

Guido Stemme

Between Aleph and Zahir and Vice Versa – Independence

EUROPA – limen vel limes

"sr": "независност", "it": "indipendenza", "sl": "Neodvisnost", "sk": "nezávislosť", "hu": "függetlenség", "is": "sjálfstæði", "mt": "indipendenza", "ro": "independență", "pl": "niezależność", "ca": "independència", "fr": "indépendance", "uk": "незалежність", "tr": "bağımsızlık", "no": "uavhengighet", "cs": "nezávislost", "et": "sõltumatus", "lt": "nepriklausomumas", "ru": "независимость", "es": "independencia", "bg": "независимост", "el": "ανεξαρτησία", "fi": "riippumattomuus", "ga": "neamhspleáchas", "de": "Unabhängigkeit", "sq": "pavarësi", "gl": "independencia", "nl": "onafhankelijkheid", "mk": "независност", "da": "uafhængighed", "cy": "annibyniaeth", "sv": "oberoende", "lv": "neatkarība", "be": "незалежнасць", "eu": "independentzia", "hr": "nezavisnost", "pt": "independência", "en": "independence"

Manway Manhole – Into, down into, up into the topic

Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.

“Stop aligning your humanness with collective Polishness. Be, each individual, human first, create your own Poland and do not let yourselves be created by it. Wake up from your giddy attachment to Poland, by which you are enthralled as if in a mass psychosis.”

In this 1951 quote, **Witold Gombrowicz**, Polish author (1904-1969), is referring to the nationalist attitudes prevalent pre-war Poland; the same could be said of all other states and all other times, of course, to the extent that – even if only here and there – there is a pervasive dark spirit that always also perceives the idea of patriotism as a devaluation of other countries and ethnic groups. Gombrowicz criticises the virtually encrusted institutionalized forms of life that we (may) encounter in the normative, ideological context, but also in art. He sees freedom – and thus also independence – in the exercise of the right to individuality, to intellectual freedom.

The fathers and mothers of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany may have had a similarly visionary idea of freedom and independence in mind in a certain sense when they enshrined the inviolability of the dignity of every human being as the fundamental principle in 1949.

As the preamble to the 1776 United States’ Declaration of Independence begins: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

And yes, in addition to the separation of powers, every democratic constitutional state has the declaration of human rights, the rights that guarantee our freedom, as a central element.

Thinking “independence” leads us into the deep layers of human existence, nature and presence, as soon as the – obvious – sociopolitical reference, which in turn can also be exposed in various depths, is set aside, or even overcome.

Philosophical reflections, proto-political considerations, political positioning

The tenth chapter of “Way to Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy” by **Karl Jaspers**, German philosopher (1883-1969), deals with the independence of philosophers. We shall follow his clear, concise presentation, broaden the topic and thus find a basis for approaching independence in its practical implementation.

“The independence of man is rejected by all totalitarianism,” as Jaspers introduces the chapter and thereby quantifies the essence of independence as fragile, as delicate, as vulnerable. Even “the habitual” and “the unquestioned commonplace” suffice to cause independence to “be silently disappearing”.

He sees the preservation of independence in several basic features:

Freedom from needs, ascetic life

Freedom from fear

Citizenship of the world

Jasper’s words, however, all too quickly give rise to pride, vanity, even the ugliness of hostility from the life of these ideals; independence turns into its opposite if it holds itself to be absolute.

Independence is almost always ambivalent, as he illustrates with examples. Hence, independence based on non-commitment leads to a “dead perception with waking eyes”, because it is precisely not anchored in the unconditional. It is found, apart from in itself, in the dictatorial language of wisdom and prophecy. The irresponsible play of opposites makes it possible to take any position as needed.

“In order to gain true independence we must not only elucidate these various forms of independence but achieve awareness of the limits of all independence.”

“Indeed, independence in the world implies a particular attitude toward the world: to be in it and yet not in it, to be both inside it and outside it.”

“Battle for truth and humanity in unconditional communication”

The path of independence cannot be otherwise pursued, it always leads from a procedural approach to positions that have an effect, as it were, in their political dimension; the experience of social responsibility cannot be separated from independence.

[The semitones were the major obstacle in the class struggles of the 1970s.]

Interlude – Or, those who avoid incomprehension

Light, prudence, logos – warmth, serenity, myth – sun, union in the right measure. In the right measure? What is the right measure, how is it determined, how long is the determination valid, where is the determination valid? If the question of measure is overdetermined by law, the essentials are lost; the measure is lost. And yet the procedure is maintained. The apparently more independent ones who seek to measure the extent of the process become unpleasant, stand out for their lack of reliability, are no guardians. The schools seek to wrap them in the usual corsets; often breaking free is successful, and the seed of opposition to all that is free is growing. Status and possessions are the

reward of destruction. Instead of feeding existence with life from emotion and daring, the safety of the final destination is preferred. But there will always be some who are naturally drawn to independence from within themselves. A phenomenon that runs through all cultures, all generations, all social classes and age groups. Salon culture, long forgotten, provides an image of this. **Leó Popper**, Hungarian art historian (1886-1911), writes, “We take from nature through art that which it takes from us through our life: eternity.” We should add that we give nature through love that which it gives us through our life: eternity. In this type of atmosphere, independence can be cultivated and lived. **Karol Irzykowski**, Polish author (1873-1944), writes, “The world can only take things seriously to a certain degree, at the decisive moment the valve opens, throws out the abundance and reduces the ideal to a bearable level. The safety valve works in man at the bottom of his soul; there is his sanctum, where he palters unobserved.”

The Aleph and The Zahir – Does Poetry Teach Us?

I presume that both works by **Jorge Luis Borges** are known. Should I be mistaken, I can only advise reading both short stories. What form of independence creates a mood that such thoughts find their way into the world in writing? We know that Borges spent his time in the Biblioteca Pública Miguel Cané (he endured nine years there), mainly reading or writing in the basement. He carried out the daily library chores in the first hour, had to adapt to the behaviour of his colleagues in order not to expose them as the lazy slackers that they were. Of the daily hours of the long ride on the tram to work and back, Borges reports that he spent the time reading the “Divine Comedy”.

Now if you know the stairs that lead to the basement of the library, the stairs that Borges walked up and down every day, and if you know that this staircase on a step (possible even the 19th?) in the lower part of the lower right hand side had a kind of spot, a small piece of flattened rubber used for repairing books, the size of a 2-euro coin, the trivial cause that accounts for the creation of the central feature of the Aleph suddenly becomes completely clear.

[The staircase has been closed since 2014. The basement is no longer part of the library.]

“Fortunately, it’s impossible to miss anything. In some moment, sometimes literally in the last, it appears out of nowhere and fills my entire field of view. That way, something becomes everything.” (**Zbigniew Bieńkowski**, Polish poet, literary critic, translator and essayist (1913-1994), from “Introduction to Poetics. I See and Describe.” [For **Vera**])

The Aleph, which is also the name of the spot in the story, unites/unifies everything (and it makes sense, it’s a pleasure at this point to have read the story) in a single point.

And the Zahir? In the eponymous story, the Zahir (a 20-centavo coin from 1929 in Buenos Aires, the size of a 20-eurocent coin) narrows everything down to one point, to itself. The Zahir creates an obsession in the observer; this fixation is focused on the coin itself. The afflicted person progressively narrows his or her perception until it is exclusively determined by the Zahir. – “...perhaps behind the coin is God.”, the story ends.

Can one create an Aleph from the Zahir? In many respects the Zahir is the opposite of the Aleph and yet both thoughts can be mathematically converted into one another (using the Riemann sphere and

the Möbius transformation | generic point, algebraic geometry). On the one hand, definite, on the other, indefinite ...

“One curious characteristic of the mind is that, besides its own self, it most enjoys thinking about that which can be thought about with no end. That is why the life of educated and enlightened people is a constant process of forming and thinking about the beautiful mystery of their destiny. It always redefines them, because that is its entire purpose, to be defined and to define. Only in its searching does the human mind find the secret it seeks. [...] The definite and the indefinite and the fullness of their definite and indefinite relationships; that is the one and all, that is the most wondrous and yet the simplest, the simplest and yet the highest. The universe itself is but a play of the definite and the indefinite, and the real determination of the determinable is an allegorical miniature on the living and weaving of eternally flowing creation.” (**Friedrich Schlegel**, German thinker (1772-1829), from *Lucinde*)

Bienen summen!

Bees are buzzing!

The overtones give birth to the fundamental tone.
(There seems to be a secret nexus to the Banach–Tarski paradox.)

Only Two Can Play This Game

...

Two limits of independence

coincidentia oppositorum (**Nikolaus von Kues**, German thinker (1401-1464))

Unica Zürn, or if Rilke had been a girl
(German artist (1916-1970))

Roman Opalka, or if Rilke had been a boy
(~~French~~ Polish artist (1931-2011))

Das Spielen der Kinder ist streng untersagt

Das Spielen der Kinder ist streng untersagt
Satt irrt der Spassgeist in den Dunkelregen,
satt des Kreisens in Plunder. Geigend startt
er in den Garten. Der Spaß litt den Tigerkuss.
Kinder, rettet den Sprung! Sagt leis: Reis, Sand
Spart die Genien des Sterns! Irrstunde klagt:
Das Spielen der Kinder ist streng untersagt.

Die Nuetzlichkeit ist aller Laster Anfang

Die Nuetzlichkeit ist aller Laster Anfang
Zart sang ein Leichenkleid aus Flitter alt:
Neuland, Angst, ich friere kalt. Alle Zeit ist
aller Anfang. Die Nuetzlichkeit ist Laster

Children Playing is Strictly Prohibited

*Children playing is strictly prohibited
Full, the spirit of fun wanders into the dark rain,
full from circling in trinkets. Violin in hand, it gazes
into the garden. The fun suffered the tiger's kiss.
Children, save the jump! Quietly speak: rice, sand
Save the star's geniusses! Fairy-Time laments:
Children playing is strictly prohibited.*

Usefulness Is the Beginning of All Vice

*Usefulness is the beginning of all vice
Softly, the corpse's gown, of old flittery sang:
Unknown territory, fear, I coldly freeze. All time is
all's beginning. Usefulness is vice*

Unika Zürn (Anagrams)

1918 1919 1920 1921 1922 1923 1924 1925 1926 1927 1928 1929 1930 1931 1932 1933 1934 1935 1936 1937 1938 1939 1940 1941 1942
1943 1944 1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1951 1952 1953 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 1960 1961 1962 1963 1964 1965 1966 1967
1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992
1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017
2018

Roman Opalka, »OPALKA 1965 / 1-∞« (excerpt)

That circulation, which being thus conceived
Appeared in thee as a reflected light,
When somewhat contemplated by mine eyes,
Within itself, of its own very colour
Seemed to me painted with our effigy,
Wherefore my sight was all absorbed therein.
As the geometrician, who endeavours
To square the circle, and discovers not,
By taking thought, the principle he wants,
Even such was I at that new apparition;
I wished to see how the image to the circle
Conformed itself, and how it there finds place;
But my own wings were not enough for this,
Had it not been that then my mind there smote
A flash of lightning, wherein came its wish.
Here vigour failed the lofty fantasy:
But now was turning my desire and will,
Even as a wheel that equally is moved,
The Love which moves the sun and the other stars.

(Dante – Paradise – End of the final canto | Longfellow translation)

and you?

There is no closure, no completeness.
More can't be done if thinking should stay fresh.
[and beware of any kind of Murti-Bing pills, focus "pierwiastek pałubiczny" (the pałubic element)
instead]

Koniec i bomba

A kto czytał, ten trąba!

W. G.

Sources:

The source of my text are the impressions, the encounters, the coincidences that resulted from my participation in this wonderful project by the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, in cooperation with the Poster Museum in Wilanów. Here it begins. The next step will be the exchange with the two professors of the University of Applied Sciences Mainz, Anja Stöffler and Julia Kühne, and the lecturers Hans-Jörg Pochmann and Jens Hartmann. Then comes the group of students who found their own individual points of entry into the topic individually a variety of ways. Their unbiased perspectives were and still are very enriching. I would also like to thank all those I spoke with about the project or who – perhaps unintentionally – triggered important thoughts, and I would like to highlight the seminar group on Friedrich Schlegel in particular.

Regarding literary sources, I explicitly consulted Karl Dedecius, German writer and translator (1921-2016), who, with his excellent and outstanding “Panorama of Polish Literature of the 20th Century”, gave me a deep insight into the wealth and diversity of Polish intellectual history, a perfect point to start. I would like to thank Karl Jaspers, whom I (also) consulted to a great extent, for his “Introduction to Philosophy”. On a mere seven paperback pages (Piper Edition), he succeeds in developing essential points of independence from a philosophical point of view.

Two Anagrams by Unica Zürn // from the Gesamtausgabe [complete edition], volume 1 // Verlag Brinkmann und Bose, Berlin 1988

I shall spare myself you a discussion of Dante and Jorge Luis Borges due to the limited space available.

The introductory translations of the term "independence" into European languages are excerpted from the source text of James Trimble's <http://ukdataexplorer.com/european-translator> project.

Video on the Möbius transformation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0z1flsUNhO4>