

Fig. 1. Edward Sheriff Curtis (American, 1868-1952). *The Eclipse Dance*. 1910-14, gelatin silver print, 14.15 x 20.3 cm (59/16 x 8 in.). J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Furthermore, what a work of art is of may be described in a variety of ways. One way is to describe what the work of art is of in generic terms. In *Categories for the Description of Works of Art* (CDWA)<sup>1</sup>, this way is called Description, a subcategory under the category Subject Matter. A second way is to give a specific name to what the work of art is of—a subcategory called Identification under the category Subject Matter in CDWA. Any one subject of a work of art can be described with a range of terms, from the broadly generic to the highly specific. For example, we can describe one of the subjects of Curtis's photograph as "dance" or less broadly as "ceremonial dance," and we can also identify it specifically as "Eclipse Dance." We see "people" who can be identified as "Native Americans" (or, in Canada, "First Nations") but who can also be identified more specifically as "Kwakwaka'wakw," and, if information were available, could be still more specifically identified by their personal names. As we can see, the range from generic to specific, from description to identification, can be more of a continuum than a dichotomy.

As another example, the subject of Frederick Henry Evans's photograph *Across the West End of Nave, Wells Cathedral* (fig. 2) could be described using terms such as "architecture," "religious buildings," "cathedrals," and "Wells Cathedral." Describing or identifying a particular subject at just one point in this range of terms will not necessarily meet the needs of all searchers for an image. One can easily imagine a set of circumstances in which describing the subject of this last image as "religious buildings" would best meet one searcher's needs, but a different set in which describing the subject as "cathedrals" would meet another searcher's needs. And, of course, one can imagine a third searcher who would best be served by identifying the subject as "Wells Cathedral."

Although any subject, whether of a text or an image, can be described in both broad and narrow terms, images are different from text in that they are always of a specific instance of something. Unlike a text about religious buildings, an image cannot be a purely generic depiction of "religious buildings." An image must necessarily be, if not of a particular known and named building, at least of a particular type of building or construction. It may be a church or a monastery, a nave or a cloister, but it must be something more specific than "religious buildings." This characteristic of images makes it particularly important to provide access to a subject of an image at as many points as possible within the range of terms that can describe or identify that subject.

The three subjects I have just mentioned—"Eclipse Dance," "Kwakwaka'wakw," and "Wells Cathedral"—show that activities or events, persons, and objects can be described using a continuum of terms from the broadly generic to the relatively specific. It is useful to recognize that place and time can also be described in generic terms or identified with specific terms. For time, the difference between generic and specific is between description of cyclical time and identification of a chronological time, while for place it is the difference between description of a kind of space and identification of a geographic place. The place of Evans's photograph is the town of "Wells," in the county "Avon," in the country "England." Speaking descriptively or generically, the place of the photograph is "interior." The time of Curtis's photograph is "1910-1914" it is also "daytime." If we knew more about the photograph we might be able to identify the season; it might be, for example, "spring" or "summer." It is easy to imagine circumstances in which a user would be interested in a generic description of a place depicted (for example, interiors of churches) or the identification of a particular place (for example, churches in England) or a combination of the two (interiors of churches in England).