Art or Technology: Where Do You Classify Design?

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Abstract

This poster examines the two major U.S. library classification schemes, Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and Library of Congress Classification (LCC), to understand how they represent design and reveal issues in locating library materials.

Classification is not neutral

Recent years have seen significant interest in how knowledge organization systems in libraries, such as controlled vocabularies and classification systems, express positions and viewpoints.

Bowker and Star (2002) confront the invisibility and ubiquity of classification: they assert that practitioners in every field of study and practice utilize classification without recognizing the impact that these structures impose, including ethical and economic impacts.

Studies have shown how library classification schemes erase or bury particular aspects of identity, such as:

- race/ethnicity in the Dewey Decimal Classification
- gender and sexuality in the Library of Congress Classification
- design as a science (Simon 1969);
- Design in libraries, such as and
- DDC was originally developed by Melvil Dewey in 1876 and is now in its 23rd edition. It is a general schema that aims to classify all documents in the knowledge domain, divided into ten main classes that encompass all knowledge (Satija 2013). DDC has been adopted now in more than 200,000 libraries in 135 countries and is typically used in public libraries across the US.

Given that DDC is a hierarchical classification system, thus hierarchical force applies: all attributes of a superclass apply to all attributes of the subclasses.

LCC, on the other hand, was developed around the same time by Charles Mixter, who was the Chief Classifier at the Library of Congress, 1897-1910. Rather than universal, LCC was created to classify the pre-existing collection and allow for its further growth. This is reflected in the adoption of LCC at many, mostly large, research and academic libraries in the US.

LCC is not a universal knowledge system nor is it hierarchical. It is enumerative, meaning that subjects are classified in lists instead of trees. Items are grouped together due to their similar attributes; however, there is no inheritance of traits.

Methodology

Empowering a close reading and critical analysis of the two classification systems, DDC and LCC, we analyzed similarities and differences in representation. Utilizing the indexes of each system, we scanned for every indexed representation of design and cross-analyzed all instantiations. Given the nature of DDC as a single hierarchical system, DCC has one index for subject location. However, LCC has an index for each schedule respectively.

We followed each index instance to its location in the schedule(s) and reviewed the hierarchical positioning and/or the context in which it had been positioned. This revealed the ontological, and therefore epistemological, implications of the classification.

Our analysis is contemporary, observing the current locations of design. However, let it be recognized that each of these systems were constructed in the early 1900s.

Classification may also marginalize a specific domain

For example, design is a complex domain with historically competing views:

- design as a science (Simon 1969);
- a reflective-based practice (Schön 1983);
- design as a unique discipline, distinct from arts or science (Cross 2011).

About DDC and LCC

There is no superclass “Design”.

Design is split under Fine Arts and Technology in both DDC and LCC, with minor mentions under philosophy, education, and law.

Instead, design has been classified wholly subordinate to artefacts under either arts (decorative) or technology (applied).

Observations

Catalogers: Consider carefully under which larger discipline (art vs. technology) you classify design books to best ensure findability. Think about possible amendments to classification schemes that could include other design perspectives.

Reference practitioners: Complex domains like design need to be approached from multiple angles. This will require more in-depth questioning during reference interview work and more patron support in order to ensure readers are connected with the most relevant information for their needs.

Patrons: Don’t assume the books you are looking at on a shelf are your only choice! Similar topics may be at alternate shelving locations.

So what?

References


Design

Arts, Technology, Engineering, Mathematic, Education, Philosophy, Law

Cataloging and Classification

N Fine Arts

T Technology

Where can I find a book on design?

Am I an artist?

Am I an engineer?

Any questions, please contact Kristina at sir dot edu. A huge thank you to Dr. Clarke and LIIT at the School.