

The fact that a work of art has a politically radical content...does not assure its revolutionary value. Nor does a non-political content necessarily imply its irrelevance to revolutionary action. It is in the larger context of the social movement and its positive historical results that the practical significance of partisan art has to be judged.

– Meyer Schapiro: *'The Patrons of Revolutionary Art', Marxist Quarterly, October-December 1937*

1. Introduction

In the unpublished note ART-AS-ART [1] from 1966 or 1967, the painter Ad Reinhardt wrote:

"Those who write for all time are unreadable at any time..."

The concerns that preoccupied Reinhardt in his latter years were no different from those that preoccupied his one time teacher, Meyer Schapiro, some thirty years earlier. Both were concerned with the relationship between the artist and the world.

This relationship between the artist and the world – particularly the relationship between artistic freedom and social responsibility – still concerns us today. For that reason, Reinhardt remains both readable and crucial to our age.

To this end, the following is an early attempt to understand the context of Reinhardt's seven-part text 'SHAPE? IMAGINATION? LIGHT? FORM? OBJECT? COLOR? WORLD?', published posthumously in 1969 as part of Ned O'Gorman's 'Prophetic Voices: Ideas and Words on Revolution'.

2. Ned O'Gorman's "search for the prophetic visionary"

For Ned O'Gorman, 'Prophetic Voices' was "a meditation on work, law, peace, race and language [that hoped] to point to ways of rescuing man from the terrible grandeur of wealth, speed, nationalism, and the 'winnable war'" [2]. While on a three month State Department appointment to teach American studies in South America in 1965, during which he "spoke with gusto and delight about poetry, religion, race and education," O'Gorman found himself in Córdoba, in northern Argentina, where "the United States had blundered with moral violence and brutality into a revolution it could not tolerate or understand." As he says, "In May 1965 I was jolted from poetic fancy into the real world by revolution. . . . I looked into the face of my country – a frightened, brutal, counterrevolutionary face."

'Prophetic Voices' became, then, "the effort of a poet without a homeland...to search for the prophetic visionary who knows what must be done so that men may endure in peace and joy." Of the twenty-two essayists O'Gorman invited to contribute to 'Prophetic Voices', Ad Reinhardt was the only painter.

3. "Be an oracle. Be Lyric dogmatic and Shinto"

On 10 December 1965, O'Gorman sent Reinhardt the 'Prologue and Outline' for what was then titled, 'Essays in Revolution: A Search for the Prophetic Voice' [3]. On the subject of Art, O'Gorman noted: "I would seek out a poet, a musician, a painter, an architect, and try to discover in his life and in his creativity the vision that made Rouault and Picasso such revolutionaries in their time."

To support his hope that Reinhardt would "do something" for his "mad book," O'Gorman commented: "It would be an incredible honor to think you'd write some prophecy for it. ...[I] can't see the damn book without your clear, impeccable vision." [4]

4. 'Prophetic Voices'

The Kirkus Review [5] of the period describes 'Prophetic Voices' as, "an unusual collection of brief statements, mostly by radical Catholics, on such varied subjects as revolution, silence, eternity, beauty, freedom, and death. The editor's original intent was to compile ideas on mass upheaval, but the transformations most under discussion here are inward: toward the wholeness, humanity, and joy to be found in sex (Michael Novak on "Marriage," Thomas Merton on "Purity"), in nonviolence (James Douglass on "The Revolution of Peace") and in the opening of self to love and death (David Rast on "Eucharist"). These inner revolutions are opposed to the outward oppressions: racism, wealth, nationalism, speed, war. Against such delusions, the authors prophesy with spontaneous passion, whimsy ("I like to contemplate revolutions as something the tritons undertake for fun"), and with intoxicating mystic wordiness. Intimations and illuminations which catch the attention of an open mind."

The second section ('Definitions in Revolution') of Prophetic Voices – "a delightful and sometimes whimsical dictionary devised by Ned O'Gorman" [6] – focuses the book's various authors ("monks, political scientists, poets, philosophers") on the following themes:

ABSOLUTE | BEAUTY | CAPITALISM | CIVILIZATION | CULTURE | DEATH | ETERNITY | EUCHARIST |
FATHERLAND | FREEDOM | FRIENDSHIP | GOD | IMAGINATION | JUSTICE | LAW | LITERATURE |
MARRIAGE | MARXISM | NATION | NEGRO | PURITY | PATRIOTISM | POET | REVOLUTION or
REVOLUTIONISTS | SCIENCE | SILENCE | SOVEREIGNTY | SYMBOL | THE CROSS | TIME | WORLD

As O'Gorman wrote, "The dictionary's words range widely but the idea of "World," defined severally, and our most deeply personal lives are the dominating themes. Thus we move, for example, from the uses of the imagination, the mind and the absolute to the concrete world of friendship and marriage, to the larger world we all share and the demands of nation, state, man, social justice, law and order - and finally to revolutionary goals of truth and freedom." [6]

5. SHAPE? IMAGINATION? LIGHT? FORM? OBJECT? COLOR? WORLD?

As the only painter involved, Reinhardt's contribution introduced the additional words of SHAPE, LIGHT, FORM, OBJECT and COLOR, all of which are followed by a question mark.

When Reinhardt delivered his text to O'Gorman, his covering note [7] (written in the painter's characteristic "GeRMaN-BLaCK-LeTTeR-MeDieVaL" script) invited the poet to "Use anyway you want", asked "Want any more?" and concluded with "GOOD LUCK, Ad."

At the bottom of this covering note, and in a different hand (probably O'Gorman's), is written in pencil:

use World [underlined]
shape, form, object [all underlined]

Followed by this, in pen:

+ Color [underlined three times]
ALL IF possible

Interestingly, this possible guidance to the publisher mentions only five parts of Reinhardt's seven-part text, the missing sections being IMAGINATION? and LIGHT?

In a letter of 30 December 1965 to Reinhardt [8], O'Gorman wrote: "Here are five words. Would you think of defining, un-defining; creating, destroying, illumining them; by say first of April?" The assumption must be that these five words may have been SHAPE, LIGHT, FORM, OBJECT and COLOR.

In the same letter, O’Gorman asked, “Might we think too of your writing a volcanic, prophetic statement/ essay on Art. Say about 8 - 10 pages long. Written especially for this book?” This additional text was never written. As O’Gorman acknowledged in a letter of 6 February 1967 [9], Reinhardt had been ill (his first heart attack) but, even so, the poet was still hopefully that the painter could still “toss your vision at those definitions.”

On the basis of this later letter, it is likely that O’Gorman’s ‘five words’ became Reinhardt’s seven-part text ‘SHAPE? IMAGINATION? LIGHT? FORM? OBJECT? COLOR? WORLD?’ for ‘Prophetic Voices’ some time between early February and late August 1967. Ad Reinhardt died in his studio from a second heart attack on 30 August 1967.

6. Ad Reinhardt’s ‘Worlds’

The final section of Reinhardt’s seven-part text for ‘Prophetic Voices’ is titled WORLD?, a three-part text dealing in both positive and negative terms with:

World of art | World-art | The other world

WORLDLINESS [10], an unpublished and undated variation on Reinhardt’s WORLD? text for ‘Prophetic Voices’, shows only minor changes from the published text.

World?	[WORLDLINESS]
World of art, world art, art world?	World of art, world art, art world
Best of all possible worlds?	World of art, best of all worlds
Primary world, secondary-world?	Primary world, secondary
Free, non-servile, fine, non-applied?	Free, non-servile, fine, non-applied?
Pure, ideal, intellectual, useless, timeless world?	Pure, ideal, intellectual, non-practical world?
Art-world, ivory-tower, control-tower, art-control?	
Wheelers-dealers-world? Collectors-world?	Art world, ivory tower, control tower
Art-words-world, art-critics, art-critters world?	Art control, wheelers-dealers world
World of business-before-pleasure-and-vice-versa?	Art words, world, art critics, art critters
Living, living-it-up, living-it-down, art-world?	World of business-before-pleasure-&-vice-versa
Art whorls, whirls, whoreo-heros, parts, rolls?	Living art, living-it-up, living-it-down world
Painting is more than the scum of its pots?	Whorls, whirls, whirls, wholes, parts
Can't you tell your impasto from a holy ground?	Painting is more than the scum of its pots
Holy smoke.	Can't you tell your impasto from a holy ground
	Holy smoke
World-art, all-art, all-of-art, universal-art?	
Museum-world, museology, museum-without-walls?	World art, all art, all of art, universal art
World-of-color-slides, images, pictures, signs, symbols?	Museum world, museum-without-walls,
Wonders-of-the-world, world-travel, wonder of art?	World of color slides
Wonderful world of Disneyland?	Wonders of the world, wonder of art
World of imagelessness, voices of silence?	Wonderful world of Disneyland
Action-arts speak louder than voids.	World of imagelessness, silence
	Action arts speak louder than voids
The-other-world, this-world, second-hand-world?	
Day-in-day-out day-to-day-routine, ritual-world?	The other world, this world, secondhand world
Inner world, all-in-the-mind, nothing-out-there?	Day-in-day-out day-to-day routine, ritual world
Outside-world, world-outside-window, watch out?	Innerworld, all-in-the-mind, nothing-out-there
Anti-world, anti-matter, anti-texture?	Outside world, window, watch out
Other-worldly, anti-worldling, anti-happening?	Anti-world, anti-matter, anti-energy
Out-of-this-world world, the other side of creation?	Other worldly, anti-worldling, anti-happening
Worldlylessness.	Out-of-this-world world, the other side of creation
	* Worldliness
Ad Reinhardt	
Published as 'SHAPE? IMAGINATION? LIGHT? FORM? OBJECT? COLOR? WORLD?' in Ned O'Gorman: 'Prophetic Voices, Ideas and Words on Revolution', Random House Inc. 1969, pp149-153	Unpublished, undated notes in Barbara Rose: 'Art As Art', University of California Press, 1991, pp129 & 130

In both versions, Reinhardt uses the line "Free, non-servile, fine, non-applied" to describe the 'World', specifically the 'World of art' ("best of all worlds").

The same words are to be found in another unpublished text of the same period to describe the 'artist-as-artist'. In the text AN ARTIST, / A FINE-ARTIST OR / FREE-ARTIST [11], Reinhardt writes:

A *fine artist* by definition is not a commercial or industrial or
fashion or applied or useful artist.
A fine, free or liberal or abstract artist is by definition not a
servile or professional or meaningful artist.

This play on the word 'free' as applied to the artist and/or the world could be assumed to have been of considerable interest to Reinhardt during the latter period of his life. But this tension between the two, between the artist and the world, appears earlier in Reinhardt's thinking, as in the 1961 Resnick / Reinhardt Debate [12] for example:

"The problem comes up...after you've looked inside yourself, about the possibilities of what to do about the outside world."

Again, in much earlier texts like 'The Artist in Search of an Academy' [13] published by the College Art Journal in early 1953, Reinhardt writes:

"A few questions for artists. . . . How can a free artist accept this managed and managerized condition? How can an artist exist without or outside institutions? Why are so many mature artists so pleased to compete for such slight prizes, purchases, and praises? Why are there still artists who feel it's an honor to be asked to serve on a jury to judge other artists? Why are artists so eager to accommodate their behavior to the undignified and standard forms in fashion, such as artist as entertainer, parasite, sufferer, actionist, cry-baby, primitive, handicraftsman, acrobat, beggar, expressionist, clod, hobbyhorse, parrot, puppet, designer, jobber, etc.? Is it too optimistic to think that perhaps some new activity among artists, possibly toward a true modern academy, could free the circumstances again? Am I being too pessimistic to feel great doubt about this."

In all of this, and as in much of Reinhardt's contribution to 'Prophetic Voices', there are echos of Meyer Schapiro who Reinhardt studied art history and aesthetics with at Columbia University between 1931 and 1935. Reinhardt's demands of both the artist and the world are no different from Schapiro's take on painting's *touche divisée*, that point of tension between artistic freedom and social responsibility.

Meyer Schapiro delivered his landmark paper on 'The Social Bases of Art' to a closed session of the American Artists' Congress at the New School for Social Research, in New York, in February 1936. In the spirit of Ned O'Gorman's ambition for 'Prophetic Voices', it is probably this paper by Schapiro that helped shape Reinhardt's seven-part text.

"Artists who are concerned with the world around them in its action and conflict, who ask the same questions that are asked by the impoverished masses and oppressed minorities – these artists cannot permanently devote themselves to a painting committed to the aesthetic moments of life, to spectacles designed for passive, detached individuals, or to an art of the studio." Meyer Schapiro [14]

For the painter, leaving the "art of the studio" is no different from Ned O'Gorman's "search for the prophetic visionary who knows what must be done..." [15] As Schapiro also says in 'The Social Bases of Art', "...the artist acquires the courage to change things, to act on his society and for himself in an effective manner." For Reinhardt, working on his contribution to 'Prophetic Voices' during the final months of his life, it was the 'World', rather than the artist, that now had to become "Free, non-servile, fine, non-applied." Or, at least, the 'World' now came with question marks.

7. World? / Free, non-servile, fine, non-applied?

Perhaps it should be noted that there are only three lines in Reinhardt's 'WORLD?' that do not end in question marks:

[World of art] Holy smoke.

[World-art] Action-arts speak louder than voids.

[The other world] Worldlylessness.

The first two of these probably require no great explanation. Like 'holy cats', the first was (and still is) a common expression of surprise in popular American culture. The second references the silence Reinhardt associated with Chinese landscape painting [16] and his own Black (or void) paintings [17] – both of which he held in contrast to the 'noise' surrounding the work of the American Action Painters as defined by Harold Rosenberg in 1962 in ARTnews.

In terms of third, 'Worldlylessness', Reinhardt was not referencing the Cartesian worldlessness – or 'world alienation' – that was beginning to be addressed in the 1960s by great thinkers like Hannah Arendt (and against which, some fifty years later, we continue to be the mere spectators standing idly by). This is the 'Worldlylessness' that Harold Rosenberg implied (albeit negatively) in his 1963 description of Reinhardt as the 'black monk'. [18].

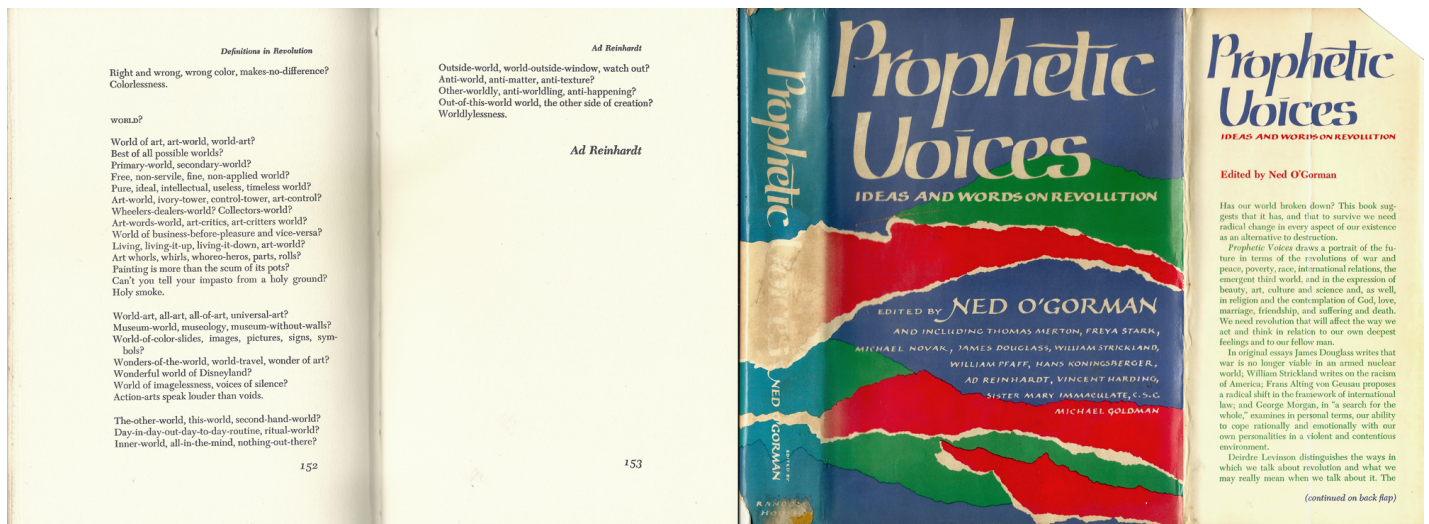
This 'Worldlylessness' is possibly explained best in Reinhardt's unpublished ART-AS-ART text from 1962-63 [19], which informs us that:

"Art-as-art is neither in this world nor out of this world. It takes us out of the everyday world and takes us in from otherworldliness. It is not fact made fancy or fancy made fact, neither matter made mind nor mind made matter. It is its own world, own fact, own fancy, own mind, own matter. Not spirit, not flesh, not sense, not nonsense."

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13. College Art Journal, 1953.
14. Meyer Schapiro: 'The Social Bases of Art', 1936
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15. Ad Reinhardt: 'Cycles through the Chinese Landscape', Art News (New York), 1954
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18. Harold Rosenberg, The New Yorker, 1963.
19. Barbara Rose: 'ART-AS-ART : the selected writings of Ad Reinhardt', 1991.



SHAPE? IMAGINATION? LIGHT? FORM? OBJECT? COLOR? WORLD?

SHAPE?

Good shape, bad shape, outlines, edges?
Absolute shape, square?
Horizontal, vertical shapes? Trisections?
Circle as shape, shape as circular, target, sun?
Bull's-eye, God's eye? Shape of time?
Circular heavens above, endlessness?
Square as shapelessness.

IMAGINATION?

Imagining? Imaging? Imagery? Image?
Imaginary-museum, image of timelessness?
Image of emptiness, empty image?
Imaginationless, fantasyless, surrealistless?
Imagelessness?

LIGHT?

Harsh, soft, reflected, absorbed, transparent light?
Soft lights, sweet music, sweeter unheard music?
Frozen-music architecture? Gothic-Greek light?
Twilight-light, twilight-time, twilight-space?
Broken, baroque, dissolved light?
Iridescence, evanescence, transcendence light?
Luminous-numinous? Rome-versus-East light?
Darkness, grayness, greyness, dullness light?
Lightlessness.

FORM?

Spirit, spirit of forms, forms of forms?
Form of forms, formalism, uniform? One form?
Styles-cycles, archaic, classic, late forms?
Broken-forms, Impressionism, empty forms?
Bad form, good form, right, wrong form?
Form follows function-filthy-lucre?
Form without substance? Without end? Without time?

OBJECT?

Subject, objective, non-objective, non-subjective?
Object of art, object-art, op-art? Antique?
Subjectlessness, mattertlessness, thinglessness?
Objectlessness.

COLOR?

Red, white, blue, flying colors?
Green, orange, purple, glossy-black?
Black as color, black as non-color, no-color?
Colorfulness, color interest?
Interest is of no interest in art.

Art-of-color versus art-of-painting?
Color-engineering, color-psychology?
Color-symbolism, symbolic-color, colored-symbols?
Colored crayons, chalks, markers?
Prism, spectrum, rainbow? Color-field?
Race-color, rat-race, dogma-eat-dogma, holy cats?
Topcat, birds of a color feather together?
Horse of a different color?
Hue, tone, tint, tinge, dye, shade, glow, flush, key?
Pigment, wash, distemper, stain, grain, daub?
Pure, primary, primitive, barbaric, emblazon?
Local-color, value, disguise, flesh, blush?
Broken-color, baroque-color, polychromatism?

Monochrome, tone down, wash out, bleach, blanch?
Discolored, pallor, pallid, pale?
Dull, cold, muddy, leaden, wan, dun, sallow?
Dead, dingy, ashen, lack-lustre?
Blackness, darkness, chiaroscuro?
Jet, ink, ebony, coal, pitch, soot, charcoal, ivory, lamp?
Right and wrong, wrong color, makes-no-difference?
Colorlessness.

WORLD?

World of art, world art, art world?
Best of all possible worlds?
Primary world, secondary-world?
Free, non-servile, fine, non-applied?
Pure, ideal, intellectual, useless, timeless world?
Art-world, ivory-tower, control-tower, art-control?
Wheelers-dealers-world? Collectors-world?
Art-words-world, art-critics, art-critters world?
World of business-before-pleasure-and-vice-versa?
Living, living-it-up, living-it-down, art-world?
Art whorls, whirls, whoreo-heros, parts, rolls?
Painting is more than the scum of its pots?
Can't you tell your impasto from a holy ground?
Holy smoke.

World-art, all-art, all-of-art, universal-art?
Museum-world, museology, museum-without-walls?
World-of-color-slides, images, pictures, signs, symbols?
Wonders-of-the-world, world-travel, wonder of art?
Wonderful world of Disneyland?
World of imagelessness, voices of silence?
Action-arts speak louder than voids.

The-other-world, this-world, second-hand-world?
Day-in-day-out day-to-day-routine, ritual-world?
Inner world, all-in-the-mind, nothing-out-there?
Outside-world, world-outside-window, watch out?
Anti-world, anti-matter, anti-texture?
Other-worldly, anti-worldling, anti-happening?
Out-of-this-world world, the other side of creation?
Worldlylessness.

Ad Reinhardt

SOURCES

Ad Reinhardt's late writings are built on phrases taken from other sources. By identifying these other sources, we can manifest "the philosophy hidden in the words" (Gregory of Nyssa) to reveal the painter's interests and influences during the latter period of his life. For his contribution to 'Prophetic Voices', Reinhardt repeats phrases from at least three of his 'Art-as-Art Dogma' texts of the same period, namely:

Ad Reinhardt: ART IN ART IS ART-AS-ART (Art-as-Art Dogma, Part III), *Lugamo Review*, 1966.

Ad Reinhardt: 39 ART PLANKS: PROGRAMS FOR "PROGRAM" PAINTING (Art-as-Art Dogma, Part VII), *Art Voices* (New York), Spring 1963, and read at the 'Destruction in Art Symposium' (DIAS), Africa Centre, London, September 1966.

Ad Reinhardt: THERE IS JUST ONE PAINTING (Art-as-Art Dogma, Part XII), *Artforum* (New York), March 1966.

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SHAPE?

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