

# Hans Haacke's Zero Hour

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Perhaps more than any other, Jack Burnham's 1969 essay "Real Time Systems" solidified the central position of systems theory in contemporary American art and secured for Hans Haacke a distinctive position in the context of conceptual art. Burnham begins the essay, traditionally enough, with an epigraph, but his is not a quote from Norbert Wiener, founder of cybernetics, nor from Ludwig von Bertalanffy, whose popular studies on the interconnection of biological and social systems had influenced Burnham and Haacke considerably. Nor did Burnham appeal in the pages of *Artforum* to an educated elite, as did Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood" (1967) with his epigraph from Jonathan Edwards. Neither from the realm of science nor the echelons of higher learning, Burnham began—rather unexpectedly—with a stanza from the Beatles' newly released album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*:

I read the news today oh boy  
Four thousand holes in Blackburn Lancashire  
And though the holes were rather small  
They had to count them all  
Now they know how many holes it takes  
To fill the Albert Hall  
I'd love to turn you on.<sup>1</sup>

The decision to open his essay with John Lennon's "A Day in the Life" is, on the surface, strikingly incongruous. Unlike Fried's text, there is no dramatic moment of revelation regarding its intended application. Indeed, Burnham seems not to have noticed it at all.

Yet its subtle hail to the absurdity and erotics that arise from information analysis renders it perfect for his task. For through Lennon's negative/positive sleight of hand, four thousand potholes gained enough material status to fill the

esteemed Albert Hall. Just like that, a void was institutionalized and the institution itself riddled with holes.

The citation well describes the task of the art historian revisiting the 1960s and '70s: part information gathering, part systems analysis, part entertainment. This paper takes one hole of Burnham's and explores it in depth: that of Hans Haacke's involvement with the German artist group Zero in the mid-1960s. The influence of Zero is paramount to understanding Haacke's artistic practice, even though he would reject associations with the group by the late '60s, for there were not only morphological similarities between the work of Haacke and Zero at this time; there were, more critically, structural resonances that lingered in Haacke's later works.

In 1965 Haacke proposed to "lure 1000 seagulls to a certain spot (in the air) by some delicious food so as to construct an air sculpture from their combined mass."<sup>2</sup> The proposed work, entitled *Living Flight System* (Figure 1), was the first of Haacke's to explicitly refer to systems, and although the concept was not carried out until three years later on Coney Island,<sup>3</sup> the proposal itself has tended to stand for a shift in Haacke's work and that of his contemporaries as well: the shift from object to system, or what Lucy Lippard famously called the "dematerialization of the art object."<sup>4</sup>

What is significant about Haacke's proposal, however, is not its status as a watershed in contemporary art, for as Leo Steinberg has written that moment would come much more forcefully with the cancellation of Haacke's Guggenheim Museum exhibition (1971) precisely because of "Real Time Social Systems,"<sup>5</sup> but its subjection to a series of critical decontextualizations. Jack Burnham cited Haacke's proposal in the essay "Real Time Systems," and Lippard included the

<sup>1</sup> Jack Burnham, "Real Time Systems" *Artforum* 8.1 (1969): 52. "A Day in the Life" is quoted with permission of Sony Records from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, released in 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Burnham (1969) 52.

<sup>3</sup> The project was then titled *Live Airborne System, November 30, 1968*.

<sup>4</sup> Such a shift was more than the dissolving of material art, more than a change from paint on canvas to steam on roof: it was a political shift that reflected the postwar transition from a goods-producing society to a service society in which knowledge and information replaced financial capital as the strategic resource. Critics like Burnham ac-

knowledged the origins of systems analysis as "the military-industrial strategy of the Vietnam War meant to 'solve' mega-dollar problems in logistics and weaponry," yet beneath these concerns remained a certain cautious optimism about the possibilities of real time systems to effect change. Jack Burnham, "Hans Haacke: Wind and Water Sculpture," *TriQuarterly Supplement* [Evanston, IL] 1 (1967). For more on this shift from object to system in the art of the 1960s, see Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Leo Steinberg, "Some of Hans Haacke's Works Considered as Fine Art," in Brian Wallis, ed. *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986) 8–19.

1968 manifestation of the project in her *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, to name just two examples.<sup>6</sup> In each case, the project was isolated from its original context, the exhibition *Zero op Zea/Zero on Sea*, scheduled to take place in Scheveningen in the spring of 1966.

While critics have retroactively explored Haacke's early works—setting turtles free (1970), growing grass (1966 and 1969), freezing and melting water on a rope (1969), and hatching incubated bird eggs (1969)—in light of his political engagements, they have often severed them from the specific German exhibition history from which they emerged. The early works are, then, either grafted onto an American version of conceptual art, a trajectory that began with Burnham and has continued through current practice, or they are relegated to an experimental status, as if mere preparation for the artist's subsequent use of "more complex" economic and political systems. Several of Haacke's most outspoken supporters have gone so far as to suggest that the early works be disregarded altogether: as one scholar recently stated, "it is only when [Haacke] abandons systems theory—says I have to get rid of [the] von Bertalanffy that Burnham bought for me—that he gets to something real: real political agency."<sup>7</sup> Thus Haacke's connection with the German group has been, when not overtly ignored, relegated soundly to the footnotes.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Haacke's early involvement with the group was not at all marginal. From 1962 to 1966, Haacke participated in fourteen Zero exhibitions, including two major shows in Amsterdam and significant exhibitions in London, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. His work, however, has rarely been included in the numerous Zero retrospectives.<sup>9</sup> The omission of Haacke's work from these retrospectives is due as much to the artist's decision as to curatorial oversight, as when Haacke refused to exhibit his works in the *Zero aus Deutschland* exhibition at the Villa Merkel in Esslingen, Germany, although he was included in the catalogue. An examination of the ways Haacke's early work intersects with Zero, in particular, and European kinetic art more broadly, will recover something of the specificity of Haacke's practice at the time, by returning to the moment of production. The

argument that something was switched "on" between the early works and the later ones that gave them "real" agency is a myth of activation that insists upon a binary framework and presupposes an absolute break between the zero and the one. It is precisely this notion of disconnect that this paper argues against: Haacke's involvement with Zero does not simply function in the zero, "off," position.

Founded by Heinz Mack and Otto Piene in 1957, joined by Günther Uecker in 1961, and officially disbanded five years later, Zero was an artists' group that explicitly contested such a label, even while exploiting that status by exhibiting and publishing collectively. Instead of the word "group" they insisted upon "zone" and "network," hailing the new technologies of systems theory and cybernetics and, perhaps less consciously, the military connotations of each.

The "result of months of search...finally found more or less by chance," the name Zero was intended neither as an "expression of nihilism" nor a "dada-like gag," but rather as the designation of a starting zone and launch pad for artistic exploration. Thus, as a name Zero represented both the literal building blocks of a new information age—the world as reconfigured through ones and zeros—and the very unhinging of that mathematical logic.

The Zero "network" expanded and contracted considerably over its eight-year lifespan, and their exhibitions included Yves Klein and Lucio Fontana (often called the "spiritual forefathers of the group"), as well as Piero Manzoni, Jean Tinguely, Arman, and Pol Bury. Gruppos T and N from Milan, the Dutch group Nul, and the Japanese Gutai group were also included in their shows and publications. The international aims of the group, and by extension of their audience, were further underscored by the three volumes of their magazine *Zero*, which presented contributors' texts in their original language without translation.

What Piene called "the great quarantine, Zero" was established to hold at bay "the scrimmage of forms and colors, the dramatic closeness, the nightmares, the agglomerations of fear and despair" that had emerged in 1950s *tachisme*.<sup>10</sup> It inaugurated a space separate from the drama of the immediate postwar years, isolated from what the artists called

<sup>6</sup> Burnham does mention that the proposal was for an "art festival in Holland," but does not mention Zero. Lippard listed the work under the title *Live Random Airbourne System* in Lucy R. Lippard, ed. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973) 62.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Buchloh at the conference "Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics in Practice," held at Columbia University, 18 April 2003. Buchloh's division between the works of "systems esthetics" and the "mature—i.e. political—works" is well known and generally accepted. Such a conceptual divide between the "early" and the "mature" works, is not accepted by all of Haacke's critics, several of whom have reconnected the biological and political systems with regard to Haacke's recent project for the new Reichstag, *Der Bevölkerung* (1999), as in the work of Rosalyn Deutsche. Nonetheless, the separation between the two is implicit in many writings on Haacke, even when the early work is not at issue in the critique itself. See, for example, Yve-Alain Bois, "The Antidote," *October* 39 (1986): 128–44.

<sup>8</sup> In a 1975 essay, Burnham was explicit about Haacke's connection to Zero, and even acknowledges that Haacke exhibited with Zero artists in several major shows; but he quickly dismissed the German group's work, and by implication their influence, as "early idealism degenerate[d] into chic interior decoration." Jack Burnham, "Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art," in Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed: 7 Works, 1970 – 1975* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975) 127.

<sup>9</sup> To my knowledge, the first Zero retrospective to show Haacke's work took place in 2004. In Milan, a small Zero exhibition presented three Haacke pieces from the collections of Zero members Otto Piene and Günther Uecker. *Zero, 1958 – 1968: tra Germania e Italia* exh. cat. (Cinisello Basalmo [Milan]: Silvana, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> "Augen," speech delivered by Otto Piene at Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, September 1963.

the “poetry of catastrophe” and the “fashionable convention” of misery and melancholy.<sup>11</sup> In direct opposition to what they saw as sentimental pessimism, indeed to discipline and punish this spontaneous gestural, Zero focused on “dynamic optimism,” on purity, silence, and light.<sup>12</sup> To quote Piene: “Where [other] artists are pointing out the evils of technological expenditure, we don’t feel there are evils. We see no nightmare of machines.”<sup>13</sup>

Though the rejection of *art informel* and *tachisme* served as a common bond, such “dynamic optimism” distinguished the three Germans from others who took part in Zero’s activities. Their works have, for example, neither the irony of Manzoni nor the “conspicuous phoniness” of Klein.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to other European kinetic artists, Zero aimed not just for an integration of art and technology, but also for the utopian reconciliation of art, technology, and nature, emblemized by a space-age fetish of aluminum’s reflectivity, Plexiglas’s durability, and helium’s buoyancy (Figure 2). Mack, Piene, and Uecker did not strive to “colonize of the everyday” in the same way as did the Situationists, but rather to conquer the skies and seas. It was what critic John Anthony Thwaites described as the “organic sense” of their artworks that distinguished the German artists from their Dutch and French colleagues.<sup>15</sup> In his 1965 article “The Story of Zero,” Thwaites concludes, “It is extraordinary. They seem the perfect fusion of nature and technology.”<sup>16</sup>

Two images dominated Thwaites’s article: a close-up of streaming water droplets and a billowing square of fabric, captured mid-flight by the camera (Figures 3 and 4). Although Haacke’s name was not mentioned until the article’s concluding paragraph, these images of *Condensation Cube* and *Blue Sail*, respectively, were central to the “Story of Zero,” and they were two works in particular that illustrated for Thwaites this “fusion of nature and technology.”

Both the *Blue Sail* and one of Haacke’s “weather boxes” were exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in the show *Nul 1965*, a follow-up to an exhibition three years prior. In *nul* (1962)—Haacke’s first major show—the artist exhibited several mirror-reliefs in the room adjacent to

Mack, Piene, and Uecker’s “salle de lumière collectif,” which combined a “light-dynamo” by Mack, five light-spheres by Piene, and a rotating nail-work by Uecker. On the heels of Zero exhibitions in the United States and Great Britain and a successful presentation *Documenta 3* (1964), for which Mack, Piene, and Uecker had reconstructed their collective installation, *Nul 1965* was an ambitious successor to *nul*.<sup>17</sup> While Haacke’s exhibited works had changed from mirror-reliefs to wind and water pieces, the impetus behind them had not: *indeterminate* was the word Haacke used to describe them in both 1962 and 1965.

The aluminum mirror-reliefs created in the early ‘60s were very much like those of Mack, whose textured patterns on metal refracted and reflected light. Shifting between real and reflected space, materiality and immateriality, Mack’s reliefs were indefinite and inexact, and this was precisely what intrigued Haacke: “Their indetermination—that’s what fascinates me.”<sup>18</sup>

From 1962 to 1965, “indeterminacy” was presented as a concept in several variations: containers of oil and water could be turned over by the spectator, so that the immiscible liquids floated slowly past one another, and towers filled with water that dripped through layers of perforated acrylic could be inverted. *Large Wave* (1965) was a thin Plexiglas box, filled partially with water and suspended from the ceiling. By pushing the plastic, the viewer created waves that rolled from one side to the other and bounced off the ends until the turbulence inside returned to stillness. The works had the aura of science museum displays: exhibited at different heights (some hung at eye level, others at waist level), they demonstrated physical properties and natural processes, particularly the way systems, when disturbed, seek equilibrium. It was not the homeostatic regulation of systems that caused such fascination for Haacke, but rather the way dynamic processes could be aestheticized. In his oft-repeated catalogue statement for the 1965 exhibition, Haacke wrote, “[M]ake something indeterminate, which always looks different, the shape of which cannot be predicted precisely. . . .”<sup>19</sup> Just as the attempts of kinetic and op art to literally set painting in

<sup>11</sup> Otto Piene, “The Development of the Group Zero,” *The Times Literary Supplement* 3 September 1964: 812. Piene continues, “We recognized the authentic interpreters of the Forties: Wols, Hartung, Fautrier, Michaux, Pollock and De Kooning; but we did not feel any need to assume their position. We opposed them as soon as their existential experience and its expression were turned into . . . a handy spiritual convenience.”

<sup>12</sup> Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, “Dynamo,” *nota* 4 (1960).

<sup>13</sup> “Art in Orbit,” *Newsweek* 14 April 1966: 93.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase is Nan Rosenthal’s. See her unpublished dissertation *The Blue World: Yves Klein*, Harvard, 1976.

<sup>15</sup> John Anthony Thwaites, “The Story of Zero,” *Studio International* 169–170 (1965): 9.

<sup>16</sup> Thwaites 9.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Alfred Schmela offered Haacke his first one-man show in his gallery after seeing *Nul 1965*. Letter from Hans Haacke to A. J. Petersen, dated April 28, 1965. Stedelijk Museum Exhibition Archives, Amsterdam.

<sup>18</sup> “Leur indetermination, voilà ce qua me fascine.” Hans Haacke’s statement in the exhibition supplement to *nul*, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

<sup>19</sup> The entire statement reads “... make something which experiences, reacts to its environment, is nonstable ... / ... make something indeterminate, which always looks different, the shape of which cannot be predicted precisely ... / ... make something, which cannot ‘perform’ without the assistance of its environment ... / ... make something, which reacts to light and temperature-changes, is subject to air currents and depends, in its functioning, on the forces of gravity ... / ... make something, which the spectator’ handles, with which he plays and thus animates it ... / ... make something, which lives in time and makes the ‘spectator’ experience time ... / ... articulate something

motion belied their engagement with art as a fundamentally perceptual practice, Haacke's attempt to "make something" that could not be visually anticipated esteemed the dynamism of systems on a purely aesthetic level.

At the same time, the ideas of self-regulation and self-maintenance were steadily gaining significance in Haacke's projects. A work's reaction to environmental changes was increasingly separated from its visual clues and even from the viewer. It was with the weather boxes that the idea of entropy (a version of indeterminacy) from cyberneticians like Max Bense merged with concepts of dynamic self-regulation, central to the systems theory of Bertalanffy. The underlying independence of the works, and their adamant refusal to be taken in at a glance, distinguished them from their minimalist counterparts. Haacke's condensation cubes and ice sticks changed slowly and surely on their own, seemingly without external stimulus. No courageous spectator was needed to turn the works over or set them in motion, and the processes were physical, not perceptual. The cubes *could* function as records of the viewer's presence, anticipating Haacke's viewer polls, since they responded to the atmospheric changes that accompanied the spectator: when more people crowded into the gallery space, the external temperature rose and the cube acted accordingly; when a viewer cast a shadow over the cube, the temperature dropped and the system would again adjust. Yet the viewer was not required.

Condensation regenerated on its own. As light entered the cube, its internal temperature rose and water evaporated and condensed on the interior, slowly moving back down to the cube's base: more light, more condensation. Loquacious in their interactions, constantly adjusting and readjusting, the works themselves effect changes in other pieces. Haacke described it as such: "Air drifts play a role, light sources play a role, the temperature in the room plays a role, and naturally the changing relationships between these factors."<sup>20</sup>

Haacke's 1966 *Ice Stick* (Figure 5) was equally dynamic. A tall copper pole attached to a refrigeration element, the work covered itself with a layer of frost as humidity from the surroundings condensed on its surface. The work visually recalled, and parodied, Constantin Brancusi's bronzes, Barnett Newman's zips and Naum Gabo's kinetic wires, just as Jean Tinguely's *meta-matics* mocked the skilled hand of the artist; but more immediate in Haacke's mind were likely to have been Uecker's large nail works from 1965 and 1966. These

slender sculptures, nine-foot-long polished tubes meant to resemble the nails for which the artist was famous, each contained a fluorescent bulb, whose light was visible through a slit in the metal casing. Rising from a square platform and plugged into the wall, works like *Electric Nail* (1966) were manipulated by the viewer, who was free to move the elements or change the intervals at which the light flashed. Taking the idea of participation even farther, *Ice Stick* actively draws from its surroundings; pulling moisture out of the air, it registers that effect on its surface. In Lawrence Alloway's 1968 *Options* exhibition, *Ice Stick* was placed in the same room as another Haacke work, *Steam* (1967).<sup>21</sup> As *Steam* continually evaporated water, it increased the humidity of the room, thereby hastening the melting of *Ice Stick*, which in turn changed the atmospheric conditions for creating steam. The pairing perfectly demonstrated the definition of systems aesthetics offered by Burnham: "A dialogue where two systems gather and exchange information so as to change constantly the states of each other."<sup>22</sup> As Haacke put it, "Irrespective of what he [the viewer] was reading into it, the dynamic system took its own course. I was dealing with real stuff, on its own terms."<sup>23</sup>

It was hardly a big step, then, from the wind and water works to Haacke's *Living Flight System*, and to return to Haacke's proposal is to recontextualize both his involvement with and break from Zero. The *Zero on Sea* festival was to be the culmination of Zero's activities; had the financial backers not pulled out shortly before the opening, it would have been Zero's grand finale, for the group disbanded later that year. Thirty-seven artists from ten countries were commissioned to submit proposals for the three-week event, including the Gutai group and Fontana.<sup>24</sup> Mack, Piene, and Uecker, in collaboration with Haacke, had conceived of seventeen stations to be seen from the Scheveningen piers. Mack described them as "a flourish of euphonious and spacious genius," but this was a fantastical "circus" with distinctly apocalyptic overtones: clouds of smoke, burning oil barrels, one thousand red balloons alit with fire, and searchlights scanning the sea through the nights, "the whole thing like an air-, steam-, fireship."<sup>25</sup> Uecker even suggested painting a rocket-launcher pink.

To suggest why Haacke would distance himself (and be distanced by others) from Zero in the 1970s is thus not difficult. Against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, racial tensions, and the increasingly contentious view of American

natural ..." First printed in *Nul 1965* exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1965) n.pag.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Haacke in Wulf Herzogenrath, ed., *Selbstdarstellung: Künstler über sich* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1973) 61.

<sup>21</sup> *Directions 1: Options*, curated by Lawrence Alloway, opened at the Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee in June 1968 and later traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

<sup>22</sup> Jack Burnham, "The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems," in *On the Future of Art*, ed. Edward Fry (New York: Viking Press, 1970) 96.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Haacke, "Provisional Remarks," in *Hans Haacke: Mia san Mia (We Are Who We Are)*, ed. Sabine Breitwasser (Wien: Generali Foundation, 2001) 149–50.

<sup>24</sup> The show was planned by Leo Verboon and Albert Vogel of the Orez Gallery, The Hague. See Renate Wiehager, "The ZERO Spirit: action, demonstration, and teamwork," *Zero aus Deutschland 1957–1966: Und heute* (Ostfildern bei Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2000) 25.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Wiehager 25.

imperialism, the *Zero on Sea* projects demonstrate how close to untenable a position such as Zero's must have seemed. If it was possible in 1965 for Piene to say without irony, "The exploding atom bomb would be the most perfect kinetic sculpture, could we observe it without trembling," such a time had passed. If Zero had been negligent in dealing with their historical past, if their optimistic internationalism had smoothed over any postwar limits and prohibitions implied by their own experiences in the war, the few years that had tolerated such options were by that point over. After 1968, the ineffectiveness and impotency of such groups, along with the disillusionment of technological idealism, would have been reason enough to separate oneself. As Haacke wrote to Burnham in 1968, "No cop will be kept from shooting a black by all the light-environments in the world."<sup>26</sup>

Haacke's move away from Zero, then, may not be surprising, but the reason given for it should be, since his involvement with the group has been tersely explained by his naïveté. Such a characterization allows Haacke's involvement to be summarily dismissed, as if so childish as to render any exploration of it unnecessary and misguided, while sidestepping any questions of the group's specific European context and implying that Haacke's own associations with the group are beyond responsibility.

Naïveté on the part of Zero or Haacke had little to do with it. One of the significant reasons Zero did not survive the '68 moment, one reason why it became little more than "chic interior decoration" (in the pejorative words of Burnham), was its silence in the post-WWII years, a silence that was actively cultivated. Zero was, according to Piene, a "zone of silence," that "immensurable zone" formed from "a longing for silence, freedom, peace."<sup>27</sup> It was a silence that could be read as complicity, and one that allowed the war experience to be aestheticized without comment. "Up to now we have left it to war to dream up a naïve light ballet for the night skies, we have left it up to war to light up the sky with colored signs and artificial and induced conflagrations."<sup>28</sup> Mack's sense of aesthetic community with the maker of the sign marking Ground Zero at the site of the first atomic bomb explosion reveals a troubling displacement of a historical register onto an aesthetic one. His breathless exclamation—"we used the same font"—could not be farther from Tinguely's *The End of the World, No. 2* (1962). While

Tinguely's piece makes clear the historical connection between site and destruction, Mack's work seems to enforce a willful iconographic amnesia.

Only four years after Piene's and Mack's proclamations, silence would serve again as the breeding ground for revolution, but then it became a battle against it. For 1968 was, at least in part, about the right to language and its political necessity. It was this clash that most trenchantly positioned Zero among the obsolete.

It is through silence, rather than speech, that Haacke's projects most effectively function. Silence, as John Cage taught us, can be rather noisy, and Haacke's numerous boycotts, pullouts, and cancellations of exhibitions have become part of his most effective work. This was a concept learned from Zero and immediately distorted, as if in resistance to the "great quarantine," and its isolationist approach to the political realities around it was refracted through Haacke's own wind and water works, themselves literally determined by their containers.

Treating like with like is the dominant technique in Haacke's projects. As he has often stated, he uses the enemies' tactics to best them: hence the metal plaques of *On Social Grease* (1975), the simulated advertisements of *A Breed Apart* (1978), the photorealistic oil painting of *Taking Stock* (1983–84). Haacke's meticulous efforts to determine the right antidote for the social ill he fights is comparable to a homeopathic method, "the controlled introduction of a negative element—a symbolic, or in medical contexts, real poison—[in order] to heal a system."<sup>29</sup> Homeopathy is more than appropriation: it is a method that empowers the element of disruption to become the cure. On a metaphorical level the homeopathic method is that by which the "work of mourning" is accomplished in a "process of elaborating and integrating the reality of loss or traumatic shock by remembering and repeating it in symbolically and dialogically mediated doses."<sup>30</sup> Small measures of poison are administered to the patient so that a tolerance can be built up, thereby enabling the individual to master the "potentially traumatic effects" of larger doses of the "morphologically related poison."<sup>31</sup> Rejecting Zero's call for quarantine, Haacke has also homeopathically cultivated his own brand of silence. If an insistence on exposure, rather than isolation, distinguishes Haacke from Zero, the maintenance of such silence is what

<sup>26</sup> Letter dated April 10, 1968, quoted in Jack Burnham, "Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art," *Framing and Being Framed* 130.

<sup>27</sup> Otto Piene, "Ansprache zu Eröffnung der Ausstellung Mack-Piene-Uecker im Kaiser-Wilhelm Museum Krefeld, Haus Lange, January 1963," in *O: Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, Günther Uecker*, ed. Wieland Schmied (Hannover: Kestner-Gesellschaft, 1965) 132, and Piene, "The Development of the Group Zero" 812.

<sup>28</sup> Otto Piene, "Wege zum Paradies," *ZERO* 3 (1961). Such a claim suggests that for Piene the violence of recent history has more to do with the gestural abstraction of *informel* than with the Holocaust.

<sup>29</sup> Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990) 21. Yve-Alain Bois has explored this subversive means with regard to Brecht's "On the Restoration of Truth" in his essay, "The Antidote" 130–34.

<sup>30</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects* 21.

<sup>31</sup> Eric L. Santner, "History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 144.

links his work (then and since) to the group. In his work, silence functions as the hinge, as opposed to switch, between his Zero-era works and later ones.

In 1970, Haacke set about training a mynah bird to say "All systems go" (Figure 6). The phrase, wildly popular at the end of America's first decade of space travel, has been attributed to astronaut John Glenn, who used it to announce his readiness for takeoff. It is emblematic of an optimistic preparedness in the face of technology, a "ready-set-go" for the atomic age. Part tribute to and part parody of Norbert Wiener, Haacke's *Norbert: All Systems Go* applied the methods of command used in cybernetics to harness a single element of nature. In communication and control, "We are always," wrote Wiener, "fighting nature's tendency to degrade the organized and to destroy the meaningful."<sup>32</sup> Haacke's absurdist attempt to force a bird to internalize this technological stance made comic Wiener's belief that language had to be employed against nature's entropic tendencies.

<sup>32</sup> Wiener quoted in William Gaddis, "The Rush for Second Place," *Harper's* (April 1981): 35.

The bird, however, never did master his task, or better, never succumbed to the mastery of language. When Haacke's Guggenheim exhibition was cancelled, lessons stopped, and the bird never spoke.<sup>33</sup> In retrospect, the failure of Haacke's lesson, however tongue-in-cheek, may be more telling than the gesture behind the attempt. The bird's inability to repeat such a phrase (one is tempted to say, his refusal to toe the party line) confirmed Wiener's fears even while ironizing them. Nature had resisted his attempt at organization, but its resistance retained meaning. *Norbert: All Systems Go* poignantly brackets the technological optimism of the rocket launch a decade before (Figure 7) and the cynicism with which reality responded to such a takeoff; it is the acknowledgment, however slight, that such a failure may still have something to offer. Silence, after all, speaks to change.

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<sup>33</sup> As noted in 1971 records, Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956–1991, Getty Research Institute, Research Library, Accession no. 910066.



Figure 1. Hans Haacke, *Living Flight System*, 1968, dimensions variable. © Hans Haacke, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Figure 2. Installation view, *nul* 1962 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Courtesy Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

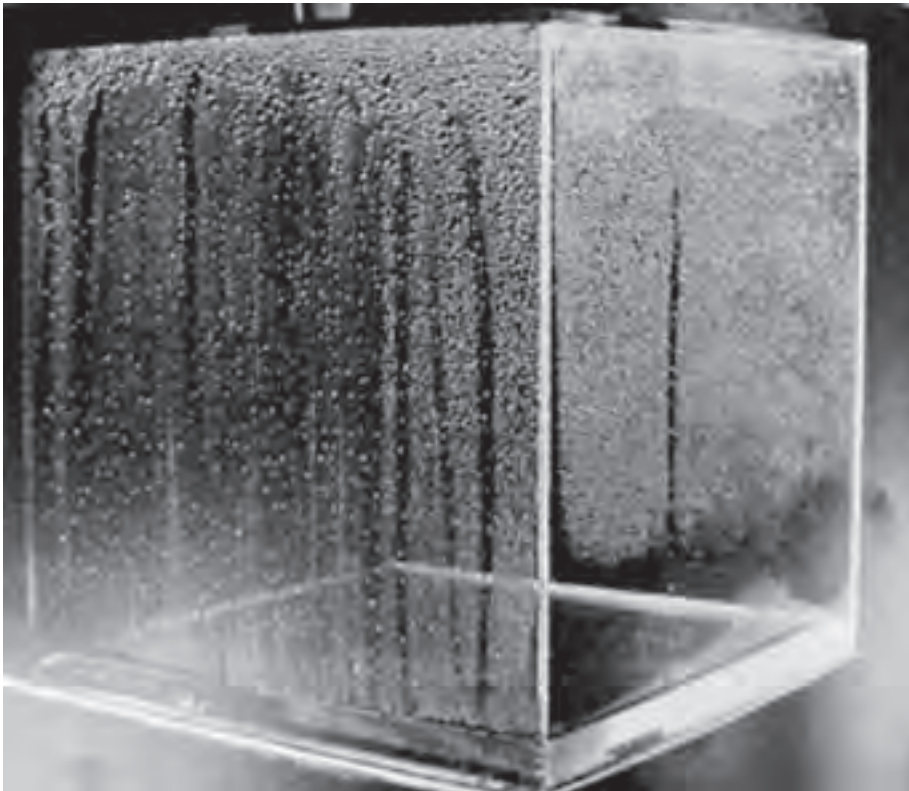
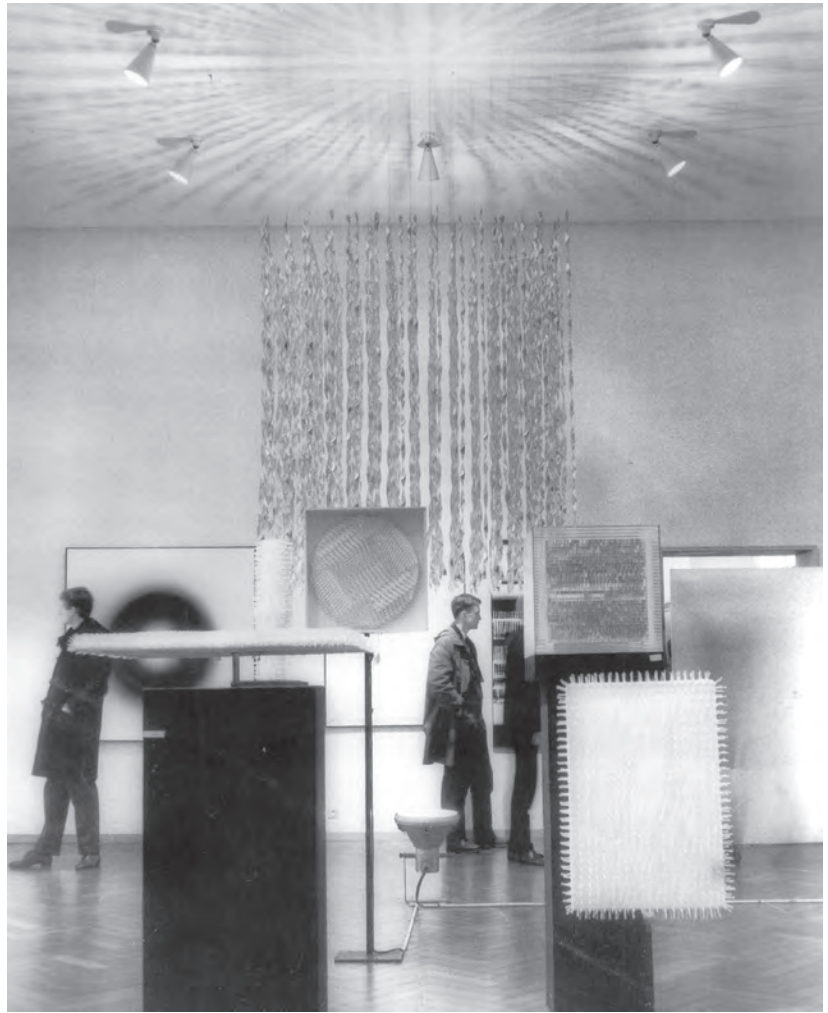


Figure 3. Hans Haacke, *Condensation Cube*, 1963–65, acrylic plastic, water, climate in area of display, 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. © Hans Haacke, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



Figure 4. Hans Haacke, *Blue Sail*, 1965, chiffon, oscillating fan, fishing weights, and thread, 134 x 126 inches, Collection San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, SFMOMA, Accessions Committee Fund purchase: gift of Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein, Mimi and Peter Haas, Patricia and Raoul Kennedy, Elaine McKeon, and Robin Wright, 2005.185.A-B. © Hans Haacke, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



Figure 5. Hans Haacke, *Ice Stick*, 1966, stainless steel, copper, refrigeration unit, frozen and condensed water vapor, Art Gallery of Ontario. © Hans Haacke, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



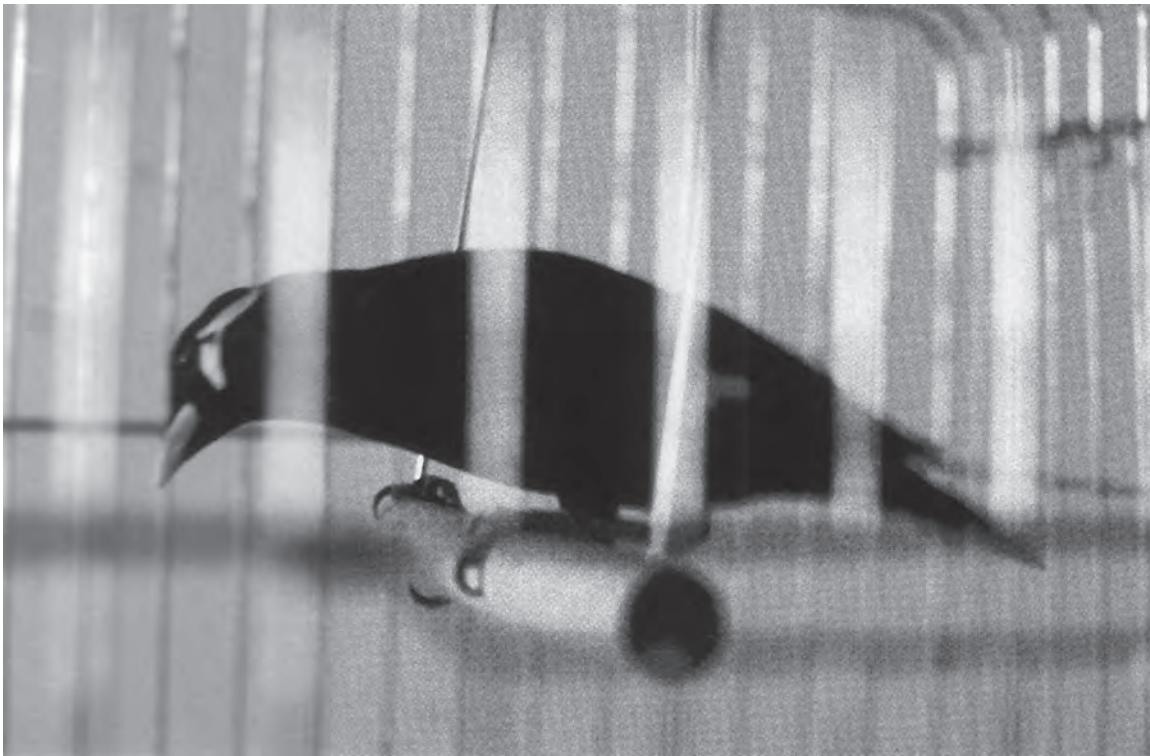


Figure 6. Hans Haacke, *Norbert: All Systems Go*, 1968, mynah bird and cage. © Hans Haacke, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

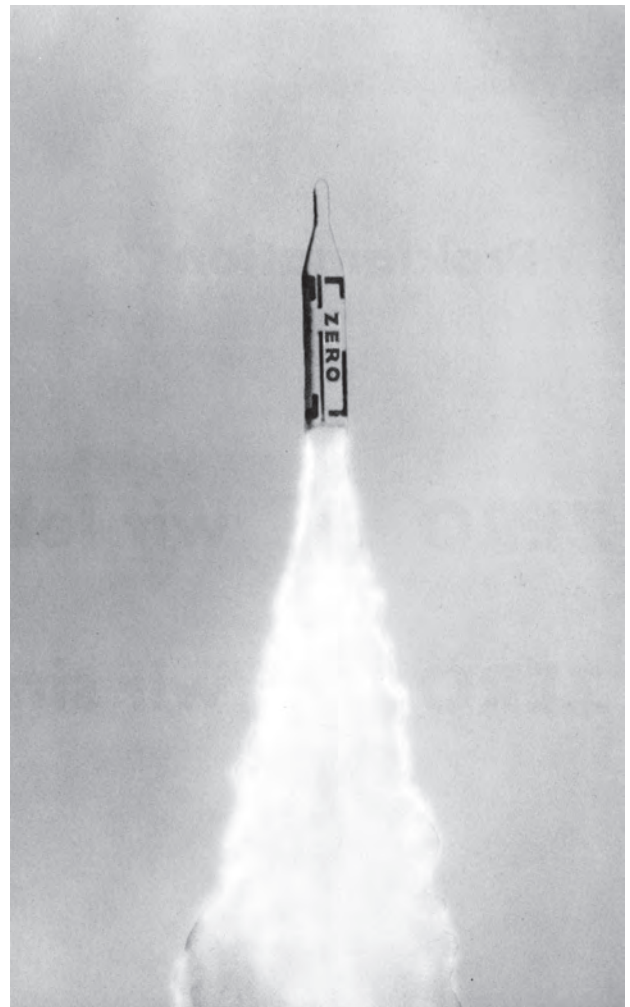


Figure 7. The Zero rocket launch, final page of Otto Piene and Heinz Mack, eds. *ZERO 3* (1961; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, reprint 1973).