Charting a Journey Across Knowledge Domains: 
Feminism in the Dewey Decimal Classification

Abstract: This paper addresses problems of representing marginalized knowledge domains in general and feminist or women's studies in particular in the Dewey Decimal Classification. The authors develop and apply a theoretical framework that makes the classification's limits permeable. A variety of approaches are proposed to create paradoxical spaces, places that accommodate the margins and the mainstream simultaneously. The resulting changes, expansions and options proposed for DDC are accessible through a user interface designed for the purpose.

1. Introduction

This paper concerns work addressing the problems of classifying marginalized knowledge domains. It is a preliminary report of the second in a series of projects to create a prototype for representation of marginalized knowledge domains using the case of women's/feminist studies.

In the previous project, we created links between terms in a major feminist vocabulary, A Women's Thesaurus, and numbers in the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). Some of the concepts in A Women's Thesaurus fit effectively into DDC, others have various problems of fit, and some cannot be represented in DDC at all. Assessment of the fit of individual terms has been carried out using spatial metaphors of classification as mapping—in this case, mapping a marginalized knowledge domain. The fit is measured for coextensiveness and sensitivity of context.

Having identified these problems, we are now proposing ameliorative changes to DDC on three scales: "global," "regional" and "local." Changes on a "global" scale will suggest revisions to the existing schedules of DDC to remedy the clearest marginalizations and exclusions. They will be in the form of specific proposals to the editor of DDC for modification of the existing classification. Changes on a "regional" scale (regional in the sense of feminist or women's studies as area studies) will create an expansion (or supplement) for use with DDC by institutions wanting to meet more fully the needs of women, women's studies scholars, and feminists. The expansion will be operationalized in a database which is compatible with Dewey for Windows and amenable to searching on the World Wide Web. Changes on a "local" scale will suggest techniques that are significant departures from the standard DDC, but will be usable with DDC in ways similar to options currently contained in the classification.

In describing this second project, this paper will: 1) explain theoretical constructs for change, 2) give examples of their application and 3) describe a sample database and user interface.

2. Theoretical framework

The underlying assumption for the theoretical framework comes from Drucilla Cornell's
interpretation of deconstruction as a philosophy of the limit. Cornell suggests that all systems are by definition limiting (Cornell addresses the legal system). Their limits define what is included and what is excluded. Changing the limits will change the exclusions, but will not offer a universal solution. There will always be exclusionary limits. Cornell proposes that an ethical stance in this situation is to make the existing limits permeable to allow the voices previously excluded to be heard within the system. The notion of a limit with an inside and an outside suggests using a spatial concept for implementation. We have chosen feminist geographer Gillian Rose's concept of paradoxical space. Paradoxical spaces are places where seemingly incompatible concepts, apparent opposites, are simultaneously or alternately present.

Mapping knowledge from a marginalized domain creates a different landscape than mapping knowledge from a mainstream perspective. Because of its interdisciplinarity, women's/feminist studies cannot be located in a bounded area of a mainstream classification such as DDC. Biases inherent in the mainstream permeate the locations of feminist topics across the landscape. To create paradoxical space we suggest taking over some spaces and reinterpreting the mapping of others in such a way that the mainstream and the margins coexist.

The previous project diagnosed problems of representation in DDC, the problems that shape the limits of this system (for further explanation see Olson and Ward 1997). In this paper we will address three of these problems in order to illustrate possibilities for global, regional and local changes. A variety of theoretical approaches will be taken to implement these changes. Agreeing with Cornell's rejection of a universal system with no limits, we are accepting that there is no universal solution applicable to all problems.

Theoretical constructs for creating paradoxical spaces can begin with the simple dualities that are common in western thought. Deconstruction is a useful tool for recognizing these dualities and illustrating that they are constructed, not innate or natural (Olson 1997). It heightens the visibility of the often hidden other element of the duality. Often a category will seem neutral or objective because it represents a mainstream perspective to which most of us are accustomed. However, it is likely to exclude its implied opposite so that that which seems transparent is actually opaque, occluding its opposite. A deconstructive approach to classification can raise awareness of the artificial nature of our categories and illuminate what they exclude.

Deconstruction does not end with making the transparent visible. It also suggests that the constructed limits of our systems and categories will change. Peggy Kamuf uses the image of a map and the fluidity of a shoreline to convey the shifting of boundaries or limits:

That feminist thought has yet to decide where to situate itself on the map of the known world's divisions—either in a canonical mainstream with its centers of learning and culture, or in an outlying and unexplored region—may be a clue that such generic distinctions cannot contain it. To pursue this analogy still further (and at the risk of leaving even further behind or below the solid ground of a more quotidian tread), what feminist thought can and has put in question is the capacity of any map to represent more than a fiction of the world's contours. The line traced along the eastern edge of North America, for example, the line following the extreme border of an American context, for all its inlets and protrusions, its islands and peninsulas, still can only demarcate with the fiction of an arbitrarily traced line the point at which land moves out to sea and the ground slips from beneath us. (1990, 111)

To represent information, especially along the littoral where the included and excluded
mingle, Kamuf calls for a "plurilocality ... finding always another place from which to begin" as we remap an institution (1990, 111). The plurilocality of classification can offer plural solutions for different contexts.

The socially constructed categories which our classifications frequently reflect are grounded in the power relations of our society. Dorothy Smith notes that institutionally established conceptual practices create the illusion of a universal system or ruling apparatus (1987, 108-110). Because women's lives are typically outside of that apparatus, Smith suggests beginning with women's everyday/everynight lived experience to create systems (in her case a sociology) from women's standpoints. A system must be receptive to the infinite varieties of realities. If it successfully represents the diversity of perspectives it will not be static.

Each of these three theoretical approaches: deconstruction, plurilocality and grounding in experience can operate to create different types of paradoxical space, permeating the limits of the system, changing the shape of the limits to divert their skewing toward the mainstream.

3. Implementation of paradoxical spaces

The following three examples of problems in DDC will show how the theoretical approaches described above can be operationalized as cartographic praxis for global, regional and local solutions.

A problem that needs a global solution is the exclusion from DDC of the concept of unpaid work (Olson forthcoming). The section in DDC on labour economics, 331, clearly implies throughout that it only considers paid labour. One way of addressing this problem is to create a paradoxical space by locating the general concept of unpaid employment alongside paid employment. To create a category for paid labour and one for unpaid labour and put them side-by-side takes a step toward deconstructing the division between the two. The common presumption in measuring production is that only paid labour is productive. The value of unpaid labour is thus made invisible. Putting the concept of unpaid labour into the context of the labour force recognizes the unpaid contribution made, mainly by women, as a significant factor in productive labour:

300 Social sciences
330 Economics
331 Labor economics
331.1 Labor force and market
331.11 Labor force
331.110* < Zero Subdivisions >
331[.111] Geographic distribution
331.114 Qualifications and personal characteristics
331.116 Economic basis of labor
331.1162 Unpaid labor
331.1163 Paid labor
331.117 Systems of labor
331.1172 Free labor
331.1173 Compulsory labor
331.118 Labor productivity
331.119 Labor force by industry and occupation

Deconstruction highlights the hidden aspect of a duality, here unpaid as opposed to paid. Juxtaposing it here to Systems of labor that include free labor as opposed to compulsory...
labor problematizes the idea of a labour force paid or unpaid. Compulsory labour and unpaid labour are not synonymous, but the coercion of one and lack of recognition of the other point to a hegemonic labour environment.

An example requiring a regional expansion is the problem of different streams of feminist thought. A Women's Thesaurus has eighteen narrower terms under the heading feminism, from anarcha feminism to spiritual feminism. Most of these particular feminisms are paradoxical spaces in themselves. For example, socialist feminism is not simply socialism + feminism. It is a development of its own "emphasizing structural discrimination in economic, political, and social systems that perpetuate inequality" (Capek 1987, 444). That is, it is both a feminism and a socialism. It speaks in both discourses simultaneously. This plurivocality needs a plurilocality. A synthesis using DDC's number building capabilities brings together the two facets of this concept. The phrasing of the headings suggest that anarcha feminism, socialist feminism, spiritual feminism and the others are feminisms modified by various adjectives denoting other perspectives. Therefore, the proposed number building of a regional expansion begins with feminism following DDC's "rule of application" that emphasizes the aspect acted upon (1996, v.1, xxxvi, 5.7):

300 Social sciences
305 Social groups
305.4 Women
305.40* < Zero Subdivisions >
305.42 Social role and status of women
305.42/8001-305.42/8999 Specific feminisms
305.43 Women's occupations
305.48 Specific kinds of women

The entire area of 305.42 will need to be considerably expanded, but this one example gives an idea of the potential of employing traditional DDC mechanisms from a different theoretical perspective:

Class Number: 305.42/8001-305.42/8999
Caption: Specific feminisms
Notes: Add to base number 305.428 notation 001-999, e.g., socialist feminism 305.428335

This mechanism allows for greater specificity:
Class Number: 305.42/8335
Caption: Socialist feminism
Notes: Number built according to instructions under 305.42/8001-305.42/8999

This approach offers a flexible space with opportunity for Kamuf's plurivocality (plural voices). It will meet the needs of general collections with concentrations in feminism or women's studies. However, it only allows one space with limits (though they are elastic limits) for these topics. To add a dimension of plurilocality (plural spaces) requires further adaptation. For example, special collections of feminist materials may not find it useful to have all of these materials in one slightly differentiated clump. Therefore, an option to reverse the focus of the topic should also be available. Presently, DDC's standard subdivision --082 has several definitions including "feminist views of a subject" (1996, 23). An expansion of the subdivision would make it possible to use socialism as the location and add feminism to it to create a paradoxical space. So a stream of feminism or feminist theory might be --0821
(parallel to --01 as the subdivision for philosophy and theory) with the alternative number for socialist feminism becoming 335.00821. This option is similar to the current choices for classification of bibliographies.

The third example of problems in DDC is an instance calling for local variations according to the context of specific everyday/evverynight lived realities. Presently, DDC's tables of preference disallow differences of emphasis when synthesizing or building numbers. For example, the section of DDC on social groups instructs classifiers to "observe the following table of preference" (1996, v.2, p.328):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons by physical and mental characteristics</td>
<td>305.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age groups</td>
<td>305.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups by sex</td>
<td>305.3-305.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social classes</td>
<td>305.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious groups</td>
<td>305.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial, ethnic, national groups</td>
<td>305.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language groups</td>
<td>305.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational and miscellaneous groups</td>
<td>305.9 (except 305.908)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This order may or may not coincide with the intentions of an author or the interests of a particular audience. It presumes that an optimal order can be achieved. However, this consistent order constructs a limit of what can be represented. For instance, bell hooks' book, *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*, raises the question of what facet of the topic should be given preference for representation. hooks was speaking from her own experiences and speaking primarily to black women (hooks 1989, 15). She was very clear about her audience:

> When the book was first published, white women readers would often say to me, "I don't feel this book is really talking to me." ... I responded by saying that while I would like readers to be diverse, the audience I most wanted to address was black women, that I wanted to place us at the center. (hooks 1989, 15)

She sets up both facets, sex and race, as being vital to the book. The responses she received suggest that the concatenation of race and sex was conveyed to at least some of her audience. It is, then, difficult to say that this book is first for and about women and feminism or that this book is first for and about African Americans. The realities of different readers will affect their perceptions of what should be the primary facet. Different people will find this book depending on where it is placed for browsing. We propose that in such an instance the decision of which facet receives preference should be made as close as possible to the everyday reality of its readers, that is, by the people who are organizing a given collection. Therefore, a local decision should be made, possibly overriding the table of preference on a case-by-case basis.

The plan for this project is, then, to make suggestions for change to the "master" DDC, create an expansion for greater specificity in feminist and women's studies, and develop options for local application. A variety of theoretical concepts will be used to breach DDC's limits and construct paradoxical spaces including deconstruction, plurilocality and grounded experience.

4. Database and interface

The revisions and the expansion to DDC will be captured in a database with linkages to

Advances in Knowledge Organization, Vol.6(1998)
A Women's Thesaurus. The user interface for this database will permit navigation of the thesaurus and display of the Dewey numbers relevant to a given term, along with an assessment of the appropriateness of each number. Where no appropriate context for a term is found in DDC, a link to the revisions or expansions of DDC will be provided.

Screen captures from a prototype version of the user interface are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below. This search program has been implemented in Visual Basic, and provides access to a digital version of A Women's Thesaurus which has been captured in a relational database using Microsoft Access. The database is currently being extended to incorporate the proposed DDC revisions and expansions, and the sample screen in Figure 2 demonstrates how the modifications to DDC can be displayed. A World Wide Web search interface has also been developed, but is not shown here for brevity. A more complete description of the database and search interfaces will appear in Ward and Olson 1998.

This search interface and its Web counterpart allow the user to traverse the thesaurus and identify DDC links in a quick and intuitive "hypertextual" fashion. Clicking on any of the terms in the lists will provide an expansion of all the relationships for that term.

To obtain appropriate DDC numbers for a particular concept, the user can identify a relevant term in the thesaurus and then display the linked Dewey numbers. In the sample search that is illustrated, the DDC numbers for "socialist feminism" have been retrieved.

The search began with "sociali" being typed into the term entry box at the top left of the screen. The matching terms from the thesaurus appeared automatically in the Thesaurus Terms list. Clicking on "socialist feminism" in the Thesaurus Terms list caused an expansion of the relationships for that term as shown in Figure 1, with the linked DDC numbers being displayed as well. The codes appearing below the DDC numbers in the Dewey Links list summarize the goodness of the match. "(Exp)" appearing at the end of the codes means that the number is part of the proposed expansions to DDC.

To display further information on a given DDC number, the user can click on the number in the Dewey Links list. The caption and notes for that number are then displayed as shown in Figure 2, along with a list of all the terms in the thesaurus that are linked to that number.

5. Conclusion

The result demonstrates how our second project charts a journey from theory to practice crossing and recrossing seemingly incompatible knowledge domains. We have taken seriously Cornell's suggestion to make the system's limits permeable. Using a variety of approaches—here we have shown three examples of deconstruction, plurilocality and grounding in

Advances in Knowledge Organization, Vol.6(1998)
experience—we are creating paradoxical spaces along the boundaries of DDC. The changes we propose bring theory into practice, bridge global and local and pull together topics across disciplines. Finally, to make the practice we create practicable we are developing an interface to allow classifiers and users to search and display our results. Upon completion of this project the database will be publicly available as we test its viability in everyday realities.

References