

Book Reviews



Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences.* Cambridge, Mass. and London, Eng.: MIT Pr., 1999. 377p. \$29.95, alk. paper (ISBN 0-262-02461-6). LC 99-26894.

Written by two professors in the Department of Communications at the University of California, San Diego, and issued as a volume in the MIT Press Inside Technology series, *Sorting Things Out* is a scholarly, well-documented discussion of classification and its ramifications. The tone of the work is set in "Introduction: To Classify is Human." Classification, the authors declare, is a ubiquitous activity. Although the systems by which classification is done are relatively invisible and the processes employed are often not conscious ones, the action itself pervades all aspects of our daily lives and carries consequences.

Classification occurs when one organizes work on his or her desk, deciding what must be given priority, what will wait until tomorrow, what does not require attention until next week, and so on. It is likewise done when dealing with e-mail. Headers are scanned. Some messages may be deleted unopened, others are read and given a quick response or perhaps no response, and still others are read but given no immediate reply because an answer requires thought and/or information finding. Among the messages in the final group, some may ultimately go unanswered and, again, classification will be the determining force.

Chapter one discusses the analysis of classification. The remainder of the book is organized into four sections. Part I, "Classification and Large-Scale Infrastructures," comprises chapters two, three, and four, with the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) discussed as a concrete example. Chapter two deals with the ICD text, chapter three with the

history of the ICD, and chapter four with its wide-ranging impact. Part II, "Classification and Biography, or System and Suffering," comprises chapters five and six, which explore the influence of classification on human experience. Chapter five examines the classification systems used by victims of tuberculosis and their doctors in the 1800s and early 1900s. And chapter six discusses the racial classification schemes employed in apartheid South Africa.

Part III, "Classification and Work Practice," comprises chapters seven and eight. The Nursing Interventions Classification (NIC) is studied as a classification system used in a specific kind of work, with current practices and how they have changed from earlier times presented. Part IV, "The Theory and Practice of Classifications," comprises chapters nine and ten and brings together many themes discussed earlier in the work. Chapter nine "examine[s] classification systems as historical and political artifacts very much as part of modern Western bureaucracy." In chapter ten, "Why Classifications Matter," the authors emphasize that systems must be open to change. The text is followed by an extensive bibliography of more than three hundred references, a name index, and a subject index.

Although the primary audience for *Sorting Things Out* will be classification theoreticians, the work also will be of interest to medical anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, as well as scholars with an interest in social stratification. The writers make reference to the eclectic content of the book in their statement: "We would hate to assign a Dewey classification number to this book, which straddles sociology, anthropology, history and information systems, and design. Our modest hope is that it will not find its way onto the fantasy shelves." At the moder-

ate cost of \$29.95, *Sorting Things Out* is a bargain.—James Williams, *University of Illinois at Urbana*.

Challenges Facing Higher Education at the Millennium. Ed. Werner Z. Hirsch and Luc E. Weber. Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx Pr. (American Council on Higher Education/Oryx Press Series on Higher Education), 1999. 199p. \$29.95, alk. paper (ISBN 1-57356-293-9). LC 99-28204.

This volume is a compilation of papers presented at a colloquium held at Glion, Switzerland, in May 1998. It is interesting to note that not all the views expressed at the conference are represented here. In the preface, the editors observe that two points of view were in evidence: David Saxon, president emeritus of the University of California extolled the virtues of stability and caution in plotting the future of the university, whereas “most” others took a more activist stance. The book comprises the latter only.

Many familiar buzzwords anchor the discussions contained in the book’s seventeen chapters: Contributors express concern about lifelong learning, producing educated citizens, and the effects of new technologies and globalization on institutions of higher learning. They worry about the deepening gap between research and teaching, consider the value of distance education, and look at the role of the student as consumer. Part 1, “Missions and Values,” includes a survey chapter followed by discussions of the university’s role in “meeting the challenges of the new millennium” and universities in “the new Europe.” Contributors to this section include volume editor Luc E. Weber, a professor of public economics at the University of Geneva; David P. Gardner, a foundation president; and Paolo Blasi, rector of the University of Florence.

In Part 2, “The Effect of the Changing Environment on Higher Education,” University of Michigan president emeritus James J. Duderstadt looks at the pluses and minuses of current trends affecting university life and offers two widely dif-

ferent possible scenarios for the future. Stanley O. Ikenberry, former president of the University of Illinois and current president of the American Council on Education, writes about “The University and the Information Age” in this section, and it is astonishing to note that he does not mention the word *library* once in his discussion of new computing and telecommunication technologies. Indeed, libraries appear only three times in this volume: once in an offhand sentence suggesting that libraries should share their resources, a second time in a discussion of the California Digital Library, and a third time in University of Geneva Professor Dennis Tsichritzis’ chapter, “Research and Education: New Roles, New Instrument.” Professor Tsichritzis observes that:

First, book libraries will gradually be replaced by all-encompassing digital libraries available on the networks. Libraries will be there, but they will play a limited role as rare document collections. Most people will not need to consult the real thing. Second, students will have access to too much information.

One wonders just who Professor Tsichritzis imagines will help students make sense of all that information.

Part 2 concludes with a chapter by businessman Harold M. Williams on the economics of higher education in the United States and what other “developed countries” can learn from it. The affiliations of the authors mentioned so far is representative of the entire book—with one exception, they are men with either academic or corporate backgrounds. Without wanting to belabor the absence of library consciousness in this volume (well, maybe I do), it seems appropriate to note the existence of a very fine, similar, earlier book, *The Modern University: Its Present Status and Future Prospects* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Wm. Rand Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust, 1994). Introduced by library educator Edward G. Holley, it also is a compilation of papers