

On numbers.

(To be discussed with J.M. Levy-Leblond).

The alphanumerical code is hybrid. Letters are musical notations, numbers are ideograms, ("a" means a sound, "2" means the mental image of a couple). Letters have to do with speech and song, numbers with Gestaltic vision. Probably, two different cerebral hemispheres are involved here. Letters are organized in lines, they are, like speech, discursive. Numbers are usually immersed in the letter discourse, but they need not be. If we look at a mathematical expression, we see a Gestalt, a scene, a "Sachverhalt", not a discourse. Numbers are somehow extracted from imagination into discourse, when they appear in texts, they are not fully developed. The alpha-numerical code does violence to image thinking. This may be one of the reasons which had Kant say: "if a text does not contain numbers, throw it away". Computer codes, (especially digital ones), may be seen as a liberation of numbers from letters.

There are however various points which bother me. (a) There is a gray zone between numbers and letters. For instance: "A" is a symbol in formal logical, (and syntactical) analysis, meaning "class". Is this a letter or a number? Or is it neither? Or: you may write "two" instead of "2". If so, did you transcode an image into a discourse? Again: is the symbol "=" imaginative, (because it is reversible), or is it discursive, (because it is linear)? (b) What is logic? It cannot be reduced to mathematics, (see "Principia mathematica"), but it is not necessarily linear, (see Boolean logics). Is it linked to letters, (as its name suggest, "logos"), or is it extra-linguistic, (the logic of dreams for instance)? What do I do if I formalize logic? What do I mean by "proposition calculus"? Is this a synthesis between numbers and letters, (between imagination and discursive reason), or is it a lower level which underlies both numbers and letters? (c) What are synthetic images of equations, (for instance fractal ones)? Imagination delivered of letter tyranny? Or is it a different sort of imagination, different from mathematical imagination? What has it to do with "art"? And what about mobile curves on a terminal? Can curves be made to vibrate, (like sound waves)? Is this what Pythagoras had in mind? Is "pure music", (Bach), a meeting point between letters, numbers, and concrete experience, and is this what art is about, ("aisthestai" = to experience concretely)? Is Mondriaan a visual Bach? And are computers potential synthesizers of Bach with Mondriaan? (d) Is "science" a method to make such syntheses and if so, what do we mean by "truth"? The opposite of "error", or of "falsehood", or of "fake", or of "fiction", or what? Have numbers a different truth from letters because they "mean" something different? Is there something out there which is adequate to letters, and something which is adequate to numbers? Are the Jews seekers of literal truth, and the Greeks of "ideal" truth? The letters JHVE as against the image of the Unmoved mover? Is this the difference between Eneth and aletheia? Call us up, dear friend, sometimes next week, (when we are back from Switzerland). All the best to your charming wife, also on Edith's part.

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