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ESSAY · TRANSLATION

The Representation of a Number

German original: *Darstellung einer Zahl*

by Dietus Elbl

The essay as a film

THIS ESSAY IN OTHER LANGUAGES

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Because we are used to depicting numbers as mathematical quantities and quantifiable elements, we have gained a very limited view of these form-giving informal principles.
Although there are various branches of cultural history that shed light on the development of numbers, there exists, independently of them, a close connection to the formation of language and to the figurative representation of what is perceived. Among many peoples, each letter was assigned not only a numerical value but also a corresponding name or active power, which made writing far more than the recording of language-bound content. Because the depiction of a number required greater exactness, however, the written word was adapted to the requirements, and letters were either left out, added or changed. In this way the numerical value – to which a fixed archetypal meaning was linked – was to be preserved in its pure form. Just as in German the word "Himmel" (heaven) remains understandable even with a single "m", linguistic changes were formerly made in such a way that the original form of the term could still be recognised.

An example:
The first letter of our alphabet – the A – was originally a figurative representation of the head of a bull, which was later turned upside down and finally forms the beginning of today's ABC. In Hebrew the stylised image of the bull's head was known as *aleph*, whose name meant "ox" and to which the number 1 was assigned. This classification remained essentially the same in Greek, where the *álpha* with the sound "a" was likewise linked to the number 1 and to the beginning of a process, just as we know it today.

As Oswald Spengler already observed, *"the true essence of numbers has not the slightest to do with mathematical things"*. He therefore distinguished between the chronological number and the mathematical number, interpreting the former, with regard to its qualities, as "organic-living" and the latter as "logical-constant". This led to his provocative remark that "numbers kill", in the sense that they are subject to change in time, like every living being. Chronological numbers are linked with destiny and time, mathematical ones with causality and space. Both, however, represent two completely different aspects of number as an informal unit in itself.

This separation also aims at distinguishing the *ordinal* and the *cardinal* part of a number, which appear as partial aspects of it. The Maya of Central America already distinguished two forms of zero, an ordinal one ("the zeroth day") and a cardinal one (zero days), which also held true for all further numbers that arose from the unit 1. When we consider the power of a number (e.g. 3^3), the base and the exponent are obviously the same number, but not their "active power" or their cardinal component. The "shell" or form corresponds here to the ordinal part, the content or quality to the cardinal part.

This leads almost inevitably to misunderstandings, because we have defined the concept of number itself only as a collective term, such as "fruit". On the collective level, logically, no insight into the individual essence of an object can therefore be gained, because knowledge or recognition also needs a concept in order to classify what is at first still unknown. For this reason I consider it elementary to render the number 1, as unity and origin of being, correctly as 1^2, because it contains polar parts (male/female) and is inseparably connected with the square as a geometric form. Like everything in the cosmos, this **unity 1^2** appears threefold; its different aspects are:

Unity 1^2 = -1 (female) 0 (zero, child aspect) +1 (male)

On the level of language, the number therefore consists of the bodily digit part *cifa*, the soul part *cora* and the spirit aspect *cera*.

NUMBER = Cifa Cora Cera

One recognises immediately that the exact handling of a number requires a distinction according to its "inner essence", in order to avoid any confusion and false assignment.

From this point of view, the collective definition "number" in current use proves too weak to say anything in detail about its qualities of being. If you want to know which apples are bigger and which smaller, you must not examine pears and bananas. It is the same with numbers, for only like can be compared with like, in our case the number aspects cifa with cifa, cora and cora, or cera and cera.

As a suggestion, further possibilities follow for representing numbers as "crystalline engrams", "form-giving principles" or "spiritual atoms". Because every number springs from zero and zero is immanently contained in every number, an unlimited number of representations of the original "emptiness" can be found:

REPRESENTATIONS OF NUMBERS

as trinity	-1 / 0 / +1 and cifa/cora /cera
as relation	1 = 1:1
as digit sum	compressed, 125 passes into the number 8
as limit	1.0
infinite form	0.999999999999999
as infinite sum	1 = ∑ 1/2 + 1/4 + 1/8 + 1/16 + ...
as dual appearance	2/1 and 1/2, pair structure
through its gap	missing number in the period
figuratively transformed	13 → I3 → letter B
cardinal/ordinal	3^4
decimal/binary	9 and 1001 (cf. "a thousand and one nights")
through its partner	series expansion of 3 or 7

as nominal value	result = 1.61803398875
as formula	phi = (√5+1) : 2
as sum	89^{-1} = 0.011235955056
as continued fraction	1-1-1-1-1
as number series	1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55 89
as word	Greek: "αμην" *(alpha/mŷ/êta/nŷ)* = "Amen" = 1+40+8+50 = 99
as symbol	A and bull's head
as metaphor	phi and bees, light woven into matter
as date	Helios and 31.8.
encrypted	e.g. as a word: Anna, Otto palindromic
as building	pyramid, temple, calendar stone

COMMENTS:

> Bernard of Clairvaux, the author of the rule of the Knights Templar, was once asked "**What is God?**" and gave the astonishing answer: "**He is length, breadth, height and depth**".

> "Thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight", says the Wisdom of Solomon of God.

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