

Work Room



—Lynne Cohen

Youth

Know-it-alls. A great commodity. (*see* Intelligence, New Technology)

—Janine Marchessault

Zero

Zero is really nothing else but zero. But it would not be wrong to say that the zero was invented so as to signify empty space. That great confusion arose in the early mathematical systems as far as nothing was concerned. The Babylonians, for example, wrote “106” as “1. .6”, a subtlety that could easily be missed by a tired or drunken scribe. Without zero, an empty space next to an empty space (as in 1006) could easily be read as a single empty space.

“Zero” is said to derive from the Sanskrit “*shûnya*.” Indian civilization distinguished over twenty-five nuances of “*shûnya*” (the non-existent, the non-present, the unthought, the unborn, the immaterial, . . .) and India can be rightly designated as the Great Breeding Ground of Zero. It was in ancient India that was born “*shûnyata*,” a Buddhist concept that relates to vacuity and does not distinguish between reality and non-reality, thus reducing things to complete insubstantiality.

Zero is at the origin but it seems it may also be at end of a certain line, as in the ground zero of the bomb, the zero degree of writing and the zero of entropy. Whether cyphers belongs to generals, writers or scientists, everyone seems to agree that the universe is ineluctably heading towards a state of evenly distributed homogeneous cold dust.

While we are set on this ineluctable crash course with nothing, our world is for now one of weak truths, weak events and weak forms—a lukewarm buffet of near-zeroes where everything tastes the same and where architecture and cities are more about holes, voids and interstitial spaces than about actual forms. The zeroes of the cities are those empty spaces between form apexes. Not form that bites back like a hungry hyena when given mental space to do so. Sometimes they are voids but then sometimes voids are as form-full as solid sheer-angled blocks. The zero is often mediocre. As



in “you’re just a zero.” But this zero mediocrity is a fruitful mediocrity that can give birth to the beautiful and the unexpected. And beyond the Zero there is some fleeting thing, like ripples expanding around an empty center. While Hölderlin wrote in German: “But where danger is, grows the saving power also,” we could say that: “But where absolute smoothness is, grow the ripples of the Zeroes (also).”

— Michel Moussette