Works and Representation

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The concept of the "work" in art differs from and challenges traditional concepts of the "work" in bibliography. Whereas the traditional bibliographic concept of the work takes an ideational approach that incorporates mentalist epistemologies, container-content metaphors, and the conduit metaphor of information transfer and re-presentation, the concept of the work of art as is presented here begins with the site-specific and time-valued nature of the object as a product of human labor and as an event that is emergent through cultural forms and from social situations. The account of the work, here, is thus materialist and expressionist rather than ideational. This article takes the discussion of the work in the philosopher Martin Heidegger's philosophical-historical account and joins this with the concept of the work in the modern avant-garde, toward bringing into critique the traditional bibliographic conception of the work and toward illuminating a materialist perspective that may be useful in understanding cultural work-objects, as well as texts proper.

The Work of Art

Richard P. Smiraglia in his book, *The Nature of "a Work"* (Smiraglia, 2001) has argued for a traditional bibliographical account of the work, stating that the work may be defined as

> …the set of ideas created probably by an author or perhaps a composer, or other artist, set into a document using text, with the intention of being communicated to a receiver (probably a reader or listener). A work may have many texts, and may appear in many documents. (Smiraglia, 2001, pp. 3–4)[1]

Such an understanding of the work is made up of various traditional container-content metaphors, beginning with an originating set of "ideas" held by an author which are said to be embodied or contained in a physical and rhetorical (or other semiotic) form ("set into a document using text"). As the above quote demonstrates, as well, such an understanding is also commonly related to traditional understandings of the concept of information as a communicational notion, following the conduit metaphor ("receiver") for communication (see Day, 2000; Weaver, 1949). In this way, Smiraglia's book joins a well-established tradition of library- and information-science theory—not only in regard to bibliographical discussions of the work in cataloging, but also in regard to cognitive agency in information retrieval and information behavior—that understands ideas as being quasiempirical objects—generated in the minds of authors—that are contained in documents and that are sought by and transferred to the minds of information seekers or users upon reading, viewing, or listening.

Despite this theoretical tradition, the bibliographic notion of the work has proved problematic for art and other cultural-object catalogers. Such standards as VRA Core 4.0 have attempted to distinguish between different senses of "work," as occurs with images, art objects, and collections. Indeed, the concept of work in regard to art may appear to be not only different, but the opposite of the traditional notion of bibliographic works, with the former beginning with the site-specificity and time-valued properties of material items and the latter concerned with premising an ideal or archetype, which is said to be "embodied" or "contained" in the material artifact. Yet, the historical and philosophical reasons for these different understandings of works have not been much discussed, particularly in regard to their wider cultural origins and ramifications. While it is not the purpose of this paper to give a full explication of such a history and philosophy, this paper will suggest that there are historical and philosophical reasons—and social and cultural reasons, too—for calling into question the traditional bibliographic concept of the work, particularly in light of considerations of the work of art.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to situate a discussion of the concept of the work in general within a discussion of the work of art in particular. I, therefore, propose philosophical and historical arguments for viewing works as events that are constitutive of meaning by virtue of their negotiation

[1]A referee of this article has suggested that Smiraglia's use of the word *text* in the quote above is ambiguous. I would assume that the ambiguity being pointed to is that *text* may refer to printed alphabetic letters (in Smiraglia's first use of the term) or to inscriptions in general (in his second use of the term).

of cultural and social horizons through material forms and techniques.

The philosophical analysis of the work in this paper will follow Martin Heidegger's analysis of *work* in the work of art, for what we are attempting to account for is the work as an event or phenomenon. Heidegger's discussion of the work is part of his critique of modern technology as a reproductive or representational form of creation that begins with a concept of an ideal product and then proceeds toward the manifestation of that ideal in the actual reproduced and reproducible object. This teleological and metaphysical understanding of technology is contrasted by Heidegger with a concept of creation (*poiesis*) in which *techne* (craft, art, or skill) is co-responsive and co-responsible for the emergence of the work by means of the interdependence of cultural forms, social situations, historical moments, and materials. Thus, Heidegger's oeuvre on these topics may be viewed as an argument against the Latin or "metaphysical" conception of production and an advocacy of the latter view of *poiesis* and *techne*.

Heidegger's description of art works as events that are intentionally created so as to generate meaning in site-specific and time-valued manners, rather than as containers for subjective ideas, is an approach shared with that of the modern avant-garde in the arts,[2] particularly in regard to viewing the work as being an intentional site-specific and time-valued construction. In the modern avant-garde in art, content or meaning is a product of material or textual form in social space. Art, in the sense of the modern avant-garde, is time-valued and site-specific (Watten, 1985). This sense of the art work stands against both Kantian understandings of art works as originating from genius and affecting mental harmony in the mind of the viewer or reader, and "realist" views of art as representation.

The difference between the work as re-presentational of mental cognition and the work as socially constructed and culturally formed (and with this, critical of transcendental meaning) goes to the heart of library- and information-science theory in so much as it opens up a space for a critical philosophy or "critical theory" based on social and cultural constructivism and materialist expression, rather than on metaphysical characterizations of meaning, understanding, and cognition. In this manner, a critique of the traditional concept of work joins a host of critiques of cognitive models that have dominated library and information science and knowledge management for the past quarter century—critiques such as Foucauldian-inspired "discourse analysis," social-constructivist critiques of "information behavior" and "information needs," and historical

and philosophical deconstructions of "information-age" and "information-society" rhetoric, as well as deconstructions of the modern concept of "information." In other words, such a critique joins materialist critiques of the metaphysical subject, most recently understood in terms of information.

Modern library science evolved in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century with the rise of technological modernism. When meaning is at issue, cataloging and information retrieval hope for a correspondence between the contents of works or their representations in metadata or abstracts and searchers' "mental models" or "needs." But the view that meaning is contained in works rather than produced by works is challenged by a concept of work in art works, particularly those of the modern avant-garde, where meaning is seen as a product of socially and culturally renegotiated meanings. Meaning, here, is a product of the assertion of unique forms and the "making strange"—or "defamiliarization"—of common forms through the artist's use of technique and material in site-specific and time-valued manners. The notion of "form," here, may refer to physical forms (as in art works) or linguistic forms (as in bibliographic works—though objects such as artist books make use of both physical and linguistic forms). Both physical forms and linguistic forms, as meaningful, are cultural forms. Cultural forms are tools that afford the expressions of living beings.

Read bibliographically, this understanding of the work would understand texts, too, as socially situated and culturally formed. Broad theoretical traditions in literary, art, and cultural studies that speak to this understanding are Russian formalism (which intersected with Russian constructivism in the arts), reader-response theory, and movements in post-structuralism, such as deconstruction. Crossover approaches or methods between literary studies and library- and information-science theory would be critical forms of "discourse analysis" and other "social constructivist" accounts.

In these approaches, terms such as *ideas* or *concepts* and *understanding* refer, respectively, to assemblages of words, their use, objects, actions, and expectations regarding these assemblages and to the relative shared uses of families of such assemblages, so as to be able to do things with words and to do things with other meaningful objects (cultural "tools") in the world. Overtly following the later Wittgenstein and a Russian formalist and sociological tradition, we may state that mental events are here understood as the use of cultural forms or "tools" (cf. Day, 2007b). For example, *understanding* is the negotiation and pragmatic arrival between actors at more or less common manners of using words and other cultural tools in order to do actions, including other semiotic actions, so that intentions may be premised and fulfilled, responsibilities claimed, descriptions made, and meanings assured, as well as other activities being accomplished. The role of the work of art here would be to set up challenges and conditions for the making explicit and/or renegotiation of these cultural-social-cognitive horizons and their elements. Thus, the avant-garde work of art, for example, is understood in the modern period to have—implicitly within its techniques and social functions—political potentials.

[2]By the term *avant-garde* in the arts I am referring to the historical avant-garde of the late 19th through the 20th and now the early 21st centuries, which may be characterized by a concern with the production of new, and the contestation of normative, meanings through the extension of form in social space. The avant-garde work, I will suggest in this paper, is also characterized by a concern with the space specificity and time-valued (Watten, 1985) nature of this production, which leads to the work being seen as an event. Such works are sometimes characterized as "formalist" and "constructivist" to various extents.

One consequence of this analysis is that no transcendental aboutness can be said to be "embedded" as the "content" of the work, since the word *content* does not refer to any ideational quality "found" in the work, but instead, it is a product of formal expression. *Content*, in the sense of ideas, is the more or less agreed upon meanings that we give to a text or other semantic object. It is not an ideational entity embedded in an aesthetic form. Heidegger's "destruction"—beginning with his book, *Being and Time* (1927/1996) and continuing through his later writings—of the "ontotheological tradition" of Western metaphysics (one aspect being the view that meaning is transcendentally located in private minds or in divine understandings and then contained or re-presented in particular forms of expression, leading to an adequation or correspondence theory of truth), finds a very clear form in his discussion of the work or art. It is art, for Heidegger, that is the highest and the latest domain of the struggle with Western metaphysics (Heidegger, 1977a) because it is here that the creation of meaning is the explicit function of cultural forms. In this way, the concept of the work, particularly in regard to the work of art, becomes the foremost site for engaging, unraveling, and destroying the hold that metaphysics has upon our understanding of language, meaning, and being.

The *Work* of the Work of Art

Although not part of the avant-garde tradition, the twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger developed a historical and philosophical account of the work of art that stressed it being an act of *work* and, thus, a social *event* of constructive creation. In this manner, Heidegger's account contributes to a critique of art as ideational representation and, therefore, shares a critical standpoint with the tradition of the avant-garde. This view, seen in light of the history of aesthetics, is useful for countering the traditional notion of work held in bibliography, as we have explicated the latter, above.

Heidegger's analysis of the work of art according to its productive character occurs in his lecture and essay of the 1930s, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (Heidegger, 1971) where he argues that we should look for the *work* of the art work when we encounter and think about art. Heidegger gives a historical argument for taking this critical path, which also contextualizes the historical specificity of representational views of the concept of the work (and with this, I would suggest, the historical specifity of the term *information* along the lines of what Bernd Frohmann, 2004, has termed *epistemic content*, that is, as a metaphysical understanding of knowledge; see also Day, 2001). The consequences for critically discussing the concept of work in the context of an information culture or information society, that is, in the context of a metaphysics of knowledge that pervades culture and society today, is far reaching, not only encompassing a critique of what we see today as professional education, theory, and practice in library and information science and information management, but also demanding an engagement with the modern concept of information in today's late-modern

cultures and societies (Day, 2001, 2007a). Such an investigation, I have earlier suggested, forefronts the problem of the aesthetics of information as one of our chief ethical and political horizons today (Day, 2001).

In "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger (1971) 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, 1971, p. 56). In a later lecture and then essay, "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954/1977b), 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 (1961/1977b), 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 (1961/1977b) rereading of *causa* as *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 craftsperson 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 Ancient Greek term *techne* refers to the techniques and activities that work to bring forth (*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.[3] In so doing, Heidegger develops a phenomenological understanding of the art work based on site-specific and time-valued labor and reception. By critiquing the understanding of the work as a symbolic object that is said to contain or embody meaning in its form, and by asserting an

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[3]Beginning with Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's works and lectures and, later, Immanuel Kant's (1793/2000) *Critique of Judgment*, the term *aesthetics* left its Ancient Greek roots referring to feelings or affects in general, and 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). For a history of modern aesthetics, see Hammermeister (2002).

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 (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 art work'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 art works 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, 1961/1977b, points, for example, to the exploitation of the Rhine River as a source of hydroelectric power.) Particular beings are seen as informational resources for the purpose of short-term exploitation for determined human ends, a purpose that is often detrimental for beings overall, including human beings in the long run. It is for this reason that Heidegger (1961/1977b) understands physics, the science of determinate 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, but rather, of the inappropriate and misleading overextension of the determinate sense of causation in Newtonian physics (as causal forces between bodies) to other studies and phenomena, particularly 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 physical 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 (see, for example, Warren Weaver's discussion of *affects* in dance performances as instances of communication causes and *effects*: Weaver, 1949).

For Heidegger, the art work, like the natural being, appears as an expression of an environment's affordances. Heidegger views *techne* as being the means by which *poiesis* occurs. Thus, for Heidegger (1961/1977b), 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 mark the beginnings of the "task of thinking," 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 in the universe. (Heidegger's "destruction" of the metaphysical tradition, following what Heidegger saw as Nietzsche's incomplete destruction of the metaphysical tradition—see Heidegger, 1961/1991—was meant to encourage this historical event.) 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 type 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 type of thought that seeks to understand and condition an environment in terms of what we think beings must essentially be (i.e., what "causes" them to 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.[4] It is a type of thought that challenges the cultural traditions of technological modernity, the foundations of humanism, the divisions between the human and the animal, the "ontotheological" underpinnings of philosophy, policy, and production, and it opens up to an "ecological" type of thought rooted in thinking creation in terms of co-responsible affordances and emergence.

The Work of Texts

The notion of the work as an event leads to challenges for a documentary practice based on understanding documents—especially printed texts—as formal containers of ideational contents. If Heidegger's arguments raise questions about works being understood as containers for originary ideas, can we point to instances of texts that raise the same objections as art works (narrowly understood in terms of the visual, architectural, and plastic arts), and may the formalist analysis of the avant-garde help us analyze these work-objects?

For this, we might look at texts that manifestly position themselves as discursive events, rather than claiming to represent a subject or to be "about" something. Such texts occur less often with scientific papers, whose keywords, subject categories, titles, and arguments implicitly or explicitly claim to represent concepts or empirical referents and their events, and more often in arts and even humanities writings, which manifestly use rhetoric and other compositional tools

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[4]This task of thinking begins for Heidegger with, first of all, thinking beings in terms of their being-with one another (*Mitsein*). The concept of *Mitsein* is most explicitly articulated in Heidegger's first book, *Being and Time* (1927/1996).

as devices in their investigations. If representation in literature succeeds through the masking of rhetorical or "literary" devices (such as schemas and tropes) in the same way as common conventions of drawing lead the viewer to see a picture or representation rather than a series of lines, then formalist arts and literature make explicit these rhetorical means so as to show the social and cultural construction of what we see as realistic representations. In the humanities, the artistic "revealing of devices" (as the Russian Formalists termed the tendency of art to show its materials and techniques of construction) has its corollary in writings that highlight stylistic and literary devices rather than claim, first and foremost, subject representations. Whereas art works may simply be bracketed by the skeptic as works with aesthetic appeal but no real knowledge base, the explicit presence of art techniques in scholarly writing (qua the explicit use of rhetorical devices) not least of all raises the question of what styles and literary devices form cultural norms for information, knowledge and scholarship.

For example, Avital Ronell's book (1989), *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*, is not solely, or even primarily, *about* the telephone, as we might commonly expect this term to be discussed in texts with such a title (that is, in terms of standard histories about those objects that we call *telephones* or technical manuals on telephones). While Ronell's book does contain a historical discussion of the telephone as a technological object, the concept of the telephone in her book is rhetorically investigated through various historical figures and philosophical writings that involve telephones and language related to telephones (for example, Heidegger's discussion of the "*the call* of being" is related to political events involving his use of the telephone). In Ronell's book, rhetorical tropes are critically used and examined in her analysis of philosophical, literary, and historical events. The understanding of language and described objects as not simply "literal," but also figurative, in human affairs leads to an analytic account of a sort of "collective unconscious" use of words and objects. Ronell's book, thus, is a type of "culture analysis" or group psychoanalytical account of the telephone and its language, which cannot itself avoid grappling with its own being embedded in culture and language. Thus, in its examination of its topic and in its self-reflective performance, the book constitutes not just commentary on, but also acts of, cultural politics. In this regard, the "information" which such a book gives is both *said* in its argument and *shown* in its critical use of form. Such an approach subverts the modern conception of information as the transmission or representation of meaning, and it challenges the common belief that scholarly works are composed simply of the representation and transmission of learned knowledge as "content."

Such formally invested academic works may sometimes seem difficult, unclear, or unreadable to a disciplinary audience whose expectations are that the titles and the arguments of scholarly books should simply be understood in terms of the representation and the transmission of learned knowledge. For example, we might view as "unscholarly" and without

knowledge a historical account of the telephone's role in modernity that does not assume a narrative history of the telephone, telling, for example, a story of "men and machines." Yet we must recall that narrative stories—including those of history—are, first of all, literary forms that largely mask their own representational constructions.

The difficulty, obscurity, or unreadability of a work, thus, may have nothing to do with grammatical difficulties or errors, but rather, it may have to do with conditions of rhetorical and disciplinary reception. If *informational* is understood as a synonym for *representational* (and *information* for *representation*), then texts such as Ronell's may not be seen as informational, and with this, not really "scholarly." Ronell's book, in fact, in its introduction, suggests that it is working against such criteria for knowledge by orienting itself as a critical and formal response to knowledge understood as information or representation (and the fellow traveler to such, the conduit metaphor for communication):

A User's Manual

Warning: *The Telephone Book* is going to resist you. Dealing with a logic and tropos of the switchboard, it engages the destabilization of the addressee. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to learn how to read with your ears. In addition to listening for the telephone, you are being asked to tune your ears to noise frequencies, to anticoding, to the inflated reserves of random indeterminateness—in a word, you are expected to stay open to the static and interferences that will occupy these lines. At first you may find the way the book runs to be disturbing, but we have had to break up its logic typographically. Like the electronic impulse, it is flooded with signals. To crack open the closural sovereignty of the Book, we have feigned silence and disconnection, suspending the tranquil cadencing of paragraphs and conventional divisions.

(Ronell, 1989, unpaginated introduction)

In Ronell's (1989) book, the critique of representational understandings of communication and information is textually performed, in part, by its typographic innovations. This strategy begins with its visually confusing listing of the Library of Congress subject headings in the front matter of her book, where subject headings are typographically layered over one another in an obscuring fashion. This typographic "anticoding" of textual aboutness visually gives more information about the meaning of the book than the subject headings themselves (i.e., it indicates to the reader the critical intent of Ronell's book in regard to ideational notions of representation and reference). Indeed, if we tried to actually use the Library of Congress subject headings assigned to this book for searching purposes,[5] we would have very little chance of finding the book in a large catalog, because the first three subject headings inaccurately describe the book, lumping it in with items in scientific psychology, and the last subject heading leads to overload when searching. More

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[5]Oral communication—Psychology; Oral communication—Psychological aspects; Technology—Psychological Aspects; Telephone

appropriate subject headings would have nothing at all to do with the ideational or aboutness content of the book at all, but would, instead, describe the book according to its discursive genre (for example, "phenomenological discourse," "Derridean discourse," or even "cultural analysis"). Such headings would tell one about the intent of the work in terms of an analytical tradition, and these might then be combined with the term *telephone*. That such is not the case, however, tells us that what is expected in scholarly books is information, in the sense of ideational representations about a thing or phenomenon. Within the genre expectations for scholarly books and the corresponding expectations for their conceptions of knowledge and information, aesthetics, rhetoric, and discursive styles and families are seen as things that should not obscure the "true content" of scholarly works, and indeed, the manifest appearance of such elements lead such works to be judged as "unclear," "immature," "pretentious," and so on. However, in the case of Ronell's book, her writing enacts aesthetic and literary, as well as argumentative, performances against a representational type of knowledge that, today, is known as "information." To attempt to understand her book solely or dominantly in terms of "information"—as this term is understood to mean re-presentation—is to miss the very argument her book enacts, both typographically and discursively.

Subject headings, understood as descriptions of ideational aboutness, can do little toward illuminating the workings of works such as Ronell's book. Subject headings of scholarly works claim to represent the "content" of works, and they do so by means of controlled vocabularies about a work's content in the hope that these will be able to describe works in a manner that is both universal and relatively permanent. Such hopes rest upon a desired correspondence between readers' expectations about a work and the work's text at the level of a mediating normative vocabulary, as well as through graphic design and cultural understandings of what is, and what is not, "content" in a textual form. But Ronell's book works against an idealist view of scholarly texts and knowledge and it reasserts the text's materiality through rhetorical play and typographic demonstrations. Even as a mass reproduced work, Ronell's book contains enough formal and rhetorical play by which it can renegotiate normative metaphysical, cultural, social, and political horizons and their devices. In many ways, given the central concerns of Ronell's book, her book could *not* simply assume a primary rhetorical strategy of representation and it *had* to engage her topic in critical aesthetic and rhetorical manners. Indeed, one may suggest that any scholarly book that critically engages the concept of information today ought to consider engaging the aesthetics of information in the form of the work being composed itself.

Further, we sometimes assume that "literariness" (as the Russian Formalists characterized texts where rhetorical devices were explicit) only occurs with works in the arts, or sometimes in humanities texts, as well. But the "literary" construction of ordinary language and even scientific discourse has been a topic of critical theory (broadly understood), as well as art practice, for the past forty years.[6] Indeed, as the name of our ordinary *telephone books* suggest, even our ordinary language is permeated by rhetorical tropes (i.e., what we ordinarily call *telephone books* are not books about telephones or about the "idea" of telephones, but rather, the name refers to books that contain *telephone numbers*—that is, the name and title of that ordinary language object, the "telephone book," is metonymic).

To state the obvious, the problematic of information as representation may be seen in many other contexts than that of art works and bibliographic records. However, in art works, the social, cultural, and formal construction of representation may be most explicitly seen because such works often have as their themes the contestation of representation. To then treat such works as instances of representation is not only deeply ironic, but it betrays the aesthetic, textual, and social and cultural critiques that are part of their construction and their traditions.

Today, another important site for the problem of representation in regard to works can be found with digital museums. Conceptual works, minimalist works, and foremost, performance art "happenings" are all types of works that emphasize their materiality and their site-specific and time-valued characteristics, and that use these in critiques of normative meanings and values in culture and society, including critiques of art as representation. Live performance art cannot be preserved as such. Recordings of such events constitute new and different (often, documentary) events whose meaning cannot be reduced to the first, particularly when the art work intends to make manifest or otherwise critique the representational status of such types of recordings.

Digital museums, like physically based art museums, use universal art historical categories (artist, period, genre, historical time, place, school) to construct transcendental meanings for works. Such categories both universalize and recode the meaning of art works, particularly revalorizing those works that work against such categories (such as the work of the modern avant-garde) through site-specific and time-valued means. More directly, the digital reproduction of art works can erase the explicit materiality and the site-specific and time-valued nature of the works in the very event of digital representation. In a museum one might stand, impressed and historically and aesthetically informed, before a painting by Vincent van Gogh, which one knows is by van Gogh by the name plate attached to it, its position in the museum's gallery,

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[6]The formal and the so-called "sociological" construction of *the work* (and related terms in literary study, such as *genre*) occupied a central theme in Russian formalist and "sociological" poetics, for example, in the works of such writers as Tynianov, Shklovsky, and Bakhtin. Russian Formalism, as a theoretical study of poetics, communication, and documentary forms, was theoretically and socially linked to the Russian avant-garde in the arts. In the arts, the Russian avant-garde (i.e., constructivism) was related to Dadaism and, to some extent, Surrealism, and has a direct historical relation to today's constructivist arts, performance art, and formalist poetics. Theoretically, some of the concerns of Russian formalism and constructivism continue in "social constructionist" accounts in many areas of inquiry, including library and information science.

the brochures in the museum, one's previous cultural and formal education, the museum's taped narrative of its collection, and so forth. Within a digital museum one might likewise be impressed, though one is now encountering the work in its digital representation(s). But, take the same painting and remove its institutional and educational framing by placing it in any ordinary hallway and it may be more or less moving and impressive for different reasons. In the museum, the art work is—by the very institutional and educational nature of museums, not less than by the mechanical and digital devices used in and by museums—positioned so as to be understood as a historical and cultural document. Its construction as a work is reframed (literally and figuratively) so as to present it as a document within an art-historical narrative. It is said to be "about" the categories of that ontology and narrative. Digitally reproduced works in online museums do the same, but at an even greater remove from the material properties of the work (if the work has not been designed for the digital space, that is). By such means works are reworked as documents of art history.

Similarly, with bibliographical works, works are traditionally said to be "about" normative categories, events, and objects. Such normative entities are said to inhabit the mind of the author who then represents them as "content" in a documentary form. The cataloger's job is to read the work "correctly" and to correctly represent its contents in the subject field of a record. But, in this tale of the work, the workings of the work disappear in a mythology of normative subjects, normative authorial intents, and ideational contents. What is erased is the formal construction of the work as a site-specific and time-valued event using cultural forms (language, images, etc.). Also erased are the numerous works produced, the edited versions, and the fact that the published work is a result of numerous compromises, agreements, and coincidences between the author, editor, copy editor, and numerous others. Last, what is forgotten is that the work's meanings emerge in the act of reading it, that is, in creating its meanings in the worlds of the readers, listeners or viewers.[7] In sum, in an idealist account, what is lost is the work of the work and what is assumed is the work as a document of mental activities or literary history.

In a materialist and emergence account, what are the work's ideas? "Ideas" or "concepts" are commonly understood or understandable learned ways of using words or other semantic materials in relation to like materials and in relation to other types of materials in the world. The work doesn't "contain" or reproduce ideas, but instead, these are generated by the work in relation to the world. When a cataloger enters through a subject heading or descriptor what a work is "about," he or she is using his or her judgment to render meaning using the words of a professional, controlled vocabulary. In natural language, our vocabularies are less "structured," more fluid, and more open to negotiation in many instances through conversation.

Simply, there is no reason to evoke the notion of an arche-meaning "in" the work, that is, to evoke a form-content epistemology or metaphysics, in order to account for the meaning of a work. There is no "archework" that we can call or even posit as the "true" work from which others may be said to derive.[8] Physically, there are drafts and authorized editions by various agents in different social situations (the author, the publisher, the copy editor, republishers, etc.). In terms of meaning, there are pragmatically agreed upon meanings from encounters with a work (whether it be a text or any other type of work-object). There is no ideational content that characterizes the meaning of the work previous to its appearing and being read (the author's statements about the work constitute a reading of it, as well, though this may be treated as a more privileged reading than that of others for a host of reasons). The event or *work* of the work occurs through the reading of semantic marks or other objects as cultural forms in social situations at specific times. This is what characterizes a materialist account of the work.

Conclusion

In summary, why should we be concerned by what we mean by a *work* and why should we raise such a concern to the level of philosophical and social inquiry?

The first question is answered, in part, by the practice of image cataloging, in particular, and the cataloging of any art work, in general. Image catalogers and art catalogers have struggled with the bibliographic sense of the work in their cataloging because of the manifestly material and cultural characteristics of their objects. Lately, with the digital proliferation of art works and their broad transmission, the problem of the work as representation and reproduction has become even more pronounced.

Often with cultural objects the concept of the work involves individual items, rather than an ideal of a class (e.g., the "original" of all printed manifestations). The digital reproduction of cultural objects, however, raises the problem of the confusion of the two approaches, and it makes more manifest and brings into question the inherent assumptions of bibliographic practice, which are rooted in assumptions of reproduction and representation. More recent art cataloging standards, such as VRA Core 4 are more sensitive to the cultural concept. For example, VRA Core 4 demands that the catalog record designate whether the object is a work, an image, or a collection. This difference is necessary when singular works are reproduced, for example. More difficult

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[7]The exception to this is, of course, so-called "artist books"—books that are constructed so that the actual items in a run or series manifestly show their differences from one another. Artist books manifestly show, at a physical level, differences that occur at a textual level, as well—that is, they show meaning as a property of form and its reception in social space. The cataloging of artist books (which lies between the tradition of cataloging cultural forms and that of cataloging bibliographic entities) constitutes an interesting boundary condition, and artist books constitute an interesting boundary object, for the examination of "works."

[8]At best, we can say that there is a "family resemblance" (using the term from Wittgenstein) of agreed upon meanings which may be said to belong to the work. Family resemblances are just that, however—resemblances. Here the term does not refer to progenitor relationships that can be traced back to an originary arche-work or set of mental or divine ideas outside of the work.

cases occur, of course, when the original work is in a reproducible form, and still further, when reproducible forms create another work or a collection. Obviously, this occurs with photographs and films, respectively, but we should note that it occurs in the case of printed books, as well.

The traditional bibliographic notion of the work is the opposite of that in the arts, and it is counterintuitive to apply the bibliographic notion of the work to art works if what we consider to constitute the work of art is that of being a cultural and social event. A notion of an "archework" to the work—an original content, or beyond that, an original authorial intent of which the physical item is a copy—has well-known theological and metaphysical origins. Heidegger's exploration of Aristotle's four causes in regard to *techne* and his explication of the work of art in terms of *techne* are philosophical attempts to account for the social situation, the cultural and material forms, and the acts of labor in production and reception that are all contributing aspects of the event of the work. In a like manner, VRA Core 4, for example, records the time period of the work's creation, its location of discovery, as well as its current housing and its creator. Both in Heidegger's theoretical work and in the practical work of image cataloging there are attempts to account for the work as a cultural and social event rather than as the "manifestation" of an ideal thought or what I have called an "archework."

The cultural and social importance of recovering the site-specificity and time-valued nature of the work as a product of techniques of expression in social situations and through cultural and material forms, may be gleaned, in part, in Heidegger's late, 1966, article, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (Heidegger, 1966/1977a).

Earlier, we have alluded to this text and its importance, but here in conclusion I would like to return to the text in order to restate and expand the general social and political importance of Heidegger's critique of transcendental understandings of works. In "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (Heidegger, 1966/1977a), *philosophy* is understood as synonymous with the "ontotheological tradition" of metaphysics, and this tradition is seen by Heidegger as recently extending into the understanding of art as a form of communication and information (particularly, for Heidegger, through cybernetics). The title phrase, "the end of philosophy and the task of thinking," refers to what "thinking" must engage once philosophy, as ontotheology, has been destroyed (a project that engaged Heidegger since the publication of his book *Being and Time* in 1927, where Heidegger attempts to "rescue" the notion of *being* from transcendental and theological roots beginning with what he claims to be misinterpretations of Ancient Greek philosophy in Latin philosophy up through the modern period). The danger that Heidegger points to in this essay is that of seeing art works as communication and information activities.[9]

Why is this a danger? For Heidegger, viewing art works as information and communication activities—in the sense that such are understood as the re-presentation, re-production, and transference of "epistemic content" (Frohmann, 2004)—is a danger because such an approach appropriates the most manifestly materialist activity of human beings within an idealist and metaphysically laden epistemology whose dominion over culture and society is near-total in modernity.

In so far as Heidegger sees modern technology as beginning from the premise of global reproducibility rather than from the premise of site-specific and time-valued co-responsible emergence, then we can see why Heidegger discusses in "The Question Concerning Technology" *techne* within the context of *poiesis*. For Heidegger, the question concerning technology—or to reinterpret the German title (*Die Frage nach der Technik*), the "questioning towards/after [*nach*] the technical" (cf. Weber, 1996)—begins today with questioning our technological/technical understanding of the work of art. For Heidegger, the end of philosophy and the task of thinking occur at the end of metaphysics, that is the end of philosophy as ontotheology. This is to say that the task of thinking, as a postmetaphysical task, begins from out of the climax of metaphysics as a cultural and global phenomenon.

Heidegger's last works fold back to the project of *Being and Time* (1927/1996) and its fundamental assertion of the primacy of *Mitsein* (being-with or co-belonging) for thinking being. Just as human existence must be thought through *Mitsein* rather than through transcendental consciousness, so human production must be thought through co-responsible emergence rather than through transcendental causes. For Heidegger (1977a), this demand today takes place first of all in the arts, which are threatened by metaphysics in the form of information and communication theory. Starting from the arts, one is able to "think back" through the history of metaphysics to the origins of our concepts of technique/technology (*techne*) and creation (*poiesis*)—that is, one is able to think back through the Western understanding of work and works.

Thus, art cataloging may be viewed as one instance—and a most telling one—for the collision between metaphysics (in the form of an information culture) and the material forms and theoretical tools that are sometimes used in its critique. Art cataloging demands that we more finely tune our descriptions of works as cultural, material, historical, and social events, whose specificities cannot be collapsed into causal archeworks.

Seen in a certain light, Heidegger's oeuvre follows the rise of the valorization of reproducible knowledge—a certain modern conception of "information"—from communication practices to the work of art (Day, 2001). Heidegger's philosophy and the practice of the modern avant-garde engaged in

[9] Cf. Smiraglia (2001): "Works contain representations of recorded knowledge. Works are created to represent the thoughts, data, syntheses, knowledge, art, and artifice of their creators. Works serve as vehicles to communicate one or more of these aspects of new knowledge to potential consumers (readers, scholars, etc.)" (Smiraglia, 2001, p. 55, in subchapter 4.1,

"Works as Vehicles for Communication"). See also Smiralia's discussion in the first chapter of his book, for example, as cited earlier in our article, "A *work* is the set of ideas created probably by an author or perhaps a composer, or other artist, set into a document using text, with the intention of being communicated to a receiver (probably a reader or listener)" (Smiraglia, 2001, p. 3–4).

a critique of the production and value of such "information," specifically in regard to the conception and the practice of "the work." As increasingly and unceasingly in modernity we are faced with communication and information technologies and techniques that reconfigure or obliterate the site specificity and the time-valued materiality of persons, events, and objects by a modern conception of information, it may be useful to recall these analyses of, and interventions into, the historical and conceptual development of the concept and practice of "works."

Acknowledgments

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