside of traditional frameworks of knowledge is a radical rereading of our modern conception of information as presence, but one that does not lie outside of earlier uses of “information” as incomplete knowledge. It is fundamentally ethical, as well as aesthetic and cognitive concept (Day 2001, chapter 5). It is foundational in a critical theory of information based upon a destructive/deconstructive project acting upon the modern conception of information.

Such a Heideggerian-deconstructive counterreading of “information” and of information science constitutes an important project for a “critical information theory.” This task would be a timely and important critical encounter with the Western metaphysical tradition in its philosophical, cultural, and social forms (Heidegger 1977b).

### HEIDEGGER, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

Heidegger in his lecture, “The Age of the World Picture” (Heidegger 1977a) argued that the sciences are characterized by an etching, tearing out, or de-sign (*reissen*) of an initial frame (*Grundriss*) from phenomena, with certain epistemic commitments and certain ontological commitments that then are not further questioned and within which further research is carried out. Heidegger’s understanding of scientific research is that it is characterized by an increasingly reductionist design of knowledge upon phenomena. Heidegger’s critique of science extends into the sociology of scholarship, which, for Heidegger, is now characterized by the busyness of researchers doing “empirical” research on established topics setup within the frameworks of established scientific points of views and the institutions, funding, and publishing agents that support them. For Heidegger, critical thought upon the frameworks of such views is lost in such a sociology of knowledge. For Heidegger, the task of philosophy is to provide conceptual critique toward rethinking a Western metaphysical tradition that shows itself in a positivist understanding of science in technological modernity.

Heidegger’s critique of science is part of his critique of modernity as the cultural and social triumph of metaphysical reason in modern technology and the technological



organization of society. Modern technology for Heidegger involves the causal mechanization of arts (*techne*) within a teleological metaphysics and, ultimately, such extends to the social organization of society. Heidegger's critique of technology in terms of art (both, and variously, understood as craft and as aesthetics) is fairly complex, and I have recounted it elsewhere, particularly in regard to the concept of the work of art (Day 2008). Here, I will provide the most relevant parts of that account for our present purposes.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger (1971c) discusses art as a form of work that explicitly displays creation or expressive emergence ("a work is always a work, which means that it is something worked out, brought about, effected" [Heidegger 1971c, 56]). In a later lecture and then essay, "The Question Regarding Technology" (1977e), Heidegger discusses art's process of creating and bringing about expressive emergence. He does this by returning to the ancient Greek term for art, *techne*, and the use of this term in Aristotle's discussion of four types of causality in Aristotle's *Physics*. In Heidegger's essay (1977e), Aristotle's four causes are reinterpreted from their understanding in Latin and modern philosophy (as *causa*) to what Heidegger claims is their proper context in ancient Greek philosophy (as *aition*), a reading that reinterprets Aristotle's four causes and the meaning of *techne* and *poiesis* according to the four causes' co-responsibility with one another as mutual affordances for a thing's appearance, rather than according to the traditional teleological reading of them (where an ideal "first cause" is understood as an origin that is fulfilled in the final product [the "final cause"] through efficient and material causes). In Heidegger's (1977e) rereading of *causa* by *aition*, Aristotle's first or formal cause (the cultural context, social situation and needs, and the resulting plan for the work), the efficient cause (the craftsman or other agency for bringing about the work), the material cause (matter), and the final cause (the reception and purpose for which the thing is brought forward) are understood as a total assemblage of concepts, materials, and labor that brings forth a work in an artistic event. For Heidegger, the Greek term *techne* refers to the techniques and activities that work to bring forth (Heidegger: *poiesis*) a work.

The notion of *techne*, here, is close to the traditional notion of the English word *art*, in the sense of craft or skill. It is Heidegger's intention to blur the modern (18th century and later) separation of art and craft, that is, to blur the difference between the fine and the crafted arts, a division that occurred in late-18th-century aesthetic theory, as well as in art practices. In so doing, Heidegger develops a phenomenological understanding of the artwork based on site-specific and time-valued labor and reception. By critiquing the understanding of the work as a symbolic object, which is said to contain or embody meaning in its form, and by asserting an understanding of the work as an event or *work* (constructed by *techne* [context-sensitive technique and method] and whose meaning is afforded by its social and cultural conditions for emergence [*poiesis*]), the fine arts are rejoined to the crafted arts according to pragmatic, functional, and constructivist understandings, rather than those of ideational representation. With this gesture, too, the container-content metaphors for the form-content distinction in aesthetics<sup>12</sup> (and in communication and information, too) are abandoned. Form, instead of being understood as a teleological first cause, is understood as cultural affordances for expression—socially situated and historically specific for the artwork's meaning.

In brief, Heidegger returns to Aristotle's writings on *poiesis* and *techne* in order to recover an understanding of creation that he sees in artworks and which he sees as forgotten in the dominance of modern technological production. This earlier understanding,

which Heidegger attempts to recover from the ancient Greek texts, views art as the process of creating an object, responsive in the way of Aristotle's four causes, to the site and time specificity of the context of production.

Heidegger's critique of modern technology is characterized by his criticism of the tendency to technically narrow beings to "useful" elements and then to exploit those elements, regardless of their originating conditions of appearance and existence. (Heidegger [1977e] points, for example, to the exploitation of the Rhine River as a source of hydroelectric power.) The exploitation takes place not simply in terms of technological framing, but in terms of the stringing together of technological elements into a social "machine." The problem is not that of tools, *per se*, but the stringing together of social and technological tools toward an instrumental rationality and a reduction of human activities to quantifiable labor within systems of production.<sup>13</sup> This is to say that the issue for Heidegger is that of the appropriation of beings within a systemic instrumentality. The central issues, here, are that of the erasure of human historicity and the exploitation of both human and nonhuman beings for instrumental goals. Within this metaphysical tradition, beings are seen as resources for the purpose of short-term exploitation for pre-determined ends, a purpose that is often detrimental for beings overall, including human beings in the long run.

It is for this reason that Heidegger (1977e) understands physics, the science of determinate (i.e., Aristotle: "efficient") causal forces, as paradigmatic of modern reason and he understands Aristotle's four causes as having been distorted by a Latin interpretative tradition wherein cause is primarily understood as determinate force, rather than as affordance. Heidegger's criticism is not of physics, *per se*, but rather, of the inappropriate and misleading overextension of the determinate sense of causation present in Newtonian physics (as causal forces between bodies) to other studies and phenomena, foremost in the social sciences (and not least to communication and information theory), as well as art. The ultimate moment of this overextension of a certain type of determinate causal explanation occurs, for Heidegger, in explanations of art objects in terms of their being viewed as products of the transfer of mental ideas or as the transfer of semantic affects. (Cf., for example, Warren Weaver's discussion of *affects* in dance performances as instances of communication causes and *effects* [Weaver 1949].)

For Heidegger, the artwork, like the natural being, appears as an expression (*poiesis*) of an environment's affordances. Heidegger views *techne* as being the means by which *poiesis* occurs in the hands of humans, rather than "naturally." Thus, for Heidegger (1977e), the "essence of *techne*" is not made up of the privileged values of effectiveness, efficiency, and teleological completion and reproduction in modern technology, but rather, of the mutual affordances—and with this, the site-specificity and time-valuedness—of the poetic or creative.

For Heidegger, a return to site-specific and time-valued manners of analyses and production marks the beginnings of the "task of thinking" (Heidegger 1977b), a task that takes place in critical regard to the metaphysical underpinnings of not only the philosophical tradition, but industrial modernity. Heidegger's task of thinking occurs at the historical end of metaphysics, that is, at the end of the dominance of the metaphysical subject and its humanism as the measure for thinking all beings and the world, including human beings. Art, for Heidegger, is the most obvious entrance into thinking co-responsible emergence and creation—a type of thinking of being that he claims has been forgotten by the Western metaphysical tradition and its foremost expression in the culture of modern technology. Heidegger is arguing for a form of thought that is engaged



with thinking the mutual affordances necessary for beings to emerge and to be expressive in co-responsible manners, rather than a form of thought that seeks to understand and condition an environment in terms of what we think beings are and should be for the purpose of engineering their exploitation (and even their creation) for the fulfillment of human needs, which, too, are engineered in a similar fashion. His thought challenges the cultural traditions of technological modernity, the foundations of humanism, the traditional conceptual divisions between human beings and other beings, and the ontological underpinnings of philosophy, policy, and production. It opens up to an "ecological" type of thought rooted in thinking beings in terms of co-responsible affordances and emergence. Heidegger's thought on beings begins with thinking the shared being of beings, rather than thinking beings in terms of individual essences.

While Heidegger's critique of science is sometimes too general—or, perhaps it would be better to write, sometimes unclear or lacking in analytic nuance—his investigation into the ancient roots of *techne* provide a powerful social and scientific critique of scientism and the overapplication of determinate causation, particularly in the social sciences and the policy activities and psychological models that issue from these.

In LIS no attention has been paid to theories of causation—and thus, method—in qualitative or quantitative studies. Those studies that have pointed to a misplaced scientism or to sloppy vocabulary in LIS have largely been ignored in the dominant literature and by the major players, and the founding frameworks remain in place with very little crossover into other disciplines. The theorization of technology has largely remained at the level of use or a simplistic dichotomy of "good" versus "bad" technologies. In brief, the Heideggerian theorization of *techne* and his critique of science could give LIS a considerable theoretical toolkit.

### HEIDEGGER, POETICS, AND VOCABULARY

Martin Heidegger's lectures and writings on the problem of language, and thus, that of communication and information, are many. Particularly after *Being and Time* Heidegger's focus shifted from ontology proper to viewing language as both the restriction and possibility of ontic being. Heidegger's analysis of language in *Being and Time* largely is an analysis of discourse and its relationship to ontological authenticity. The problem of the relation of language to authenticity is more fully developed, however, in Heidegger's many years of considering poetic works, particularly those of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin. Authenticity in poetry, for Heidegger, occurs in an event of "naming." Naming, for Heidegger, represents an event of truth (understood as *aletheia*—a veiling and unveiling of being—rather than the correspondence of intellect and thing (*adequatio*)—see Heidegger 1977d). In naming, to use Heidegger's words, worlds appear upon the earth. The European documentalist, Suzanne Briet, too had a sense of naming in her understanding of the documentary process, though, unlike Heidegger, her focus was on the further elaboration and continuation of vocabulary and discourse from the primary documents of controlled vocabulary and classes to secondary documents (Briet 2006).

In section 34 of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, we find discourse emphasized as the important element of language, along with the observation that what is important about discourse is that it emerges as an attunement to Dasein's existential being in the world:

In discourse the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world (an intelligibility which goes with a state-of-mind) is articulated according to significations; and discourse is this articulation. The items

constitutive for discourse are: what the discourse is about (what is talked about); what is said-in-the-talk, as such; the communication; and the making-known. These are not properties which can just be raked up empirically from language. They are existential characteristics rooted in the state of Dasein's Being (Heidegger 1962, 206).

In Heidegger's later works his analysis shifts from a focus on discourse to a focus on poetry and the word. In this later work, language is seen as the "house of being." For Heidegger, the poetic ("saying" [Heidegger 1971a, 1971e]), similar to the etching out of the world through the work of art (Heidegger 1971c), shows the simultaneous appearance and withdrawal of being as a world begins to appear through language. This appearance of the "world" and the disappearance of the "earth" (Heidegger 1971c) is very different than the language of propositional statements that attempt to correspond to empirical objects and events. Truth as the simultaneous veiling and unveiling of *aletheia* differs from truth as correspondence in so far as the former marks both the possibilities and limits of representation whereas the former takes representation for granted (see, for example, "On the Essence of Truth" [Heidegger 1977d]).

With the poetic word, being is brought into the "Open" where it is both unveiled and veiled. Within the opening of truth (*aletheia*), correspondences of meaning (*veritas*) through representation then take place. For Heidegger, the poetic word most primordially speaks the fact of language, which is ontologically prior to representation. "*Language speaks*" to human beings first of all the fact of language (Heidegger 1971e, 124). For Heidegger, poetic speech is an originating event for discourse.

For Heidegger, information and communication theory hide the facticity of language; that we first of all respond to language rather than to any one speaker. According to Heidegger, the job of information theory is first of all to naturalize the appearance of language as the representation of ideas and as the means for communication between a speaker and a hearer, thus ensuring that language will itself appear only as a means, rather than as the origin, for communication or information. As information, language is characterized as the representation of thoughts or as the representation of empirical events. What is forgotten in this is the foundational role that language has in constructing both the language of, and the means for, being. Within what Heidegger terms "framing" (sometimes translated as "enframing" [*Gestell*]), language operates as representation. With the modern conceptions of information and communication, framing becomes the epistemology within which language is understood:

Within Framing, speaking turns into information [*Das so gestellte Sprechen wird zur Information*]. It informs itself about itself in order to safeguard its own procedures by information theories. Framing—the nature of modern technology holding sway in all directions—commandeers for its purposes a formalized language, the kind of communication which "informs" man uniformly, that is, gives him the form in which he is fitted into the technological-calculative universe, and gradually abandons "natural language" . . . Formalization, the calculated availability of Saying [i.e., poetic language], is the goal and the norm. . . Information theory conceives of the natural aspect of language as a lack of formalization (Heidegger 1971e, 132).

For Heidegger, the metaphysical tradition is a tradition of obscuring the social and cultural constructions of normative meanings and representations. Like modern technology, Heidegger views modern communicative practices as producing statements out of previously established statements. Language understood as communication, thus, is



dedicated to the reproduction of normative forms for understanding. Ontic discourses, for Heidegger, tend to proceed out of the forgetting of the fact of language as a founding gesture for the very possibility of such discourses' claim to be representational. Poetic language, for Heidegger, returns us to the "house of being" in its reply to the world. In doing so, it must also reply first of all to language as a whole and to the fact of language as a founding gesture of, particularly, human being.

It must be remembered that in Heidegger's work ontic activities are situated in ontological concerns. Heidegger's concern throughout his oeuvre is with what he believes is the philosophical, social, and cultural forgetting of the prior conditions or ontological openings for ontic activities. It is the forgetting and erasure of these more primordial, ontologically prior, modes of being which is the danger. For modern man such a forgetting and erasure of authenticity occurs through what Heidegger terms the "onto-theological tradition" of Western metaphysics. For Heidegger, the danger is that the social, cultural, historical, and material (the four causes discussed in "The Question Concerning Technology" [Heidegger 1977e]) co-affordances for emergence may be forgotten, and thus, the historicity of man's being is forgotten in representations that, transmitted globally through standardized social and cultural forms constitute "world pictures" or representations (*Weltbild*—Heidegger 1977a). Heidegger's concerns about language are, thus, a concern about how language is understood communicatively and informationally and how these understandings forget the constitutive role of language for being.

For LIS, Heidegger's understanding of language challenges representational epistemologies and conduit metaphors for information and communication that still underpin LIS theory and practices. Heidegger's later works forefront the event of poetics in both language and the arts and raise the status of such against normative understandings of "information," today, in both LIS and popular discourses. Last, Heidegger's work attempts to investigate the primordial event of naming. It investigates the ontological nature of naming and what is at stake for human beings and other beings when names enter into discursive systems as informational representations of the true. In brief, Heidegger's work forefronts the central issue of LIS research—vocabulary—in a manner that challenges traditional LIS assumptions that originate out of the metaphysical tradition.

### THE POLITICS OF INFORMATION: "POETICALLY MAN DWELLS"

I would like to conclude this article with some considerations of the different models of person and community that Heidegger's writings offer us.

Heidegger's conception of personhood is rooted in an ontological analysis that stresses persons as emergent through mutual, co-determinate relations. Just as technical creation occurs through co-determinate affordances (Aristotle's four causes), so personal poiesis and all other natural events of poiesis must be understood as emergent out of co-determinate affordances. But this emergence also means, for Heidegger, that what emerges constitutes a difference that not only is distinct, but also gathers together all that which it emerged from. In terms of beings, this emerging-from and belong-to is what Heidegger characterizes as a being's "dwelling." Heidegger, in one of his essays commenting on Hölderlin's poetry (entitled after a line—"poetically man dwells"—of a poem attributed to Hölderlin, "In Lovely Blue"), gives a list of manners by which humans do not poetically dwell, beginning with standardized labor (*Arbeit*) and industrial production, characterized by reproduced and reproducible production regardless of

local needs (Heidegger 1971d). For Heidegger, poetic emergence is “site-specific” and “time-valued” (to appropriate Barrett Watten’s terms—see Day 2008).

For Heidegger, the poetic marks the emergence of site-specific and time-valued singular objects and beings. This emergence in the artwork is that of an originary sketching out (*reissen*), whose technique or art is forgotten in the formation of a founding concept or *Grundriss* that then acts as a frame for methodological (broadly, “scientific”) research. The sketch or tear (*Riss*) of re-presentation marks an ontological “dif-ference” (Heidegger 1971b, 202—a concept that, of course, is later taken up by Derrida). That dif-ference is an ontological difference between being and beings, a difference that metaphysics forgets in its cataloging of the universe only in terms of clear and distinct individual types of beings, that is, in terms of representations only. In the language of Heidegger and Derrida: in metaphysics the traces of being are erased, as representation is assumed and presence and *aletheia* gives way to truth as *veritas* or correspondence.

Heidegger’s thought of persons, thus, is less that of individuals, and rather more that of emergent singularities from out of in-common cultural, social, and material properties, analogous to the relation of particular types of beings out of being itself. Iteratively, beings emerge in the openness of being. All beings emerge from their *Mitsein* with other beings and they only have their singularities within such *Mitsein*. Likewise, community is, thus, an in-common community, without strict beginning or end, but stabilized in traditions and emergent and guided by those traditions.

## CONCLUSION

Martin Heidegger’s works constitute a critique of metaphysics as it unfolds from ancient Greek thought through modernity in philosophy, society, and culture. For Heidegger, the latest phase of metaphysics’ unfolding is to be found in information theory and information culture, where language and even the arts are understood as the representation and transmission of ideas *qua* messages.

The Heideggerian project repeatedly points to the failure of metaphysics to think the in-commonness of beings, and with this, its failure to think individuals as temporal, emergent singularities. For Heidegger, this failure has catastrophic consequences.<sup>14</sup> In terms of knowledge, knowledge becomes thought in metaphysics as information—self-present, auto-affective, knowledge. The modern sense of information is that of a ready-to-hand knowledge. Information, in this sense, is representational—its meaning is known beforehand. Information is, to use Descartes’ terms for true knowledge, “clear and distinct.” In terms of persons, persons are understood as a priori identities with set powers, useful or not within technological systems similarly arranged. And the same follows for communities, species and other identities.

A counter-philosophy of in-formation, beginning with a critical theory of information, would be dedicated to thinking the conditions by which in-formation becomes information; how beings emerge into knowledge, particularly, the sense of certain knowledge that the modern conception of information suggests. It would be dedicated to thinking the dif-ference of being in information. In Briet’s work (2006), for example, we would need to critically return to the moment of the antelope’s cataloging within the system of differences that make up the catalog and we would have to examine the “will-to-catalog” that is part of modern science. (Briet closes that moment down very quickly in the name of the modern “necessity” of—that is to say, the modern will for—documentation.) We



would want to account for the conversion of ontological difference to ontic differences (Derrida's *dif-férance* to "difference"). We could then also follow the various secondary documents and examine how they repeat, but also shift, the signifier of the newly discovered "antelope" within their different worlds, and yet how each of these shifts gets erased as being just instances of the same information (i.e., facts about the antelope) and how each of the forms of discourse is reduced to being just different types of documentation (or today, "information"). Within such a project, information would need to be rethought not as the apex of a metaphysicalized form of knowledge, but rather, in a much earlier sense of the term, as an affect that needs to be responded to (Day 2001) and we could read those responses in terms of their idealization of the animal as a type. Such "affects" are not to be thought of as quasi-empirical *qualia* (in the philosophy of mind, short for "qualitative feeling") or stimuli for information processing by the brain, but rather, as calls of being to which also belong the categories of understanding that we bring to bear. In brief, we would need to understand the modern sense of "information" and information science as various types of metaphysical attunements to the world, and we would proceed with a bracketing of that attunement through a rigorous deconstruction of its instances. From a Heideggerian perspective, this would help lead us to a path of thinking beyond the Western metaphysical tradition. From a more recent Derridean perspective, it would be a timely, critical rethinking of our own cultural inscriptions (now no longer confined to what Heidegger thought of as the West), so as to allow us to rethink the political situation and historical direction of identity, community, and knowledge.

Being is given to man, but the Heideggerian questions are, How so, what are the consequences, and above all, what has been forgotten, particularly in a reduction of all beings and knowledge to being information? One may propose that these are the starting questions for any critical theory of information.

## REFERENCES

- Briet, Suzanne. 2006. *What is Documentation? English Translation of the Classic French Text*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Day, Ronald E. 2001. *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Day, Ronald E. 2007. "Knowing and Indexical Psychology." In *Rethinking Knowledge Management: From Knowledge Object to Knowledge Processes*. Ed. Claire R. McInerney, Ronald E. Day, 331–48. New York: Springer.
- Day, Ronald E. 2008. "Works and Representation." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59 (10): 1644–52.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Christie McDonald. 1985. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Dourish, Paul. 2001. *Where the Action Is: The Foundations of Embodied Interaction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Frohmann, Bernd. 2004. *Deflating Information: From Science Studies to Documentation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Fynsk, Christopher. 1986. *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row.

- Heidegger, Martin. 1971a. "The Nature of Language." In *On the Way to Language*, 57–108. New York: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971b. "Language." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 189–210. New York: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971c. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 17–87. New York: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971d. "... Poetically man dwells ...". In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 213–29. New York: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971e. "The Way to Language." In *On the Way to Language*, 111–36. New York: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1973. "Overcoming Metaphysics." In *The End of Philosophy*, 84–110. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977a. "The Age of the World Picture." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 115–54. New York: Harper.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977b. "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." In *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, 373–92. New York: Harper.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977c. "Letter on Humanism." In *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, 193–242. New York: Harper.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977d. "On the Essence of Truth." In *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, 117–41. New York: Harper.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977e. "The Question Concerning Technology." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 3–35. New York: Harper.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1996. *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. 1990. *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Rapaport, Herman. 1989. *Heidegger & Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Ronell, Avital. 1989. *The Telephone Book: Technology—Schizophrenia—Electric Speech*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Weaver, Warren. 1949. "Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication." In *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 1–64. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

## NOTES

1. Herman Rapaport's *Heidegger & Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language* (1989) remains an outstanding analysis of the relationship of Heidegger, Blanchot, and Derrida's works. Christopher Fynsk's *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity* (1986) remains an outstanding analysis of Heidegger's works.
2. A useful counterpoint to this is Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Heidegger, Art and Politics* (1990).
3. In "Heideggerian AI." I find this term to be an oxymoron, though, since Heidegger's thought would have found the notion of artificial intelligence to be the height of Western metaphysics.
4. Following the standard convention in the literature, we will leave the term *Dasein* ("existence") untranslated. The term appears in *Being and Time* as a technical term for human being's mode of ontological existence, as a being concerned with its own existence.



5. The notion that persons can change the progress and narratives of history (understood as duration) by means of reinventing the future by mixing present situations with recovered elements of the past (thus, creating two senses of "history"—that of linear duration and that of radical breaks and historical retrieval [Nietzsche's "untimely"]) is a theme that runs through German-French modern theory, though with different variations. For example, Deleuze's concepts of repetition and potentiality (*Difference and Repetition*) and his two forms of time (*Logic of Sense*), Benjamin's notion of messianic history and his concept of *Jetztzeit*, Negri's politics "at the edge of time" (*Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo*), and Derrida's concept of iteration in language and identity all stress the power of the agent to revalue the historical order—that is, to use the power of difference in presence (or identity) as an historical space of freedom for historical and political reevaluation toward reinventing the future.

6. This notion of "event" is important not only in Heidegger's work, and Nietzsche's before him, but in the work of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, as well.

7. Cf. Derrida's analysis of "the gift"—patterned off of the German: *Es gibt*, literally, "there is" (French: *il y a*). Here, the issue is that Dasein's mode of being is something given to it within the universe as a whole.

8. There is a considerable literature in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) on Heidegger's concepts of "ready-to-hand" (*zuhanden*) and "present-at-hand" (*vorhanden*) entities as applied to transparent and nontransparent HCI design. Since it will take us afield, I will not cover this literature. For more on this distinction, see Dourish 2001.

9. Derrida's critique of presence constitutes a continuation, but also on certain points a pointed critique of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics.

10. On the relation of Heidegger and Derrida's works see, for example, Rapaport (1989).

11. Heidegger's remarks concerning what we now discuss as the media are both scholarly and personal. His discussion of "everyday talk" (*Alltäglichkeit*) in *Being and Time* is important, though other, more fragmentary, remarks can be found throughout his writings and lectures. In this context, his sometimes combative attitude to the interviewer in his famous interview in the German weekly, *Der Spiegel*, in 1966 should not be understood solely as a reaction to the interviewer's biographical inquiries. Heidegger's concerns with the media as a site of chitchat, and not as a site of "authentic" thought or politics, appears off and on throughout his oeuvre.

Following a trajectory of a critique of the mass media in terms of its metaphysical inscriptions and projections, we should also note Derrida's revealing remark as to his role as a philosopher and theorist: "As for me, I talk about the philosopher, but I am not simply a philosopher. . . . I believe that in a given historical, political situation of the university, it is necessary to fight so that something like philosophy remains possible. It is in this strategic context that on occasion I have spoken of philosophy's usefulness in translating or deciphering a certain number of things, such as what goes on in the media, and so on" (Derrida and McDonald 1985, 141). In a similar way, I would propose, philosophy—or beyond the traditional rhetoric and topics of this, what Heidegger called "thought"—must be possible (and urgent) in both popular and specialized studies of "information," particularly during "information ages," of which I have argued that there have been several in modernity (Day 2001).

12. Beginning with Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's works and lectures and, later, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, the term *aesthetics* left its ancient Greek roots referring to feelings or affects in general and it came to refer to a certain domain of affects, namely, those that involve the fine arts. Thus, as is well known, aesthetics in the modern sense—meaning the study of art—only emerges at the end of the 18th century and it signals the turn of art from a notion of crafts production and technique to that of being an object of contemplation leading to a feeling (i.e., an aesthetics) of either harmony (the beautiful) or disharmony (the sublime).

13. See, for example, Heidegger's comments in his 1942 lecture on Hölderlin's hymn, "The Ister":

The machine of modern technology is essentially distinct from every kind of "tool" not only insofar as it has its own sequence of effects and its own way of producing energy and is thereby a different means in the hand of human beings. . . . The fascinating side of this process can, especially in conjunction with the discipline pertaining to technology, cover over to a large extent the "misery" into which human beings are thrust by technologization. Perhaps there is no longer any such "misery" for those human beings who are completely technological. Conceived metaphysically, modern machine technology is a specific kind of "truth," in terms of which the essence of the actuality of everything actual is determined. The machine that belongs to such technology is different from a "tool," for technology itself is self-subsistent (Heidegger 1996, 44).

Such remarks on technology are consistent throughout Heidegger's oeuvre. See, for example, Heidegger's lecture, "The Age of the World Picture" (Heidegger 1977a).

14. See, not least of all, these remarks from notes from 1936 to 1946 collected by Heidegger for later publication:

The decline of the truth of beings occurs necessarily, and indeed as the completion of metaphysics. . . . The decline occurs through the collapse of the world characterized by metaphysics, and at the same time, through the desolation of the earth stemming from metaphysics. . . . The decline has already taken place. The consequences of this occurrence are the events of world history in this century. They are merely the course of what has already ended. Its course is ordered historico-technologically in the sense of the last stage of metaphysics. . . . The still hidden truth of Being is withheld from metaphysical humanity. The laboring animal is left to the giddy whirl of its products so that it may tear itself to pieces and annihilate itself in empty nothingness (Heidegger 1973, 86–87).