The Design Domain is Divided
Issues in Interdisciplinary Library Classification

Abstract:
This work explores how the two dominant library classification systems in the United States, Dewey Decimal Classification and Library of Congress Classification portray the ontological positioning of design. Both classifications reveal design has no classification schedule of its own in either system, and is instead divided largely between Fine Art and Technology/Engineering as subclasses. This subsummation isolates design into ontological siloes, with significant implications for research and practice.

1.0 Introduction
An ever-expanding volume of knowledge organization research shows that classification systems express viewpoints. Bowker and Star (1999) show how systems express particular views about labor and identity, with significant implications from healthcare billing to racial segregation. Additional scholars have shown how library subject headings, classification, and controlled vocabularies express normative views about race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and class (e.g., Olson 2002; Furner 2007; Adler, Huber, and Mix 2017; Howard and Knowlton 2018). As these knowledge organization system express perspectives, they establish an ontological worldview of the domain they describe. How do the two dominant library classification systems in the United States, Dewey Decimal Classification and Library of Congress Classification, portray the ontological positioning of design, and what does each classification reveal regarding perceptions of design as a domain?

1.1 Design as a domain
Design is a complex domain with competing views regarding its status. Simon (1996) considers design to be an applied scientific field. Others, such as Cross (2011), argue that design is a unique discipline, distinct from sciences or arts. Epistemological and ontological perspectives on design have changed dramatically in the past century: have library classification schemes kept pace?

2.0 The method
Hjørland (2002) lists examination of tools like classification schemes as one of eleven methods for domain analysis, suggesting that information professionals can better understand a conceptual space, such as a field of study or discipline, through examination of the knowledge organization systems used to describe and index documents in that space. This poster will report on a close reading and critical analysis of these two major library classification systems to reveal an overarching domain analysis of design.
3.0 Discussion of findings

Preliminary findings reveal that design has no classification schedule of its own in either system, and is instead divided largely between Fine Art and Technology/Engineering as subclasses. Moreover, the relegation of design to multiple levels of subclasses within various topics reifies the notion that design is a process or activity within other disciplines or domains, rather than its own discipline. Thus, design theories and practices—unique aspects that delineate design as a distinct epistemology—are systematically classified subordinate to the objects that design produces. Instead of supporting diverse repertoire-building within the broader design domain, this subsummation isolates design research into ontological siloes, minimizing exposure to additional alternate knowledge. Potential implications include a lack of interdisciplinary research and outside-the-box innovation, rendering design less visible as a domain of its own.

References


