

Book Reviews

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Book Review Editor

BOWKER, Geoffrey C., and STAR, Susan Leigh, eds. *How Classifications Work : Problems and Challenges in an Electronic Age*, Library Trends, vol. 47, no 2, Fall 1998, 185-340.

This issue of *Library Trends* highlights the interrelationships between classification and social structures, the ways in which different types of schemes reflect the needs and the views of their designers, and sometimes of their users. A number of the authors also look at the utility of using various theories from outside the domain of library and information science to analyse classification structures. The articles fall into two categories: those that analyse a particular vocabulary or classification scheme, and those that discuss how we look at classification.

In "Social Constructs and Disease : Implications for a Controlled Vocabulary for HIV/AIDS," Jeffrey Huber and Mary Gillaspy comment on the effects of social constructs on the active vocabulary of the various domains associated with HIV/AIDS. The authors analyse the implications this has had for the development of a controlled vocabulary, *HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS-Related Terminology : A Means of Organizing the Body of Knowledge*. Most of the paper discusses the politicization and complexities of the discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS: "[m]irroring the complex nature of the epidemic and the controversies associated with the disease, the body of knowledge regarding the pandemic is circumscribed by the same societal construct as the pathological itself" (p. 201). Although it does bring home quite clearly the relationship between vocabulary and social constructs, it would have been interesting to see here a more extensive discussion of the actual vocabulary.

Geoffrey Bowker is also concerned with these relationships between social constructs and classification in "The Kindness of Strangers : Kinds and Politics in Classification Systems." Bowker analyses the change over time in the *International Classification of Diseases* "in order to discern the relationship between the use of the classification as an information storage and retrieval mechanism and its use to encode multiple political and ethical agendas" (p. 255). Looking at the *ICD* in the theoretical light of Aristotelian classification and prototype classification,

he discovers that it acts as a "gateway between the world of the laboratory and the hospital... and the workaday world (p. 290). As a practical epidemiological tool with a long history, its evolution corresponds to changes in western medical knowledge, but also to changes in the way we view diseases and in the way we live and die. This is a fascinating look at the relationship between a practical classification and the world that it reflects.

Hope Olson addresses the problem of marginalized groups and topics in "Mapping Beyond Dewey's Boundaries : Constructing Classificatory Space for Marginalized Knowledge Domains". Using spacial metaphors, Olson proposes a methodology for making marginal concepts visible and creating paradoxical spaces where the borders between mainstream and marginalized cultures become permeable. With examples from a project in which the concepts from *A Women's Thesaurus* were mapped to *DDC*, she illustrates how apparently neutral subject positions and borders are actually skewed according to mainstream constructs. Olson suggests that this approach provides a means for giving voice to the excluded, thereby revitalizing classifications. The widespread use of *DDC* and its on-going revision gives this article particular relevance. Olson's approach combines a theoretical analysis and a practical methodology for dealing with a scheme that has many demands upon it.

In "Grounded Classification : Grounded Theory and Faceted Classification," Susan Leigh Star compares the qualitative method of grounded theory with Ranganathan's faceted classification. Star notes that "it is uncommon to see information systems classification as an ethnographic or theoretical enterprise... . However, there are potential benefits to seeking this convergence" (p. 220). Tracing parallels in the developments and approaches of the two systems, Star argues that cross-fertilization between the approaches would be beneficial and that faceted classification could prove a useful tool for analysing and constructing grounded theories. This comparison is itself, of course, an exercise in classification and it is fruitful because of that – it provides another window for looking at how classification interacts with social constructs.

Hanne Albrechtsen and Elin Jacob, in "The Dynamics of Classification Systems as Boundary Objects for Cooperation in the Electronic Library", explore the notion that "[i]n an information ecology, a classification system should function as a boundary object, supporting coherence and a common identity across the different actors involved" (p. 300) and that schemes can function as public domains for communication. As libraries shift from manual, paper-based services to digital multimedia, they cease to be closed systems, and the role of the library classification also shifts, changing from collection management to the "facilitation of communication, maintenance of coherence, and establishment of a shared conceptual context" (p. 310). To illustrate their thesis, the authors look at two collaborative projects in which users, librarians, researchers and technicians have negotiated structures suited to their needs – where the classification schemes become boundary objects, allowing discussion among users and librarians.

In "Psychiatrists make Diagnoses, but not in Circumstances of Their Own Choosing : Agency and Structure in the *DSM*", Mark Spasser analyses the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in light of Giddens's theory of structuration and suggests that modification of the theory is necessary in order for it to explicate fully the concept of agency. Spasser notes that while the theory is useful for analysing library classification because of its "discursive penetration into the sociocultural conditions of the multiple perspectives that organize the context within which historically situated practitioners act" (p. 331), its inability to "theorize intentional transformative action has an unfortunate and particularly paralyzing relevance to the ongoing revision of a living, yet institutionalized, text such as the manual" (p. 332). Despite the somewhat obscure language of this article, the role of the classification in framing a particular set of social values and constructs (the biomedical model of mental health) is made very clear. Spasser also discusses the developments within *DSM* that have excluded the bodies of literature concerning the relevance of historical life events and of human development to psychiatric problems, which highlights the ways in which classifications articulate world views.

Jennifer Tobias compares traditional cataloguing and web-based descriptions of documents in "Seeking the Subject," looking for ways of making subject visible even when it does not align with the categorizations provided in *LCSH*. Tobias comes up with a number of suggestions, such as the importance of developing subject along with keyword systems, because both are useful. Most of her recommendations apply more to making items generally accessible, but they do have implications for making subject searching easier. This short article is interesting, but it is the weakest in the collection. It lacks theoretical discussion, and at the same time the practical dis-

cussion is not fully developed. It also seems to suffer from an editorial glitch (the green card example is not very clear, partly because it appears that the illustration showing the LC cataloguing is missing, but also perhaps because some knowledge of American immigration procedures would make it more understandable – a different example would have been more appropriate for an international audience).

As a whole, this is a useful collection for those interested in how knowledge is structured and in the ways in which social norms are imprinted in such structures. It might have been helpful to have had the articles presented in different order with those that focus on the more general such as Star's and Albrechtsen and Jacob's at the beginning. That quibble aside, this volume presents philosophical food for thought and some practical directions to pursue. As information dissemination and information seeking become globalized processes, the rifts that separate dominant views from the marginalized ones become more visible. It is only by consciously addressing these rifts that classification can move forward. This collection moves us further towards a consciousness of what is needed, offering some methodological suggestions for the process of moving forward.

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CHAN, Lois Mai. *A Guide to the Library of Congress Classification*. 5th ed. Englewood, Colorado : Libraries Unlimited, 1999. xviii, 551 p. ISBN 1-56308-500-3 (pbk.)

Immeroth's Guide to the Library of Congress Classification has been a reliable friend and companion for over thirty years. In the recently published fifth edition, Lois Mai Chan, doing what she does best, presents complex technical information in clear and lucid prose. The new edition expands and updates an already indispensable text.

The purpose of the book as enunciated in the preface is „to continue to provide an exposition of the Library of Congress Classification and a tool for studying and for staff training in the use of the scheme.“

The fifth edition follows the basic organization of the previous one. The introductory chapter provides historical background and context for the classification. There are notes at the end of each chapter, in addition to the general bibliography. The appendices, A: General Tables and B: Models for sub-arrangement within disciplines, as