

A TYPOLOGY FOR THE STRUCTURES OF BOOK ARTS PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to present a typology of the structures in which teaching and learning of the book arts occur. Many book arts programs exist, but there are few, if any, models for describing or classifying programs. At a fundamental level, book arts programs are based on students and teachers working together to synthesize practice and theory. This is manifested in many different ways in American book arts programs. In practice, programs have strengths and weaknesses, but very little, if any, theoretical work attempts to describe or assess this. There is also a lack of vocabulary for describing and discussing these programs. As the field of book arts education develops, a typology for classifying programs can serve as a tool to improve both theory and practice. To date, no typology of book arts programs has been developed, and, in fact, the definition of a book arts program is not fixed. As the field of the book arts matures and as common obstacles are identified, a typology that is inclusive, clear, nonhierarchical, and flexible can aid teachers and students as they develop and sustain programs.

by Katherine M. Ruffin

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Many book arts programs were founded by charismatic individuals who established unique programs in affiliation with art, English, or library science departments at colleges or universities. As higher education evolved and the founders moved on or retired, book arts programs often faltered. In fact, book arts programs can and do encounter problems when transitions occur. Developing a shared set of models that describes how programs are structured and situates them meaningfully in the context of contemporary higher education may help to communicate to key players, such as administrators and donors, the strengths and the needs of book arts programs. One of the goals of the College Book Art Association is to help professionalize the field and to assist in making book arts programs more sustainable. As such, the development of a shared vocabulary to discuss the types of programs that exist and the ways in which they function within book arts education has the potential to benefit the field as a whole.

This project began with musings regarding the fundamental nature of book arts programs and those questions led to the examination of the programs' features. I studied at a major university book arts program and have taught at a number of independent not-for-profit book arts centers. For over fifteen years, I have directed a book arts program at a liberal arts college. I also teach book arts classes in a college of fine arts at a university. This has provided me with a great deal of firsthand experience and has allowed me to compare and contrast the various models for book arts programs. There is great variety within and across American book arts programs; however, there have been very few attempts to systematically analyze programs.

I began this project in 2011 in a research-methods seminar at the School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College. I presented a version of the typology in a talk, "Time, Sequence, and Technology: Book Art in the 21st Century," at the College Book Art Association conference in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2012. I received useful feedback after the presentation and subsequently shared my preliminary results with individuals who were in the process of establishing book arts programs. I have continued to develop the typology. Though the results of this study may seem obvious to those with experience in the book arts, I believe they can be helpful to those who are new to the field, who are establishing programs, or who are managing programs that are undergoing transition. I hope they will be useful to teachers, to students, to staff, and to administrators. In addition to aiding those who are engaged in book arts programs, these results may also help emerging artists and educators who are mapping out possible career paths and students who are selecting programs in which to study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research project was structured around the following questions:

What is a book arts program? What are their features? Does identifying and analyzing these features allow a typology to be developed?

How are book arts programs structured? Where are they located within institutions? What are the ranges of institutional locations and departmental affiliations? Do they offer classes for credit? Is a major or minor offered?

What disciplines (papermaking, printing, binding) do they teach? Who is teaching? Who

is learning? Do programs mount exhibitions? Do they engage in limited edition publishing? Do they sponsor lecture series?

What is the range of art and craft across various programs? Do programs include the history of the book? Do they include contemporary art practice?

LITERATURE REVIEW

After identifying the need for a typology, a literature review was conducted that included articles and presentations, both published and unpublished, on the topic of book arts programs in the United States. The literature on book arts programs is not expansive and has many gaps. Useful studies of the history of book arts programs, including the emergence of graduate programs, have been conducted, as well as surveys of letterpress printing and bookbinding training opportunities at colleges and universities and a wide variety of other venues. Four main themes were identified in the existing literature on book arts programs: historical perspectives, profiles of programs, bookbinding education, and the spectrum of art and craft in the book arts.

Philip Gaskell, David Farrell, and Sidney Berger offer historical perspectives on the study of the art and history of the book within higher education.¹ These resources link the book arts to the legacy of bibliographic presses that were frequently founded in affiliation with libraries in the middle of the twentieth century. These programs often had the express goal of teaching library science students and graduate students in English about historical methods of book production.

Articles by Sandra Kirshenbaum, Gordon Neavill, and Kathleen Walkup present a view of graduate book arts education that illustrates how bibliographic presses evolved into programs focused on producing limited edition fine press literary publications. These graduate programs emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. Betty Bright edited a publication that describes the multifaceted undergraduate book arts program at Colorado College. These items sketch out a historical trajectory that leads to the emergence of book arts programs; however, the articles about programs are, in general, freestanding case studies.

Bookbinding education is another distinct topic identified during the literature review. Sam Ellenport contextualized the study of hand bookbinding in the early 1990s. Jeffrey Altepeter surveyed the state of contemporary bookbinding education in 2004. A panel discussion by Anna Embree, Mark Andersson, Consuela Metzger, Julie Leonard, and Steven Tatum in 2006 captured the range of contemporary bookbinding study opportunities. These resources describe the range and depth of educational opportunities specific to the discipline of bookbinding; however, they do not address the larger field of book arts education.

The final theme identified in the literature review is the spectrum of art and craft in the book arts. In 2009, Steve Miller and Shawn Simmons explored the current state of book arts education in the United States. In a thought-provoking article, Clifton Meador delved into the issue of art and craft within the book arts. Matthew Brown assessed the utility of the workshop model and progressive education as a philosophical grounding for book arts programs. In 2011, Martin Antonetti and Ruth Rogers reported at a College Book Art Association conference about the emergence of book studies within the liberal arts curricu-

lum. They reported on common obstacles faced by book arts programs and illustrated the ways in which book studies could include a greater range of teaching and research within the context of the liberal arts. These stimulating items highlight many important issues in contemporary book arts education and suggest many topics for further research.

The literature about book programs is scattered and does not contain widely applicable terms or categories for describing or classifying such programs in the United States. In fact, there is no widely agreed upon definition of what constitutes a book arts program. The potential for a typology of book arts programs to contribute to critical dialogue in the field of book arts education was reinforced by the literature review.

METHODOLOGY

Developing a typology for book arts programs is a qualitative research endeavor in which a model is constructed through the application of inductive techniques. Typologies are developed by studying phenomena and are generally accepted if they solve problems in a field. This project was conducted from a pragmatic perspective and incorporates some aspects of a phenomenological study, in which the focus is on determining what the essence of the object of study is. By asking, what are the distinguishing characteristics of this book arts program? a clearer understanding of the phenomena of book arts programs can be achieved.

A typology is a conceptually based classification strategy, typically used in the social sciences, that analyzes variables and creates useful categories for phenomena that are evolving and changing. Categories, or types, are developed that reflect the phenomena being investigated and also serve the purposes of the study or investigation being conducted. These constructed types are tested against empirical data from selected samples. As the characteristics of the phenomena are analyzed, categories that are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive are developed. This means that each individual sample has a place in the typology, but it only has one place. The measurement and sorting of book arts programs into categories result in the creation of a typology that reflects the variety of book arts programs while also establishing categories that allow for analysis and some generalization.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To create a typology of book arts programs, a purposeful, stratified sample of forty individual book arts programs was identified. This approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to identify subgroups and to conduct meaningful comparisons. The study was limited to American book arts programs that were chosen based on their unique properties from among the institutional members of the College Book Art Association² and programs listed on the “Book Arts Education” page of the Book Arts Web.³ Book arts programs described in articles included in the preliminary literature were also included. The first round of samples included fifteen programs, and the second round of samples included an additional twenty-five programs. The processes of sampling, sorting, and analysis may have been biased due to my previous experience with book arts programs, but this method is believed to be both valid and reliable.

Types could be identified after data about the features of book arts programs were analyzed. The first issue in the analysis, however, was to define what constitutes a book

arts program. The literature review yielded one definition that was compelling and also had the potential to be applied broadly in the development of a typology. Clifton Meador defined book arts programs in the following conceptual terms: “Book arts is the study of making books as expressive artistic objects. This practice focuses on thinking about how books create meaning, how books function culturally, and how a book can be a unique experience in art.”⁴ This definition needed to be transformed so it could be readily applied as data collection and analysis were conducted. A more concrete version of the definition was formulated. For the purposes of this typology, a book arts program was defined as an educational entity that offers hands-on instruction in at least two of the following disciplines: letterpress, bookbinding, papermaking, and calligraphy. A book arts program must also offer at least one of the following types of outreach activities: exhibitions, publishing, or lectures. In addition, the people who are involved in a book arts program were considered. Programs teach students and create communities of both students and teachers. In addition, programs reach out into the wider communities in which they are located—campuses, cities and towns, and local, national, and international networks.

The spreadsheet was populated with the following data about programs selected for the study sample: name of program, name of institution, location, degree/certificate offered, disciplines taught (letterpress printing, bookbinding, hand papermaking, calligraphy), facilities, teaching and administrative staff, students, exhibition, lecture series, publishing, and sources for the data. The data were sorted and analyzed in order to determine the essential features of a type of book arts program and to identify patterns within categories. These features and patterns were recognized, described, and named. Then these draft types were tested against sample programs, some of which came from the original sample of fifteen programs and some of which were introduced in the second group of samples for the purpose of testing the applicability of the types.

As the features of programs were analyzed using inductive methodology, categories were created and a typology was drafted. By examining the features of individual programs, such as institutional location, type of degree or certificate offered, and which disciplines of the book arts were taught, hints about the shape of the typology’s categories were revealed. Further analysis of programs included research regarding who does the teaching and learning in book arts programs. Activity that complemented teaching, such as mounting exhibitions, publishing limited editions, and sponsoring lectures and readings, was also examined. The spectrum of art and craft across programs was also considered. The pedagogical orientation of programs toward the history of the book and contemporary art practice was analyzed, as well.

As the types were developed, a logical problem presented itself. Should programs be grouped by the kind of degree they offer (BA, BFA, MFA, etc.), or should they be grouped according to their institutional identity (i.e., liberal arts college, university, art school, craft school, or independent not-for-profit)? Some programs offer multiple kinds of degrees, and thus fit into more than one of the former categories. This violates the mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive principle and therefore is not a suitable structure for a typology. For the purposes of this study, this issue was resolved by grouping programs by type of institution. This added a new dimension to the study: an examination of the effect of institutional context on book arts programs. The grouping of programs according to their institutional identity does recognize and represent the variety across the field of the book arts or acknowledge the strengths of programs situated in various contexts. Since

typologies are flexible and evolve as the phenomena they describe evolve, this is only one possible typology. Alternative typologies could be developed, or this typology could be revised as the field of book arts education develops.

A TYPOLOGY FOR BOOK ARTS PROGRAMS

Book Arts Programs in Liberal Arts Colleges

These programs may exist in their own department or center, or may be part of the art department, the English department, or the college library. A program may also be sponsored by a combination of departments or by the college library in collaboration with a department or departments. The most highly evolved programs for undergraduates offer minors or concentrations in book arts or book studies, which include the study of the art and the history of the book. Book arts programs at liberal arts colleges incorporate aspects of both art and craft, though craft is sometimes de-emphasized due to administrative concerns regarding the place of craft in a liberal arts education. The study of the history of the book is often incorporated in the programs, and is sometimes taught formally through a dedicated class or classes. Full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty, book artists, and librarians teach in these programs, and the students in the programs are generally matriculated full-time undergraduates. Examples of programs in this category include those at Colorado College, Smith College, and Wells College.

Book Arts Programs at Universities

This type includes the greatest diversity in terms of the structure and participants in the programs. Book arts programs at universities may exist in their own center or as part of the art department or college, the university library, the library school, or residential life. These programs may also be sponsored collaboratively by any of the above or may exist in an entirely different institutional context. The most highly evolved book arts programs at universities are very comprehensive and support high-level teaching and art and craft production across all aspects of the book—papermaking, printing, and binding informed by the history of the book. These programs are often organized around an MFA program curriculum, and may also offer study opportunities for graduate students in other programs, for undergraduates, and for members of the public. Faculty members who teach in these programs may be full time and tenure track. A number of book arts programs at universities are centered in the university library system, sometimes in association with special collections or preservation departments, and are able to collaborate flexibly with many different constituencies across the university. Examples of these types of programs include the MFA in the Book Arts Program at the University of Alabama and the University of Iowa Center for the Book.

Book Arts Programs at Art Colleges and Universities

These book arts programs are often affiliated and integrated with printmaking or graphic design departments. A minor in book arts or printmaking/book arts may be offered as part of a BFA degree. An MFA in book arts or printmaking/book arts may be offered. The emphasis in these programs is on the book as a means for artistic expression. Programs are geared toward teaching matriculated undergraduate or graduate students and instruction is conducted by full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty. Examples include Columbia College's Center for Book and Paper Arts and the MFA in Book Arts and Printmaking at the University of the Arts.

Book Arts Programs at Craft Schools

This type of program is focused on the teaching of bookmaking skills in the craft context and tends to center on the discipline of bookbinding. Other craft schools offer bookmaking workshops regularly, but do not support book arts programs per se. The bookbinding certificate program at the North Bennet Street School is an example of this type of program. Craft schools offer classes for students enrolled in certificate programs, if they have them, and for the public. Classes are generally taught by instructors who are practicing artists and craftspeople who may be faculty or staff at other institutions. Penland School of Crafts offers workshops and classes across the “whole book” disciplines of papermaking, letterpress printing, and bookbinding.

Book Arts Programs as Independent Not-for-Profits

Many book arts programs are incorporated as independent not-for-profits. These programs are primarily designed to offer workshops to the public. Some book arts centers do offer certificate programs. Not-for-profit book arts programs may emphasize one or two disciplines of the book arts. Some integrate various facets of the book arts with one another, resulting in very rich offerings. Book arts not-for-profits are particularly active with respect to outreach activities such as exhibitions, lectures, and limited edition publishing. Within not-for-profits, the book arts are practiced across the spectrum of art and craft at very high levels. Examples include the Center for Book Arts in New York City and the San Francisco Center for the Book.

CONCLUSION

The book arts incorporate many different disciplines, and the programs in which they are taught are not uniform. In this study, a functional definition of book arts programs was established, and a sample of forty individual book arts programs was analyzed. Features of the programs were analyzed, and a typology of programs was developed. A typology of book arts programs helps to establish the vocabulary for continuing discussions about book arts programs. A typology is particularly appropriate as the field of book arts education is emerging and may be helpful in addressing some of the obstacles that book arts programs face with respect to sustainability.

This research project is meant to acknowledge the breadth and variety of programs, which range widely across the spectrum of art and craft, and incorporate various media and various degrees of traditional technique-based practices and contemporary art practice. By examining the institutional settings of book arts programs in a systematic way, the practice and theory of teaching and learning can be improved. The identification of strengths and weaknesses of various types, and the advantages and disadvantages of various institutional contexts, can lead to the growth of book arts programs. This typology is offered in the hope that it will further critical dialogue and stimulate discussion. In fact, this is just one possible typology developed from the data that were collected. Alternative typologies could be developed.

Further research could address the following questions: Why is there such a diversity of book arts programs? Does the form of the program influence how the book arts are taught and to whom they are taught? How does the history of the book influence the teaching of book arts? Further research into the evolution of bibliographic presses into book arts

programs could lead to broader and deeper understanding of the nature and diversity of book arts programs based in colleges and universities. Analysis of the funding sources and the governance structure of book arts programs may permit further refinement of the types. Investigation into the emergence of book studies at liberal arts colleges and the resulting impact on the book arts could add new dimensions to the typology. In addition, further research in the form of surveys, interviews, and campus visits could add new dimensions. The research could also be expanded to include programs located outside the United States.

NOTES

1. Full source citations can be found in the bibliography.
2. College Book Art Association, “CBAA Institutional Members.”
3. Book Arts Web, “Book Arts Education.”
4. Meador, “Disciplining a Craft,” 9.

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