

Keynote II

Digital Humanity: LIS Research, Practice, Politics, and the Imperative to Act, Sarah Roberts, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, Western University.

The global, networked, and commodified digital informational landscape encourages a collective imagining of the digital as valueless, politically neutral, and as being without material consequence. One case speaking to these tendencies is that of commercial content moderation. CCM is a globalized, around-the-clock set of practices in which workers view and adjudicate massive amount of user-generated content destined for the world's social media platforms and interactive web sites. CCM workers render content visible while simultaneously remaining invisible; in the world of CCM, the sign of a good job is to leave no sign at all. And yet the mediation work done by invisible CCM workers goes directly to shaping the digital landscape experience in which our practice is increasingly immersed. These tendencies of erasure and invisibility lead to de-politicization and de-contextualization of the digital environment. Such tendencies hold sway within LIS, too, where concepts such as “neutrality” are frequently (and mistakenly) deployed to encourage a lack of political action or questioning in the face of informational, economic, and institutional landscapes that are anything but neutral. Yet LIS is a field of practice and a site of inquiry that necessitates that those committed to it act and advocate on its behalf and on behalf of its constituents and of the public at large. Its three pillars—LIS education, research, and practice—are all potential loci for interventions upon the continued, sustained encroachment on the public sphere and on free and unfettered access to information, particularly when working in concert and dialog with each other. Through our interventions we can reject the politics of invisibility and collectively assert our humanity—digital and otherwise—and our own commitment to action within the field and in the larger social sphere.