

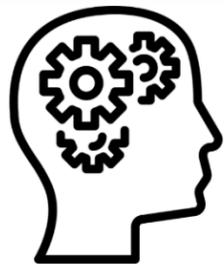
Turn, Turn, Turn

by Jenna Hartel, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

This diagram summarizes theoretical *turns* that have occurred within LIS. It is based upon a paper of the same title presented at the 2019 CoLIS conference.

POINT OF DEPARTURE: THE PHYSICAL PARADIGM

As a point of departure, LIS was and is concerned with that body of knowledge relating to the origination, collection, organization, storage, retrieval, interpretation, transmission, transformation, and utilization of information. In the 1960s, ground-breaking information retrieval research programs, such as the Cranfield and SMART (System for the Mechanical Analysis and Retrieval of Text) experiments, established a unifying *physical paradigm*. The physical paradigm featured an empirical method for testing the variables within an information retrieval system. For instance, in a laboratory-like setting, research would with a test collection of documents to determine the performance of index languages or search algorithms.



1980

1. THE COGNITIVE TURN

Then, in the 1980s, at the crossroads of information retrieval and information behaviour research, a *cognitive turn* occurred. It upheld the idea that an information retrieval system should reflect the thought world of the user, which must therefore become the foremost object of inquiry. This turn was anchored and amplified by a watershed *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* chapter on "Information Needs and Uses" by Brenda Dervin and Mike Nilan, which contrasted the traditional physical paradigm with an alternative user-centred approach. One quintessential, anthropomorphic concept of this turn was *sense-making*, a theory and methodology to examine what happens when an individual's internal sense is exhausted. A second, exemplar idea of this turn was Nick Belkin's *anomalous states-of-knowledge*. In the long run, the cognitive / user-centred turn shifted LIS research from its technical stronghold of information retrieval and bibliometrics to the social scientific study of human information behavior, where arguably the field remains centred today.

2. THE AFFECTIVE TURN

In the *affective turn* of the 1990s, the information seeker's emotional experience became a matter of keen interest. This new emphasis was sparked by Constance Mellon's perception of *library anxiety*, and Carol Kuhlthau's seminal investigations of the emotional roller-coaster for high school students as they do a course writing assignment. Likewise, Elfreda Chatman's holistic ethnographies of the information worlds of marginalized populations struck novel, poignant, compassionate chords. This turn heralded the ascent of concomitant qualitative methods, such as ethnography, for accessing the subjective realm. Forevermore, the affective turn instilled a sensitivity, intimacy, and humanity into the heart of library and information science.



3. THE NEO-DOCUMENTARY TURN

In the 1990s, the strong emphasis of the cognitive turn upon mental phenomena generated a *neo-documentary turn*. It brought library and information science back to its roots in the European Documentation movement and the work of its luminaries, Paul Otlet and Suzanne Briet. Participants in this turn rally around Michael Buckland's idea of *information-as-thing*, and are motivated by contemporary writings from sociologically-oriented intellectual outside LIS who write about documents, such as Foucault, Garfinkle, and Strauss. Neo-documentalists in LIS focus upon the properties and types of documents, their social and cultural construction within many different contexts, their changing nature in the digital age, and applied problems of documentation (e.g. retrieval, annotation, preservation, authorship, identity, intellectual property, among others).



1990

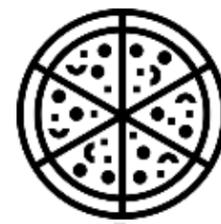
4. THE SOCIO-COGNITIVE TURN

In the 1990s, a perspective emerged of seeing information phenomena as embedded in social, organizational, and professional contexts. This *socio-cognitive turn* shifts attention from individual and internal knowledge structures to the outward and social construction of knowledge within communities. A prolific crusader for this turn is Birger Hjørland, the architect of *domain analysis*, which orients to information phenomena within social worlds. The socio-cognitive turn might be considered a *re-turn*. In actuality, social perspectives flourished in the original visions of LIS in the 1930s by Pierce Butler and his celebrated student, Jesse Shera, whose *social epistemology* is a socio-cognitive idea. Today, the socio-cognitive turn has been absorbed into the accepted wisdom of LIS.



5. THE EVERYDAY LIFE TURN

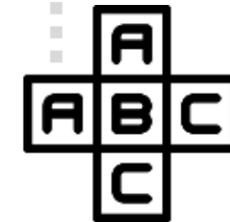
At the changeover of the century, proponents of an *everyday life turn* argued that vast swaths of the human experience had been neglected in LIS research. They sought to understand and celebrate information phenomena associated with routine or pleasurable and profound life experiences, wherein information phenomena were hypothesized to be different. This turn was sparked by Reijo Savolainen and Anders Hektor, whose work performed three necessary conceptual maneuvers for ELIS research: structuring time within everyday life, teasing apart life activities from information activities, and expanding information behavior beyond seeking to include creating, manipulating, and sharing information. Thanks to this turn, a plethora of familiar, entertaining, and meaningful experiences entered the boundaries of LIS research and practice. Significantly, this turn prepared our field to engage non-work, Internet-based information phenomena that have moved to centre stage of the Information Age, such as gaming, YouTube, and social media.



2000

6. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST TURN

In the early 2000s, the *social constructionist turn* in LIS shifted analytical attention to the way that language, in the form of discourses, constitutes the shared knowledge base of society. Radically, champions of this view argued that library and information science should define its subject matter as *conversations*, not information. A breakthrough paper of this turn was Bernd Frohmann's critique of the cognitive view point; a more extensive example is Sanna Talja's analysis of the discourses surrounding the music library. Methodologically, this turn brought a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of language and its crucial place in the LIS enterprise. The inherent critical bent of social constructionism also softened the ground for later turns of the 2010s, associated with cultural and gender studies.



REFLECTIONS ON TURNS

Going forward, what turns might animate LIS next? Perhaps an *animal turn*, that explores information phenomena between humans and animals, as well as within animal species? Or maybe a *family turn*, which recognizes the family as the ultimate information resource and system? Rather than *Turn, Turn, Turn*, as the folk song goes, the Conceptions of Library and Information Science conference is the setting for LIS to **RETURN** (to our roots), **TURN** (to new ideas), and **DE-TURN** (replace fragmentation with unity).

Please see the full text paper in Information Research for additional information and references.

7. THE EMBODIED TURN

The *embodied turn* of the mid-2000s can be associated with research into information behaviour and information literacy. Devotees of this turn ask: *How do we bring the body into focus, as the subject of research in the field?* This turn draws upon social theories of the body by Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Goffman. Within LIS, cornerstone papers include Annemarie Lloyd's studies of firefighters and ambulance drivers as well as Michael Ollson's studies of theatre professionals and archaeologists. The embodied turn is the next logical step in a progression from mind > heart > body within LIS research, aiming for a holistic understanding of the human information experience.

