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Of particular interest to us indexers is a chapter entitled “Indexing with Controlled Vocabularies.” Indexing is defined as “as conscious activity performed by knowledgeable catalogers who consider retrieval implications when assigning indexing terms.” (p. 165). The terms “indexing” and “cataloging” are used interchangeably, but the issues in indexing that this chapter describes reveal a distinction between indexing (in this case periodical or database-type indexing) and the cataloging of art and cultural heritage items. Indexers index text, whereas cataloging is for objects. The issues particular to cataloging objects include the need to index for only what is stated as obvious, not what is guessed (such as the material of pictured object), to index for exhaustivity (all aspects of an object), to index for the main material not minor parts, to deal with missing or unknown information about an object, and to be able to partially index for a group or set of similar objects at once. The book seems to be a little unclear on how nonpreferred terms are used in indexing.

What stands out as a weakness of this book is the complete lack of an index! Its absence may be partially explained by the inclusion of a highly detailed table of contents, reflecting in turn a very hierarchical structure to the book, with sections, sub-sections, and sub-subsections enumerated by decimal heading numbers of up to five levels deep. While I miss the index, the detailed table of contents (nearly 7 pages of 40 lines per page) and lack of index are probably better than having a bad index.

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Heather Hedden, The Accidental Taxonomist.
Information Today, Inc. 2010

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This book is designed as a practical guide (“what you need to know”) to the practice of taxonomy rather than as a how-to guide for taxonomy creation, and much of the content is directly relevant for freelance indexers who are interested in expanding the range of services that they offer to clients. Chapter 1 provides background information about taxonomy types and applications for information organization and retrieval, and chapters 2 and 12 cover taxonomy as a profession. Much of the content will resonate with indexers who, like “accidental taxonomists,” come to the profession because a need arose within an organization where they were working in another capacity. Hedden points out that over half of self-described taxonomists have library science backgrounds, but that other disciplines are well-represented in the field.

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