Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer, 'Melencolia I' burin-engraving. 243 x 187 mm. (B7411) dated and monogrammed on the face of the ledge far right: AD1514; dated in the bottom-line of the magic square: 1514. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
The unconventional index and its merits

William S. Heckscher

Emeritus Professor of Art History (Utrecht & Duke Universities), consultant to Rare Books Department, Princeton University Library, and a founder-member of The Society of Indexers.

For Helen M. Wright

An index is customarily regarded as an arrangement of signposts pointing the way to alphabetically analysed textual content, but may effectively serve more imaginative purposes: to relieve the text of overburdening detail, to replace footnotes, to sharpen the perspective of the text, to supplement as well as elucidate textual content. Above all, it may be made so readable that one may begin with the index, deriving from it such pleasure as will stimulate eagerness to turn back to the text, perhaps piecemeal rather than as a continuous whole.

A few years ago I was commissioned to edit a Latin text of the year 1541, to supply an English translation and, if necessary, to add a commentary to which I added, on my own initiative, carried away by rash enthusiasm, a fairly substantial Index. This study formed part of a publication in honour of a German humanist, friend of both Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam, Joachim Camerarius the Elder (1500-1574): it appeared under the editorship of Frank Baron at Munich (Wilhelm Fink), 1978. In spite of its brevity—750 words—Camerarius's text with which I had to deal was of significance as being the earliest known analysis of Albrecht Dürer's (1471-1528) most important engraving, the 'Melencolia I' of the year 1514 (Figure 1). As I worked my way into Camerarius's description of the engraving—offering a mixture of revealing insights and blatant errors—I soon realized that I had to offer to my readers conclusions regarding the meaning of Dürer's Melencolia. One need not be a trained art historian to see that this strangely secular work of art poses riddle after riddle. On closer examination it turns out that much of its enigmatic character was part of the fashionable thinking of the humanistic élite of Dürer's truly cultured circle, of which Camerarius was a member. Camerarius had known Düe personally; he had watched him at work, and when Dürer died, Camerarius had been made the official executor of Dürer's writings which he had translated into immaculate Latin. Camerarius published his Melancholia-essay in 1541, thirteen years after the artist's death.

Melencolia herself, as well as her numerous attributes, compelled the commentator of Camerarius's essay to deal with melancholia as one of the humores, with the pose of the woman who leans her head against her clenched fist, with the celestial phenomena in the background, with the seven-rung ladder, the square stone, the elements of inertia (female, putto, dog), the geometric tools at Melencolia's feet. All of this, as well as the ambiguities in Camerarius's text, demanded a detailed, critical treatment. The diversity of matters dealt with persuaded me to add to my study a substantial Index, apart from Notes and Illustrations.

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Figure 2. Albrecht Dürer, 'St Jerome in His Cell' engraving. 248 x 191 mm. (B60) dated and monogrammed on cartellino AD1514. M 29037. (Commentary 12, 46 & passim). Courtesy, museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Not counting the half-dozen illustrations, my total Text amounted to some 40 pages, and in very small 6-point: 73 Notes on some 27 pages, an Index of 18 pages. I omitted a voluminous bibliography as well as a table of captions which I placed instead, one by one, underneath the individual illustrations.

My initial concern, by giving so much space to Notes and Index, had been to make the Text more readable. My Notes, as I see it now, have at times grown into small essays. Virginia W. Callahan wrote in a review of my article [Moreana, XVII, Angers, 1980, pp. 137 f.]: ‘Heckscher’s impresa I am told is: “Il faut penser à côté”. What is certain is that in much of what he introduces, he allows himself to be guided by free association rather than by strict scientific reasoning . . . ’ This critique applies, I think, with particular force to my Notes which, charitably, might be seen as nothing but ornamentation and amplification. She added: ‘The essay is capped by an elaborate, highly unconventional Index: although a tour de force, it appears as an entertaining and informative counterpoint to Text and Notes’. It was my intention that the Index should stand more or less on its own and yet present a mirror-image to the Text, relieving it of small but essential detail that might have overburdened the Text.

My ambition went perhaps even higher: I intended the Index to carry an independent theme. In writing my contribution—notwithstanding the fact that I am almost totally deaf—I had at times a feeling while I was at work that I was a descendant of Johann Sebastian Bach, sitting at my harpsichord, working out challenging problems in counterpoint. Notes rather than Index could be left by the wayside; while Text and Index were equivalent entities standing at opposite poles from one another, the Illustrations were meant to form integral parts of both Text and Index. The Notes, close allies to the Text, should remain discreetly hidden—like the roots of a tree—as vital partners in nourishment. I left it to my reader either to start with the Text, then consult Notes, Pictures and Index wherever desirable, or as a second option, to start with the Index in quest of matter of specific interest, working one’s way back as it were.

A few words have to be said about the particular character of Dürer’s ‘Melencolia I’ (Figure 1). It will be easier to make my point if I may compare to the ‘Melencolia I’ another print, also of the year 1514: Albrecht Dürer’s ‘St Jerome in his Cell’ (Figure 2). This latter print shows a beautifully organized stage-setting, relatively shallow in depth, firmly controlled by the laws of mathematical perspective. St Jerome, a Church Father beloved by the conservative, and that is to say Roman-Catholic elements, was renowned as the author of the so-called Vulgate, his unsurpassed translation of Old and New Testaments into Latin. Somehow we are made to feel that the well-organized interior of the saint’s cell is not only meant to testify to the clarity of the Saint’s mind but that it is also a reflection of the God-ordained creation here at work. Both prints of the year 1514 may be said to manifest the atmosphere of the critical years, 1514 to about 1517, the time when Martin Luther and his doctrine began to emerge. On the one hand St Jerome, encapsulated in his serene, sunlit cell, appears as a representative of a world that is about to come to its end. He is the embodiment of the past, of the intelligible crystal-clear world of Patrology and Scholasticism. The print affords a last nostalgic glance at a God-centred cosmos as it had most beautifully been present in the thought of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, a world whose integrity was now threatened by both Luther and Erasmus. ‘Melencolia I’, on the other hand—a quasi-prophetic picture—shows a winged spirit in distress, her eyes searching, it seems, for an undetermined point at an uncertain distance, as if mesmerized by something unseen and unseeable. Further back in the
composition, a seemingly eyeless putto scribbles on a slate messages which have to be erased in order to make place for new messages which are equally doomed to an ephemeral existence. The flawless organization of the Saint's Cell has been changed into an uncertain, nocturnal out-of-doors setting topped by cosmic events grouped around the resplendent planet Saturn, while far down below we behold an ominously flooded landscape. Dürer offers here a conflict-laden world which was, above all, secular in character, under the sway of astrology, mathematical science, numerical symbolism, while his theology speculated on mystical ideas of redemption by means of an ascent to perfection in the embrace of divine wisdom. But what thus might seem to us a concatenation of abstractions, Dürer knew how to express, in the vernacular of his time as it were, by means of a carefully assembled conglomeration of items evoking clearly definable ideas: the seven-rung ladder = ascent; the dog = melancholia of a lower kind; the sphere = the restlessness of human endeavour; the cubic stone = the solidity of geometrical knowledge; the house lacking doors or windows = the House of Divine Wisdom. The title, to the student of Renaissance iconography, refers to diversified aspects subsumed under the term melancholia; it suggested paradoxical contradictions in that being born under Saturn, the planet of melancholia, implied despondency and madness as well as the qualification of genius, uncontrollable ecstasy beside perfect memory, the infirmities of old age and the ability to find absolute beauty in geometry. The great art historian Erwin Panofsky pointed out that the winged woman, Melancholia incarnate, was also the personification of noble Saturnian geometry (an artist's indispensable equipment) referred to by Dürer as 'Kunst'. The diligently scribbling putto on the other hand should be regarded as the personification of the lowly, semi-literate workshop tradition of the late-mediaeval artisan-artist, frequently referred to by Dürer as 'Brauch'. In order to unburden my Text, I made the following entry for my Index:

'Kunst' and 'Brauch' – identified in Dürer's print as meditative "Melencolia" and scribbling "Putto"

KUNST = theoretical knowledge of the artist (synon. 'ars,' as well as 'disciplina' (Isidore of Seville) / 'discretio' (= critical discernment, Ren. German 'Bescheidenheit') / 'doctrina' / '(recta) ratio' / 'scientia' / 'theoria');

BRAUCH = execution of the work of art according to workshoptradition (synon. 'usus,' as well as 'ars mechanica' & '(quotidianum) exercitium' / 'peritia');

Cf. Dürer, Vnderweysung (1525) "man hat byssher in vnsern deutzschen landen / vil geschickter jungen / zu der Kunst der mallerey gethon / die man an [= ohne / without] allen grundt vnnl alleyn aus einem täglichen Brauch [day-by-workshop-tradition] gelernt hat / sind dieselben also im vnnerstand wie eyn wylder vnbeschnytner bawm auf erwachsen" [Camerarius:] "In Germania, nostra, Bilibalde excellentissime, adhibiti sunt hactenus arti picturae adolescentes felicis ingenii, qui sine omni artis fundamento sed quotidianum somum exercitio instituti in ignorantia sua velut arbor imputata aoleverunt" "One has apprenticed in our German lands up to now many youths to the art of painting [KUNST der mallerey] who have been taught without any background, merely by means of daily/workshop- training, with the result that in their ignorance they have grown up like a wild, untrimmed tree"; we might well wonder, whether Dürer, when he introduced the image of the untrimmed tree remembered that the man who "trims a tree" was a melancholicus? – 1, 5–8; 12, 46; 16, 71/72 & Fig. 1

see also: Dürer (d.); gewalt
The print of 'Melencolia I' may be called a manifesto by means of which the artist laments the separation of craftsmanship from mathematics-bound art theory. Geometry belonged to the noble liberal arts, while artists were—socially speaking—artisans whose activities belonged to the despised mechanical arts under whose banner those engaged in manual labour were gathered, doomed to remain anonymous and generally regarded as lowly people who ignominiously used their hands. Albrecht Dürer knew why he pursued geometry in the form of perspective and proportional theory while he wrote a book on geometry which he based on Euclid. Dürer may have lamented the strict separation of Kunst and Brauch, but at the same time his engraving represented a signal triumph by which, after all, he had managed to show both his command of theoretical geometry and along with it his craftsmanlike virtuosity. Dürer was the first artist of the Northern Renaissance to be widely accepted beyond Germany's borders as a bona fide humanist.

Dürer shared with his learned confrères the view that what he had to say was not meant for the ears, eyes and minds of the vulgar people but was—exclusively—the preserve of an intellectual élite. This hermetic character we find nowhere in Dürer's œuvre so prominent as in 'Melencolia I'. Again, in order to relieve my text of the burden of detailed definitions, I created an Index-entry under the heading of

sacer
ded ideas, i.e. ideas which must be withheld from the vulgar (the range of this and related ideas is enormous & reaches from the lofty to the down-to-earth, ranging from Christ's injunction not to cast pearls before swine - Mtth. vii: 6 - to Suger of St.-Denis, De administratione xxxiiii: "Et quoniam tacita visus cognitione materiae diversitas, auri, gemmarum, unionum, absque descriptione facile non cognocit vulgus, opus quod solis patet litteratis, quod allegoriae jocundae spectabiliter resplenderunt, apicibus litterarum mandari fecimus" ("And because the diversity of the materials, gold, gems and pearls is not easily understood by means of the mute perception of sight without a description [descriptione might here be better rendered by 'interpretation'], we have seen to it that this work which is intelligible only to the literate, because it scintillates with the splendor of its beautiful allegories, should be rendered in writing [follows a rhythmic titulus]") cf. ed. & tr. E. Panofsky, Princeton, 1946, pp. 62 f.; from Paolo Giovio who stipulates that an impressa of his design should not be of the "mystery of a Sibilline oracle, nor so clear that just anybody might understand it," to Erasmus' injunction not to divulge cultural ideas to the lowly kind of people— as much as one ought to avoid to place food into a night-jar—"cibum in matellam ne immittas—nee sermonem urbanum immittas in animum hominis improbi" (ed. Adagia, Basel 1523, p. 17) which led to Alciati's strange emblem LXXX which, having been placed on the Index, appeared only in a very few editions of the Emblemata; I refer to the forthcoming ed. & tr. by Prof. Virginia W. Callahan in which two classical sources of this adage—Plutarch and Martial—will be discussed as well as the unexpected reversal of the more commonly accepted idea of the thoughtless committing of precious things to an unworthy receptacle (Alciati's sinner befouls: a golden vessel) — 1, 14; 8, 41 and Fig. 1 (and its hermetic character)

see also: bell ("multi sunt vocati..."); obscura and next entry:
"Sagt es niemand nur den Weisen, weil die Menge gleich verhöhnet" (Goethe, the incipit of "Selige Sehnsucht")
see: sacred ideas
sanctuary on a mountain-top with adjacent podium — see: House of Wisdom
Sap. ix: 16 – 14 end xi: 21 – 11, 43
"Sapiens aedificavit sibi domum" inscription on the Tower of Wisdom (a sanctuary traditionally associated with the number seven: columns / daughters of Wisdom / steps of ascent) — Fig. B
see also: House of Wisdom; "Turris sapiencie"
One of Dürer’s contemporaries, Mutianus Rufus, said in a secret communication to a friend: ‘We must resort to the veils of fables and riddles wherever sacred matters are concerned’. Those words might indeed serve as a motto to Dürer’s engraving which, however secular in appearance, essentially dealt with ‘sacred matters’.

The mood of brooding irresoluteness expressed by the woman in Dürer’s print is somehow reflected in the stage-setting. Once more we may compare ‘Melencolia I’ with the ‘St Jerome’ to come to the conclusion that the noticeable untidiness surrounding the brooding woman must have been part of Albrecht Dürer’s planning. Try as you will, it is impossible to draw an acceptable ground-plan on which locations of objects in space and in relation to each other can be stated unequivocally. The half a dozen kinds of tools scattered about at the woman’s feet seem oddly arranged, and the other objects elsewhere found seem oddly encapsulated and, though stereometric in structure, they fail to extend with their volume convincingly into the background. What we see, especially if we half-close our eyes, are not so much sphere, octahedron and millstone but intricate intersecting planes and shapes, stacked haphazardly, it seems, one behind, above, below or beside the other. Dürer could hardly have found more convincing images by which to express the predicament of the thinking, melancholy human being of the Northern Renaissance in the first quarter of the 16th century.

The world of untidiness, disarray, désarroi (French), Unordnung (German), wanorde (Dutch), ἀταραξία (Greek), turbatio (Latin) should be seen as an historical phenomenon. Modern man accepts and even cherishes untidiness as part of human existence. We visit Rome to admire its ruins; our mind is fascinated by the raging sea and by active volcanoes; a battlefield is an ideal subject for a painting. J. Robert Oppenheimer, a poet and scientist turned administrator, once said to me mournfully: ‘The days of the untidy desk are past’, by which he meant that he had stopped using his desk to write on it poems. Tidiness can be inhibiting. Yet the situation was quite different in mediaeval times. Not only was untidiness a sinful state: mediaeval artists were incapable of depicting untidiness. In mediaeval painting there are no ruins gracing land- or cityscapes. The representation of fools and beggars in rags and tatters, we might say, was a signal of the beginning Renaissance. In order to accommodate my readers, I used various short entries in my Index, under disarray, Ineinanderschachtelung [a handy German word describing encapsulation of objects], the agnostic fool, rags and ruins, and others. My main discussion was, however, put into a footnote (46) which in the end referred to the cult of untidiness in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries:

(a.) caricatures appear in the work of the great Baroque masters such as Bernini from ca. 1600 onward; an amazing selfportrait in caricature occurs (repeatedly) in Erasmian manuscripts around 1524 – quite possibly the first intimation of a delight in disarray; cf. W. S. Heckscher, “Reflections on Holbein’s Portrait of Erasmus,” Essays in the History of Art, Wittkower Festchrift, London, 1967, pp. 128–148, esp. pp. 135 f. and fig. 8;
(b.) intentional neglect stressed in the appearance of aristocratic models: e.g. Bernini’s bust of “Scipione Borghese” which shows the second button from the top of the Cardinal’s vestis talaris left unbuttoned;
(c.) with many literary parallels, as e.g. Robert Herrick’s Julia who (in 1648) shows the poet’s disdain for preciseness in Art, endearing herself to him by “A Sweet disorder in the dresse”; confusion, carelessness, tempestuositity – all may serve as words of highest praise, placing irregularity above order; for the history of this creed, cf. W. S. Heckscher, “Sturm und Drang,” Simiolus, I, ii (1966–67), pp. 1–21.
I am by no means the first critic to have pointed at the rather obvious disorganization in Dürer's 'Melencolia I' composition. Here one can even go too far. Modern critics [Panofsky] have pointed out that the woman is 'neglectful in her attire, with dishevelled hair', and that 'her keys are disarranged and the purse trails on the ground with its leather strap twisted and partly unfastened'. That this view was not tenable, I tried to express in my Index:

ψυχαγωγία (a time-honored device of psychological persuasion used in the rhetoric of "that arch-corruptor" - as Plato called him - Gorgias, the head of the Asiatic school of philosophy; IVth c. B.C.) - 7, 37

the purse carried by "Melencolia" (according to Dürer, signifying 'wealth,' it hinted at economic success, an important argument in D's thinking; cf. Panofsky, Dürer I, p. 164; the six keys and the purse are suspended - each separately - by what looks like fairly strong leather-straps - G. Tragschnüre. They belonged, in D's time, to a Franconian woman's outfit and were gathered, on moving about, in the wearer's free hand; cf. e.g. the dancing woman clutching keys & purse with her right hand (B. 90); the keys, contrary to what has been maintained, are in no way trailing on the ground, nor is the purse. The leather of the straps is a material belonging to Saturnians) - 7, 37 & Figs. 1 & 4

purification - see: Läuterung

the putto on the millstone personifying 'Brauch' is shown scribbling (not: playing) with a stylus (not: a burin) on a slate - (signifying futility of endeavor when in isolation from 'Kunst'; cf. e.g. the putto in Dürer's engraving "The Doctor's Dream" of the year 1497 (B. 76), or the five putti in Cranach's "Melancholia" (1532) in the Copenhagen Museum in their futile pursuits) - 1, 5, 11, 43, 12, 46 & Fig. 1

see also: slate
Moreover, we need only use our eyes to see that 'Melencolia' is not neglectful in her dress; her coiffure is neat and I suspect that (at least to the farsighted) the decorative leaves of the plant *levisticum*—the anti-melancholic herb-wreath that crowns the parting of her hair—may have looked like so many unruly curls.

Dürer died in 1528, and it is interesting to see how after his death a number of his epigones managed to outdo him in the exaggeration and abstraction of what had once been realistically seen forms:

Lovers of Surrealism, and I am one of them, should get a great amount of satisfaction out of a comparison of Lorentz Stöer's geometrical woodcut of the year 1567 with Dürer's 'Melencolia I'. In this particular case I made a brief Index-entry under Stöer which referred to an extensive note on Dürer-Nachleben in the 16th century into which I worked a more detailed discussion of the significance of the Stöer woodcut for our understanding of Dürer's proto-manneristic tendencies in the 'Melencolia I':

**Figure 4.** Lorentz Stöer (1545—after 1620), 'Ruined Building', woodcut from *Geometria et perspectiva*, Augsburg, 1567 (executed by Hans Rogel the Elder).
A few brief remarks will indicate the intense response to Dürrer's graphic works among mannerists of the advancing XVIth century. I list the following Italians: Pontormo (1522), Vasari (1550), Lodovico Dolce (1557), Lambert Lombard (1565) and Lomazzo (1582 and 1590). Lomazzo, who spoke of Dürrer as 'divino,' referred to Dürrer in his art theoretical writings (which represent high water marks of manneristic feeling) with ever new observations and detailed references in twenty different passages. There is a rich but by no means exhaustive literature dealing with Dürrer's graphic work and the enormous influence exercised by it on the art of Mannerism and beyond; for a recent study of relevance which lists earlier literature, cf. Joseph Polzer, "Dürer et Raphael," Nouvelles de l'estampe, Sept./Oct., 1974, pp. 15–22, esp. notes 1–4. Among the Germans I would call attention to the Augsburg school of ornament-designers, Wenzel Jamnitzer, Stöer and several others whose work was largely based on that of the great master-geometicians of the High Renaissance - above all that of Dürrer. The process of turning stereometric figures into quasi disintegrating shapes and, hand in hand with it, the exclusion of the human form (compensated for by the strange animation of those irreall configurations), together with the love of ruins (which for the first time in the history of art turn into beautiful objects felt to be beautiful), with a concomitant second wave of dissolving of recognisable form by means of 'enroulement' (Rollwerk) - a method by which loose ends of the disintegrating architecture and its geometrical substitutes cascade downward like ornamental banderoles made of a fairly solid kind of pasta — all this takes us a consistent step beyond Dürrer's "Melencolia I." Our Fig. C, a woodcut-design made for the benefit of makers of wood-entarsia furniture, affords a fairly good reminiscence of Dürrer's geometric objects, the cube and the sphere and perhaps even of "Melencolia" herself, translated into the lingua franca of Manerism. This woodcut, executed by Hans Rogel the Elder, was designed by the admirable Lorentz Stöer (a native of Nuremberg who emigrated as an older man to Augsburg). It appears in his Geometria et perspectiva, Augsburg, 1567, with the revealing sub-title: Hierijn etliche zerbrochen gebew: den Schreinern jn eingelegeter Arbeit dienstlich ('containing numerous fragmented buildings: of service to cabinet-makers specializing in inlaid-wood furniture'). It is possible to overrate the iconographic significance of the inlaid-wood furniture and to see in its playful predilection of ruins too much of a yielding to notions of vanitas vanitatum. They were, as far as I understand, rarity-cabinets in miniature. Their drawers were filled with precious specimens of 'naturalia' and 'artificialia' - creations of God and products of human skill; I can visualize collections of ancient coins tucked away in the drawers faced by intarsia work whose ruins speak of antiquity preserved and revered. The grandeur of Dürrer's thought has evaporated. Yet Stöer and others of the Augsburg School furnish an enchanting commentary to Dürrer's "Melencolia I" as a powerful leitmotif to which the mad geometrical distortions of the group around Stöer resorted with great success. Dürrer's horror vacui has yielded to manneristic voluptas pleni.

I do not underrate the danger, in my unconventional indexing and annotating, of 'reading' a variety of meanings into a picture of an admittedly hermetic nature because they fit my general assumptions. On the whole I think that I am right in stating that open season has been declared on Dürrer's 'Melencolia'. Let me cite a few instances:

The ladder, we are assured, reveals that the house is still unfinished—its state of incompleteness is obvious: the builders' tools are lying at the feet of the winged woman. Another opinion: Since the picture deals with planetary signs (Saturn in the sky and behind the title, Jupiter in the numerical tablet attached to the wall), the ladder logically leads up to an astronomical observatory. Surely, another voice decrees, the ladder is needed to restore the tower (suddenly the building has changed into a tower) which lies in ruins. This kind of hypnotic argumentation the ancients referred to as psychagogia (see index-entry previously cited). The unfinished house or the tower in ruins, as well as the astronomical observatory, exist solely in the critic's phantasy.
I found it profitable to examine specific forms as they occur in the print, namely the seven-rung ladder and the inaccessible building in front of which Melencolia is seated:

Far from being a Dürerian invention, the configuration ladder—building could look back upon a time-honoured tradition. Lullus and ladder required and found entries in my Index:

- the seven-rung ladder (or staircase) (to represent rightful aspirations as well as absurdities of the melancholic minds) – 12 in toto; 13 & Figs. 1 & 3 & Fig. B
- Läuterung (step-by-step purification until, by degree of transcensus, perfection has been achieved) – 12, 46 & passim
- Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) – 16, 72
- see: paragone
- libri (there appears only one book, lying in the lap of "Melencolia," shut with a clasp; Camerarius uses here as well as in the enumeration of the other attributes the plural) – 11 & Fig. 1
- lignaeae quaedam opera – 11 & Fig. 1
- see also: Arma Saturni
- tenuissimis lineis expressa – 1, 17; 16 in toto
- see also: nigrae lineae
Raimundus Lullus, the great mystical philosopher-theologian of the 14th century, whose work exercised lasting influence above all on the thinking of the Renaissance humanists (including those of Dürer’s circle), is the bearded gentleman here portrayed. Man’s soul, undertaking Lullus’s secret ascent, went, to quote him, ‘beyond sensory perception and imagination’. Dürer’s closest humanist friend, Willibald Pirckheimer, the mayor of his native Nuremberg, was, as we know, in possession of a 15th century manuscript which perpetuated the ascent-descent ideas discussed by Lullus. What Lullus transmitted to Dürer was the idea of ladders of spiritual ascent in combination with a hermetically sealed building which, according to Lullus, represented the Old Testament House of Divine Wisdom (‘Wisdom built herself a house, she has hewn out seven pillars’; Prov. ix:1).

A curious broadside, circulated in Nuremberg in the last quarter of the 15th century, shows the House of Wisdom as well as the seven steps leading up to its sealed door and windows; this (shown as Figure 6) is only one of several popularizations of the seven-rung ascent idea that obviously presents the main message of Dürer’s ‘Melencolia I’.

As the sole responsible author of Text, Notes, Index, Illustrations, I had the privilege of placing accents at will. Apart from succinct Index-references, and relatively short treatment in my Text, I placed the main burden of ladder-building explanation onto the Notes:

Cusanus here carefully specifies a procedure which urges the adept striving for ultimate perfection to undertake such a transcensus, to leave behind what is accessible to the sensory perceptions and to imagination (and that is, of course, the two main-characteristics of the melancholicus of the first degree), so that the intellect may gain access to the realm where all contradictions are resolved so as to be prepared for the final ascent to the infinite realm of the divinity; cf. Eusebio Colomer, S.J., Nikolaus von Kues und Raimund Lull, Berlin, 1961, “Die Methode des Aufstiegs und Abstiegs,” pp.75–82, esp. 79 note 60. Cusanus stands, as far as influences go, between Raimundus Lullus and Agrippa of Nettesheim (who in turn influenced Dürer); it was Lullus who had pointed out this crux of the ascent by which the intellect had to rise “supra sensum et imaginacionem” [“beyond sensory perception and imagination”]. In Lullus’ system of ascent, the seven rungs of the ladder went from the earth via plants, animals and man to heaven (stage 6) and the final realm: Angels (stage 7) which was inscribed, in the illustrated schemata, ‘perfectio.’ (Fig.6) The house of perfection was identified with a banderole reading: “Sapientia edificauit sibi domum” [“Wisdom hath built herself a house”] (Prov.xi:1). Lullus’ treatise on ascent appeared in its printed editio princeps, Valencia, 1512 (for a reproduction of the accompanying woodcut showing
Figure 6. ‘Turris sapiencie’ broadside 389 x 245 mm (after the original in the Germanische Museum, Nuremberg) ca. 1475 (Schreiber, Holzschnitte 1927, No. 1858).
Intellect about to ascend to the House of Wisdom, cf. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, Chicago, 1966, fig. 4 on p. 180; cf. also her “The Art of Ramon Lull,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XVII, 1964, pp. 115–173). – It is not very likely that anyone in Nuremberg could have seen a work printed in Valencia in 1512. A woodcut made, printed and published in Nuremberg(?) about 1475 (Fig. B) may, on the other hand, well have been available to young Dürer; it shows the inaccessible “Turris sapienclie” a moral-theological structure some fourteen storeys in height while, again, the ascent to the initial gate has to be negotiated by means of seven steps: Oracio (prayer), Compunctio (remorse), Confessio, Penitentia, Satisfactio (amends), Elemosina (eleemosyna – alms-giving), Jeiunium (fainting). Obediencia and Paciencia are expected once the initial gate has been reached. Such and similar towers of ascent were everywhere in evidence. These primitive pictures share in common with Dürer’s ladder the seven-fold steps toward perfection and the imposing structure which discourages easy ascent, not to speak of entry. Philosophy and metaphysics of ascent, as I have tried to sketch them out, were undoubtedly suggested to Dürer by Willibald Pirkheimer. The pictorial imagery was as easily available as the calendar pictures explaining the four complexions and the broadsides identifying the ‘Children of Saturn’ and that is the raw-materials that were incorporated in “Melencolia I.”

For my Index entry see ‘Sapientia aedificavit…’; cited above under ‘Sacred ideas…’. Without feeling in the least apologetic, I still believe that a combination of flexibility with utmost consistency may lead to useful solutions of the overall need to supply one’s reader with the right kind of information in the appropriate place. On the whole, an entry which might come under a number of different words should, preferably, be placed under one key-entry (the ‘matrix’), while cross-references can take care of the secondary terms; however, I also see situations in which, in fairness to the user of my Index, several equivalent terms receive each in turn full-entry treatment. This applies, e.g., to the ultimate aim of Dürer’s Melancholia programme. As we look for the proper terms with which to describe such aims, we must keep in mind that in a sense Dürer’s ‘Melencolia I’ is a ‘still’ (if I may use here film-terminology)—some action (even if it is nothing more than Melencolia’s sitting down) must have preceded the ‘still’ of the print. In equal measure, we are entitled to ask: What will happen next? And if we come to the conclusion that what Dürer had in mind was to give expression to the idea of purification or perfection of the spiritual human being, we may come to the prediction that—abstruse as it may sound—somehow Melencolia will have to try to negotiate in person, one-by-one, the seven rungs of the sturdy ladder, while majestically flapping her wings. The German word for purification is Läuterung, for which see Index:

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L

museum labels – see: description
the seven-rung ladder (or staircase) (to represent rightful aspirations as well as absurdities of the melancholic minds) – 12 in toto; 13 & Figs. 1 & 3 & Fig. B
Läuterung (step-by-step purification until, by degree of transcensus, perfection has been achieved) – 12, 46 & passim
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In connection with this aim and message it will be worth considering the desire, deeply rooted in human nature, to be ‘born again’. Depending on creeds, this desire may take any number of forms, private and institutionalized, ranging from baptism (promising the rejuvenation which baffled Nicodemus on his nocturnal visit to Jesus), to renascence as a personal experience.

The best of many studies devoted to those ideas is Gerhart B. Ladner’s *The idea of reform*, Cambridge (Harvard University Press), 1959.

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There existed several modes in man's quest for such purification and rebirth which led along oft-repeated paths toward ultimate self-perfection. The two main directional options were either moving straight along a predetermined horizontal path on the one hand, or, on the other, a vertical ascent.

Mithraism knows seven successive stages of transformation and ultimate redemption —each one more daring and hazardous than the preceding one. In a wonderful novel of late classical Antiquity, Apuleius's *Golden Ass* (available in Robert Graves's flawless, unexpurgated translation), we hear of the adventurous love-encounter between Lucius, the hero of the tale, and Fotis, the seductive kitchen-maid who at his bidding appeared at the end of his bed in the guise of Venus rising from the waves. In the course of the story, the hero is turned by evil magic into a donkey who, after a variety of picaresque and increasingly humiliating adventures, is finally redeemed, as devoutly he witnesses an Isis ritual in the course of which the true Isis-Aphrodite—rising from the waves—brings about his ultimate metamorphosis, back into human form. Stories of similar accounts of suffering and ultimate purification range from the fairytale of Eros and Psyche, to Mozart’s ‘Magic Flute’ and, ultimately, Pinocchio and Alice in Wonderland.

The ascending path towards perfection is certainly as old if not older: it is found in Babylon, where the seven-stepped *zikkurat* (shaped like a pyramid) serves to represent the image of the seven celestial spheres which the human soul has to negotiate in its ascent to the empyreum and the ultimate union with the divinity.

Classical Antiquity knew, in many variations, the proverbial saying *per aspera ad astra*; ‘via rough paths, to the stars’. It entered with ease into early Christian texts such as St Benedict’s *Monastic Rule*, *dura et aspera per quae itur ad Deum*; ‘bitter and rough paths by which one ascends to God’. The Renaissance loved, and again and again represented, a Hellenistic moralizing tract, the so-called *Tabula Cebetis*, which deals with the wearisome ascent of a mountain at whose top Supreme Bliss personified will crown the persevering man who, supported by Constancy and Continence, has successfully negotiated the hazards of fickle Fortune, of False Learning, who has resisted the temptations of Music and other voluptuosities and even the vainglory of the seven Liberal Arts (among which geometry!) until, aided by true Learning (*vera disciplina*), he has reached the apex of the mountain. The *Tabula Cebetis* was a school text by which students learned to translate Greek into Latin, deep into the 18th century. At the same time the Old Testament offered the dream-ladder of Jacob’s vision (Genesis xxxviii: 10-12) which turned out to be one of the favourite themes in art.

To this, the *Glossa ordinaria*, the authoritative biblical commentary of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, adds: ‘they [that is to say the “angels” of the dream vision—here interpreted as prefigurations of the Apostles and Evangelists] ascend on that ladder from the earth up to the heavens, from the flesh up to the spirit: because the carnal creatures, advancing by means of the ladder, become in ascending as it were spiritual. We must ascend to Him so that on high we may comprehend’.

The ladder in Dürer’s ‘Melencolia I’ has seven rungs; in my Index, I briefly referred to those seven steps under *scalas* and *seven*:
Once we become attuned to the symbolism inherent in numbers, we cannot fail to note that seven is the holy digit par excellence, hinting, as St Augustine said, at perfection.

Seven days of the God-created week, seven planets with their seven heavenly spheres whose music consisted of seven musical tones to which the seven strings of the Greek lyre corresponded, seven winds, seven vowels, the seven colours of the rainbow—the sign of the covenant of God with Man, the seven liberal arts as well as the number seven connected with Wisdom: the seven columns of her house and her seven daughters. This was the kind of intelligence which was as self-evident to Dürer and his circle as the concepts of Freudian analysis are to us in the twentieth century.

I have tried to suggest that Albrecht Dürer may have wished to indicate with pictorial means that there was only one solution to the melancholy state of mind of the main figure of his print: a leaving behind of rationality and unwavering trust in the mathematics of measuring, weighing, distributing in space, while striving for a weightless ascent to the house of Divine Wisdom as the ultimate goal on the pathway to perfection.

In the end I should deal with two closely allied questions: (a) are we supposed to consider Melencolia beautiful? (b) are we meant to assume that she was physiologically capable of soaring up the seven rungs of the ladder?

The years 1512-1514 were years of crisis. While Dürer might voice in his diary grave doubts about mathematics as the ultimate means to unlock the gates to perfect beauty (he might now speak of his desire to ‘wrench beauty out of nature’), he remained, for reasons I have indicated, an artist-mathematician, even in 1514, as, for example, the beautifully constructed interior of the ‘St Jerome’ print of the same year had shown. Modern critics have spoken of the figure of Melencolia as that of a typical Nuremberg hausfrau. I consider this ill-bred slander. We have valid reasons, I would counter, to declare Melencolia the incarnation of feminine beauty, at least in the eyes of Dürer himself and his Franconian contemporaries. Melencolia should not be compared to the familiar Gestalt exemplified in the present-day fashion-model or beauty-queen.

Melencolia, as a type of feminine beauty, was heir to a type of beauty which can be traced back by about a decade to the year 1504 when we find her, proud, dominant and naked, nobly soaring through the air in the figure of the so-called ‘Nemesis’ (see Figure 7).

Both ‘Nemesis’ and ‘Melencolia I’ can easily and legitimately be seen as representatives of the same beauty-type. If in our mind we undress ‘Melencolia’ and make her stand up while turning her to the right, we are bound to get the noble female who in silhouette shares in common the exact somatic outlines of the earlier ‘Nemesis’. Both females are ultimately late-Gothic nudes, with protruding belly, small breasts, powerful leg with pronounced gluteus maximus. That this was the type of perfect feminine beauty which accompanied the artist throughout his mature life, we may realize as we turn to a late
Figure 7. Albrecht Dürer, 'Nemesis', engraving. 333 x 229 mm (B77) ca. 1504, representing a divinity who is part 'Nemesis' part 'Fortune'.
Figure 8. Albrecht Dürer, 'Female Nude in Profile', Symmetria [Theory of Proportion of the Human Body], ed. princeps Nuremberg, 1528; the original concept may be dated at about 1524; our ed. Venice, 1591, in Italian.
(posthumously published) proportional study of 'Female nude turning to the right' that appeared in his book titled Symmetria, only published in the year 1528. Our Figure 8 is taken from a late-16th-century edition of this work which made use of the original woodcuts.

If it was possible and appropriate for 'Nemesis' to wing her way through the air, there was little that could prevent her younger sister 'Melencolia I' from climbing up the seven-rung ladder leaning against the House of Divine Wisdom, while there was much that pleaded for both being easily recognized as prototypes of Beauty of the classical kind. In sum, we may find expressions of this canon of proportional beauty in Dürer's work at the beginning and end of two successive decades: 'Nemesis', 1504, via: 'Melencolia I', 1514, to: 'Proportional Figure of a Female in Profile', ca. 1524.

Although the essay was in essence a detailed study of only one of Albrecht Dürer's works, the 'Melencolia I', I thought it might be helpful to the user of my unconventional index to have under the artist's name not just a limp: Albrecht Dürer, see passim—but a select few references (23 in all) to what I considered the highlights of Dürer's achievement here discussed:

Albrecht Dürer (21 May, 1471—6 April, 1528)

(a.) Geometria (Vnderweysung der messung (Geometry) mit dem zirckel (compasses) vnd richtscheyt (ruler), 1525) — 1, 5; 11, 44; 16, 68
see also: circini
(b.) Symmetria (Hrern sind begriffen vier bücher von menschlidier Proportion, 1528) — 1, 3 & 8 & 17; 16, 68/69
(bb.) "The Four Apostles" — 7, 37; 12, 47
c. the 'second Apelles' — 1, 3; 16, 72
d.) as art theorist — 1, 5 & 9; 12, 45
e.) the "Calumny"-theme — 1, 1
(f.) as creator — 1, 4; in general 2, 21/22 & 25; 4 end
g.) intellectual and religious crises — 1, 4; 3, 30; 4, 31; 7, 37; 12, 45
(h.) biographical description (Camerarius) — 1, 3
(i.) hand (fingers) described — 2, 18; 16, 72
(i.) as a humanist — 1, 3 & 4
(k.) "St. Jerome in his Cell" (1514) — 12, 46 & passim & Fig. 2
(l.) "Madonna by the City Wall" — 12, 46 & Fig. 4
(m.) a noble melancholic — 1, 5; 3 passim & 6 passim
(mm.) "The Great Triumphal Car of Emperor Maximilian" — 9, 42
(mmm.) "Melanchthon" (1526) — 2, 18
(n.) as an adept of mnemotechnics — 4, 31
(nn.) "Nemesis" (1501/02) — 1, 17
(o.) and Raphael's "Nude Men" — 1, 17; 2, 28
(p.) and syphilis — 6, 36
(q.) his grandiose style (Melanchthon) — 1, 1

In summing up my ideas with regard to the unconventional Index, I would say that I can imagine that a mechanized, computerized Index may have its function, and that is to satisfy the mechanized, computerized human minds and their particular, totally legitimate intellectual needs. The type of Index I have in mind should be more than the carefully tended cemetery of the ideas expressed in the to-be-indexed text. I have indicated that for me there should be a carefully attuned balance between Index on one side and Text, Notes, Illustrations, on the other. All those participating in the making of a publication which carries an Index—the indexers, the publishers, the editors, the critical readers, and
finally, maybe, even the author himself—should ideally share the conviction 'mea res agitur' 'my very own interest is at stake'. Ideally, then, a good Index should be more than merely a taciturn sign-post erected after all the rest has been done and is immutably crystallized. Otherwise we get the ordinary Feld-Wald- und Wiesen-Index which tells the reader how many kilometres he has to proceed in which direction, and at which locality he will receive further information, with the usual infras and supras, the ridiculous op.cits, the obscure qua voces, and the tantalizing see alsos. I prefer the Index which has a life of its own, which may pride itself on being the child of imagination, and which should enable us to spend a peaceful evening in bed, reading such an Index, as if we were reading a good novel.

The author presented the substance of this article on the occasion of the first international conference of The Society of Indexers, London, 14-16 July 1978.

Editor’s note: Wilhelm Fink Verlag München, the publishers of Joachim Camerarius (1500-1574) . . . Essays on the history of Humanism during the Reformation (Munich, 1978), have kindly given us their permission to quote extensively from W. S. Heckscher’s contribution, ‘Melancholia (1541)’, pp. 31-120. It is reviewed in this journal; see p. 58.