

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

ARTISTS' BOOKS

AN INDEXING LANGUAGE

FOR

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

OF

MODERN ARTISTS' BOOKS

BY GROUP 3:

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LIS 537

CONSTRUCTION OF INDEXING LANGUAGES

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of the indexing language is to assist in the indexing and retrieval of Artists' books by their physical attributes. This language was developed in cooperation with the University of Washington's Special Collections in order to assist users in access and identification in the process of searching the UW Special Collections Artists' books.

The University of Washington's Special Collections' Book Arts collection consists of over 15,000 items. This collection spans a number of different collecting areas including children's books, historic bookbinding, 19th Century American Literature, the history of science, in addition to modern Artists' books. Our vocabulary will address the portion of the collection that encompasses modern Artists' books. We will discuss this portion of the collection we are addressing as the University of Washington's Special Collections' artist's books (UW-SCAB).

These unique items span the boundaries between literature, visual art, and sculpture. In a constantly changing domain, we are attempting to provide a controlled vocabulary as a standard set of metadata to assist in indexing and retrieving Artists' books. Our initial set of terms will not cover the entire possible realm of Artists' books, but rather provide a representative set of terms dealing with the books' materials, production processes, and binding structures for use specifically within UW-SCAB. The vocabulary will need to be flexible and hospitable as terms will change, the vocabulary may need to be increased to more fully cover the collection, and the field and collection themselves will expand.

History

The realm of Artists' books is an area particularly reluctant to be defined. This is a reality that the constructors of index languages always face, but in this case, the struggle with definition has been an issue within the field throughout the history of Artist's Books. Any branch of artistry is difficult to categorize, and the evolution of the Artist's Book being recognized as a craft, a genre, or as malleable has been fraught with disagreement and uncertainty.

Betty Bright discusses the beginning of Artist's Books in her work *No longer innocent: Book art in America*, "Modern Artists' books came into being in the latter part of the nineteenth century in France...As the term itself indicates, Artists' books undoubtedly have a dual, not to say schizoid, nature: textual/verbal and visual/pictorial."(2005). There are four strong contributors to the framework of the Artist's Book's history.

- The changes that have taken place in publishing: it is now a popular practice that can make material available widely, cheaply, and the form of the production itself allows for artists expression
- The collaboration between writers/artists of words and visual artists in the purposes of the creation of "books"
- The social/political/artistic movements taking place during differing periods of evolution within Artist's Books
- The acceptance of Artist's Books as works of art themselves.

The Artists' books that were produced at the turn of the century marked a change in the conceptualization of what a book was, what it was actually allowed to be.

Further down the line, the expansion of the production of Artist's Book had profound consequences for the consumers of publications. "The proliferation in the 1950s of art books from trade publishing helped to develop a more visually sophisticated reading audience...Most American museums and collectors had yet to accept contemporary printmaking as a fine art, and with the deluxe book, they also had to confront a prejudice against books as an art form" (Bright, 2005).

Along with the popularization of publishing as a business, a trade, and a hobby came the distinguishing of the aesthetics of publication. Figures in the publishing world (such as William Morris) made their own mark on the history of publishing which intertwined with the history of Artist's Books, "...his (Morris') work and writings awakened American type and book designers to an awareness of the design potential of the book, a respect for and sensitivity to a book's presentation and materials, and an integrity conferred upon historically based typefaces" (Bright, 2005).

If the inception of Artist's Books was a partnership between writers and visual artists; it's a natural step that the publication branch of the production process would become part of that equation "...enterprising publishers functioned as matchmakers who would bring together, on equal terms, a poet and a compatible painter. In recent years the codex has undergone radical transformations that it no longer resembles a portfolio or requires an equal partnership between writer and artist but rather the grand design of a single planner." (Bright, 2005)

Artist's Books stand at the crossroads navigating business, production, inspiration, technology and art. Because Artist's Books are themselves art, they inherently take on the characteristics of the art periods in which they were created. Art and social change go hand in hand and Artist's Books are no exception, "The Arts and Crafts movement (1861-1914) exerted the greatest early influence on America's fine press book. The Arts and Crafts was an established, international art movement infused with a revivalist spirit that accepted the book as an expressive partner equal to other art forms". (Bright, 2005). The Arts and Crafts Movement had the social aspect desiring that work be meaningful, and for workers to have something to be proud of in their labor. Artist's Books were in the center of this movement because they were expressing the publishing industries changing roots and influence over society while also being art in and of themselves.

Bright goes on to give more examples of how cultural/artistic movements and Artists' books overlap, "Book workers as a rule show affinities with the avant-garde movements of their time, such as Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Fluxus, and Pop Art. Outstanding revolutionary artists, such as Duchamp, Schwitters and Warhol, who negate the boundaries confining the various arts, have produced at least one work that can qualify as an artist book" (2005). During the 1960's, the artist and print maker Edward Ruscha created Artist's Books of photography that purposefully contained no differentiation between copies. He believed that art should be equal and equally available to its consumers. His vision and his production method are a reflection of the political and artistic climate of the time. As Lauf, Phillpot & Weatherspoon (1998) discuss in *Artist/author: Contemporary Artists' books*, "Artists' books really took hold around 1969, inspired by Ruscha's example, the rise of conceptualism, the activities of Siegelaub, and the political and social events of the late sixties. This was an incredible moment in art when definitions were wide open."

Contemporarily, Artist's Books are no easier to conceive through definitions than they were at their inception. Technology will continue to move forward and influence the temporal nature of art works and their place in our world and society. It continues to remain true though that, "Artists' books are distinguished by the fact that they sit provocatively at the juncture where art, documentation and literature all come together." (Lauf, Phillpot & Weatherspoon, 1998)

Scope and Structure

The index language prioritizes and organizes the information we believe to be most useful in searching and retrieving document records for UW-SCAB. This includes preferred and lead-in terms relating to the physical attributes (binding structures, materials, and processes) of items in the collection, definitions of those terms, citations of the resources used in determining the definitions, and notes on the continued development of the language and the relationships

between terms.

At the time of writing, the indexing language includes 127 preferred terms, 108 non-preferred terms, and their Language Status (Preferred - P; Non-Preferred - NP; Candidate – C). Additionally the language includes the term's relationship structures (BT, RT, NT, and Synonym) and is formed into a hierarchy of five levels and includes room in the notation for additional terms to be added at a later date.

Information in the Records (Fields)

There are three main divisions in the indexing language: Materials, Processes and Binding Structures. The hierarchy has a depth of five levels although most sub-sections presently don't reach that deep. The information in the records includes:

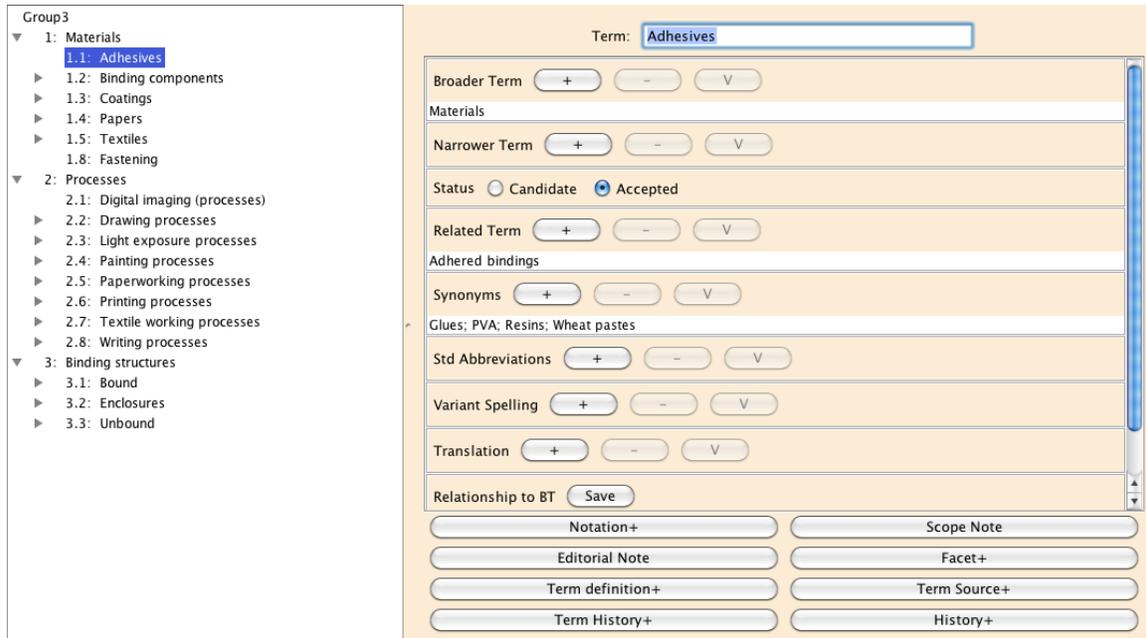
- Broader Terms
- Narrower Terms
- Related Terms
- Synonyms
- Spelling Variants
- Term Definition
- Term Source

The Term Definition and Term Source are accessed in dialog windows when selected. The language can be seen in a hierarchical view or an alphabetical view, among others provided by DataHarmony, dependent on the user's preference.

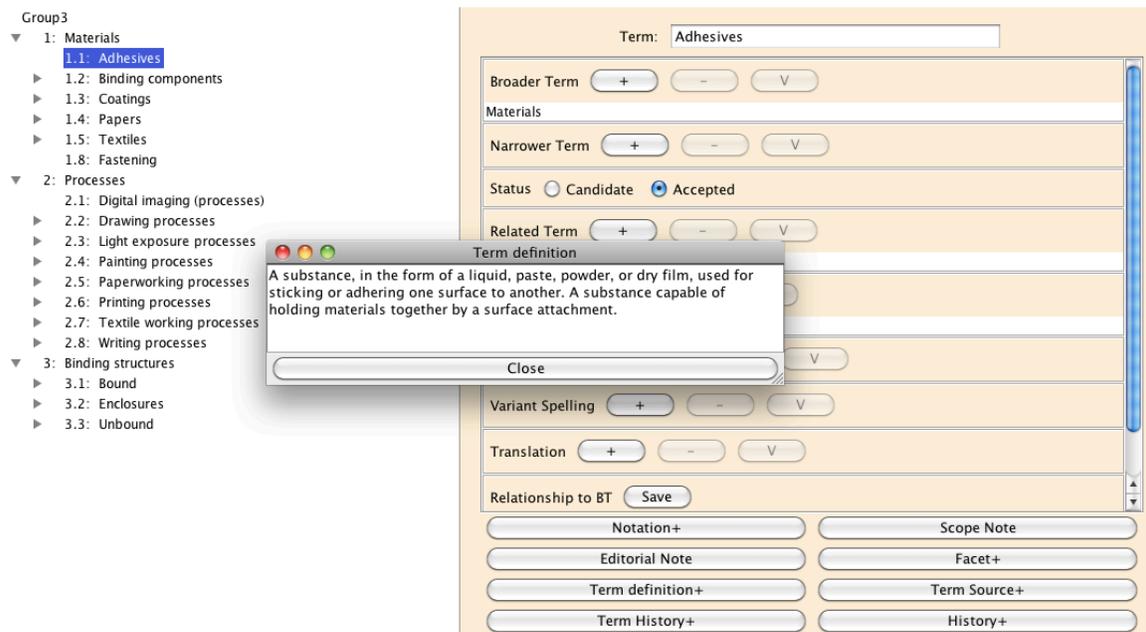
Sample Record

The example seen below is the record for *Adhesives* which has the BT of *Materials*, the RT of *Adhered bindings* and the Synonyms *Glues; PVA; Resins, Wheat pastes*. The Term Definition and Term Source are accessed in the

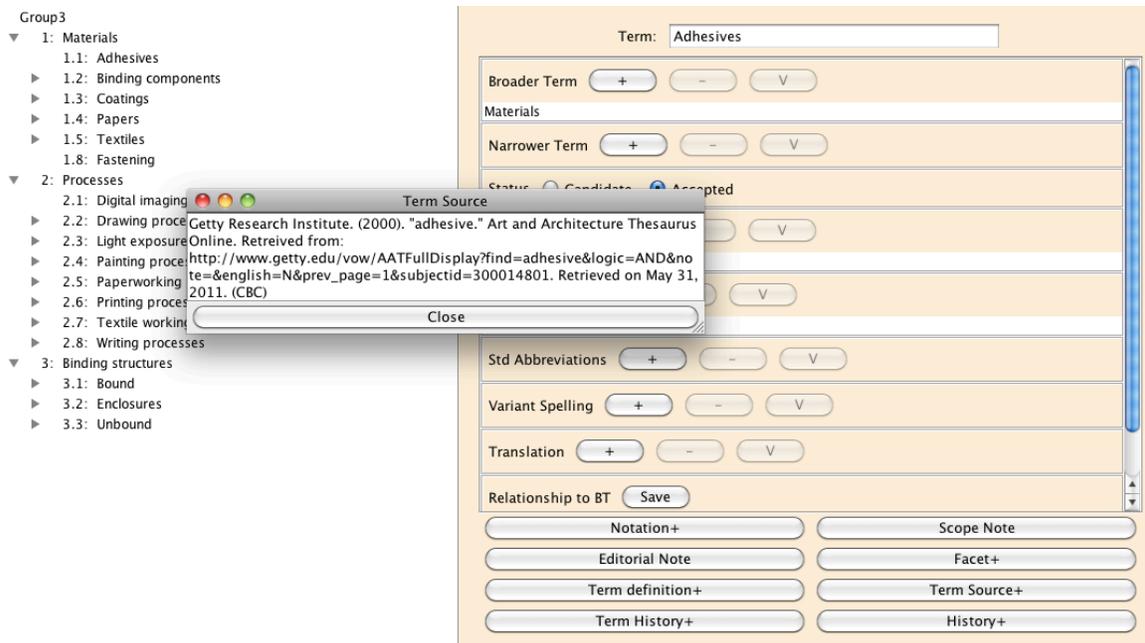
bottom right by clicking on those phrases for a dialog box containing their information to appear. These dialog boxes are visible in the second and third images that follow.



DataHarmony record for PT “Adhesives.”



DataHarmony record for PT “Adhesives” with Term Definition pop-up window.



DataHarmony record for PT “Adhesives” with Term Source pop-up window.

Implementation

The indexing language in this case will support the existing UW Special Collections catalog (via inclusion in Content DM the content management system used by UW libraries) in order to facilitate searching so that users will be able to do research without the direct aid of the curator of the collection. The audience of the language is the users of the collection, who are primarily Artists’ books practitioners themselves as opposed to exclusively being researchers.

Our vocabulary will first be constructed in DataHarmony, software intended for the entry of indexing terms and their hierarchical relationships for the ultimate display of alphabetical and classified views. The indexing language will be uploaded to TaxoBank and can be applied to any Artists’ books collection that will benefit from being searchable by physical attributes.

After the completion of our first set of terms, we will work with Special Collections and Digital Initiatives to import our terms list into ContentDM and to build a complimentary user thesaurus in HTML that will be attached to the front page of

the collection so that users will have the full benefit of the index languages' capacities that are built in with DataHarmony but not compatible with UW's systems.

The utilization of this language will involve at least one entry from each of the three branches of the language's hierarchy: Materials, Processes, and Binding Structures. In this way, users can post-coordinate terms in an interactive online search that references the flat files housed by ContentDM. The results will be responsive to requirements for precision by allowing for the collocation of multiple physical attributes in one search and in recall by allowing the user to only utilize one field, or term, should she so desire. In this way, the indexing team can leverage the constraints of ContentDM with the benefits of a hierarchical organizational structure.

Future Plans

The inclusion of an HTML formatted hierarchy for user reference on the Special Collections website will inform readers of the topography of the UW collection and better hone their search capabilities. Additionally, the implementation of a visual dictionary project, beginning this summer, will further aid in the definition of complicated binding structure and process terms. This indexing language enables these initiatives by providing a framework for analysis of the collection and a standard format for indexing and searching that can be as instructive as it is organizational.

Citations

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