

Bawden, David and Lyn Robinson. **Introduction to Information Science**. Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman an imprint of the American Library Association, 2012. Print. 351 pp. 70.00 USD. ISBN-13: 978-1-55570-861-0.

Introduction to Information Science is an exceedingly ambitious – although not overtly critical – effort to offer an essentially definitive and catholic portrait of the discipline and its many professional manifestations. Librarians, archivists, researchers, ICT professionals, social scientists and administrators alike will find this an essential volume.

Structured as a textbook – complete with subheadings, text boxes, photographs, chapter summaries and further reading at the end of each chapter – Bawden and Robinson’s book is extremely well-organized, logically progressing from historical origins to theory, concepts, practices, domains, methods, administration, technologies, applications and future potentialities. Furthermore, the authors explore the human and social dimensions and implications of information science with chapters devoted to information-seeking behavior, the varying information policy needs of different organizations, and a general discussion about the “information society.”

Bawden and Robinson are both prolific, UK-based information science academics who teach at the City University, London’s Department of Information Science. Bawden’s background is in the sciences, while Robinson’s lies more in the history and philosophy of information; their respective interests are well-reflected in this, the most recent of their numerous collaborations.

What is particularly noteworthy about this volume is the depth and extent of its review of the relevant literature. It is replete with references to classic and recent scholarship, demonstrating a comfortable familiarity on the part of the authors with a vast range of interdisciplinary work and publications. Their efforts are quite up-to-date as well, as evinced by regular references throughout to James Gleick’s 2011 title **The Information**. Particularly important readings are helpfully highlighted with annotations in each chapter’s bibliography.

In a charming flourish, chapters are prefaced with several pithy quotations – some from the literature but others from celebrities or historical figures. The book itself features several brief prefatory essays by notable scholars in the field, including Andrew Dillon, Theresa Dirndorfer Anderson and Jonathan Furner – the latter of whom points out the relative dearth of introductory textbooks such as this, making it, in his view, an important contribution.

After setting the stage by defining information science as a unique “meta-discipline” concerned with all aspects of the communication chain (p. 8), the text provides a fairly standard history of documents, covering the rise of writing from tablets to the 21st

century, with the interesting observation that the “Victorian information environment” – and its ubiquitous tool set of indexes, catalogues, filing cabinets and subject headings – is still very much at the core of our own “information age.”

While librarianship has been criticized in the past for its lack of philosophical underpinnings (see Pierce), it is refreshing to see that information science is here considered in terms of its ontologies, epistemologies and ethics. Bawden and Robinson not only delve into systems, cognitive and socio-cognitive paradigms of information science (which, respectively, consider information in the absence of users, in terms of user behaviour, and within larger social contexts) but also offer a discussion of various “turns” in the field as well as a survey of (mostly) 20th century philosophers and their views on the role of information. Karl Popper, in particular, is referenced throughout the book for his “three worlds” concept: those of physical objects and events, mental objects and events, and objective knowledge.

With these foundations in place, the authors explore the major practices of information science (such as ontologies and classification schemes) and their application across various domains, including the sciences, medicine and law. The authors further explicate the types of investigations necessary within these disciplinary and professional domains in the form of specific information tools, user studies, document types and diverse terminologies.

For the student and researcher, Bawden and Robinson also offer a serviceable description of both quantitative and qualitative research methods in the field, which are then illustrated with examples of noteworthy papers which employed particular research methodologies. However, a brief reference to Chapter 3 aside, stronger linkages could have been made here to philosophies – particularly epistemologies – as the chapter essentially treats research as a positivistic and unproblematic process, even though competing notions of what constitutes “knowledge” are becoming more apparent in our increasingly multicultural society.

This lack of criticality characterizes the text. Much of the relevant literature is often summarized in bullet points or tables without elaboration, which can prove frustrating at times. Indeed, one could wish for an entire volume devoted to some of the chapter topics. Given its broad scope yet slim dimensions, the book may be forgiven for the relatively superficial treatment accorded these concepts. It does however result in a few significant and troubling oversights.

Despite discussing critical theory briefly in the philosophy chapter, the authors don't themselves exercise it to any extent. Their overall treatment lacks a recognition that both sources of information and the media and technologies through which they are accessed are economically and politically situated, making the production and dissemination of information embedded in and dependent upon power relations. The closest we get is several paragraphs on information poverty, but this too is treated only as an issue to be dealt with by professionals rather than questioning the forces

that bring it about.

The chapter on information policy, too, would have been made immensely more interesting, relevant and timely had it adopted a critically realist stance to look beyond the publicly-stated policies and strategies on the part of governments and corporations on how they manage information, to consider instead what is *actually done* and how this disparity affects the public interest. In the wake of the April 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, for instance, BP was notoriously reticent to divulge data and information regarding the actual extent of the damage being wrought on the environment and public health, as was the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) following the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in March 2011. Contrary to their own policy statements, governments, too, can jealously clamp down on the production and dissemination of information – such as is happening in Canada under Prime Minister Stephen Harper – or, in the case of outright despotic regimes, use networks and social media against dissidents to maintain their hold on power (see Morozov 2010).

The effect on the text is an acceptance at face value of the complex processes and contexts of information and the information professions rather than looking beneath the surface to engage more complex and problematic forces.

The book closes with a thought-provoking chapter on the future of information science. Both scholarship and works of science fiction are mined here to raise some interesting possibilities, but the authors stress that rapid technological changes will not, as some people fear, eliminate the need for information professionals. Rather, the future for the field looks “bright” but “different from what anyone can at present imagine” (p. 336).

Weakenesses in terms of criticality aside, this is an admirable and highly readable introductory source. Accessible, comprehensive, far-reaching and offering an impressive overview of the relevant literature, **Introduction to Information Science** is an excellent resource that will likely serve as the standard text for the foreseeable future.

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Works Cited

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