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"Never again the in the history of humanity": information education for onlife

David Bawden and Lyn Robinson

Keynote paper presented at the International Symposium of the Future of Education in Information Science (FEIS 2018), Pisa, September 2018

Summary

It has become commonplace for those involved in the education of information professionals to note the need for new skills and competencies in an ever-changing and increasingly challenging digital information environment. This presentation examines this perception through the lens of Luciano Floridi's concept of the 'infosphere', and suggests some appropriate responses by educators in library and information science (LIS). It builds upon a presentation by Lyn Robinson at an earlier multiplier meeting of the EINFOSE project, on developing standards for LIS education.

Floridi (2018) explains the infosphere as the condition of 'onlife', a seamless merging of analogue and digital, offline and online, and points out that the transition to onlife has already happened, and happens only once in the history of a species. Those of us teaching LIS today are the only generation that will ever experience the world before and after this transition. It is therefore no surprise that the LIS profession, and LIS education, seem in a state of constant transition.

This presentation reflects on this, and suggests some responses, particularly in education for data management and for digital ethics, to prepare our students to participate in the design and curation of the infosphere, and of the information society which will inhabit it. It evokes cyberpunk author William Gibson's comment that the future has already arrived but is not evenly distributed, and local historian W.G. Hoskins' principle that "it's older than you think", to argue that we can look to the present and indeed the past in assessing the needs of the future. Following Floridi, we argue that what is needed is a careful study of our direction of travel, not simply a speeding up of our activities; and this applies to LIS education as much as to our professional activities.

Supporting references

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D. Bawden and L. Robinson, Curating the infosphere: Luciano Floridi's Philosophy of Information as the foundation for Library and Information Science, *Journal of Documentation*, 2018, 74(1), 2-17

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W. Gibson, The future has arrived - it's just not evenly distributed yet, [quotation clarification] https://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/01/24/future-has-arrived/

W.G. Hoskins, *The making of the English landscape*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955

L. Robinson, In perfect harmony: an international standard for library and information science education, [blog post] https://thelynxiblog.com/2018/05/13/in-perfect-harmony/, 2018

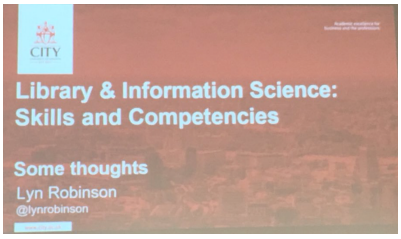
L. Robinson and D. Bawden, The story of data: a socio-technical approach to education for the data librarian role in the CityLIS library school at City, University of London, *Library Management*, 2017, 38(6/7), 312-322

The **slides** accompanying the presentation are shown below:

"Never again the in the history of humanity": information education for onlife

David Bawden and Lyn Robinson
City, University of London

Ljubljana, April 2018



A conventional viewpoint

new skills and competencies in an ever-changing and increasingly challenging digital information environment

Luciano Floridi's Philosophy of Information

- fourth revolution
- hyperhistory
- infosphere
- onlife

Today, in any mature information society, we no longer live online or offline but *onlife*, that is, we increasingly live in that special place, or *infosphere*, that is seamlessly analogue and digital, offline and online. (Floridi 2018)

Onlife

- a seamless merging of analogue and digital, offline and online
- in a society where ICTs are the essential basis (hyperhistory)
- where we share the infosphere with other 'inforgs', such as AIs

.. the revolution has already occurred: the transition from an entirely analogue and offline world to one that is increasingly also digital and online will never happen again in the history of humanity… our generation is the last one that will have seen a non-digital world. And this is the really extraordinary turning point, because that landing in the infosphere happens only once. (Floridi 2018)

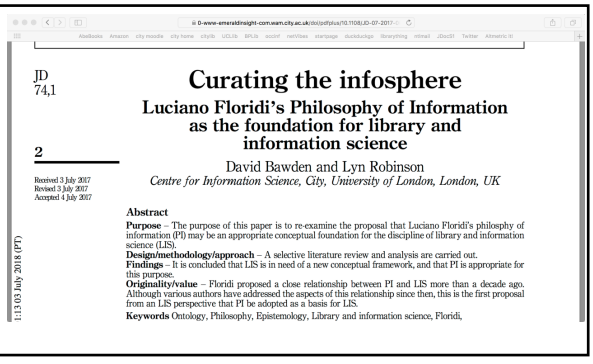
LIS "in permanent transition"

- the transition to onlife has already happened
- it happens only once in the history of a species
- we are the only generation that will ever experience the world before and after this transition

We should not be distracted by the scope, depth and pace of technological innovation … It is rather how we are going to design the infosphere and the mature information societies developing within it that matters most … the real challenge is no longer digital innovation, but the *governance of the digital* (Floridi 2018)

The polluted infosphere

- fake news, alternate facts
- misinformation disinformation
- post-truth society, post-factual society
- death of expertise
- filter bubbles, echo chambers
- toxic social media



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Curating the infosphere

Luciano Floridi's Philosophy of Information as the foundation for library and information science

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the proposal that Luciano Floridi's philosophy of information (PI) may be an appropriate conceptual foundation for the discipline of library and information science (LIS).

Design/methodology/approach – A selective literature review and analysis are carried out.

Findings – It is concluded that LIS is in need of a new conceptual framework, and that PI is appropriate for this purpose.

Originality/value – Floridi proposed a close relationship between PI and LIS more than a decade ago. Although various authors have addressed the aspects of this relationship since then, this is the first proposal from an LIS perspective that PI be adopted as a basis for LIS.

Keywords Ontology, Philosophy, Epistemology, Library and information science, Floridi,

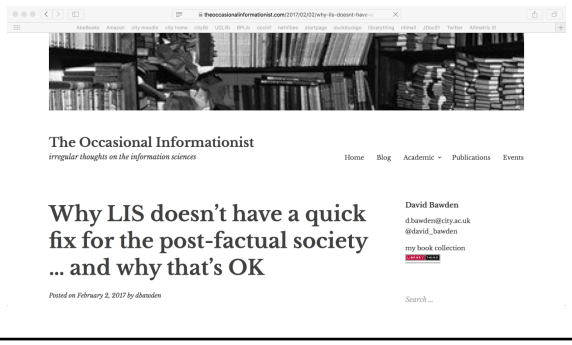
1:13 03 July 2018 (PT)

Curating and reshaping the infosphere

- solving the problems of fake news and the rest requires a reshaping of the infosphere, our whole information environment and our interactions within it
- the more important the problem, the more it needs a long period of reflection to find the best solution

When change is dramatic and rapid

- we need to think deeply
  - and slowly
- we need to plan our direction
  - not increase our speed



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Why LIS doesn't have a quick fix for the post-factual society ... and why that's OK

Posted on February 2, 2017 by dbawden

David Bawden
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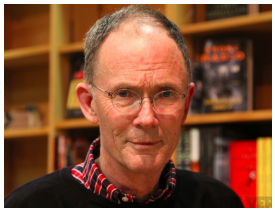
my book collection

Search ...

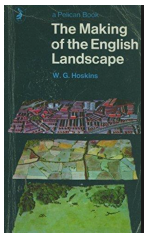
The best way to catch the technology train is not to chase it, but to be at the next station (Floridi 2018)

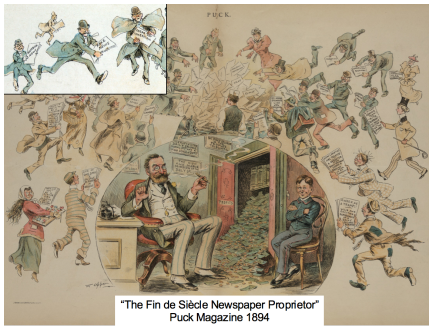
William Gibson

The future has arrived - it's just not evenly distributed yet



It's older than you think (W.G.Hoskins)





"The Fin de Siècle Newspaper Proprietor"
Puck Magazine 1894

So: how to educate for LIS

- prepare our students to participate in the design of the infosphere, and the information society which will inhabit it
- to be 'curators of the infosphere'

- lasting principles, not quick fixes
- right use of technology, not just digital fluency

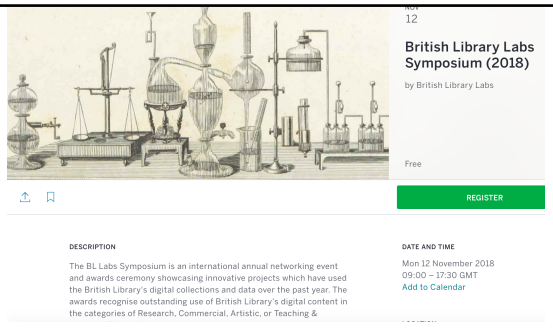
- identify the future in the present (and the past)

The story of data

- module replacing 'data and information technologies'
- very practical, but no computer labs
- all sessions focus on right use of technology:
  - privacy, algorithm bias, digital divide, robotics, etc.
  - as well as on the technology itself
- all sessions include examples of 'the future here, now'
  - as well as on 'the past in the present'

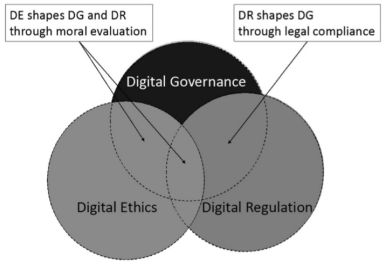
- finding the I in data
- you will be assimilated
- data about data
- taming the data
- searching for the data

- working with the data
- counting the data
- the meaning in the data
- the data will replace you
- playing with the data



Putting ethics everywhere

- no 'ethics' course
- ethics comes everywhere:
- technology, knowledge organisation, information management, research methods, digital libraries, etc.
- fundamental to curation of the infosphere



What is our *human project* for the digital age? (Floridi 2018)

and what is LIS's contribution to it?