

ple, nowhere are the international thesaural symbols defined in ISO 2788 (such as < (BT), > (NT), – (RT), →/= (USE/UF), etc.) mentioned. These are minor lapses in face of the many outstanding features of this book. It is heartily recommended to all instructors in the field and to a wide range of indexers.

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*Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 23 (2/3), May 2006, p. 1–50.

### 1. Introduction

Classification is of interest to many disciplines. It is a fascinating phenomenon, though it might not be obvious to researchers in classification theory and knowledge organization with our intimate association meetings, however many groups are interested in it. For everyone who comes to it, classification is a profoundly abstract and complex process, riddled with problems of contradictions, universality, semantics, and provincialism – heady and important topics for social science. In the first 50 pages of the May 2006 issue of *Theory, Culture & Society*, a journal of cultural sociology, theory, and interdisciplinary social science (Sage 2006) – the contributors address questions of definition and scope of classification. This is only part of a larger 616-page project called the New Encyclopedia project. I have been asked to review these first 50 pages.

The structure of this review is as follows. First I will briefly outline the structure of the first 50 pages of this issue of *Theory, Culture & Society* (TCS). I will next talk about the discourse used to address problems of classification in this issue. Then I will make an analysis of some of the key concerns outlined in TCS and compare it to some key concerns I see present in Knowledge Organization research. I will then close with an assessment of what the readers of *Knowledge Organization* could take away from the project and discourse outlined in TCS.

### 2. Structure

The contents of this issue run as follows:

- Mike Featherstone and Couze Venn, Editor and Review Editor respectively, “Problematizing Glo-

- bal Knowledge and the New Encyclopedia Project,” pp. 1–20;
- Roy Boyne, Notes and Commentary Editor, “Classification,” pp. 21–30;
- John Dupré, not affiliated with the journal, “Scientific Classification,” pp. 30–32;
- Luciana Parisi, not affiliated with the journal, “Generative Classification,” pp. 32–35;
- Couze Venn, Review Editor, “The Collection,” pp. 35–40;
- Mark Donohue, not affiliated with the journal, “Classification and Human Language,” pp. 40–42;
- Derek Robbins, not affiliated with the journal, “Classification in French Social Theory,” pp. 42–44;
- Couze Venn, Review Editor, “Rubbish, the Remnant, Etcetera,” pp. 44–46; and,
- Maria Esther Maciel, not affiliated with the journal, “The Unclassifiable,” pp. 46–50.

### 3. Discourse

Overall, this issue provides a novel look at classification – one that not every Knowledge Organization researcher would take. Insight into the human propensity to classify is described here. Classification is an apparatus of social division, aesthetics, identity, and resistance. The literature used to support this exploration of classification is not a literature of Knowledge Organization, but rather a literature of social theory. And though Knowledge Organization may not consider them core, they are not unfamiliar authors: Foucault, Borges, Plato, Descartes, Lévi-Strauss, Durkheim, Mauss, Heidegger, Putnam, Deleuze, Darwin, Habermas, Lyotard, Barthes, and Eco.

These references to the arts and philosophy, demonstrate the conceptual geography of this journal, and this issue. It is not concerned with the evaluation or design of classification systems – at least not in the same way Knowledge Organization would consider. Rather, the authors here are engaged in the creation of constructs in order to interpret social life. This issue explores constructs in classification. And the work presented in TCS aims to help us see aspects of classification relevant to our society, through these constructs. Some of these constructs we assume in order to do our work in Knowledge Organization. Others we do not.

The first article is an introduction to the whole 616-page work. As such it is a general interpretive essay on the nature of global knowledge, and it outlines the New Encyclopedia Project. This Project is designed to question how globalization affects theo-

ries of identity and knowledge. This article argues for the need to see classification as aesthetic. And this opening article is particularly artistic in its use of language. That is, the language itself is part of the art. There are few specifics, there is an appeal to discursive turns like using scare-quotes to signal a word used in a self-conscious manner, and the vocabulary is provocative – often making very sweeping statements about the West and Europe. These statements are sometimes rooted in citations, and sometimes not. The reader is expected to know that Jacques Derrida has invoked a concept of *archive fever*, because he is not cited in reference to this text (see Derrida, 1996). They do the same with the ideas of Max Weber and Karl Marx.

There are unfortunately some contradictions that surface from the dramatic language deployed and the wide range of topics discussed in these opening twenty pages. First the authors claim that “it is important that the problematization of knowledge does not repeat the denigration or silencing of non-western knowledge that has been the mark of a certain universalizing Occidentalism (Moore 1996; Venn 2000),” (Featherstone and Venn 2006, 2). They go on to say (p. 4):

The potential constitution of the global archive of knowledge is in the first place a bringing together of the different knowledges [sic] of the world into the same space. A good deal has been written about the potential of digitalization to create such an archive, by scanning in the material in the various national and independent libraries and archives in order to achieve flexible search and recovery of documents. In one sense the contemporary ‘archive fever’ and ‘storage mania’ are driven by the new technological possibilities of digitalization which offer great ease to document, record, store and retrieve material.

Featherstone goes on to cite himself twice (2000 and 2006). If we look past the self-citation, we see a contradiction here between grand acts of silencing and colonizing. On the one hand Featherstone and Venn want to give voice to knowledge that was rendered silent by Occidentalism, or the West. On the other hand, they want to digitize all knowledge from national libraries, and place it in one central location – the Web. This seems to me, to be an act of colonization on multiple levels. To remove knowledge from places seems colonial. Furthermore, there are cultu-

res of knowledge that do not have national libraries. It seems these resources are left to reside forever in oblivion, and not in this project. Further, there are national libraries that silence voices, not collecting certain languages or materials. This is especially acute in the contemporary metadata environment, where metadata structures are stored at national libraries in countries with multiple national languages, but remain in one language – not translated into the other languages. For example, Spain has four national languages, and much of the metadata work, hosted by the national library, is in Spanish (Mendez, 2006). With such sweeping claims used as acts of *problematization*, it is unclear what Featherstone and Venn see as the Global Encyclopedia Project.

The discourse of this work also suffers from bald overstatement. In the article on Collection, Couze Venn decides to write (p. 39): “Today, collections are increasingly deployed both as the object for a public gaze, thus, as spectacle for consumption, and to function as a pedagogical device.” This platitude is not developed beyond talking of the subjectivity of collections – how they are chosen, arranged, and marketed. This is something Knowledge Organization assumes even before we begin our work, and so this discursive naiveté on the part of some of the writers makes for slow reading. However, this style is particular to a few authors; it is not a universal trait in the issue.

The second article, “Classification,” is a different story. It is an intriguing account of George Perec’s urge to classify, and a primer on classification as seen from philosophers such as Plato and Descartes. What we learn from this paper is the construct of *classification as production*, where classification is a methodology, a device developed in order to comment on, make sense of, or reject the existing order. Classification as production allows us to think about the act of classifying in and of itself. The articles on Scientific and Generative Classification follow suit, and present a discussion about how biologists have classified, and what that has meant for classification in general. These are a refreshing reflection on humanity’s urge to classify, and provide a more enjoyable read.

The remaining articles present short discussions of classification in language, French social theory, and the unclassifiable. In each of these articles we see social commentary, drawn from literary works and philosophical literature, framed in a discourse that, more often than not, eschews the functional ethos of classification, as we know it, in favour of the inevitable ossification of classification as a social and political tool, so ripe for critique. Thus, the discourse of classifica-

tion in this issue of TCS is the discourse of the socially responsible art critic, not concerned with functionalism, but concerned with creating a perspective on a selection of extant concepts. It makes for interesting reading that will allow one to reflect on the power of classification, but we have been aware of this for some time (see Wilson 1968). Of course, it is always good to be reminded of such important things.

#### 4. Constructs Useful for Classification Research

This issue of TCS can serve as a springboard to consider particular constructs in classification. It conjures in my mind, a desire to look at the aesthetics of classification, classification as a productive mode of being, and role of classification in identity and sense of place.

##### 4.1. Aesthetics

Classification is an aesthetic activity because it establishes balance and symmetry. It is appreciated that way by critiques and more humanistic social scientists (see Borges 1942/1999). It can be explored when asking questions such as: “How do issues related to balance and form, to evocative representation, to symmetry in presentation and content affect the way we classify?” This leads us to reflect on matters larger than aesthetics. For instance and in a similar vein, Elaine Scarry (1999) talks about symmetry beauty and arrangement, and links it with our concept of justice. It is not a stretch to take this metaphor and apply it to methodology for creating classes and a system of classification. This is what is done in the texts of this issue of TCS. Art, literature, and philosophical engagement with those subjects inform this critique and discussion of classification. Our own literature reflects this, though in a more limited way. When Birger Hjørland has claimed that arranging flowers in a vase is a type of classification (Hjørland 1997), it invokes a sense of aesthetics – that purpose is one of arrangement, not a means to another end.

Borges surfaces again and again in regard to this. His (1942/1999) “Chinese encyclopedia” is offered as a starting point for more than one author in this issue. This particular list, presented in Borges’s work is a difficult one. It is difficult because most writers and scholars stop with Borges, but it seems it does not stop with him. Borges cites another compiler – a Dr. Franz Kuhn. Dr. Kuhn is an author of many books, in German, on Chinese art, culture and translation. However, I was not able to identify the text in

which Kuhn presents this *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. Of course, Borges could have fabricated this, as he is wont to do. However, in this essay, immediately after this “Chinese encyclopedia,” he treats us to a short discussion of the Bibliographic Institute of Brussels and how it “exercises chaos” by parceling the universe into 1,000 subdivisions. We know this to be the *Universal Decimal Classification*, and because this is a historical fact, it would stand to reason that we should be able to find the citation to Dr. Kuhn’s work. It would be a great bibliographical service to Knowledge Organization if we were to find this original source (if there is one).

##### 4.2. Means of Production

In “Classification” Roy Boyne discusses the work of Georges Perec, who sought to create classification anew in order to escape sociology and political science of the late 1960s in France and in so doing, take a greater control of his own self-determination (Boyne, 2006). Perec uses language like a puzzle to complete a picture – to call attention to the fact that it is a system (Perec 1965; 1965/1999; 1985). The work then is in classification, but its purpose is to create again and again, to reproduce in a reflective way. In this way classification is a means of production, a mode of engagement with the world. The purpose of which is, in this case, to escape from the use of extant classifications (societal and others), in favour of creating new classifications. A partial listing of Perec’s work can be found in the bibliography. It seems a valuable lesson to reflect on the fact that reclassification is an important part of the human drive to classify.

##### 4.3. Identity and Locale

Classification is about identity and locale. We shape our perception of the world and our place within it through classification. The TCS authors explore this through tropes of globalization, race, and language. This too is clearly articulated by many thinkers in Knowledge Organization (Beghtol, Olson, Lopez-Huertas, etc.). In this issue of TCS we are asked to consider how collections, like the zoo of the 19th century, construct our gaze as dominant over animals and other races (Venn 2006). It is through classification that we can reflect on this gaze. In this case Venn is talking about organizing and framing an object – much like Briet’s argument about antelopes and information (Briet 1951/2006).

## 5. Closing

In closing, I want to say that there is little that is truly problematized in this issue of TCS – at least from my perspective. Knowledge Organization does not learn much in the way of problems of classification from this discourse. What is valuable about this work lies in its work at engendering constructs for analysis beyond function; work in which Knowledge Organization has been less interested. In this way we have been functionalists, caring only for particular functionality. However, we can take these constructs and examine the role played by classification in other spheres, like the aesthetic and material lives of people, their identities, and sense of place. Perhaps we can turn this discourse on ourselves and reflect. We can ask whether our work in classification is of a particular aesthetic, for example an aesthetic of functionalism – chosen from a variety of aesthetic options. Perhaps our identities are rooted in a particular notion of material and place – books and the library or documents on the Web. And for various and important reasons we do not create discourse beyond these. This issue of TCS offers us a strange looking glass for reflection. We can see how classification is the same in another discourse, but if we look inward, we see how different our discourse is.

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Knowledge Organization Systems and Services (KOSs) are the topic of this special issue of NRHM edited by Marianne Lykke Nielson and Doug Tudhope. The call for papers defined KOSs broadly: classification systems, gazetteers, lexical databases, ontologies, taxonomies and thesauri. Those concerned with the tenor of the discussions that have been swirling around the recent decision of the Library of Congress to eliminate series authority control, and continued signals that even more far-reaching changes may be afoot, will find this issue especially resonant. Underlying each paper is a clearly articulated stance that legacy systems, such as controlled vocabularies, remain worthy scaffolds for powerful KOSs.