

# How May Derridean Thinking on Difference Inform Information Architects' Categorization and Labeling Practices and Support Norm-Creativity?

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## How may Derridean thinking on difference inform information architects' categorization and labeling practices and support norm-creativity?

At the 2019 annual Information Architecture (IA) Conference, the roundtable theme was Diversity and Inclusion as "imperative for anyone practicing information architecture". (IAC Diversity and Inclusion Roundtable 2019). It was discussed how:

- how to embrace difference to deliver flexible, user-centered, forward-thinking design solutions.
- how categories, labels, and complex information spaces being built today will inherit value judgements by those who create them.
- how to educate clients to become aware of their own biases and stereotypes (Blitzer 2020).

This awareness of a need to support diversity and inclusion is echoed in the broader field of norm-critical design studies where e.g. Nilsson & Jahnke (2018) are developing "norm-creative innovation tactics" through "design thinking of what might be" to counteract norms that contribute to inequalities and social exclusion (Nilsson and Jahnke 2018). Thus, the major question of my research is how norm-creative thinking of the core IA practices of categorizing and labeling may be developed to support diversity and inclusion.

This question is explored through the lens of Derrida's study on the differential construction of meaning, and conceptualized as a tension between traditional categorization and labeling systems and more fluid and flexible information spaces. As described by Jacob (1994), the traditional process of formal classification entails the systematic arrangement of entities within a hierarchical structure of mutually exclusive and non-overlapping groups or classes, and mandates that an entity *either is, or is not, a member* of a particular class, to ensure consistency and stability of meaning. Bowker and Star (1999) argue that a key for the future is to produce "flexible classifications, whose users are aware of their political and organizational dimensions, and which explicitly retain traces of their construction".

Thinking in terms of hierarchized binary oppositions is what Derrida calls logocentrism that rests on a philosophy of 'presence' implying that difference is *static*. But Derrida also theorizes difference in a second sense, by emphasizing the actual process of division itself, and the *processual* nature of difference, for which he invents the term 'différance'. This "*dynamic* difference" opens up the possibility to see what Cooper (1989) calls a "perpetual double movement *within* the opposition", and thus to change the perspective from the relationship between apparently opposing terms 'to a process where opposites merge in a constant *undecidable* exchange of attributes' (Cooper, 1989:483, quoting Norris (1987)).

Thus, my initial analytical strategy will focus on deconstruction of opposites to show examples of what and who is being silenced, ignored, or devalued (Bowker and Star 1999). A next step to be developed will be to theorize norm-creativity in relation to the role of language - and IA practices of labeling - in-between a logocentric "stability of meaning" and a more fluid and creative use of language to support a processual form of thinking.

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