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Fine Art Painting.

THE SUM OF THE PARTS OR A PART OF THE SUM.

By

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THE SUM OF THE PARTS OR A PART OF THE SUM

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## INTRODUCTION

The title is a reference to Reinhardt's 'Black' canvases which are divided into nine equal parts. Each part of the canvas reflects and defines the total, which is itself a reflection of each square of the overall composition. So the total reflects each part of the sum which add up to give the total.

This title also suited in defines the personality of Reinhardt, who was engaged with a wide variety of activities, artistic, political, economic and cultural. The title also reflects all the elements of personal activity one must go through to become a whole and meaningful individual. Each part of the whole is intrinsically bound to the total meaningfulness of an individual and a mode of production. Reinhardt is viewed as a person capable of both spheres of contemplation, macrocosm and microcosm.

Finally the title asks the question, was Reinhardt the most complete artist of his generation or just a part of the sum. Did he complete the Greenbergian formalism, thus becoming the sum of all the parts.

In the following chapters, Reinhardt's development as a artist and individual will be traced. He is related to his





contemporaries and the cultural production of the time. The chapter titles are a reflection on Reinhardt's personality and development as an artist. The intent of the proceeding chapters is to illuminate Reinhardt's intentions. The position taken in this thesis is a theoretical one, I felt that detailed discussion of the artist's work would be inappropriate due to their unavailability to me and to the general public. This is particularly important because the poor quality of Reinhardt's work in reproductions leads to complications of discourse revolving around the retinal responses to the work in question. Reinhardt's practice is usually confined to a discussion of formalist qualities, representing Reinhardt as a minor colour painter as Greenberg has pointed out. Or representing him as the precursor to Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland in a ongoing modernist painting tradition. Reinhardt's position as an artist goes far beyond the object production of his practice, newer levels of investigation and contemplation about the nature of art and its public, private, economic and cultural functions are raised by Reinhardt. These aspects of discourse revolving around the nature of Reinhardt's practice hold a more fruitful engagement into the artists practice and his significance to the art of his generation and ours. The thesis will show how misleading a purely formalist reading of Reinhardt is, leaving out essential information in the formation of a focused view on the artists functioning.



CHAPTER ONE.

DIRECTED BY GENES AND GENERATIONS.



DIRECTED BY GENES AND GENERATIONS

Ad Reinhardt was born on Christmas Eve in Buffalo, N.Y. nine months after the Armory Show of 1913. Politics were to play a major role throughout his life. Political activism on his part took the form of demonstrations on MOMA, satirical cartoons in PM magazine, publishing books and pamphlets opposing "old school" critics and signing anti war protests for Vietnam between 1960 and 67 which was the year of his death. Reinhardt's political activism originated at a early stage in the home. Parents, Olga and Frank emigrated to the United States in 1907 where they brought up Ad Reinhardt as a Lutheran and a Socialist. Frank who had been a soldier in the Tzar's army before emigration, was a keen activist in political affairs. Upon his death in 1957 a memorial oration noted that:

Frank stood firm in the ranks of the Union...he was working and fighting now to save Unions from becoming a tool for the oppressors of the working class... (and in his memory) we must put forth more effort, that liberal organizations and the liberal press might live.

( Lippard, 1981, p.9.)

Reinhardt emerged at a time of great upheaval in western civilization and in the American art world. Western man was recreating society, mass capitalist culture was developing into a



phenomenon during the prosperity of 1920s America. Mass expansion of industry through technology led to the inception of contemporary consumerism. Wealth and prosperity due to industrial expansion introduced psychological stability for Americans. Reinhardt was also to see the destruction brought about by World War Two, and the ill effects of the depression that followed. During the war over sixteen million Americans served in the armed forces, and more than four hundred thousand lost their lives. During the war the spirit of the European avant-garde came to settle in America fleeing from the destruction of Nazism. Modernism had its inception into America well before cultural values had fallen under Fascism in European civilization.

Reinhardt developed in the tradition of the European avant-garde. He was the first artist in America to practice the creation of abstract art from the beginning of his career to its completion in 1967. Reinhardt's career was a protest, the protest of the avant-garde which had a long tradition in European culture. The avant-garde crossed the water in 1913 entering American consciousness bringing with it the Modern ideas that were to shape Reinhardt.

It is generally asserted that the Armory Show of international art ( 17 February - 15 March 1913 ) provided the introduction of modern art into America. This show was to be of crucial significance to the later development of Reinhardt's practice. The show was the first





pedestal for non-representational European Modernist art in America. If anything the show demonstrated the crisis American art was in. The show exemplified the divergence between the European aesthetic and the outdated American predisposition to realism in art. The show consisted of some sixteen hundred items, paintings, sculpture, prints and drawings. Some three quarters of the work was produced by the Americans. The show also travelled to Chicago where it opened on the 24th of March followed by an opening in Boston on April the 23rd. In total a quarter of a million people paid to see the show.

At the show the Cubists and the Fauves were shown in force. Matisse had thirteen oil paintings including the important Red Studio and Blue Nude. Nude Descending a Staircase by Marcel Duchamp was selected by critics as "deserving special calumny".

(Davidson, 1981, p165.)

This exemplifies the distance the American art world's awareness had to travel. The large American section was littered with the traditional American aesthetic and the new European styles. There were works by the American Impressionists who were in public favour and works by the Ashcan School. American Modernist painters were also widely represented. At this point in time domestic modernist practice was only starting to form. John Martin showed fourteen paintings including four versions of the Woolworth building. Stuart Davis showed five Ashcan type of watercolours, Davis was also



interested in politics and at this time was influenced by the Socialist John Reed. For most American Modernist painters the show was seen as an encouragement to move in the direction of European Modernism. Many artists were directly affected by the Armory Show, Davis's style changed radically from Ashcan realism to an echo of the style of Van Gogh and then to " a network of quadrilaterals and partially diaphanous triangles derived mostly from Analytical Cubism.

" (Davidson, 1981, p.168.)

Davis was later to recall the significance of the Armory Show as the " greatest single influence I have experienced. "

( Rose, 1937 p.167.)

Milton Brown wrote that the Armory Show was without doubt the most important single exhibition ever held in America. It acted on the complacency of American Art like a powerful shock. Smug academicians could attempt to ignore it and act as if nothing untoward had happened but obviously something had happened, something which all the ignoring in the world could not undo.

( Davidson, 1981, p.168.)

The Armory Show brought a message for Americans in the developments of the European aesthetic. The message was a clear one : American artists and public needed to develop if they had any hope of grasping the future. The Armory show brought the fever and enthusiasm of Europe to America; the show's influence was



dramatic on the American art world. Over night the spirit of the American avant-garde was founded. Reinhardt was to receive the benefits of the Armory Show in the effects of the aftermath. The modern art scene as Reinhardt came to know it was built around the Armory Show. It showed two different strands which were developing in American art practice, the new modernist style and American regionalist painting.

Revolution is possible only in instances and domains where tradition is present. No tradition, no revolution

( Graham, 1937. p.57)

During the thirties the crisis of American art was answered in 'reaction and rebellion'. Throughout the years of the Depression American art was divided into two distinct categories which fought each other in the hope that one became the official American style. The two styles that predominated in the American scene were American regionalist painting and the European abstract aesthetic. The regionalists like Thomas Hart Benton looked to the past, the golden age of the American mid-west and its God-fearing people and their white picket fences. The other side of the coin was occupied by artists like Stuart Davis and the architect Frank Lloyd Wright who had accepted the new machine age and were going to work within what seemed its limitless potential. The American abstract artists were to suffer under the opinion of the general public and the Regionalists, as a foreign invader. Realism was chosen to personify





the true American condition and chosen to represent the real form of American expression. The one thing that did not separate the arts was the Depression, the Works Progress Administration was set up in 1933 in accordance with the new deal. The aim of the new deal was to give employment to those who were out of work due to the Depression. The Works of Art Project was set up by the Treasury Department and lasted only one year. However it was replaced by the Federal Art Project. The WPA radically reformed public opinion by making no distinction between abstract and representational art practices. The WPA supported both as distinctly American styles thus firing the enthusiasm of the avant-garde. It also developed the professionalism of artists who existed outside the academic circle. The programme gave artists \$87.60 a month and was of profound importance to the development of minority art in America. Artists had the opportunity to experiment and develop their skills to a new level. Most importantly it developed a community of artists who could interact and unify their efforts.

Amid the artists who worked for the WPA in the easel and mural divisions were Stuart Davis, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Marsden Hartley, Jack Levine, Hyman Bloom, Lolren MacIver, and Morris Graves. The younger artists in the project included de Kooning, Gorky, Pollock, Gottlieb, Rothko, Guston and Reinhardt. The WPA/FAP gave Reinhardt vital financial support at the inception of a professional arts career. Reinhardt was greatly influenced by the group as a young





painter. Stuart Davis who was also very politically minded exerted much influence over the developing Reinhardt. The WPA was also to effect him considerably, introducing him to many artists who had studied in Europe and were determined to form a new American aesthetic with the help of the new techniques of European modernism.

Carl Holty had studied with Hans Hoffman in Munich in 1926. Holty and an artist called Calder were the only members of Michael Schapiro's " Abstract Creation ". These artists were highly influenced by Mondrian and his Neo-Plasticism. Holty with his non-objective late Cubist machine style was to attract Reinhardt's eye and also alter his conception of the function and creation of art. Reinhardt's early career became preoccupied with the curving shapes and flat planes of Synthetic Cubism and Leger's machine art. The combination of Picasso's flat planes, Gris's interlocking still lifes and Holty's rich palette of close key colours are found in Reinhardt's work of this period. Reinhardt's work at this time resembles Cubist design with the palette of his American contemporary and friend Davis. Undoubtedly the above had it's place in the creation of the later Black works. Holty was also a very useful associate, he knew everything about the underground abstract scene. Furthermore he was a charter member and spokesman for the American Abstract Artists. The AAA was created in 1936 as a showcase for the unpublicised community of non-objective artists in



America. Due to Holty, Reinhardt was introduced to many of the group's members and a year later was elected to membership after submitting the required work for entry. Reinhardt's artistic political and social developments can be greatly attributed to the group of artists associated with the AAA. The artists to have influence on Reinhardt's practice at this time were Stuart Davis, Harry Holtzman, Rollin Crampton, George McNeil, Giorgio Cavillon, Balcomb Greene, and Burgoyne Diller, who was to sponsor him for membership of the WPA. Reinhardt like his friends and fellow abstract painters Davis and Holtzman epitomized a new type of New York artist of the thirties. These artists were attracted to Cubism and a Neo-Plasticist aesthetic. Reinhardt fell in line with the AAA policy of militantly defending modernist abstraction, politically believing modernist abstraction to be a social science and therefore a contributor to the cultural order. Reinhardt was indifferent to the bohemian sub-culture affiliated to the older generation of New York artist-radicals. Reinhardt's political roots stem back to socialism like many of the members of the AAA. In the thirties he was to find his political kinship in the practical appeals of the political left. Here he was to find his own culture in a environment of artist intellectuals. Reinhardt believed he had found a group that was collective and progressive in art and in social functioning. Reinhardt's belief in the social functioning of art can be heard throughout the thirties and forties in statements of a vocal and printed manner.



A sensitive organisation of lines and colours on a canvas must have ultimate social value... not until the appearance of abstract painting, at the turn of the century, was direct first-hand experience demanded for its understanding and a direction indicated for the ' democratization ' of art .... The rhythmic organization of a painting has always been its real value, and, in recent times, certain abstract painters have been able to explore the meanings in line and colour relationships by themselves. These relationships remain to be explored and exploited further, in social terms and in relation to people's needs, And this extension from the individual to the social is possible only under democracy and genuine collective activity, probably in the creation of good housing instead of merely good pictures.

( Lippard. 1981.)

Reinhardt's radical approach and militant speeches were a constant protest at his dissatisfaction towards the institutions and artists who held tradition as the voice of American art. In the late thirties American abstract art was a voice lost in the darkness of tradition. This would explain the radical tendencies of Reinhardt towards the art institutions who poorly represented the growing American practice. And Reinhardt's commitment was to the education of those artists and people who as yet did not know of the significance of the new practice. Reinhardt committed himself to the authoring and designing of broadsheets for the AAA. These broadsheets were a mass media exercise to explain to the general public how to receive and understand abstraction in art. The sheets also functioned as protest to various institutions who claimed to





be American, yet were far more devoted to the European Modernist aesthetic.

Alfred Barr was appointed the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929 the year of the institute's inception. Barr was an art historian, and extremely young to fill such a crucial position. During the first year Barr had ten major shows with the intention of informing and educating the visually illiterate American public. Although he managed to inform and educate the American public, the question had to be asked, and Reinhardt did, in the publication of his design for a protest on the Museum of Non-objective Art:

" How modern is the Museum of Modern Art ? "

Barr had created an evident gulf between the Institution and the American contemporary artist; a complication that was further exaggerated by the class consciousness; hence the reactionary fever of the abstract artists of the period. Reinhardt was a model progressive artist, molded in the European avant-garde tradition. Reinhardt's battle cry was for the new. Like so many previous Europeans, this is exemplified in his many cartoons and publication in so many mass media pamphlets. Reinhardt was appointed the role of proselytizer for the AAA and other more political radical magazines, (P.M.). The pamphlets and broadsheets which Reinhardt





produced can be seen as manifestos somewhat similar in spirit to the earlier European cries of the Futurists, intoxicated with enthusiasm. For Reinhardt the position he occupied was logical and necessary, his peers had educated him in the European aesthetic and for him it was the most logical progression towards expressing the times, just as Jazz music was recreating the rythmn of the bustling city. The gulf that Barr had created was rectified by the needs of the abstract artists, the need to be heard and identified as an association of artists. The group's aim was to educate Americans to be more sympathetic to American abstraction, showing it to have the same relevance as the European version. European modernism of this period was championed far above the American modernist position. This can be seen in the demand for European artists' works and the prices they commanded over their contemporaries in America. This was due in part to the poor exposure Barr had given to Reinhardt and his contemporaries. The problem can also be attributed to the lack of a contemporary language which did not lean heavily on a European aesthetic of one form or another. However Barr's complacency acted as a positive step forward in the development of abstract art in America. These aims were to be achieved in the form of the founding of the American Abstract Artists. The group gave a platform for the development of American abstraction, in the form of exhibitions and lectures. Reinhardt was to give many lectures on the functioning, purpose and appreciation of modern art. The AAA also gave artists with similar concerns the opportunity to meet and



talk. In this regard it functioned as a Parisian cafe. Reinhardt's involvement is crucial to his development; the group was a source of democracy, debate and the production of reform. Another reason for the inception of an artist's group is given by David Hare:

I think this group activity, this gathering together is a symptom of fear, possibly you could connect this with the question of mass production, in the sense that in this country there is a feeling that unless you have a large public you are a failure. To which the other arch individualist Ad Reinhardt replied that all the same, why couldn't the group find out what their community is and what their differences are ?

( Ashton. 1972, p.200. )

Reform is Reinhardt's single strongest influence throughout the thirties and forties. The group functioned as a womb for the developing consciousness of Reinhardt, not only in political terms, demonstrations and protests, but in the artistic guidance employed by the group to the development of Reinhardt's production. The space in which Reinhardt worked in the mid-thirties and forties was deeply occupied by the belief that aesthetic values were inherent in all the activities of human endeavour. For the left and followers of Mondrian, abstract art was a form of propaganda which would unite the fragmented social environment due to the Second World War and the Depression. Joseph Freeman and Balcomb Greene praised the writings of Leger because they were socially integrating and anti-violent.



*It has remained for the artist, as specialist, to make paintings whose function is to integrate, individuals, by clarity and courage transforming them from defensive human beings.*

*( Greene, 1936.)*

*Much of Reinhardt's activity was born out of the environment and its need to understand the functioning of the modern artist. Mayer Shapiro was to influence Reinhardt's early artistic and political practice, Shapiro held classes in Columbia University which Reinhardt attended during the thirties. Shapiro encouraged Reinhardt to join the radical campus groups and become involved in anti-war, anti-fascist demonstrations. In Shapiro's " public use of art " Shapiro sets forth the justification for a politically charged approach. Shapiro states, that political and economic transformation is necessary if a meaningful art practice is to exist. Without this transformation Schapiro credits the possibilities of art having the " utmost banality and poverty of invention ". Reinhardt had found the ultimate answer for Neo-plastic expression, that of its aesthetic capabilities to promote political functioning as social and economic reformer. This marks Reinhardt's ultimate justification for abstract art, until his break with Marxist doctrine for his own 'art-for-art's sake'dogma.*

*Reinhardt's early career is a product of influences, the development of American art and its drive to separate itself from the European modernist tradition to form an autonomous American*





art. The political climate involved with the birth and mass mis - representation of a new aesthetic, led to demonstrations and avid activism. Heated debates surrounded the new European aesthetic which had entered American via the Armory Show. America was recreating itself during the thirties and forties. Reform was seen in every position in American culture. Art was as much a part of this reform as political, social and economic. The European avant-garde had shown the need for drastic reform and reappraisal of American art and its purposeful functioning in an environment of rapid progress and expansion. Reinhardt was one of the key figures in the reform and revolution of the growing modernist tradition in America. Motherwell saw " the history of modern art as the history of modern freedom ". Reinhardt was part of the new tradition of American art, a tradition that was born out of a desperate fight for independence, representation, equality and freedom. Later Reinhardt was to free himself and his art production in his " art-as-art " positioning, subsequently making him official thorn in the art world's side.



CHAPTER TWO

EMANCIPATION FROM DOMINATION.



### EMANCIPATION FROM DOMINATION.

In respective of Reinhardt's interest in fine art, he declined many scholarship offers to art institutes, accepting a scholarship instead with Columbia University. Reinhardt had decided that a liberal arts education would be of more benefit than a fine art course which had strict academic limitations. This choice was probably due to his liberal upbringing and surely the fact that Columbia had huge recognition for its academic prestige. At Columbia Reinhardt would encounter his future, in the form of the Frankfurt School and Mayer Schapiro.

The Frankfurt School had its inception in 1923 as the Institute of Social Research. The institute was founded by Felix Weil, Weil was a wealthy businessman and even though the institute was formally attached to the University of Frankfurt it was an autonomous body due to this wealth. From 1923-29 the institute was under the supervision of Grunberg. Marxism was the inspirational and theoretical basis of the institute's programme. The aim was the combination of concrete historical studies with theoretical analysis. Then, in 1929, the institute took a new direction towards critical analysis, due to the direction of Max Horkheimer who replaced the dead Grunberg. Horkheimer advanced the link between social philosophy and science. There was also the introduction of the term of action " Interdiscipilinary Studies ". The aim of this





direction was to bring about a better analysis of Marx. The second aim of the institute was to bring about the formation of a social theory to transform society. The Institute questioned the activities of the day, such as the nonunification of the European labour market, the questioning and comprehension of Nazism and Authoritarianism and the social relations inherent in the family. The Institute fled Germany in the thirties. They were to settle in New York, where they were to continue their investigations in Columbia University. They fled due to the decline of Germany into Nazism, and also the fact that most of the group were Jewish. When Hitler came to power in 1933 any remaining Jewish professors were dismissed from their activities at those universities, leaving their only option as exile.

Reinhardt's conception of art and politics was initially Marxist. The Frankfurt School introduced Reinhardt to the Conflict tradition and their own specific interpretation of Marx. The differences between Marx and the Frankfurt School were.

- (1) The elaboration of Marxist thought to critique of advanced capitalism of the day.
- (2) The incorporation of Freudian psychoanalysis into Marxist theory of society.
- (3) Neo-Marxist because it was pessimistic about the possibilities of revolutionary change of capitalism by working-class struggle.
- (4) The School placed an emphasis on the cultural over economics, the School also produced influential studies of music, literature and aesthetics.



These new theories were developed in the post-war years while the institute was under the direction of Horkheimer and Adorno. This theory was the development of the field of critical theory, this theory aimed to analyse " the breach between ideas and reality " ( Held, p182.)

Context of origin and context of use are two key terms in the understanding of critical theory. Reinhardt was influenced by this theory from Columbia to the end of his professional art career. The Frankfurt School believed that the traditional idea of theory is based on scientific activity as carried on within the division of labour at a particular stage in the latter's development. The division of labour was the activities and functions individuals carried out in a social environment. What was wrong with traditional theory for the Frankfurt School was it sought theory in isolation. They saw in it an illusion of self-sufficiency, they saw theory as a series of interconnections between all elements in society. The School believed that the illusion of self-sufficiency of science or whatever should be discarded for the realization of the 'context of origin' of any theory or field of activity.

Neither the structures of industrial and agrarian production nor the separation of the so-called guiding and executory functions, services, and works, or of intellectuals and manual operations are eternal or natural states of affairs.

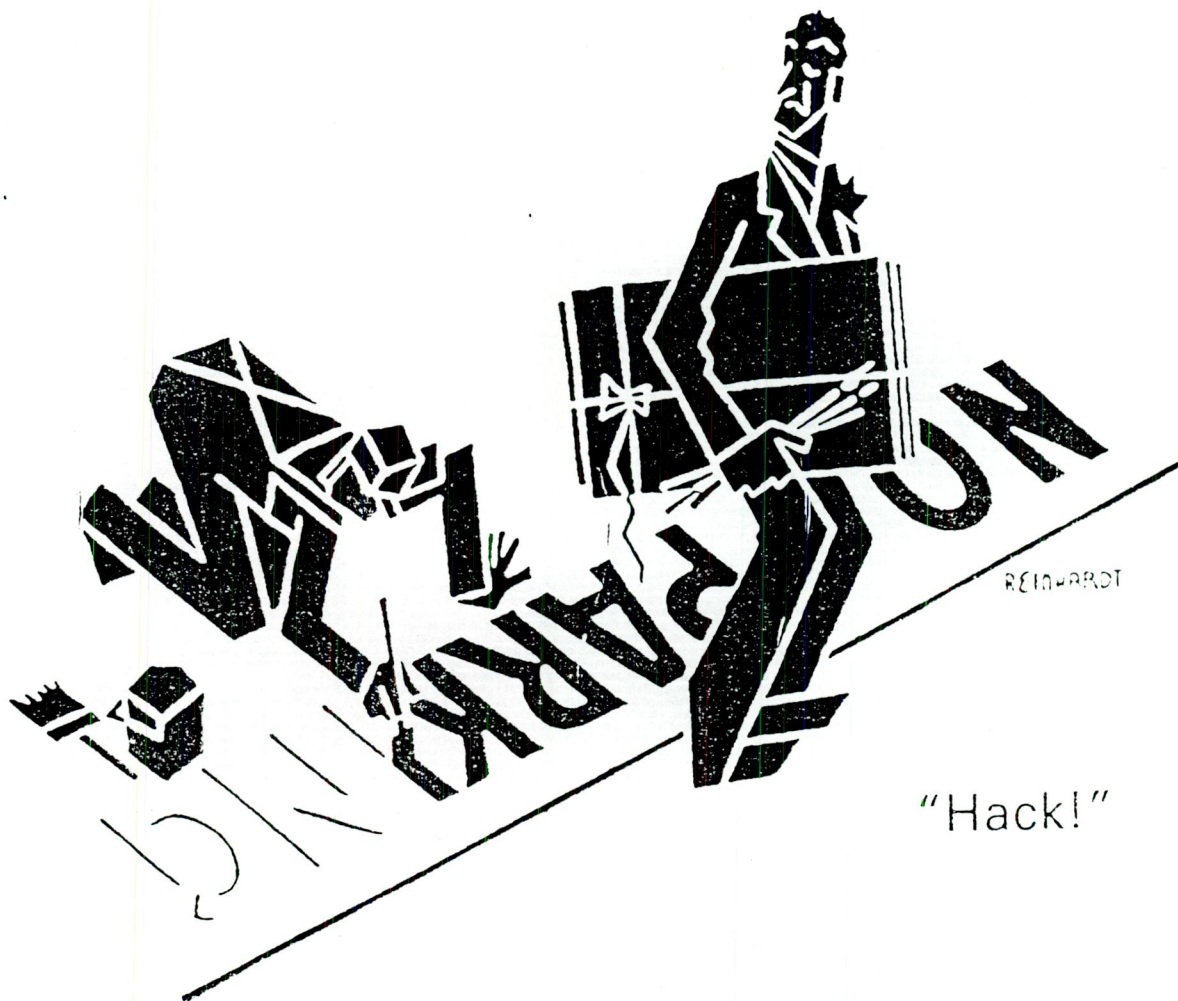


Reinhardt demonstrated this point in his unlimited boundaries: there are no boundaries from high to low art except the specific function intended in each. Reinhardt reflected this stance by practicing many different types of art concurrently. Reinhardt saw high art and low art holding specific functionings in a social context, each had a important function, neither greater than the other. This stance is exemplified in the cartoon Reinhardt drew for his collage paper Jester in 1933, intitled "HACK" ( plate no.1, p.21). The cartoon questioned the place of artist and artisan, further questioning the distance between artistico practices within a bourgeois society. When this realization of interdependence and interconnectedness is achieved they believed that one must look at the theory, developed and completed. The question arises, what does the theory do ? It is not static as it enters the world of interconnection. An example of this is, a scientist who builds a machine after his theory. This is not the end of his theory as it will be used again by someone else, maybe for radically different purposes. Hence after we consider the context of origin, we must move forward to the realization of the context of use. Now we can see our example as interconnected and interdependent and not in the mythic light of self-sufficiency, as somebody may use a theory. This exemplifies Reinhardt as a meaningful and responsible artist in the light of his own stance, and explains many of his actions and reactions towards the art institutes and his fellow artists, and towards the social position he believed he occupied, as an





ART HAS NO HISTORY!



"Hack!"



individual who is meaningful and purposeful and who is and was of the greatest importance and significance for the present and the future. Due to this theory we can see why Reinhardt had no time or respect for Surrealism or Dadaism. The Surrealists had begun using automatism in the 1920s to uncover the hidden forces that occupied the unconscious.

" According to Breton "pure psychic automatism" probed the "unfathomable depths" of the mind where there dwelled "a total absence of contradiction " and "a release from the emotional fetters caused by repression." (Annette Cox, 1977 p.158).

However Reinhardt saw this type of approach as confusing the artistic activity. He saw automatic activity creating ambiguity and multiple associations, distancing the artist and the public further and further away from the real meaning and progress in art.

" Masson's forms easily changed identity; they could easily be birds, leaves, or vaginal openings."

(Annette Cox, 1977, p.51)

Reinhardt's searched for a pure unambiguous art form, full of autonomous meaning and self-awareness. However he knew and believed in the Marxist statement ' paradox is inherent in every phenomenon '. Reinhardt had a great respect for Cubism which he saw as a progressive form of art in theory and in format. To Reinhardt it



was the natural progression towards a pure art form; that of pure abstraction. For Reinhardt and many of his associates Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism became a guiding force in the 1940s. Mondrian's work was shown at MOMA during the late thirties and throughout the forties, culminating in a show at MOMA in 1944 intitled 'Mondrian'. Mondrian's artistic theories had also become available due to George Wittenborn, who published six of his essays in " Plastic Art And Pure Plastic Art ". This essay was the source of much inspiration for Reinhardt and his AAA associates. Mondrian's essay would reconcile for the first time their aesthetic tastes and political duties. Mondrian's search through rectangular forms, straight lines and primary colours for a truly universal art was also the ambition of American artists to find a purely American universal art, through any means. Reinhardt was attracted to the logical history of progression in which he saw Cubism as the first in a line of guiding forces towards a new purer aesthetic. A force which was strengthened by Mondrian's ideas were a synthesis of artistic form and format. Mondrian presented views which were a logical progression for Reinhardt towards an art which was autonomous. The Surrealists brought myth and the primal instincts to art in the form of automatic release, Reinhardt saw this as driving the progression of art back to the dark ages. The theories of the Frankfurt School had shown Reinhardt that his position in society was a meaningful engagement, leaving Reinhardt in the position of cultural and artistic critic. Reinhardt's dismissal of Surrealism and Dada was his rejection of the





unconscious and the uncontrollable manifestations in practice and in theory which stunted the proper progression of art towards a meaningful and autonomous property. Reinhardt saw the world of Surrealism as a trap for the artist, a discipline of " chaos, confusion, individual anguish, terror and horror,...without any understanding, direction or rest ".

( Cox, 1977, p.115)

He reiterated this belief in "Twelve Rules For A New Academy" which were published in Art News In May 1957. These rules can be seen as his manifesto towards a purer art production and conception.

"No texture, texture is naturalistic or mechanical and is a vulgar quality, especially pigment texture or impasto. Palette knifing, canvas stabbing, paint scumbling and other action techniques are unintelligent and to be avoided. No accidents, automatism.

(Reinhardt, 1957.)

Reinhardt turned to an art with more concrete foundations, an art that was self conscious, self critical, and whose progress was one of historical lineage. The context of origin and the context of use were well known by Reinhardt, he was well aware of the effects of history and the significance it played in the future. This is why he began attributing meaning to his own work around 1950, realising how artistic history of the period was misinterpreting the position his work held in the form of the ideas of Clement Greenberg.



" Reinhardt has a genuine if small gift for colour, but none at all for design or placing. I can see why he let Newman, Rothko, and Still influence him towards close and dark values, but he lost more than he gained by the desperate extreme to which he went, changing from a nice into a trite artist. "

(Greenberg, 1957-69).

Reinhardt by minimizing the fundamental components of painting had taken Greenberg's conception of modernism to its logical conclusion. Greenberg's conception of modernism was a systematic programme of reduction; the purification of form and a self critical approach that would lead to a logical conclusion. What Greenberg did not realise was that the logical conclusion was attained by Reinhardt and Frank Stella in their black works. Greenberg is not to blame for his misconception of Reinhardt, for he was given sole responsibility for a generation of American artists, which left him little time to inform himself with the new developments of a younger generation. As Picasso commented ( in Conversation with Picasso ) to Christian Zervos in 1935 " They've simply cut a coat to the measure of their own ignorance ", this comment can be generally applied to Greenberg and those who saw Reinhardt in the light of a limited colour field painter. This was one of the driving forces behind his decision to inform people about his art in the form of his Art-As-Art dogma. Reinhardt's stance was to bring meaning to art. He saw this as the responsibility of progressive artists and their practices. This was



something Greenberg could not understand, for his criticism of art was purely an aesthetic one, founded on the principles of taste rather than logical reason and progression. Reinhardt's every decision was a decision of meaning, right down to the reason for not titling his work. During the rise of Abstract Expressionism many of its contributors had titled their works linking them to myths and legends and in the case of Newman, religious figures or escapades. Rothko had titles such as Syrian Bull and Antigone, Gottlieb, Eyes of Oedipus and Rape of Persephone, Newman, Dionysus and Abraham. Reinhardt believed this to be a futile exercise in adding more misconception and myth to the modernist tradition. The untitled painting allowed the viewer no such luxury of presumptuousness, therefore protecting them from misinterpretation and false pretences. This type of stance distanced Reinhardt from the art world and left him in the eyes of many a product of Greenbergian interpretation ' a minor colour painter '. It was due to his background in Critical Theory that he became aware of the need to be self-critical and to invest time in attributing the proper meaning to his practical works. Reinhardt was like most of the radicals of the thirties and forties, a hybrid of Marxism-Leninism and Mondrian's Utopian Neo-Plasticism. However Reinhardt had a different perception of Marxism than most of his contemporaries, his interest in Marx was more theoretical than radical, eventually giving way to his Art-As-Art position. A position that was certainly radical for his contemporaries but one





that was necessary in Reinhardt's eyes for a developing artistic position. It is clear to see the link between the Frankfurt School and Reinhardt. Reinhardt's contemporary activities as a multi functional artist originate in the Schools 'interdisciplinary studies' policy. It saw this type of action producing individuals with a broader understanding of the complexities of any given structure. Reinhardt's Utopian days of the thirties and forties were spent trying to incorporate political agendas into an aesthetic frame work to produce a socially meaningful art. In his writings of the fifties and sixties he found meaningfulness in the separation of political agendas and artistic ones. Reinhardt was to reiterate many of the school's theories as his own unique brand of Art-As-Art dogma. His belief in the historical and its constant functioning in the present creation of all structures, academic, cultural and so on originated in the development of Critical Theory. Though Reinhardt had forged many friendships in the thirties and forties, the fifties saw him distance himself further and further from the activities of the art world and his past friends. His constant criticism of the modes of production and their producers isolated Reinhardt from the avant-garde for the remainder of his life. He called Rothko a " Vogue magazine cold-water-flat Fauve." Pollock a " Harpers Bazaar bum " and Newman was the " the avant-garde explainer entertainer...educational shopkeeper in...residence ". The key to understanding Reinhardt's Art-As-Art Dogma and his venomous attacks on past friends and art institutes, and the use of cartoons lies in his insistence for a



proper code of meaningful attributes and activities in art. All of this can be attributed to the Frankfurt School, which became for Reinhardt the protector and moralizer for the conduct of a meaningful and productive engagement with life. He hated commercialization in the art world for he saw this as a serious threat to the production of art. Art was fast becoming a commercial transaction, profit and loss and the pursuit of everything art is not. Reinhardt tried to impose reform through criticism, even writing twelve rules for a new academy, showing his dedication towards reform and the pure purposes of art 'doing'.

" Fine art is not a means of making a living or a way of living a life and an artist who dedicates his life to his art or his art to his life burdens his art with his life and his life with his art. Art that is a matter of life and death is neither fine nor free."

(Lippard, 1981, p. 34)



CHAPTER THREE

THE SUM OF ALL THE PARTS.





The sum of all the parts.

" The most common mean to the most uncommon end.  
The extremely impersonal way for the truly personal.  
The completest control for the purest spontaneity.  
The most universal path to the most unique.  
And vice-versa."

( Cox. 1977 p. 115. )

Reinhardt by the late fifties had developed what he called his ultimate works " I'm merely making the last paintings which any one can make (Glasner 1956 p32 ). An interview with Ad Reinhardt, Art International. Due to this statement Reinhardt has been scrutinized and misinterpreted. The paradoxical nature of Reinhardt and his written statements cannot be isolated for interpretation. They have to be viewed as a whole, the majority of individual statements cancel each other out. For Reinhardt this was probably a parody on the serious art writings of Newman and the Abstract Expressionists. The aim of them was to discredit the writings of Newman and others who in Reinhardt's interpretation were mis-interpreting the real functioning of art and substituting meaningless functions and theories to prop up their art practice. Through his Art-As-Art Dogma Reinhardt disassembled the serious rhetoric of his fellow Abstract-Expressionists. This Dogma in the end functioned as a evasive strategy to enhance suspicion of the meaning and functioning attributed to art by the Abstract-Expressionists and also by critics like Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. By the



sixties Reinhardt had separated his political agenda and his artistic practice. Gone were the days of Utopian functions in art and along with them Mondrian and Marx. Reinhardt had broken with his early mentors because he had now developed his own stance in which Marx and Mondrian had been a guiding factor in the days of the AAA, but now held little currency in his agenda of purification. There is no doubt that Reinhardt was trying to free art from the strangle hold of associations, just as he saw the potential in Marx for freeing the strangle hold of repression in society, and Mondrian striving for that same freedom some years earlier.

For those for whom art begins in a kind of original purity, the grid was emblematic of the sheer disinterestedness of the work of art, its absolute purposelessness, from which it derived the promise of its autonomy.

(Krauss, 1986, p. 151)

Reinhardt's use of the grid is thus set out above, it functions for him as the most democratic and logical system for the production of art. For Reinhardt the grid is the most suitable choice for a variety of different reasons and functions. The systematic ordering of the grid was violently opposite to the expressionistic and automatic production of art. It also offered Reinhardt the opportunity of systematic progression, which he could concentrate on refining and mastering, which he did from the late fifties to



his death in 1967. Reinhardt was interested in historical progression, a progression which is a logical step after step. In this way he fulfilled that task by now using the grid to create his Black canvases. The grid had figured in the production of Avant-Garde art right back to Malevich. The connection of the early influences of Mondrian, Leger and Picasso, can now be seen in Reinhardt's use of the grid. Krauss attributes the grid as being 'impervious to language' she continues to attribute the grid with "silence, exile and cunning". If the grid promotes silence, on the part of Reinhardt it represents a refusal to speak. Therefore silencing the meaning of art, attributing nothing to it but what it is. Another reason for this choice is the grid's hostility to narrative, something Reinhardt satirised the Abstract Expressionists for. The grid destroys the myth through its democratic and logical composition, it does this by destroying the hierarchy. There is no emphasis in the grid's formation, each element is a reflection of that same element and of the whole composition. Reinhardt's paintings can be broken into nine equal parts; each one the same as the total. There is complete democracy between each part and the total sum of the parts. Reinhardt therefore produced his ultimate paintings which conform to his specific need for purity. The grid also reflects Reinhardt's ideal concept of what an art work should be, meaningless and purposeless. The grid is impervious to association, it will not allow language in the realm of the strictly visual. Reinhardt's





attempts to silence art are answered in the strict production and visual formation of the grid. Due to its simplicity the grid closes itself off from the complicated world of language, which by its very nature is paradoxical. The paradox is that Reinhardt brought a new function and purpose to art by attributing no meaning but the one inherent: itself. Therefore he freed art from myth and legend, theory and so on, leaving its purpose and meaning intact so it might function in a more productive way. For the first time the viewer has to attend and address the art work, looking at what can be seen instead of what may be perceived to be seen. The viewer attends more closely to the differences of tone, dispersal of pigment, the overall composition, the placement and displacement of elements and vice-versa all the similarities. Reinhardt represents conscious reductionism, he deliberately eliminated all non-essential elements to the production of unity and the promotion of the art of painting. Reinhardt achieved purity in his art through the symmetrical composition and the close value of the colour range in the 'Black' paintings. His Twelve Rules for a New Academy can be seen as a programme of reduction towards the purification of art . The grid that has given liberty to art by the hand of Reinhardt also has a paradoxical element, it acts also as a strict and highly inflexible construction. In Reinhardt's case this is the most suitable of choices, for the Black paintings were created as his most complete paintings, therefore originality in Reinhardt's case is redundant. This can be seen in Reinhardt's third rule for a new academy.



" Everything, where to begin and where to end,  
should be worked out in the mind beforehand.  
In painting the idea should exist in the mind  
before the brush is taken up..."

Art and Design magazine, No 34. 1994 pp-25-27.

Structurally and logically the grid functions as the best means of repetition. Reinhardt's final years were spent refining the black canvases to a point that any one could make one. In Reinhardt's mind this was the final gesture towards an autonomous art.

" A single colour unifies at the same time as it articulates."

( Colpitt ,1990 p.34 ).

Reinhardt found the unity of the grid in the use of the one colour: the monochrome reinforces the impartiality of the grid system. The unity is preserved due to the same principles discussed regarding the grid, although if one looks closely at a Reinhardt for a period of time many colours become evident, blues, browns, greens and reds. Due to the grid and monochrome system Reinhardt has achieved the most meaningful art of his generation. It is complete from the concept to its eventual and monotonous working completion.

Here form becomes meaningful not because of ingenuity or surprise, but because of repetition and extension."

( Colpitt. 1990 p.66 ).



The only problem Reinhardt encountered with the 'Black' canvases was the common perception of black by the mass media and the cultural group. This is probably due to the fables, myths and dictionary definitions such as the one supplied below, which add an erroneous and anti-logical explanation, which in turn hinder the true functioning and understanding of the word.

*Dictionary definition of Black:*

" Of the darkest colour, the opposite of white... Dismal, Gloomy, Sullen, Forbidding, destitute of moral light or goodness, Calamitous, Evil, Wicked, Atrocious. Evil Spirits, Magic. To sully, to stain, to vilify, to slander," the list continues on in much the same manner for a considerable distance.

*Dictionary definition of White:*

" Being of the colour of pure snow, the opposite of black or dark."

( Virtue, 1964, P.90,91 & p.976)

Reinhardt took a step beyond the artistic practice of his contemporaries in the production of his 'Black' works. Not only in their striking detachment; but also in their intellectual inquiry, which subsequently sparked a critical discourse into the functioning of the art object. Reinhardt's practice presented contradictions that were evident in the theories of his contemporaries and their modernist art practices. By pressing contradictions in theory; Reinhardt brought them into the arena of painting practice. This shift in the production of art would see Reinhardt expelled from the contemporary art scene only to be discovered by a younger generation some years later.





" Ad Reinhardt's paintings, for many of us, were a kind of passage. His contradictions were the contradictions of modernism being made visible to itself. After Reinhardt, the tradition of painting seemed to be in the process of completion, while the tradition of art, now unfettered, had to be redefined."

( Kosuth, 1991, p.192. )



## CONCLUSION.

Reinhardt's life can be seen as a struggle for reform in all facets of social interaction. His constant engagement with all the powers of cultural production and relation, point out his dedication to reform. In this way Reinhardt belongs to the Conflict Tradition.

By this definition the individual is an active creator of the society in which he lives. However, the individual may well act as a servo-mechanism back on to the society. The conflict tradition is so called because it understands society and social order to consist of individuals or groups in either violent or non-violent struggle to promote their own interests.

Reinhardt can be seen to be part of this tradition, due to his actions which reflect this stance. Reinhardt reflects his mentors ,Marx, Mondrian and the Frankfurt School. His actions were non-violent and his praxis was cartoons and writings along with his art practice and his social engagement, which took the form of countless pickets and demonstrations. As Marx stated ' each individual is meaningful and purposeful to the greater social order. Actions are of the greatest significance. For Reinhardt this was particularly true and this is painfully evident in the production of his artistic work and in the role he played out in his life.



Society moves within boundaries that are diachronic, subject to historical imperatives, and can be understood as fragile; a changing entity subject to the interacting influences of its competing groups. Reinhardt's production as a artist was a constant progression informed by a historical past. So his painting and art practice can be seen in hindsight fitting into a particular development of art history which leads onto other developments which are attributed to him such as conceptualism and minimalism.

' The one thing to say about ' Reinhardt ' is that he is one thing.'





The Twelve Technical Rules (or How to Achieve the Twelve Things to Avoid) to be followed are:

1. No texture. Texture is naturalistic or mechanical and is a vulgar quality, especially pigment texture or impasto. Palette knifing, canvas-stabbing, paint scumbling and other action techniques are unintelligent and to be avoided. No accidents or automatism.
2. No brushwork or calligraphy. Handwriting, hand-working and hand-jerking are personal and in poor taste. No signature or trademarking. 'Brushwork should be invisible.' 'One should never let the influence of evil demons gain control of the brush.'
3. No sketching or drawing. Everything, where to begin and where to end, should be worked out in the mind beforehand. 'In painting the idea should exist in the mind before the brush is taken up.' No line or outline. 'Madmen see outlines and therefore they draw them.' A line is a figure, a 'square is a face.' No shading or streaking.
4. No forms. 'The finest has no shape.' No figure or fore- or background. No volume or mass, no cylinder, sphere or cone, or cube or boogie-woogie. No push or pull. 'No shape or substance.'
5. No design. 'Design is everywhere.'
6. No colors. 'Color blinds.' 'Colors are an aspect of appearance and so only of the surface.' Colors are barbaric unstable, suggest life, 'cannot be completely controlled,' and 'should be concealed.' Colors are a 'distracting embellishment.' No white. 'White is a color and all colors.' White is 'antiseptic and not artistic, appropriate and pleasing for kitchen fixtures and hardly the medium for expressing the truth and beauty, 'White on white is 'a transition from pigment to light' and 'a screen for the projection of light' and 'moving' pictures.
7. No light. No bright or direct light in or over the painting. Dim, late afternoon absorbent twilight is best outside. No chiaroscuro, 'the malodorous reality of craftsmen, beggars, toppers with rags and wrinkles.'
8. No space. Space should be empty, should not project, and should not be flat. 'The painting should be behind the picture frame.' The frame should isolate and protect the painting from its surroundings. Space divisions within the painting should not be seen.
9. No time. 'Clock-time or man's time is inconsequential.' There is no ancient or modern, no past or future in art. 'A work of art is always present.' The present is the future of the past, not the past of the future. 'Now and long ago are one.'
10. No size or scale. Breadth and depth of thought and feeling in art have no relation to physical size. Large sizes are aggressive, positivist, intemperate, venal and graceless.
11. No movement. 'Everything else is on the move. Art should be still.'
12. No object, no subject, no matter. No symbols, images or signs. Neither pleasure nor pain. No mindless working or



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