

Editorial

We live in the time of flesh. Of bodies and materiality. Everyday life in a world coloured – or darkened – by a pandemic outbreak challenges dichotomies of body and mind, individual and technology (see also Haraway 1991, Mol & Law 2004).

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, our bodies are regulated in new ways. We are not allowed to come near other bodies and we are not supposed to touch other bodies, except close family and the like. In many countries, we must cover parts of our bodies (mouth and nose) in certain situations, for example on public transport. In addition, we should not leave our homes if our bodies have certain characteristics, such as high temperature or symptoms of a cold.

We receive information with recommendations and regulations on how to act from different sources to whom we attribute more or less cognitive authority, such as national health agencies and self-appointed experts. At the same time, our bodies and the information we receive from our senses are given a key role. One of the main recommendations from the Public health agency of Sweden is to avoid contact with others and not go to work or school if you “feel unwell”. Thus, we are urged to turn ourselves into subjects, to turn our gaze onto ourselves and adjust our conduct according to the truth of our own wellbeing (Foucault 2016 [1980]). In this process, we use technologies to get more information on our bodily conditions. Thermometers confirm, or refute, feelings of fever. Different forms of tests diagnose persons with Covid-19, but the testing is often preceded by sensory information indicating disease. Thereby bodily information, from senses and technologies, defines and reveals the enemy that is embedded in bodies and spreading between bodies.

When writing this editorial, I sit in a slightly uncomfortable chair in my bedroom. My laptop is located on the desk next to my husband’s guitars and our bed. This has been my workplace the last couple of months. Obviously, this is far from remarkable. Thousands and thousands of people in the Nordic and other countries are working from home due to the pandemic. It took some weeks, but by now I am used to interacting with students and colleagues on the screen instead of face-to-face. However, the consequences of not encountering others in the flesh appear in more detail as my experience of the situation gets richer, since infrastructures become visible during a breakdown (Star & Bowker 2010). For example, the infrastructure of bumping into colleagues at the coffee machine or in the corridor at work is out of play, and the everyday small talk has slowly evaporated. Through this, information is lost. When I do interact with colleagues or students, but at a distance via videoconferencing, the experience as well as the mediation and influence on human activity is different (Huvila 2018). Bodily

information is limited when everything we see are small frames of faces on the screen. At the same time, the question of space and power is in flux when all participants appears on the screen in equally designed squares in a random order. I very much look forward to reading about research on how online settings for human interaction, meetings and conferences have changed the informational landscape of work, and I am convinced such research will be conducted. Maybe an article on the subject will be published in the next issue of NJLIS – a special issue on research on pandemic and crises information. Submissions with a broad variety of perspectives are welcome to this special issue, so do not hesitate to submit your contribution! (See tidsskrift.dk/njlis for more information and a Call for Papers.)

This issue of the Nordic Journal of Library and Information Studies contains three very different, yet all equally inspiring, research articles. The first article, *“This is really interesting. I never even thought about this”*, is authored by Pamela J. McKenzie and Nicole K. Dalmer. The article relates to issues of materiality and practice in library and information studies and McKenzie and Dalmer introduce and discuss four methodological strategies that can be used to analyse unnoticed information work: “(1) consider the local and the translocal; (2) attend to the material and the textual; (3) consider visual methods; and (4) (re)consider the participant’s role and expertise”.

The article’s starting point, to make unnoticed or neglected information practices visible, is highly relevant and interesting in itself, but also timely in relation to the prevalent situation. In the literature review, McKenzie and Dalmer state that many informational activities are “essential to the success of paid work but are invisible to its evaluation system” (p. 2). The authors mention secretaries’ chatting as an example, which makes me reflect upon the situation of working from home once again. Even if I did know, to some extent, that the everyday small talk between colleagues is important, I had not experienced and truly felt it until the infrastructure broke down and it became clear how important small talk is for the success of other tasks. The four methodological strategies McKenzie and Dalmer outline and discuss appear to be constructive tools to analyse such informational activities and the authors’ reflections contributes to deepen and strengthen the methodological discussion within LIS.

The second article, *Den digitale offentligheten i kultur- og bibliotekpolitikken*, is authored by Håkon Larsen and Per Aleksander Solheim. The digital information society and its transformation of the public sphere is the backdrop to this text, and the current situation of forced online interaction therefore relates to the article’s point of departure. As mentioned above, human experiences and activities are affected when human interaction, and consequently the public sphere, is practiced online instead of face-to-face. Larsen and Solheim state that Norwegian cultural policies traditionally promote public libraries as key institutions to support democracy. In relation to the development of digital technology, there is a discourse that problematizes the state of democracy and discuss filter bubbles, echo chambers, lack of digital literacy, etcetera. Therefore, Larsen and Solheim analyse Norwegian cultural policies’ description of how digital information technologies challenge democracy, as well as the solutions ascribed to these outlined threats.

Mia Høj Mathiasson has authored the third and final research article in this issue of NJLIS; *From means to an end to ends in themselves*. Mathiasson maps and analyses programming activities between 1960 and 2020 based on a rich empirical material from two Danish public libraries. All activities referred to in the article take place in the physical library, but Mathiasson uses Facebook events reporting on programmes between 2018 and 2020 as one of many sources. This exemplifies the blurred line between online and offline. In the analysis, Mathiasson creates six temporal units describing the development of public library programmes: 1) 1960-1968: Programmes as a means to disseminate literature and increase book loans; 2) 1969-1976: Programmes as a means to promote the library as something more than books; 3) 1977-1982: Programmes as a means to community building; 4) 1983-

1994: Programmes as a means to shaping the library profile as a meeting place; 5) 1995-2008: Programmes as community building; and 6) 2009-2020: Programmes as ends in themselves. Thus, Mathiasson shows how the programming has changed over the years and she analyses the reasoning behind offering these activities. Maybe the current situation, in which many libraries have been forced to try out online alternatives (some successful, some not so much), will leave a mark on how programming is practiced in the future.

From the very beginning, the editorial board of the Nordic Journal of Library and Information Studies has emphasised the importance of using the journal to disseminate research by junior scholars in library and information studies. Therefore, it is a pleasure to announce that this issue of NJLIS, just like the previous one, includes a review of a fresh doctoral thesis. Wiebke Keim reviews Nora Schmidt's thesis *The privilege to select. Global research system, European academic library collections, and decolonisation*. Nora Schmidt was a doctoral student in Information Studies at Lund University and she successfully defended her thesis in October. Schmidt's research on how academic knowledge is circulated, or not circulated, due to inequalities in the global research system provides thought-provoking insights, and Keim's review of the thesis takes the discussion even further.

After these reflections on bodily matters and introductory notes, it is time to conclude this editorial. The texts in the journal will certainly speak for themselves.

Read and enjoy!

Lisa Engström
Editor-in-chief

References

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