Levels of information and LIS as a science of mentefacts

Claudio Gnoli
University of Pavia, Italy
Outline

• Reconsidering the basic notions of work, KOS, information and LIS in light of
  • the theory of levels of reality.
• Mentefacts
• Works as mentefacts
• KOSs as mentefacts
• “Information” at different levels
• LIS as a science of mentefacts
Theory of levels of reality

- has inspired Brown, Richardson, Bliss, the CRG, Dahlberg and other LIS-KO authors

- developed (± explicitly) by philosophers in different traditions: positivism (Comte), materialism (Engels), Christianism (Teilhard), metaphysics (Hartmann), ...
N. Hartmann’s levels ("strata")

- spirit [= culture]
  - objectivated spirit
  - objective spirit
  - personal spirit
- mind
- life
- matter
- ideal being [logico-math. entities]

Emergence

Existential dependence
Can be further analyzed into:

- **spirit** [culture]
  - objectivated spirit [culture as human products]
    - **mentefacts**: artworks, intellectual works ≈ “World 3”
    - artefacts: tools, buildings...
  - objective spirit [social culture]
  - personal spirit [individual culture]
- mind
- life
- matter
- logico-math. entities
“Mentefacts”

have a thrilling bibliographic history:

- Classification Research Group 1969 building on B. Kyle 1963; E. Coates 1963 “I invented it at a CRG meeting” (Kyle 1965)
(So, is “mentefacts” a woman’s idea?...)
“Mentefacts”

- J. Huxley 1955 credited in *Wikipedia*, but quoting:

- D. Bidney 1953 quoting:

- E.E. Eubank 1932, *The concepts of sociology* quoting:

- Mrs. Eubank [J.L. Burrall ?] pers. comm.
(So, yes: “mentefacts” is a woman’s idea, although another woman’s!)
Reactions to “mentefacts”

Among other comments, Hjørland suggests that “mentefacts” are related to “works”

Thomas M. Dousa (pers. comm.) suggests the same
“Work”

Discussed by Lubetzky, Verona, Domanovsky, Wilson

- “is the intellectual content of a bibliographic entity. [...] Substantial change in ideational or semantic content results in the creation of a new, but related, work” (Smiraglia 2001); or

- “is the intellectual or artistic content of a distinct creation” (IFLA LRM, cf. Zumer 2017).
Works = mentefacts?

Works have their own life at the level of objectivated spirit.

Indeed, they can become part of a canon and stimulate the origin of new works.

These processes are independent from the origin of a work by a specific author (personal spirit) and social milieu (objective spirit).
Works = mentefacts?

“Language as a body of mental concepts [...] The great body of knowledge which the race has accumulated through the centuries [...] the systems of thought, the great codes of morals, the great mythologies and philosophies of the world” (Eubank 1932)

Mentefacts do not include just works, but also concepts, whole theories and systems

\[ \text{works} \subseteq \text{mentefacts} \]
KOSs as mentifacts

Quotings suggest that another important kind of mentifacts are knowledge organization systems (KOS)
KOSs as mentefacts

KOSs do include components of personal culture (e.g. Melvil Dewey’s worldview) and social culture (e.g. Christian bias in 1876 NY), but also have autonomous mentefactual properties (e.g. notational system, discipline- or phenomenon-based structure…)

- objectivated spirit [culture as human products]
  - mentefacts
  - artefacts
- objective spirit [social culture]
- personal spirit [individual culture]
Bawden and Robinson (2018) support Floridi’s philosophy of information as the best foundation for LIS.

To Floridi, “information” is a fundamental entity, any pattern in the configuration of things:

- culture
- mind
- life
- matter
- logico-math.
However, “information” in LIS has a narrower meaning:
information contents as organized and recorded in documents that is mentefacts recorded in artifacts

- culture
- mind
- life
- matter
- logico-math.
Floridi’s philosophy can be relevant to LIS, but it can be as well to other disciplines dealing with “information” at different levels:

- ICT (artefacts sublevel)
- neurobiology (mind level)
- genetics (life level)
- ...

Philosophy of information in the basic sense does not seem to have any exclusive relationship with LIS.
LIS

LIS depends on information at lower levels (foundational, genetic, neural, artefactual) but focuses specifically on the intellectual content of information at the mentefactual level (concepts, arguments, works, citations, bibliographic families, subjects, KOSs, …)

so it basically is a science of mentefacts.
Thanks :-) 

@scritur
claudio.gnoli@unipv.it