

To explain Foucault’s *The Order of Things*’ preface, I attempted to map it the form of an inventory, displaying my understanding main ideas of each paragraph, and how they connect to each other.

PAR.

OPENING

1 **Central issue & key Example, the hidden absurdity of categorizing/classification.**

Foucault here starts by laying out the central idea of the discussion, where the frameworks we use to classify things are unstable and are in fact mere arbitrary constructs innately absurd. This is demonstrated by the fictional ‘Chinese Encyclopedia’ with incoherent and absurd classifications.

CONNECTIONS & BOUNDARIES

2 **Language transgresses boundaries of the imagination.**

Breaking down the fictional encyclopedia with its bizzare categories of animals, Foucault points out how juxtaposing elements such as the imaginary and spatial can be connected in their respective categories by simple enumeration (language structure).

3 **Coexistence of extremes through enumeration.**

Connection of seemingly different things can only be found or facilitated through language constructs.

4 **The *tabula*.**

Language acts as the table of sorts where it creates and destroys connections and boundaries, putting in order, divide, and group between entities.

5 **The worse kind of disorder.**

The possibility of incongruent categories challenging syntaxes of traditional classification, creating unlimited ways of classification, reveals a form of disorder much more severe than mere incongruity.

6 **Asphasiacs.**

An example of the case of an Asphasiac, who is mentally unable to comprehend and express the traditional rational system of classification, demonstrating endless exploration of unconventional connections between wool skeins, spiralling them into the brink of anxiety.

FORMING KNOWLEDGE

7 **Commonly held assumptions or utopias**

Using the idealized western view of “China”, a civilization of timeless quality and isolated, Borges’ fictional taxonomy create unease due to how through such strict and meticulous categories create thought without space, but are rooted in ceremonial space, in turn rendering language powerless to connect entities.

8 **Challenging commonly held assumptions.**

A challenge of the conventional assumed *a priori* or basic assumption of how to give order to things, categorizing them.

9 **Order and the fundamental codes of a culture.**

The grid, upon which classification is operated through, is ever changing based on the fundamental codes of a culture governing language, perception, ways of communication, value systems, hierarchy, and means to form knowledge.

THE ARCHEOLOGY

10 **Archeology of the codes of culture.**

Here Foucault invites us to look back in time, how common assumptions or Episteme, sets of values and cultural codes has produced different ways of classification. This archeology explores underlying structures of how knowledge is formed.

11 **Episteme shift 1.**

The first shift of episteme happened in the 17th century, marking the beginning of the Classical age where representation became central to organizing knowledge, aligning language, natural order and economic theories.

12 **Episteme shift 2.**

The second happened in the 19th century, ushering into the modern era. Representation is replaced by Historicity, where knowledge is things are defined within their own connections between them based on their respective places in time.

13 **History of madness.**

Foucault here mentions his previous work, the *History of Madness*. It explores how the classical age thinkers systematically categorize the so-called ‘same’ and the ‘other’. The piece explores the historical background of the age and how it influenced the thinkers.

CLOSING

14 **Shifting grounds.**

To wrap things up, Foucault reminds us that classification is never stable, they change according to who is doing the classification, and from what time and context. These grounds for connecting and seperations will continue to change in the future.

Through this inventory, we can see how the piece is divided into 3 parts. First it explains the problem of forming classifications, and how this is done based on the cultural codes of the classifiers. It is continued by the explanation of the relationship between formation of knowledge and said cultural codes. Lastly, Foucault briefly delves into Archeology, a critical analysis of the change of cultural code in history, and demonstrate how it influences classifying decisions.

I think it is interesting to see how flexible and broad the potential of ways things could be classified. There are certainly exciting ways we can, for example, package a Shipping Forecast radio recordings and classifying them based on the popular use as a potent sleeping agent. Foucault demonstrates how the formation of knowledge, through creating and destroying of connections and boundaries, is never truly universal, and is always subject to its observer. I reflect upon the uneasiness that stemmed from Borges’ demonstration of the absurdity of language in attempting to unify seemingly contrasting themes. Does this mean that the truth of things are never innate and are instead always dictated upon by ‘godly’ minds of the classifiers of their respective times? Will there be no connections at all between ages when these foundations of *episteme* shifts to a point the future are disconnected from the past? I believe Foucault takes for granted the fact that we can simply identify that one thing is different from another, the very thing that causes us to create distinctions and classifications. There must be innate qualities within things that never change, and simply is expressed in different perspectives according to the observer.

Foucault, M. (2002) *The Order of Things*. New York: Routledge Classics.