

Art for All: Lines of Tradition and Development of a Central Narrative of Art since ZERO

ULLI SEEGER

"'4 3 2 1 ZERO' is the countdown of a generation of artists who want to reach the light and the stars. From complaining about the dark past they want to reach a dimension of free possibilities. The new and the unseen attracts them. They want to overcome the heaviness of the earth, and art becomes the place of their dreams. ... Heinz Mack and Otto Piene also dream of a better world. Should they dream of a worse?"¹ Dirk Pörschmann and Mattijs Visser begin their foreword to their 2012 reprint of the three ZERO magazines with a rhetorical question with reference to Otto Piene:² How could one dream of a worse world if it wasn't a nightmare? The young family fathers Mack and Piene, on the other hand, dreamed a very concrete dream when they lit their first rocket for a better world on April 11, 1957, with the first of a total of nine *Abendausstellungen* (evening exhibitions). In their backyard studio in Gladbacher Strasse, which the two art teachers had shared with Kurt Link, Hans Salentin, and Charles Wilp since 1955, they began a series of exhibitions "which consisted only of a vernissage at night without the exhibition lasting any longer."³ A total of eight artists presented their works to a first small group of spectators on this evening. The background to this form of presentation was extremely pragmatic, as it responded to the lack of exhibition possibilities: "When in the middle of the fifties the activity of the younger artists in Düsseldorf increased more and more, no

gallery proved to be willing or able to take real interest in their work and imagination."⁴ With the evening exhibitions, however, a new era began, because it was the starting signal for highly successful artists' careers and the beginning of the first international art movement of the postwar period that came from Germany.

On the occasion of the seventh evening exhibition in April 1958, the first issue of ZERO, a magazine edited by Otto Piene and Heinz Mack, appeared. The catchy name ZERO was found as the "result of months of search": "we looked upon the term ... as a word indicating a zone of silence and of pure possibilities for a new beginning as at the countdown when rockets take off—zero is the incommensurable zone in which the old state turns into the new."⁵ In fact, the self-organized studio exhibitions transformed the previous state of artistic breadlessness into a new one of public recognition and appreciation. So it is no wonder that shortly after the eighth evening exhibition and the second issue of ZERO magazine, Alfred Schmela also became aware of the young Zero artists: already in May 1959, the first public performance of Piene's Light Ballet took place in the gallery, where later, in summer 1961, the legendary international exhibition *ZERO: Edition, Exposition, Demonstration* was also to be held. From then on, Günther Uecker actively cooperated with Mack and Piene and the three artists became the core of the movement.

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- 1 Dirk Pörschmann and Mattijs Visser, "Vorwort," in *4 3 2 1 ZERO*, ed. Dirk Pörschmann and Mattijs Visser (Düsseldorf: Richter/Fey Verlag and ZERO foundation, 2012), 7 (unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author).
- 2 "Yes, I dream of a better world./Should I dream of a worse?" Otto Piene, "Ways to Paradise," trans. Rory Spry, *ZERO*, no. 3 (1961), reprinted in *4 3 2 1 ZERO*, ed. Pörschmann and Visser, n.p.
- 3 Otto Piene, "The Development of the Group 'Zero,'" in *ZERO*, ed. Heinz Mack and Otto Piene (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973), xxiii, edited reprint of the text originally published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, September 3, 1964, 812–13.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*

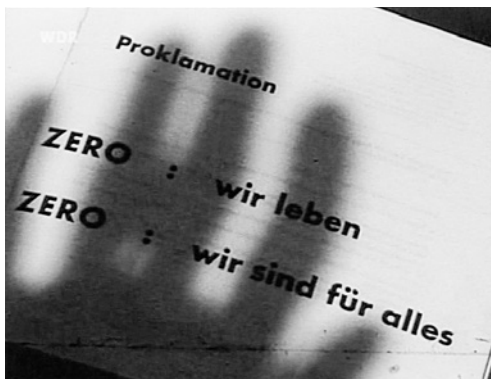
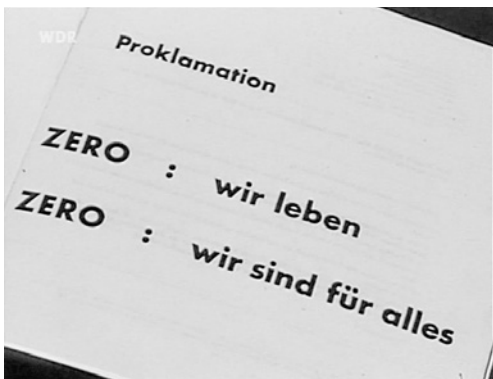


fig.1 ZERO: Edition, Exposition, Demonstration, Düsseldorf, 1961
Stills from *Hier und Heute*, WDR, broadcast July 6, 1961

The term ZERO soon developed into an international brand and also turbocharged their careers. Until the end of their cooperation in 1966, more than fifty ZERO exhibitions took place in Europe and the United States; around 130 artists took part.

The aesthetic improvement of the world, on the other hand, was less active and more characterized by silence. The artistic striving was aimed at paradise, the new and the unknown. Mack and Piene saw postwar art overloaded with burden from which art had to be cleansed. After the terror of the Nazi dictatorship and the horror of World War II, the artists sought a new beginning, a 'zero hour' that would be as unburdened as possible by the past. Otto Piene described the optimistic and completely future-oriented attitude of the Zero artists in April 1961 as follows:

For the generation of the Dubuffets and Tapiès, for the entire generation that preceded us, war and the earth were the decisive experience: earth, matter, sand, clay ... for them, that was protection, security, the world, the refuge in the hole, in the trenches, in the shelter, the last dwelling in the terrible threats of war. For us, who experienced the war only on the fringes, this experience no longer applies. ... or, differently, the war and thus also the earth were not our decisive experience. That's why we didn't feel fixed to the earth in our art, we don't care to bring its matter onto the canvas. What's the point? Our decisive experience is a time that dreams of astronomical, cosmonautical adventures in which man is able to leave the earth, to overcome gravity. We are interested in light, we are interested in the elements, fire, air currents, the unlimited possibilities to create a better, a brighter world.⁶

The artistic interest of the neo-avant-garde was thus not directed toward earthly reality, but toward cosmic, infinite possibilities. The program was thus

set out and the aim was "the purification of color as opposed to the informel and neo-expressionism; the peaceful conquest of the soul by means of calm, serene sensibilization."⁷ No longer was the subjective-individual gesture regarded as an adequate artistic expression of the postwar period, but rather the supra-individual, objective, and universalist; Zero proclaimed the "new idealism"⁸ of an optimistic worldwide art characterized by luminous monochromy. Instead of deploring the political situation, the artists strove for a change, not a revolutionary one, but one with the cautious means of aesthetic sensitization. On their mission of re-harmonizing "the relationship between man and nature," they employed little art-related phenomena and materials such as "air, light, water, fire as means of expression and form" because the artist is not "a fugitive from the 'modern world'"; he uses "the tools of actual technical invention as well as those of nature."⁹ The Zero artist thus not only adopts technical achievements such as engines, plastic foils, and aluminum, but also all ephemeral natural elements. In the new ZERO world, nature and technology are thought together in a beautiful and bright vision. The central keywords of the Zero group were therefore: color, light, space, movement, vibration, beauty, purity.

Heinz Mack's search for this new world, the very zone between the two states of no more and not yet, manifested itself in grids, rhythms, and structures. Later he 'painted' with the light that got caught on aluminum leaves, broke into corrugated glass, or was reflected by mirrors. Otto Piene remained faithful to the canvases, but also worked them with fire instead of paint alone. Soon Günther Uecker joined in and contributed his nail pictures to the movement. Like Mack's light steles and Piene's soot paintings, they are considered icons of postwar art today. "The work of ZERO seemed to say: The earth is habitable. A beginning is always possible. It's never too late. ZERO wanted

6 Otto Piene (1961), cited in Wieland Schmied, "Etwas über ZERO," in *4 3 2 1 ZERO*, ed. Pörschmann and Visser, 11.

7 Piene, "The Development of the Group 'Zero,'" xxiii.

8 Otto Piene (1963), cited in Schmied, "Etwas über ZERO," 14.

9 Piene, "The Development of the Group 'Zero,'" xxiii.

to encourage us," Wieland Schmied emphasized.¹⁰ Art should become the vehicle to make the dream of a better world a reality. The utopia of a more beautiful, brighter, and harmonious world is connected with the dream of the future new human being, who would ideally be put into a higher state by and with art and transformed sustainably.

Therefore, it was all the more important to address a broad public. In order for art to reach as many people as possible, the Zero artists developed extensive advertising measures that, from today's perspective, make artists appear to be real marketing experts: "The Zero artists wrote treatises, organized exhibitions and public events, published their own magazines or used the classic print media and the new medium of television to reach a broad public. They gave interviews, and with each statement new questions arose, to which they could give further answers."¹¹ At the end of the third and last issue of the *ZERO* magazine there was a logical "proclamation": "ZERO: we are for everything" (fig. 1, bottom).

In the spirit of a professional corporate identity, they designed iconic images, lettering, and layouts with a recognition effect. In addition, there were colorful hot-air balloons and costumes for women who carried the logo onto the street. The Zero artists also turned celebrating into a marketing tool. They did not celebrate simply for social reasons, but always as an expression of their philosophical ideas. The beginning of the ZERO festival culture was marked by the event *ZERO: Edition, Exposition, Demonstration*, on July 5, 1961, in front of and in the Galerie Schmela, where the third issue of the *ZERO* magazine was presented (fig. 1).¹² This event was recorded by the television broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR).¹³ Günther Uecker painted a white circle about five meters in diameter on the cobblestones in front of

the gallery. Helpers were busy filling a transparent plastic balloon with hot air, which then rose in the night sky above Düsseldorf's old town. The spectacle was accompanied by soap bubbles, which young women and men with ZERO cardboard dresses blew into the air. The gallery was boarded up. An oversized white arrow on the house wall pointed its tip at the word ZERO. The gallery was accessible in small groups only. Everywhere inside, ZERO could be read, and every time a customer bought issue 3 of *ZERO* magazine, the old cash register rang provocatively loud.

On the one hand, the ZERO artists recognized a kind of foretaste of paradise in earthly celebrations. On the other hand, a party was a perfect setting to generate attention. In this way, every exhibition and every action turned into a costume party to which everyone was always invited. There were celebrations on the banks of the Rhine in Düsseldorf, happenings in the old town, and even the Rhineland carnival (fig. 2) became a ZERO zone under Mack, Piene, and Uecker. The optimistically buoyant openings and campaigns turned into dynamic self-advertising with a high infectious factor. The 'party principle' guaranteed, in addition to a high influx, the hoped-for media response: hundreds of photos were taken that, in a time without a noteworthy public for contemporary art and without a real art market, provided some kind of media dissemination.

It may not be a coincidence that the group disbanded just at the moment when success actually came. After remarkable exhibitions in Amsterdam, Krefeld, Hannover, Washington, and New York, and participation in the third Documenta in Kassel in 1964, the "inner circle," as Piene called the three Düsseldorf initiators, ended the Zero group in November 1966 with a last major joint exhibition in Bonn and a rousing party at Rolandseck railway station in Remagen (fig. 3). This Zero

10 Schmied, "Etwas über ZERO," 14.

11 Dirk Pörschmann, *Evakuierung des Chaos. ZERO zwischen Sprachbildern der Reinheit und Bildsprachen der Ordnung* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2018), 164.

12 Tiziana Caianiello, "Ein 'Klamauk' mit weitreichenden Folgen: Die feierliche Präsentation von ZERO 3," in *4 3 2 1 ZERO*, ed. Pörschmann and Visser, 511–26.

13 Reportage in *Hier und Heute*, broadcast July, 6, 1961.

fig.2 Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker at the Shrove Monday parade, Düsseldorf, 1964
Photo sacha / ZERO foundation, Düsseldorf



fig.3 Zero-Mitternachtsball (Zero Midnight Ball), Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen, 1966
Photo Werner Kohn / ZERO foundation, Düsseldorf

midnight party also became a spectacular event.¹⁴ “No one should feel excluded. ZERO was not only ‘for everything’, but should also be there for everyone. ZERO evoked a sense of community. The exhibitions radiated enthusiasm, which carried away.”¹⁵ We are for everything! ZERO is good for you! Art for all! The desire to unite art and life into a Gesamtkunstwerk is already an old dream of the modern avant-garde, which undoubtedly found precursors in Romanticism and the life reform movements of the turn of the century. Art should encompass all areas of life, even penetrate into people’s everyday lives, and, as it were, shape them from within. In the neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s and 1960s, the old dream came to new life until it culminated in Beuys’s catchy dictum “Every person is an artist!” The concept of art had expanded many times and made possible the development from panel paintings to objects in space and ephemeral process and action art. The dissolution of the boundaries of the image has repeatedly been associated with an increasing democratization. In only one decade, the understanding of art has fundamentally changed. With the use of seemingly unartistic, everyday materials and performative techniques, the formerly separate genres have merged into one another. The field of art, like the universe and the emerging space flight, seemed to be in infinite expansion. Only one year after the dissolution of the Zero group, in 1967, another revolution followed that many also associate with the democratization tendencies in art of the 1960s. In Cologne, a completely new presentation and distribution format for art was emerging with the Kunstmarkt Köln as a precursor of today’s Art Cologne, the first fair for contemporary art. While established art dealers like Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in Paris turned away disgustedly from so much ingratitude of the art trade to the popular market, others

joined in the praise of an actual “art for all”: the fair as an egalitarian event without elitist inhibitions for the masses. However, the demand for an art for all in renunciation of academic, exclusive forms of image and expression is by no means an achievement of the postwar period, as will be shown in the second part of this essay. The question of democratization would also have to be renegotiated.

When the art magazine *Die Kunst für Alle* (Art for All) was founded in Munich on October 1, 1885, nobody suspected that it would develop into an unusually successful and long-lived magazine.¹⁶ The publisher Friedrich Bruckmann had already moved his publishing house in the 1860s to Bavaria, where he found ideal conditions. Munich developed into a center of the internationally operating art reproduction industry. The mass distribution of art became a lucrative source of income for numerous artists and was characterized by considerable sales success. Art had become available to everyone for the first time through the reproduction industry. While the high-quality art prints were affordable only for the bourgeoisie, the low-priced postcards also served the lower layers of society with picture motifs of all kinds. Friedrich Bruckmann had recognized the importance of reproduction photography, and in 1865 affiliated his company with his own photographic institute and a print shop. In 1884, Bruckmann founded the “Photographic Union” in order to be able to apply color reproduction. It was only through this new process that the technical prerequisites were met for putting a long-planned project into practice: the publication of *Die Kunst für Alle*, the first major illustrated art magazine.

With *Die Kunst für Alle*, a completely new type of magazine came onto the market, in which photographic image reproductions played a central role

14 Thekla Zell, “‘The Ship ZERO Is Casting Out Its Anchor, and the Voyage Is Over’: Zero in Bonn and a Final Midnight Ball,” in *The Artist as Curator: Collaborative Initiatives in the International ZERO Movement, 1957–1967*, ed. Tiziana Caianiello and Mattijs Visser (Ghent: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2015), 397–427.

15 Schmied, “Etwas über ZERO,” 16.

16 Here and in following I refer to the central essay by Sabine Brantl, “Die Kunst für Alle,” in *Ein Blick für das Volk. Die Kunst für Alle*, ed. Jochen Meister and Sabine Brantl (Munich: ART-Dok, 2006), 1–7, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2006/102>.

for the first time. It also played a pioneering role in terms of content: it was the first magazine in Germany to focus almost exclusively on contemporary art and appeal to a broad audience. Sabine Brantl discovered that its low price was equivalent to the entrance fee for a visit to a museum at that time. The journal was initially published every fortnight, from mid-1943 only every two to three months. It held its own on the market for an unusually long time and was almost unrivaled. In 1944, *Die Kunst für Alle* was discontinued due to the restrictions caused by the war.

First publisher and editor-in-chief was seventy-one-year-old Friedrich Pecht. After his studies at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste München and a less successful activity as a freelance painter, he appeared as a publicist from 1853 and became one of the leading art critics of his time. Pecht had been working on the definition of an art for all since the 1860s and had explained this term in several articles. For him, art for all was a synonym for popular and national art. The title was not at all new; even before the publication of *Die Kunst für Alle*, a series of works with this title had appeared. Between 1861 and 1866 the collective work *L'Art pour tous* was published in Paris, large-format sample sheets from the arts and crafts sector. As a patriot, Friedrich Pecht strongly emphasized the German nationality and also shaped the journal as an author. Like many German critics of his time, Pecht propagated the replacement of Paris and French art. In contrast to the "French fashions,"¹⁷ he turned to the German, the down-to-earth, which was to find its appropriate expression in a popular realism.

In 1888, *Die Kunst für Alle* had a circulation of 15,000 copies, which was to increase to an average of 18,000 by 1910. It became the market leader in its field. In the meantime, new art magazines such as *Pan* in Berlin or *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* in Darmstadt had come onto the market targeting a similar program as *Die Kunst für Alle*.

After Friedrich Pecht's departure in 1903, *Die Kunst für Alle* became more modern and inter-

national. Some articles were written by authors such as Julius Meier-Graefe, Alfred Lichtwark, and Hugo von Tschudi. They stood up for the artists of the Secession and the Impressionists. Especially Lovis Corinth, Max Slevogt, and Max Liebermann were appreciated in detailed reports. These three artists were seen as representatives of modern art after 1900. The magazine also focused on international exhibitions and artists such as Vincent van Gogh and even the young Pablo Picasso. In addition, there were reports increasingly about the Berlin art scene. However, the art of the avant-garde, today's classical modernism, was still almost completely ignored. *Die Brücke* was almost disregarded; some articles on *Der Blaue Reiter* appeared but no pictures. *Die Kunst für Alle* consistently represented its path of moderate progress and consolidated a pictorial taste that was decisive for a large majority for decades. In February 1933, in the first issue after the Nazis came to power, an article with the significant title "Die neue Stunde in der Kunst" (The New Hour in Art) was published by the editor Wilhelm Michel. The magazine obviously expected from the new rulers a new age in art as well.

At the same time, *Die Kunst für Alle* contained folk-educational slogans and catchwords such as people, health, beauty, purity, race, and space. They formed part of essays from the beginning and in all the Nazi years. For today's reader, the terms therefore provide a direct connection to the so-called Third Reich. These terms became buzzwords of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP, National Socialist German Workers' Party) and finally keywords in Hitler's speeches on art and cultural policy. But they had already been in use since the nineteenth century and were firmly anchored in the vocabulary of a nationally oriented art journalism. The idea of a renewal of art based on national origin and national identity ultimately paved the way for the art propaganda of the Nazi press that arbitrarily divided art into "German" and "degenerate." *Die Kunst für Alle* defined itself as an art magazine for

17 Friedrich Pecht, cited in Brantl, "Die Kunst für Alle," 3.



fig. 4 *2000 Jahre deutsche Kultur* (Two Thousand Years of German Culture) parade, Munich, 1937

Photo Presse-Photo GMBH / Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

the masses. Sabine Brantl hinted at the fact that it has not yet been analyzed which social strata the readership of *Die Kunst für Alle* actually consisted of, but one who undoubtedly belonged to its readership was Paul Ludwig Troost, the architect of the museum Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art) in Munich. Shortly before his death in 1934, he criticized that “the journal’s attitude did not fully correspond to the Führer’s line.”¹⁸ With the construction of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, a generally binding German art was to manifest itself, the implementation of which was guaranteed by Nazi art policy. *Die Kunst für Alle* also promoted the art of German painters but refrained from the inflammatory methods characteristic of the Nazi press.

Until 1935, *Die Kunst für Alle* had published works by artists who were later defamed as “degenerate,” such as Otto Dix and Lyonel Feininger. In 1932, a protest against the closure of the Bauhaus was even held. It was a point of view that would have displeased not only Paul Ludwig Troost. From the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in July 1937, the journal regularly reported on the annual *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellungen* (Great German Art Exhibitions), but it held back any exuberant praise. The propaganda exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) in the Munich courtyard in 1937—Hitler’s declaration of war on modernism and abstraction—was not mentioned by the magazine at all. It thus formed a certain counterweight to magazines such as *Münchener Mosaik*, *Kulturelle Monatsschrift der Hauptstadt der Bewegung*, and—in particular—*Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*. Thus *Die Kunst für Alle* was neither a reactionary battle paper nor did it go into opposing the art desired and prescribed by the party. Until its closure in October 1944, it remained a moderate organ of the bourgeois center that held still.

The ceremonial presentation of the German art to be promoted in the newly opened Haus der Deutschen Kunst was juxtaposed with the so-

called degenerate art on the opposite side of the street. Hitler’s concept of the two propaganda exhibitions in Munich in 1937 shows that the dictator made strategic use of parades and celebrations. A parade through the center of Munich was the highlight of the festival, which was held under the motto “Two Thousand Years of German Culture” (fig. 4). The program booklet stated, “With the figures from the distant and near past of German culture, we ourselves as a whole people walk in the parade of German capability, of German history. And we walk through the streets of a city consecrated forever by the sacrifice of the National Socialist fighters and victors.”¹⁹ The three-kilometer-long parade with thirty decorated carriages, 500 riders, 2,000 women and 2,500 men in historical robes thus became an incarnation of the art for all demanded by Hitler. The art is carried literally by the whole people, from the past into a new age, within the framework of a huge festival. In 2017, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the gigantic art spectacle, numerous new publications have been published on the popularization of art and aesthetics in the Nazi era.²⁰ The demand of art for all becomes clear under the conditions of a dictatorship—beyond a democratic society and beyond the freedom of art. Art becomes recognizable as an ideological means, as a folk festival with an event character, as a collector’s item and trophy, as a prestige object of performances, as an object of public reverence or contempt, and finally as an object that everyone could afford—at least in the form of a reproduction.

From Hitler’s aesthetic dictatorship we come back to ZERO with a wide jump. We have seen from history that the call for an art for all that is close to the people and easily accessible to everyone has by no means been an invention of the extended concepts of art since the 1950s and 1960s, but goes back to a tradition that has its roots in nineteenth-century nationalism. The later connection to democracy

18 Paul Ludwig Troost, cited in Brantl, “Die Kunst für Alle,” 5.

19 Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, “Deutsche Kunst und Entartete Kunst: Die Münchner Ausstellungen 1937,” in *Nationalsozialismus und “Entartete Kunst”: die “Kunststadt” München 1937*, ed. Peter-Klaus Schuster (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1987), 88.

20 See, for example, Karin Hartewig, *Kunst für alle! Hitlers ästhetische Diktatur* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2018).

is thus only a relative one and requires critical legitimacy. ZERO in particular had explicitly turned away from the individual subjective in Art Informel and turned to the objective universalistic. It is the harmonious-classical greatness and universality to which the Zeroists feel connected, not the special, deviant, and abnormal. It is an art that, in the total affirmation of technological progress, reflects the spirit of the postwar decades, in which successes in space technology led to unexpected fantasies of omnipotence. Piene, too, bears witness to this in his text "Wege zum Paradies" (Ways to Paradise), which from today's point of view is sometimes highly disturbing:

My greatest dream is the projection of light into the vast night sky, the probing of the universe as it meets the light, untouched, without obstacles—the world of space is the only one to offer man practically unlimited freedom. ... Up to now, we have left it to war to dream up a naive Light Ballet for the night skies, we have left it to war to light up the sky with colored signs and artificial and induced bursts of flame. ... Why do we not pool all human intelligence with the same securities which attend its efforts in time of

war, and explode all the atom bombs in the world for the pleasure of the thing, a great display of human perceptions in praise of human freedom?²¹

In Piene's "paradise on earth," atom bombs rise out of pure pleasure—a real nightmare.

From today's point of view, the gigantomania in light symbolism is also highly irritating, here again assuming light metaphysical undertones in an unpleasant tradition (fig. 5). Thus, Piene assured in the same place that he wishes himself so many and so strong spotlights "to light up the moon." And: the person who has "paradise in him" "follows the beams of light which he makes, they envelop him and the universe, the light passes through him, and he through it."²² Huge floodlights, rotors, atomic bombs, vibrations, sound waves, movement—the technical euphoria leads art out of the galleries and out into the street or into space. Art for all into space!

Surprisingly, the Zero artists—as seen in Piene's statement about their attitude cited in the first part of this text—felt 'only marginally' affected by the war; the war—so it was said—was not their "decisive experience." On the other hand, Heinz Mack admits an unconscious influence in a conversation he had with Tim Ackermann on the occasion of the great ZERO exhibition in Berlin in 2015: "In Riefenstahl's film *Olympia* you see at the end the *Light Dome*, of which I didn't know at the time that it was by Albert Speer. The visual spectacle reminded me of the bomb attack on Krefeld—which was also a light dome and whose afterglow and subsequent explosions I was able to photograph with my Agfa camera. Well, all this has probably already had unconscious consequences on my preoccupation with light."²³ In his most recent dissertation, however, Dirk Pörschmann was able to demonstrate convincingly that Mack and Piene "remained prisoners of a language that they thoroughly judged to be 'Nazi-centered.'"²⁴ And



fig. 5 Albert Speer, *Lichtdom* (Light Dome), Berlin, 1936
Still from the film *Olympia* by Leni Riefenstahl

21 Piene, "Ways to Paradise," n.p.

22 Ibid.

23 Heinz Mack, "Wir hatten einfach keine Vorbilder mehr!," interview by Tim Ackermann, *Weltkunst*, special issue "ZERO. Abenteuer ohne Grenzen" (Spring 2015): 6.

24 Pörschmann, "Evakuierung," 163.



fig.6 Ludwig Erhard reading from his book *Wohlstand für alle* (Prosperity for All), 1957
Photo Doris Adrian / Bundesarchiv



fig. 7 Sigmar Polke, *Sekt für alle* (Champagne for All), 1964, Froehlich Collection, Stuttgart

he notes, “It is remarkable that Piene, who was socialized like Mack in the so-called Third Reich, used this terminology in the postwar period to justify Zero’s art.”²⁵

It is these contradictions that make ZERO so ambivalent today. The works oscillate between cheerful, optimistic openness on the one hand and radical exclusiveness on the other. “Zero defined a zero point that not only never existed, but was also inherent in the consciousness of tradition and the past.”²⁶ The ‘new mankind’ should turn

to the future with strength and joy, and the ‘new age’ should leave behind everything small and small-minded.

From 1933 to 1945, the perfidious dream of a better and more beautiful world for a few became a nightmare for many. In the postwar period under minister Ludwig Erhard, the demand ‘art for all’ initially became a pure economic program for the development of the social market economy (fig. 6) that in turn animated German pop artists such as Sigmar Polke to ironic refractions (fig. 7). In the 1970s, the formula was extended to art in public space,²⁷ even to all culture,²⁸ or served as a political slogan for the cultural policy of the Social Democratic Party (SPD).²⁹ Art for all—a demand with very different contents and contrary intentions.

²⁵ Ibid., 161.

²⁶ Ibid., 165.

²⁷ Uwe Lewitzky, *Kunst für alle? Kunst im öffentlichen Raum zwischen Partizipation, Intervention und Neuer Urbanität* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005).

²⁸ Hilmar Hoffmann, *Kultur für alle. Perspektiven und Modelle* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1979).

²⁹ See, for example, the exhibition *Kunst für Alle. Multiples, Grafiken, Aktionen aus der Sammlung Staeck*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 2015.

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