

Conclusion

In this book, we have examined a broad range of different types, genres, and modes of inscription by which beings become evident and are taken as evidence. We have examined this from an aspect of strong documentarity by class categories and from the aspect of weaker documentarity due to the powers of entities to push back on their representations and to assert their own powers of presence. We have also seen, however, that such empiricism is inscribed within disciplinary assumptions and ontologies, parameters of measure, social networks, and practical ends.

The viewpoint of this book has been that of the philosophy and practice of evidence from the perspective of representation. This corresponds to documentation studies in my field, library and information science. In these studies, documents are usually taken as evidence of some content that they are said to represent.

I have suggested, however, that documentation studies can also be studied performatively, that is, in terms of what documents do, namely, a certain sense of “documentality.” Representation is certainly an important part of what they do, but we can also study documents in terms of their performances secondary to representation.

For example, we have discussed Latour’s conception of maps as indexes for navigating, Kohn’s conception of forest sounds as indexes of affective events, avant-garde art and literature’s view of representation as devices for epistemic and political ends, and we may also recall here Michael Buckland’s discussion of passports as materials used for entering and exiting countries in his 2014 article, “Documentality Beyond Documents” (Buckland, 2014). There is a rich tradition of such works by authors within or touching upon documentation studies: the writings Buckland and of Bernd Frohmann in

documentation studies, Johanna Drucker in information visualization and digital humanities, Maurizio Ferraris in philosophical approaches to documentality, and of course, that of others.

The representational imagination, however, is a powerful tool in thinking about evidence and entities, even when it ends (because it begins) in a world of fantasy. Especially in moments of crisis, we are all most likely Platonists, rather than Aristotelians: clutching to hopes of a medical cure when ill, looking for a permanent fix to political or institutional problems, seeking absolute truth in science, or asking God to save us at the end of our own or another's life. We seek a truth, instead of what can only be as true as it can be. However, this can lead to a very unhealthy politics of prejudice, a neglect of science and scholarship, and even a bibliographic mystification of the function of libraries as knowledge institutions (Day, 2019). On the other hand, beliefs in transcendental or "fictional" truths can also give us the hope and faith to get through the difficulties and fragility of our lives, to embark on cures for illnesses, fixes for political institutions, and to do research. It can also drive us in the necessary critical review of science, scholarship, and other practices and theory.

Representation, like all devices of inscription and their practices, requires us to think carefully about when to deploy it, because it has consequences not just in knowledge or documentation activities, but also in moral or "practical" activities (such as defining right-bearing entities and activities), and, of course, aesthetic judgments (such as judging what is "likeable" or not). It is sort of paradoxical to put it this way, but what becomes evident and what appears to us as evidence both depend on the mechanisms of inscription by which we represent what is present so that the present can be represented.

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/11719.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11719.001.0001)

Documentarity

Evidence, Ontology, and Inscription

By: Ronald E. Day

Citation:

Documentarity: Evidence, Ontology, and Inscription

By: Ronald E. Day

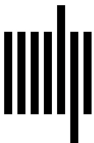
DOI: [10.7551/mitpress/11719.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11719.001.0001)

ISBN (electronic): 9780262356022

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2019

Publication of this open monograph was the result of Indiana University's participation in TOME (Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem), a collaboration of the Association of American Universities, the Association of University Presses, and the Association of Research Libraries. TOME aims to expand the reach of long-form humanities and social science scholarship including digital scholarship. Additionally, the program looks to ensure the sustainability of university press monograph publishing by supporting the highest quality scholarship and promoting a new ecology of scholarly publishing in which authors' institutions bear



The MIT Press

© 2019 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

This work is subject to a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND license. Subject to such license, all rights are reserved.



Publication of this open monograph was the result of Indiana University's participation in TOME (Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem), a collaboration of the Association of American Universities, the Association of University Presses, and the Association of Research Libraries. TOME aims to expand the reach of long-form humanities and social science scholarship including digital scholarship. Additionally, the program looks to ensure the sustainability of university press monograph publishing by supporting the highest quality scholarship and promoting a new ecology of scholarly publishing in which authors' institutions bear the publication costs.

Funding from Indiana University made it possible to open this publication to the world.

This book was set in Stone Serif and Stone Sans by Jen Jackowitz. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-0-262-04320-5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1