Notes on the Process of Classification
MAT 259, Winter 2007, Legrady

Strongly influenced by:
"Sorting Things Out: Classification & Its Consequences", Geoffrey.Bowker, Leigh.Star

Definition of classification
- A spatial, temporal, spatio-temporal segmentation of the world
- Classification system is a set of containers (metaphorical and literal)
- It is knowledge production

Classification System properties: (10)

. There are consistent, unique classificatory principles:
        by origin and descent (genetic)
        by date received (temporal order)
        by those most often used like recipes (functional order)

. Categories are mutually exclusive
        (in an ideal world a rose is a rose, not sometimes a daisy)
. The system is complete
        (Provides total coverage of the world it describes)
A medical diagnostic must enter something in the patient's record where category is called for
If unknown, then possibility exists for medical discover to be absorbed in to the complete system
of classification.

Standards
. A standard is any agreed upon rules
. It spans more than 1 community of practice and persists over time
. Standards are deployed in making things work over distance and heterogenous metrics
(ISO, QWERTY, WWW consortium, metric, etc.)
. Legal bodies enforce standards

Classification & Standards
. Classification as objects of cooperation across social worlds
. Standards tend to impose classification methods (pharmaceutical, education, etc)

Materiality & Symbolic
. All classification and standards are a combination of
        a) physical entities: paper forms, plugs, software instructions,
        b) speed, rhythm, how things are implemented

. When java computer code is written: Created within conventional constraints and innovations
made within them
. strike plastic keys, shift notes on desktop, consult manuals, types of hardware, all produced
within standards down to the 60hz power
. A good operations researcher can identify whether they all work together

Practical Classification
. The stuff of cultural anthropology, how people classify everyday worlds
. Classification system may be fuzzy or logical
. Prototype theory: we have a broad picture of "chair", we call up "best example" and then see if
there is direct or metaphorical thread that takes us from the example to the object
. Logical: Is it , or is it not (Aristotelian, also Shedroff)

Information Systems Across Contexts (290)
. To be understood,, information must reside in more then 1 context
. We know what something is, by contrast with what it is not
. Contexts of information must be relinked through some judgement of equivalence
. Information becomes more meaningful through multiple interpretations

Boundary Objects (BO)
. BO are objects that inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the informational requirements of each - Objects may be abstract, concrete
. They are plastic to adapt to local needs, and robust to maintain common identity across sites
. BO – one way that tension between divergent viewpoints may be managed
. Example: Dead birds in museum: specific meaning for scientists, another for bird watchers

Naturalization (299)
. Objects become known/defined through context of action and use
. Unknown objects are at first strange
. Through use become natural
. Naturalization: a process of stripping away contingencies
. A form of collective forgetting
. Cyborg (Haraway): intermingling of people, things, representations, that maintain their identities
. Monsters: When an object refuses to be naturalized (evidence of the constraints of classifying)

Border Processes
. Things marginal, at the borders, a paradoxical situation
. Everyone a member of multiple communities of practice
. Passing, fragmenting, segmenting, nomadic, contingency