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ESSAY · TRANSLATION

One and Zero in the History of Art

Dürer's melencolia

German original: *Die Eins und Null in der Kunstgeschichte*

by Dietus Elbl

THIS ESSAY IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Deutsch · Français · Italiano

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With this we have arrived at one of the most important works of Albrecht Dürer, whose name likewise has to do with Tür (door). Albrecht came by his name as used today through his Hungarian father Albrecht von Ajtas, who - when he moved to Nuremberg in 1455 - translated his name into German and called himself Albrecht Thürer, a name that he soon simplified to Dürer and passed on to his son, who immortalised himself just as impressively with the title "melencolia".

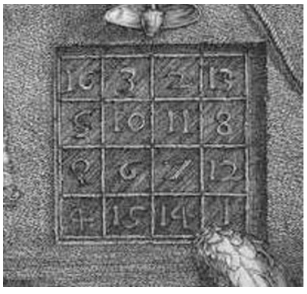
"Melencolia" has little to do with "Melancolia", or at least only superficially. Nor did the artist make a spelling mistake, for, as David Finkelstein was able to show, *"melencolia"* can also be read as *"limen caelo"*, which in plain language means "door in heaven" or "entrance to heaven".

In Latin one finds still more subtleties; thus the word *caelo* means both "in heaven" and "I engrave", which, as an ambiguous statement, fully applies to a copper engraving. Dürer's family coat of arms shows an open door (porta coeli) and is most closely related to *limen caelo*, since the door and the entrance are meaningless without each other.



Dürer's *melencolia*

The magic square is found beneath the bell of hours and shows a special feature that only becomes visible when one understands the square as a representation of creation from "emptiness" - *called "sun-ya" in Sanskrit and represented by zero* -.



magic square

For easier readability, the number structure of the above square follows once more:

16	3	2	13
5	10	11	8
9	6	7	12
4	15	14	1

Dürer completed "Melencolia I" in 1514, as the numbers 15 and 14 at the base of the square illustrate, although the lower row of numbers also expresses Dürer's name itself, since the 1st and 4th letters of the German alphabet correspond to A and D.

Because of the binary nature of the square, I would like to point to the theme of the mirror and to Islamic mysticism, in which *"creation as the mirroring of the divine name on the dark ground of nothingness"* is regarded, just as the heart is regarded as *"a mirror to be polished ever anew"*.

It is no secret that, starting with the Templars (who introduced Hebrew language schools in Europe and had a predilection for Far Eastern and Kabbalistic knowledge) right up to the Prieuré de Sion, all were in love with the theme of the mirror, and this stems from the fact that the world was born not from light, but from darkness. Whoever is interested in essence will therefore learn to love the night, the moon and women. Now, how does this show itself in this work?

Our magic square, symmetrical to the centre, has column and row sums of the numerical value 34 or 2 times 17, whereby all pairs of numbers mirrored across the middle each give the number 17. Apart from these fixed number relations there are, as mentioned, two readings or points of view that help to unlock the inner message of the magic square. The difference is rooted in the beginning itself and has to do with the binary system (as the basis of the computer), which contains the numbers 1 and 0, as the following parts of the text also indicate:

The self-confident man, or black jack (17+4) is a fine game, or why everything should begin with one:

Beginning with 1

16	3	2	13
5	10	11	8
9	6	7	12
4	15	14	1

The self-confident woman, or why darkness is delicious, or why everything begins with zero:

Here we likewise fill the magic square with 16 numbers, but instead of 1 we begin with 0 and complete everything according to the above pattern, so that all symmetries are preserved:

Beginning with zero

15	2	1	12
4	9	10	7
8	5	6	11
3	14	13	0

The year 1514, characteristic of Albrecht Dürer's dating of his work, has changed into 1314 when read the wrong way round. This is gratifying insofar as we have thereby established a connection both to the 22nd Grand Master of the Templars - Jacques de Molay, died 1314 - and to Joan of Arc, who became immortal in 1431, as they say.

These references to persons and events are intended not only to emphasise magic and mysticism as the central element of the square, but also to stake out the field (square) on which the contents offered can be better understood. The numbers themselves stand for immaterial and form-giving principles or ideas, and the "history" recorded by us illustrates how human beings deal with these archetypes. In order to better understand the essence of creation from emptiness and the dark space of the worlds, we again fill the above square with numbers, but now, instead of the decimal notation of the numbers, we use their *binary* forms, as listed below:

binary representation of the decimal numbers 0 to 15:

0 → 0	08 → 1000
1 → 1	09 → 1001
2 → 10	10 → 1010
3 → 11	11 → 1011
4 → 100	12 → 1100
5 → 101	13 → 1101
6 → 110	14 → 1110
7 → 111	15 → 1111

note: with each of the numbers 2,4,8,16 etc. a new binary place is added

magic square in binary representation

1111	10	1	1100
100	1001	1010	111
1000	101	110	1011
11	1110	1101	0

To make the whole somewhat clearer, we now complete all binary representations to four-digit quantities, which does not change the value of the numbers, since, for example, the number 3 can be written in binary as 11,011 or 0011.

decimal 3 = binary 11 = 1 times 2^0 plus 1 times 2^1 = 1 + 2 = 3

Just as in the decimal system, the units place is on the right and the tens place to the left of it, with the only difference that here each place in the place-value system corresponds not to a 10 but to a 2. If we now add two zeros to the left of it - binary 0011 - the result does not change:

0011 = 1 times 2^0 plus 1 times 2^1 plus 0 times 2^2 plus 0 times 2^3 = 1 + 2 + 0 + 0 = 3

What is interesting here is that we calculate "Arabic" style (namely from right to left) and nobody is surprised by this, although we write from left to right.

We easily recognise the special elegance of the representation *(see also the table: magic binary square and the 69)*, in which the numbers are arranged mirrored across the middle of the square. Every number has a reciprocal partner with which it merges into a unity of 4 zeros and 4 ones each. The four-digit definition of the numbers is not arbitrary but expresses the 3+1 structure of all forms of being, which correspond to the "body-soul-spirit" division of human existence.

magic binary square and 69

1111	0010	0001	1100
0100	1001	1010	0111
1000	0101	0110	1011
0011	1110	1101	0000

6 binary = 0110 and **9** = 1001

> → *the middle 1001 (decimal number 9) and 110 (decimal number 6) also represent the biblical Peter/Cephas relationship or the cube with its surface/volume ratio of 6:9 and - viewed astrologically - the constellation of Cancer*

The binary pairs of numbers represent the Mersenne number 15 (1111) and its internal divisions (15 = 15+0, 14+1, 13+2 etc.), whereby, depending on the notation, the result is nominally either 15 (binary 1111) or – if the zeros do not hide behind the ones – 240 (11110000). If one chooses the latter variant, one has at the same time carried out the multiplication 15*16, which in turn leads to a Mersenne number, namely to 31 (15+16), which appear as the cradle of creation in the realm of numbers.

This in turn has to do with time and space, because we have divided our global coordinate system into 24 degrees of longitude of 15° each.

$$15 \times 24 = 360 = 360° \text{ of angle}$$

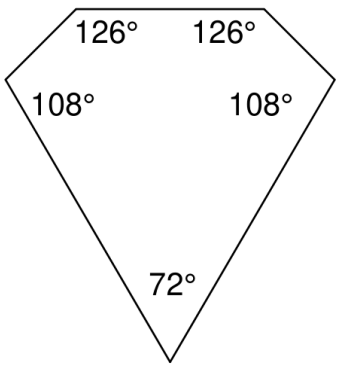
If we take a day of 1440 minutes as a point of reference and divide it into 15 sections, we arrive by this route back at our core theme, the cube:

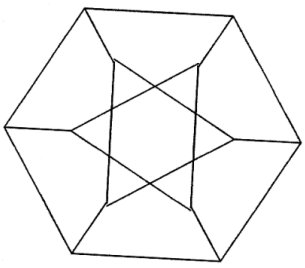
$$1440 : 15 = 96$$

What is significant here is that this magic square also embodies a world view that builds on the *female aspect* (darkness, "emptiness", zero) and does not continue the tradition of the Mithras cult, which pushes masculinity into first place in creation.

THE ROCK IN MELENCOLIA I

has not only a mirror-smooth surface, but a special geometry that builds on a truncated cube and in our case has 8 faces. The sum of the angles in the faces, which appear distorted, comes to 306° and consists of the following angles:





The "ruby" of *melencolia* · rotated view

The relations of the angles 72° to 108° to 216° are as 2:3:6, whereby half of the total sum, 153° (36° +54°+63°), points to the all-seeing eye and to the number 153, which is linked with the constellation of the Pleiades.

Since it is an 8-faced rock, the total sum of angles amounts to

1224 or 8 times 153 degrees

which gematrically corresponds to the numerical value for "fish" as the symbol of the creator Logos (Jesus Christ as the "fish god" Ichthýs).

F. Nietzsche, too, referred to creation in "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" and spoke of three stages of consciousness:

> *"Three metamorphoses of the spirit do I designate to you: how the spirit becometh a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child."*

The camel as "water carrier" (passive, female side) and foundation of creation is interwoven with the cube, as shown, among other things, by the card of the High Priestess in the Crowley Tarot. Here the camel, together with the lion (active, male part) and the child (middle aspect, zero, creativity), forms the basic trinity of the living.

In Latin the names for these three aspects are:

Camel:	*camelus*
Lion:	*leo*
Child:	*infans*

In almost all cultures the child (infans) has a closeness to the divine essence, as shown by the linguistic connection of German in- fanum and Latin fanum = sanctuary, temple = "consecrated to the deity".

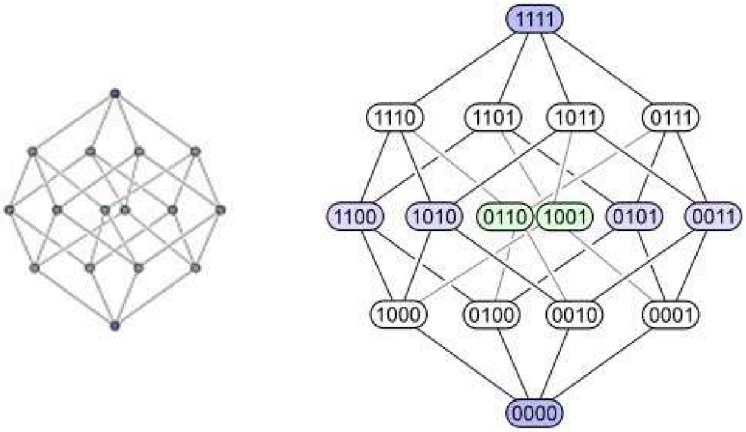
If one applies Gnostic knowledge and transforms the three terms camelus, leo and infans into a 5-3-2 sequence of letters, which renders the initial members of the number field (2-3-5, mother, child, father), one arrives at the following representation:

camel (5), leo (3), in (2)

As an anagram, these 10 letters form the word "melencolia", which, as a key, unlocks the door of heaven.

MAGIC SQUARE OF 4, TESSERACT AND RHOMBIC DODECAHEDRON

The representation of the magic square of four - building on the number 0 - corresponds to a 4-dimensional cube or "hypercube", also called a *tesseract*. It relates to the cube as the cube relates to the square, which is why the two-dimensional square symbolises the four-dimensional background structure of three-dimensional reality. The tesseract has 16 vertices, 32 edges of equal length and 24 square faces, and occurs in nature as the rhombic dodecahedron and as a crystal form in minerals of the garnet group.



Parallel projection of a tesseract:



Garnet

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DESIGN AND REALISATION LOTBLICK