

## Cataloging Cultural Objects: Community Building Through Standards

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Cataloging Cultural Objects (CCO) is a standards-based initiative developed to address the metadata needs of communities that work with a broad range of artistic or cultural works and associated images of those works. CCO provides guidelines for selecting, ordering, and formatting descriptive data used to populate catalog records. This article gives the background of the project and the involvement of the user communities in the development of the guide, as well as describing future directions.

### Early Sharing Initiatives and the Need for CCO

Conceived and developed by the Visual Resources Association, *Cataloging Cultural Objects: A Guide to Describing Cultural Works and Their Images* formally began in December 2001, but the idea was formulated in 1997 as an outcome of a test-bed project co-sponsored by VRA and the Research Libraries Group (RLG) known as the VISION project Visual Resources Sharing Information Online Network (see Kessler article in this issue). In that year, RLG co-sponsored two online pilot projects—VISION and REACH (Records Export for Art and Cultural Heritage)—one for the visual resources community, the other for museums, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions, to test the feasibility of sharing cultural heritage metadata online. A third initiative, MESL (Museum Education Site Licensing) was designed to investigate ways in which museums and academic institutions might cooperate in the supply and usage of digitized images and information for pedagogy. In each project records were either created online by a number of catalogers from various institutions or records were uploaded from contributors' databases. Although there was some effort to ensure consistency, when the results of these early sharing projects were analyzed, one common major flaw stood out. To no one's surprise, in each project the data lacked consistency and uniformity to such a degree that it would limit and hamper successful search and retrieval. Consequently, the urgent need for guidelines like CCO had been on the minds of many in the cultural heritage communities as the results of these and other pioneering metadata sharing initiatives were analyzed.<sup>1</sup>

One of the objectives of the VISION project was to test the then new VRA Core Categories 2.0 element set to see if it adequately covered the information needed to exchange image information in an online environment. The VISION template was based on the VRA Core Categories 2.0 and the REACH project template borrowed from an early version of the Getty Categories for the Description of Works of Art (CDWA). Both sets of categories claimed to be element sets, not interchange formats, but the ensuing analysis of the projects led to improvements in both, resulting in a third version of the VRA Core Categories and an updated version of the CDWA.

Another objective of the VISION project was to provide a data model in which controlled vocabularies would be used to populate the Core elements. Although the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* had been in existence for over a decade in a print edition, there had been few opportunities to study usage patterns in any kind of controlled setting. With the increased capabilities of the Web in the mid-1990s, the opportunity for widespread implementation of controlled vocabularies became available. By 1997, the Getty vocabularies, ICONCLASS, and the Library of Congress subject headings and authority files were available to anyone with access to the Internet. The VISION project made use of these newly available resources and included links to these vocabularies and authorities but did not attempt to prioritize or recommend specific vocabularies or authorities for each element. When the VISION data was examined, it became apparent that catalogers needed more detailed and specific instruction for selecting appropriate sources and terms.<sup>2</sup>

Analysis of these various projects highlighted a number of obstacles to sharing cultural heritage information. It was clear that existing elements sets required additional adjustments; that ultimately standard interchange formats would be required; and that data content guidelines were essential to ensure uniformity and consistency in cataloging. Not surprising, a major catalyst for CCO was the release of the two updated data element sets in 2000: the VRA Core Categories 3.0 (VRA Core),<sup>3</sup> and the Getty Categories for the Description of Works of Art (CDWA).<sup>4</sup> While both of these publications included some guidance for description, they did not go far enough in prescribing descriptive practice for implementation across the cultural heritage cataloging traditions.

In 2001, several members of the VRA Data Standards Committee and the Getty Standards program formed an editorial team to develop a guide to descriptive practice. The CCO editorial team includes Murtha Baca, Getty Research Institute; Elisa Lanzi, Smith College; Patricia Harpring, Getty Research Institute; Linda McRae, University of South Florida; and Ann Baird Whiteside, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In addition, the project was managed by Diane Zorich, Cultural Information Management Consultant. The team members secured primary funding for Phase I of the project from the Getty Grant Program and the Digital Library Federation (DLF), supplemented by support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

### Researching Practice Across the Communities

The CCO project began with a review and evaluation of existing data content standards and current practice in the relevant communities. A call was sent out to the participants of the VISION project to share their local, unpublished cataloging manuals, resulting in about a dozen documents ranging from a simple list of elements to very detailed rules for creating image records that could be used with bibliographic formats. Published museum guides were collected and reviewed including: *Spectrum: The UK Museum Documentation Standard*; the French museum documentation manual, *Méthode d'inventaire informatique des objets beaux-arts et arts décoratifs*; various publications by the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) including the *CHIN Data Dictionary* and *CHIN Object Name and Related Standards*; and the Canadian museum documentation manual, *Guide de Documentation du Réseau Info-Muse*, 2nd edition.

In addition, the principal bibliographic and archival content standards were consulted including: *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, Revised, 2nd edition* (AACR2) and relevant rule interpretations; *Graphic Materials: Rules for Describing Original Items and Historical Collections* by Elisabeth Betz; and *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* by Steven Hensen (a precursor to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, also known as DACS (see Landis article in this issue).

Early in the development of CCO, the editorial team decided to concentrate on descriptive content, leaving technical and administrative metadata to other standards efforts. One of the difficulties in consulting the published museum guides was their attempt to cover all aspects of documentation that might be applicable to database management. At the time, these publications were heavily influenced by database development and consequently they tended to take the form of data dictionaries, often organized by elements that would comprise fields in a database management system. While these publications were comprehensive in covering all types of metadata from descriptive to technical to administrative metadata, they lacked the depth of coverage needed for the type of descriptive content standards that were to become the focus of CCO.

A more likely model might have come from the bibliographic community, but the existing cataloging manuals such as AACR2 and its offshoots for archives and manuscripts were simply not workable for one-of-a-kind cultural objects. Occasionally AACR2 rules have been applied to works of art, but they fall far short of meeting the specific and idiosyncratic needs for describing works of art, architecture, cultural objects, and images. Among the more conspicuous examples of AACR2's inadequacy for cataloging cultural objects can be seen in its rules for creating a title. The rules in AACR2 (*1.1B7 Title proper*)<sup>5</sup> for creating a title for works that do not have a title give almost no guidance in what source to use for a title or how to devise a title should no source be available. Because cultural objects, unlike books, very often come without titles per se, thorough guidance in the creation of titles is critical. Although AACR2 has been applied fairly well to some types of cultural objects such as manuscripts, prints, and photographs, vast areas critical to the arts, such as the built environment, are completely left out. While CCO acknowledges AACR2 rules, it does not seek to conform since it is a different standard. However, for bibliographic catalogers who are attempting to follow AACR2 to catalog original objects in their special collections, CCO could be used to expand upon rules in AACR2 that are just too brief or insufficient to be very helpful.

#### *CCO: The Conceptual Model*

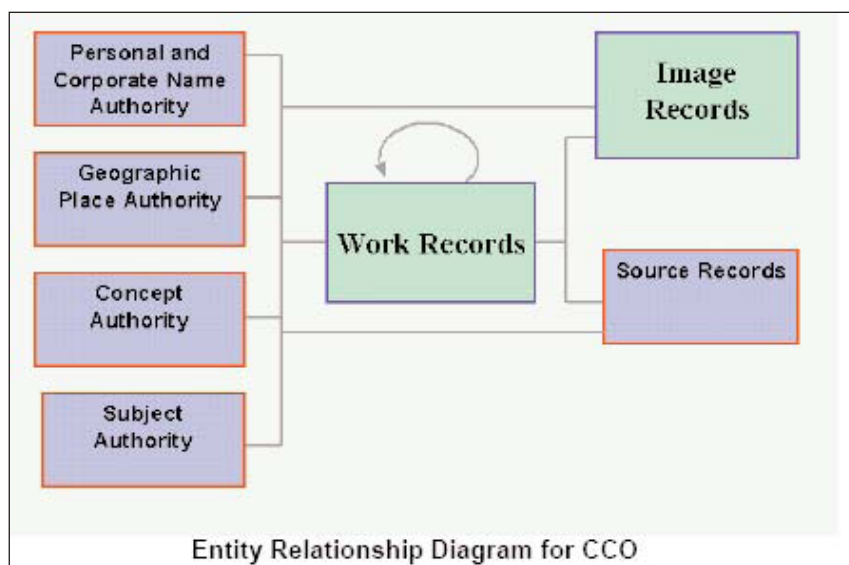
Following the research phase of the project, the editors were faced with creating a conceptual structure for the publication. The initial development of CCO began with Part 2, i.e., the chapters on various elements from the VRA Core and CDWA. Very quickly, the editors realized that there were several important overarching concepts that catalogers needed to understand before moving forward with recording and formatting data values in individual elements. Consequently, the basic tenets of cataloging cultural works and images are laid out in Part 1. One of the most invaluable features is the entity relationship diagram, which prescribes a simple cataloging model. This model shows how works, images, authorities, and sources interrelate to make the descriptive metadata package.

The question "What is a work, what is an image?" has often challenged catalogers and database builders, especially since the advent of digital collections. CCO offers a reasonable approach for modeling works, images, and assets by building on real implementations of the VRA Core and CDWA from the cultural heritage communities. In doing so, CCO also acknowledges alternative practice, specifically for collections dealing with built works. *Part 1, Section II. What are you cataloging* offers a clear distinction between works, images (the representation), and assets (items that are stored, filed, and classified for access).

Guidance on *Related Works* and *Database Design and Relationships (Part 1, Sections IV and VI)* is presented with detailed explanations of how works relate to each other, as well as to images and authority records.

*Part 2: Elements* is the heart of the guidelines, laid out as a manual to be consulted while cataloging. The elements (a generic set based on the VRA Core and CDWA) are clustered so that catalogers can, for example, construct descriptions for both "Title" and "Work type" elements within the same chapter. The clusters were created around basic questions asked when describing cultural materials: What is it? (Chapter 1 Object Naming); Who made it? (Chapter 2 Creator Information); What is it made of? (Chapter 3 Physical Characteristics); When was it made? (Chapter 4 Stylistic, Cultural, and Chronological Information); Where was it made and where is it now? (Chapter 5 Location and Geography); and What is it about? (Chapter 6 Subject).

Figure 1: Entity Relationship Diagram for CCO.



Chapter 7, *Class*, is used to relate a specific work to others with similar characteristics, often based on the organizational scheme of a particular repository or collection. Chapter 8, *Description*, is a notes element, and Chapter 9, *View Information*, includes details about the view of the work as it appears in an image of the work. Part 2 also contains numerous examples within the text of each chapter and full record examples at the end of each chapter.

The critical role of authority practice in the cataloging process for cultural works was confirmed in the results of the VISION project, where there was a significant lack of that practice. While each chapter begins with a prioritized list of recommended sources for terminology, the editorial team soon realized that more detailed instruction in the use and ordering of authorities was required. A third section was added. Part 3 covers *Authorities*, the workhorse of descriptive practice. Focusing on four types of authorities, Names, Geographic Places, Concepts, and Subjects, CCO provides a thorough explanation of how to create local authority records and files using standard and controlled vocabularies. Users of the Library of Congress Name and Subject Authorities,<sup>6</sup> as well as those who use the Getty AAT, ULAN and TGN,<sup>7</sup> will appreciate the common rules of the game that transcend specific vocabularies. Basic authority concepts are covered, including: term verification, choice of preferred term, and building hierarchies.

### Building Consensus

From the outset, the CCO editors recognized the importance of building in venues for input and feedback in order to engage cataloging practitioners in the guidelines. Research, analysis, and creation of a Web-based beta version of the CCO were completed by November 2003. In order to ensure community input, this phase included an extensive critique and review period, conducted by an advisory committee. The CCO Advisory Committee incorporated representatives from the visual resources, museum, library, and archival professions. The inaugural Advisory Committee included: Matthew Beacom (Yale University Library), Erin Coburn (J. Paul Getty Museum), Jan Eklund (Visual Resources Collection, University of California, Berkeley), Mary W. Elings (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), Elizabeth O'Keefe (Pierpont Morgan Library), Tricia Rose-Sandler (Union Catalog of Art Images (UCAI) Project, University of California, San Diego) and Layna White (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). Additionally, comments were solicited via postings on listservs and a feedback link on the VRA Web site. Various community concerns were addressed, and revised chapters were released that included additional images illustrating numerous examples provided in each chapter.

Outreach has been an important component of the initiative all along. The CCO Editors and Advisory Committee members began presenting papers and workshops on CCO at professional conferences as early as 2003 and continue to do so. These events have offered opportunities to encourage use and comment on the content of the guidelines. An additional formal review program was initiated in 2004; when thirty-five experts from the museum, visual resources, library, and archive communities were asked to submit reviews. Early comments noted the need for more examples, especially for the more complex works such as prints that could involve multiple creators. Given the scope of materials that CCO attempts to cover this is understandable. Titling works brought comments about the appropriateness of translating all titles into American English.

Figure 2: Example of a CCO corporate name authority record.

**Personal and Corporate Name Authority Record:**

- ❖ **Record Type [controlled]:** corporate body
- ❖ **\*Names:**
  - Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (*preferred*)
  - Clark Art Institute
- ❖ **\*Display Biography:** American art institute, founded 1950
- ❖ **\*Nationalities [controlled]:**
  - American
- ❖ **\*Start Date [controlled]:** 1950      ❖ **End Date [controlled]:** 9999
- ❖ **\*Roles [controlled]:**
  - art institute
  - museum
  - research center
- ❖ **Place/Location [link]:** Williamstown (Massachusetts, USA)

**Related Corporate Bodies:**

- ❖ **Relationship Type [controlled]:** associated with
  - ❖ **[link to Related Corporate Body]:** Williams College
- ❖ **Relationship Type [controlled]:** broader context for
  - ❖ **[link to Related Corporate Body]:** Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library
- ❖ **Note:** The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute is an art museum and a center for research and higher education. Williams College, in cooperation with the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, offers a two-year course of study leading to the degree of master of arts in the history of art.
- ❖ **\*Sources [link to Source Records]:**

Differences in practice between museum and visual resources catalogers were confirmed, especially in the area of assigning a “work type.” The use of plural vs. singular terms in “work type” is an example of this varying practice.

In 2004, when the first draft of CCO was nearing completion, discussions took place with various prospective publishers resulting in an agreement with the American Library Association to publish the manuscript in book form with a final draft due at the end of 2005. The manuscript was delivered to the publisher and became available in the summer of 2006.<sup>8</sup> CCO was published by ALA, on behalf of the Visual Resources Association. VRA holds copyright and continues to provide oversight for the project, specifically in the area of education and training.

### CCO Today: Education and Outreach

In 2006, the VRA established the Cataloging Cultural Objects Committee, a standing committee charged with the maintenance and dissemination of CCO. The charge includes developing and maintaining training initiatives in collaboration with other educational efforts within the VRA; maintaining and updating the CCO Web site content; educating the VRA membership, and acting as a liaison to other cultural heritage cataloging communities.

The committee is currently co-chaired by Elisa Lanzi (Smith College) and Ann Baird Whiteside (MIT). Other committee members are: Murtha Baca (Getty Research Institute); Jan Eklund (University of California, Berkeley); Linda McRae (University of South Florida); Maria Oldal (Pierpont Morgan Library); Margaret Webster (Cornell University); Layna White (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art); and Loy Zimmerman (University of California, Irvine). A new advisory group for the education phase was also created. The CCO Advisory Group includes: Matthew Beacom (Yale University Library); Sherman Clarke (Bobst Library, New York University); Erin Coburn (J. Paul Getty Museum); Bill Landis (Yale University Library); Elizabeth O’Keefe (Pierpont Morgan Library); Jenn Riley (Digital Library Program, Indiana University, Bloomington); Günter Waibel (RLG Programs, OCLC); and Ann Woodward (Johns Hopkins University), VRA Board liaison. The Advisory Group will help the committee to encourage implementations of CCO, identify educational opportunities within the communities to encourage the use of CCO and other data standards, and act as a voice for the cultural heritage communities, ensuring that relevant resources are available to them in a virtual community space, the CCO Commons Web site.

From our point of view, the most remarkable thing about CCO is how it has served as a virtual roundtable for catalogers, metadata specialists, and database builders across the cultural heritage community. The new Web site, CCO Commons, has replaced the CCO beta-test site and is envisioned as a "community space," a place in which to access CCO, find shared training materials for educating users, and to serve as a commons for the cultural heritage cataloging community. The site includes news and events, selections from CCO, cataloging examples, training tools and presentations, cross-walks and mappings, and links to related standards including metadata schemas, vocabularies, and thesauri.

As catalogers engage in discussions of CCO issues and adopt the recommendations, we can look forward to a steady accumulation of consistently documented records across multiple repositories. Over time, these records will promote and make accessible the creation of a body of cultural heritage information that will greatly enhance research and teaching in the arts and humanities. ♡

## Notes

1. *MESL images online: perspectives on the Museum Educational Site Licensing Project*, edited by Patricia McClung and Christie Stephenson. Getty Research Institute, 1998. The VISION project is documented in *VRA Bulletin* vol. 25, no. 4 Winter 1998. VISION and REACH are compared in Lanzi's article in *Art Documentation* vol. 17 no. 1 (1998).
2. Linda McRae, "Indexing Images for Subject Access: Controlled Vocabularies in the Vision Project," *Art Documentation* vol. 19, no. 2 (2000).
3. VRA Core Categories 3.0. <http://www.vraweb.org/resources/datastandards/vracore3/>.
4. Categories for the Description of Works of Art, [http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting\\_research/standards/cdwa/](http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/standards/cdwa/).
5. American Library Association. *Anglo American Cataloguing Rules*. 2nd rev. ed. Chicago: ALA, 2002.
6. Library of Congress Authorities. <http://authorities.loc.gov/>.
7. *Art & Architecture Thesaurus, Union List of Artist Names, Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names*, [http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting\\_research/vocabularies/](http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/).
8. ALA online store: <http://alastore.ala.org>.