



ILGEN

The Creative Energy of Zero

Donald Kuspit wrote in 1998 about Fré Ilgen as a "Zen master of constructivism, making works whose minimalist geometrical elements seem mystically suspended in time and space." Kuspit writes eloquently about Ilgen and the spirit of Zen in his three-dimensional constructions. However, I experience Ilgen's oeuvre from a slightly different angle than Kuspit. I prefer the concept 'Zero' above the concept 'Zen', as a guiding idea to Fré Ilgen's art. Zen is the manifestation of the sublime here-and-now, the touch of being in the immediacy of the experience. It does not allow for any hesitation as the verb 'seem' seems to indicate in my quote of Kuspit. The power of Zero stems from a source similar to Zen: both derive from creative imagination, the highest and deepest faculty of human knowledge and understanding. But Zen and Zero represent different phases in the tension between being and non-being. Ground 'Zero' in Manhattan is not called Ground 'Zen' but Ground Zero, and for good reasons. Zero precedes Zen, while Zen is the transition between two Zeroes, let's call them Zero 1 and Zero 2. Zero stands for creative nothingness, knowing that it does not belong to the world of phenomena but that it represents the emptiness, the transition of phenomena. Zero facilitates the transition of a mathematical minus quantity to a mathematical plus; it allows us to think about death; about a deficit on our bank account; about the fragrance of the ephemeral; about the illusion of stability. Zero is the hidden source of the notion of infinity, because it destroys every countable number. Without Zero, the notion of truth could not come into existence, because truth as opposed to a lie depends on the human capacity to think in opposite terms. Only the concept of Zero allows us to make the transgression of one domain into another, to imagine another world than the one in which we exist. Zero represents the sublime before the sublime comes into being, i.e. into form. The (by definition hidden) presence of Zero in a work of art determines whether the work of art is a bow, full of tension and nothingness at the same time. Zen is the momentary negation of Zero, but just for a moment. The mastery of Zen above Zero is its child-like capacity to negate the presence of Zero, always present in our mind. Zen is without fear, even without fear of Zero. But it feeds on Zero to be sharp and immediate. Zero is first of all an intellectual approach to reality, in the sense that it maximizes the reflective power of the human mind. Zen, in its turn, relies on the intuitive and sensitive dimensions of the human intelligence. "The creative energy of Zero" precedes the geometrical constructions of Fré Ilgen. The result is the opposite of Ground Zero.

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