The Economic and Aesthetic Axis of Information Organization Frameworks
Joseph T. Tennis
The Information School of the University of Washington

When we examine how and why decisions get made in the indexing enterprise writ large[i], we see that two factors shape the outcome: economics and aesthetics. For example, the Library of Congress has reduced the time and effort it has spent on creating bibliographic records, while the Library and Archives Canada has begun coordinating the work of librarians and archivists in describing the documentary heritage of Canada (Oda and Wilson, 2006; LAC, 2006). Both of these initiatives aim at reducing costs of the work of description. They are decisions based on economic considerations. When engaged in deciding what fields, tags, and indicators to use in cataloguing, librarians consider the cost of labour and whether or not the system will use that work for display and retrieval.

On the other hand, international bodies craft standards that are designed to shape the indexing enterprise. For example, we see the form of controlled vocabularies in ANSI/NISO Z39.19 in its varied manifestations from 1974-2005. I argue we make aesthetic interpretations when we evaluate such vocabularies as to whether or not they comport with that form. We can take this further and look at indexing theory and, for example the work of Ranganathan and the CRG, and compare instantiations of classification schemes as to whether or not they are truly faceted.

Classification schemes, as examples of the outcome of this work, result from designers and implementers of description and identification systems asking: *What is good enough? When is my framework for information organization good enough?* Though each of these acts is governed by a different purpose (sometimes pragmatic, sometimes idealistic), the acts involved, the identification and description of resources, is measured against both economic and aesthetic concerns, i.e., how much does it cost, and how well does it comply with an abstract form?

Information organization frameworks, like those mentioned above, comprise structures, work practices, and discourses. Examples of structure would be: the bibliographic record, the archival description of a fonds. Work practices enable, result in, and evaluate structures, and the discourse shapes how priorities and purposes are aligned in both work practices and structures. This paper argues that all examples of information organization frameworks and their constituent components grow out of often conflicting considerations of cost on one hand, and compliance with abstract form (standardization or design), on the other.

This paper argues that in order to systematically comprehend the diversity of information organization frameworks, we must look at how aesthetic concerns and economic concerns manifest in decisions made about designing and deploying work practices, structures, and discourse. In order to do this I construct an analytical rubric borne by a definition of aesthetic and economics pertinent to indexing regimes. I take the position that we need to move into a more descriptive stance on practices of knowledge organization, not only in documentary heritage institutions (libraries, archives, and museums), but also into the cultural and artistic realms. By expanding the scope of inquiry we can interrogate the integrity of my assertion above, namely, that a chief concern in systematically understanding information organization frameworks, lies in understanding how such frameworks wrestle with, and manifest along a spectrum drawn from economic to aesthetic decision-making.

This project, investigating the economic aesthetic axis of information organization frameworks, follows the recent development in knowledge organization research, which is moving from prescriptive (how to design systems) to a descriptive (what systems are being built, how and why) approach, (Beghtol, 2003; Andersen, 2005). By engaging in this kind of work, we grow more familiar with not only the professional concerns with knowledge organization, but also, expand the scope of our inquiring into the knowledge organization practices for various purposes, and develop a deeper understanding of the human urge to name and organize.

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[i] The indexing enterprise comprises cataloguing, indexing, ontology development, and social tagging. It also includes regimes of personal information management, resource discovery as well as description, and the technical and managerial apparatus of national bibliography. Its parts are description and identification and so these parts are used as metonyms for the indexing enterprise, though they are not coextensive with it. I have avoided the use of knowledge organization systems in order to broaden the umbrella, though knowledge organization is synonymous for many of the activities in the indexing enterprise, but not all.