Indexing and index in LOGOS

LOGOS, The Professional Journal of the Book World aspires to the role of a cumulative reference work, with articles of international aspect and lasting significance. Indexing is covered in its third volume, currently appearing, authored, wholly suitably, by Hans H. Wellisch, Professor emeritus at the College of Library and Information Services of the University of Maryland. Dr Wellisch has contributed several significant articles to The Indexer, as well as a regular current-awareness bibliography through four years, and also written three classic volumes in our field: Indexing and abstracting: an international bibliography; Indexing and abstracting 1977–1981: an international bibliography; and Indexing from A to Z, published in 1991.

'The art of indexing and some fallacies of its automation', in LOGOS 3/2 1992, runs to over seven pages and does us proud. It begins with a definition of indexing as good as any we have seen: 'Indexing is the pinpointing of salient bits and pieces of information potentially relevant for future searches, as well as the indication of their physical space in the storage medium.' It reviews the history of indexes and indexing; describes basic principles and different techniques for indexing books, periodicals, and databases; considers the author as potential indexer ('Authors are often much too close to their works and are therefore unable to envisage how prospective users will search for information . . . Rare indeed is the author who can compile a good index. '); where indexers come from (retired professionals familiar with index structure and user requirements, those who prefer working at home, students of academic information courses, publishers' staff); professional societies; copyright; standards; and schemes for automating indexing.

This last topic is treated at length, asserting, 'Very few automatic indexing schemes have shown what is euphemistically called "promising results" . . . the three major problems of indexing—synonymity, homography and the indication of relationships—must either be ignored at considerable loss of effectiveness or they must be tackled by human intervention. The inherent flaw of all automatic indexing schemes is that they must necessarily rely on just the words of a text, without taking into account the infinite variety and complexity of human language.' Wellisch concludes:

The rising flood of recorded and stored information will need more and better indexing if effective retrieval is not to become a mere hit-and-miss game. The road to more effective and efficient indexing will not be paved by brute force methods based on mere manipulation of words, but by more and better training of human indexers, coupled with the improvement of computerized indexing aids in the form of automated thesauri and programs along the lines of already existing software that is being used today by almost all professional indexers, relieving them of tedious, repetitive and error-prone tasks, the better to perform the intellectual work of indexing.

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LOGOS initiated its third year of quarterly publication with the issue of its first index, to be updated annually. LOGOS's editor, Gordon Graham, muses in the editorial of the accompanying issue, under the title, 'LOGOS is for keeps', on what such an index can mean to an editor:

The index records not only subjects and authors, but every significant reference to a topic, a place or a name. LOGOS can thus be used as a resource for research or study, for checking facts or for background preparation for a conference or a trip . . .

The index leads not only to major statements on any topic of interest, but also to passing references. Of course, the scope at this stage is limited since it covers only two volumes. Even so, a quarter of a million words have been published, and a browse through the index will reveal a surprising number of multiple entries even at this early stage.

For example, there are five references to 'Italy', although no contribution has yet been received from or specifically about that country; twenty-four on 'copyright'; six on 'the European Community', fifteen on 'universities'; thirty-one on 'libraries'. The index also begins to include a useful list of names and titles of people in the world book community. Finnish architect Alvar Aalto is likely to remain the first entry indefinitely. Zimbabwe, the last, reveals we have as yet made no references to zodiac, zoology or Zwingli.