



The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power

Ronald E Day

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In *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power*, Ronald E. Day provides a historically informed critical analysis of the concept and politics of information. Analyzing texts in Europe and the United States, his critical reading method goes beyond traditional historiographical readings of communication and information by engaging specific historical texts in terms of their attempts to construct and reshape history.

After laying the groundwork and justifying his method of close reading for this study, Day examines the texts of two pre–World War II documentalists, Paul Otlet and Suzanne Briet. Through the work of Otlet and Briet, Day shows how documentation and information were associated with concepts of cultural progress. Day also discusses the social expansion of the conduit metaphor in the works of Warren Weaver and Norbert Wiener. He then shows how the work of contemporary French multimedia theorist Pierre Lévy refracts the earlier philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari through the prism of the capitalist understanding of the “virtual society.”

Turning back to the pre–World War II period, Day examines two critics of the information society: Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin. He explains Heidegger’s philosophical critique of the information culture’s model of language and truth as well as Benjamin’s aesthetic and historical critique of mass information and communication. Day concludes by contemplating the relation of critical theory and information, particularly in regard to the information culture’s transformation of history, historiography, and historicity into positive categories of assumed and represented knowledge.

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