A tribute to Ad Reinhardt

Ad Reinhardt realized what every serious artist dreams — he defined a sensibility of his own. His serenely resonant black-on-black paintings, when seen in a large body, were obviously one of the great achievements of American art in this period. They set new rules of sensitivity and subtlety, they conquered new frontiers of taste: in their presence one felt a rare sense of finality. Reinhardt accomplished this through a lifelong devotion to his own vision and through a cool condescension toward all fads and tendencies of the moment. He deserves to be remembered as one of the major figures of this period. — Robert Fulford, Toronto.

The end is not the end of art — Jerry Samberg, Toronto.

I'm very sorry Ad Reinhardt is dead. I don't want to begin to think of him and his work in a static context. Mainly, since I didn't know him well, that means that all the paintings there are to see exist — there are so many and perhaps I've seen half and will see three quarters or all; there won't be any new paintings. — Donald Judd, New York.

Is black death or is it the infinite of a new department. — Yves Gaucher, Montreal.

Ad Reinhardt devoted himself to art, scholarship, social justice, his friends, his family and his students. Few lives have been so well used or so productive. With his wit, knowledge, and generosity, he enriched all our lives.

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A tribute to Ad Reinhardt:

Ad’s lifelong devotion to modern art, often against extreme opposition, his openness to the young who were willing to learn from him, and his own exemplary paintings changed the face of American art. Ad believed that life and art were separate; yet his life and his art were of a piece because in them both he pursued the same goals: consistency, honesty, and unswerving idealism. In our time such civilizing virtues are rare; Ad was among the few to believe that Civilization was a single enterprise and that the fine artist was above all the agent of its continuity. His contribution to insuring that continuity was substantial.

There were many reasons to admire Ad. He was a good friend and a gentleman. He was also the great hold-out in an age of capitulation. I guess I admired him most for that. — Barbara Rose, New York.

Ad was his own man. He saw things his own way. But he didn’t keep it to himself. He said what was right about what he did and what was wrong about what other people did. People tolerated his work and polemics, but nobody liked it. The only way to deal with Ad was to make an ultimate evaluation. And it was severe — a gifted minor artist. This kind of vicious game playing at the heart of the matter was right down Ad’s alley. He can’t play the game anymore, but nobody can get around the paintings anymore either. If you don’t know what they’re about you don’t know what painting is about. — Frank Stella, New York.

Ad Reinhardt was the negative space in the composition of American art since the war.

He was the author of a magical formula for concentrating upon himself the intellectual resistance of people with or without intellect. By disagreeing with Reinhardt anyone could give himself the illusion of having something to say.

Thus Hilton Kramer could not resist taking advantage of Reinhardt’s death to enlighten readers of the New York Times about the naiveté of Reinhardt’s generation.

In time Reinhardt’s stubborn reiterations assumed the poetry of an unshakable denial, as easy to respond to as a sunset over the sea.

His bellicose postcards were an affectionate reminder to his friends of his constantly hostile presence. They will be missed. — Harold Rosenberg, New York.

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I am writing to express my appreciation for the excellent work that you are doing in the publication of your magazine — arts/canada. It is a source of encouragement to all of us in the creative arts to see one of our journals with the courage to explore new formats that represent our changing attitudes toward communicative media. It is even more rare to see such experimentation executed with the high degree of quality in typography and layout which is not usually associated with the innovative.

— Bill Lacey, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
Black as spatial concept, symbol, paint quality; the social-political implications of black; black as stasis, negation, nothingness and black as change, impermanence and potentiality: these are some aspects of the experience of black discussed by seven men in conversation between Toronto and New York.

Arts/Canada arranged this simultaneous conversation. It was made possible through the cooperation of the C.B.C. and the Bell Telephone Company who set up a telephone loop for one hour between New York and Toronto. The text of this conversation, taken from tapes made in the C.B.C. studios, forms a running commentary in this issue. Some deletions and sequential reorderings were made in the interest of conciseness and clarity.

The conversation begins on this page; participants are shown on pages 4 and 5; captions are found on page 19.

Reinhardt

I once organized a talk on black, and I started with black as a symbol, black as a colour, and the connotations of black in our culture where our whole system is imposed on us in terms of darkness, lightness, blackness, whiteness. Goodness and badness are associated with black. As an artist and painter I would eliminate the symbolic pretty much, for black is interesting not as a colour but as a non-colour and as the absence of colour. I'd like then to talk about black in art—monochrome, monotone and the art of painting versus the art of colour. Here is a quotation from Hokusai: “there is a black which is old and a black which is fresh. Lustrous black and dull black, black in sunlight and black in shadow. For the old black one must use an admixture of blue, for the dull black an admixture of white, for the lustrous black, gum must be added. Black in sunlight must have grey reflections.” I wanted to read that because that doesn't have any meaning for us.

I might, also, touch on some religious aspects of black, because I've been called a number of names like “the black monk” and so on. I suppose it began with the Bible in which black is usually evil and sinful and feminine. I think a whole set of impositions have affected our attitudes toward white and black—the cowboy with the white hat and white horse, and the villain with the black gloves. And then the use of black all the way through the Bible, through Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare and a few others. Even in terms of colour caste there are blacks and coloureds, what Harold Isaacs in Encounter once called a yearning for whiteness in the West, like high yellow, and so on. There is a relation in Christianity to the black hell void and the white heaven myth, the blackness of darkness that is involved with formlessness or the unformed or the maternal, the hidden, guilt, origin, redemption, faith, truth, time. Black can symbolize all those. There is the black castle and the black knight; and I suppose in one way or another they all represent transcendancy, which is interesting. And Lao Tze "the tao is dim and dark"; and the Kaaba, the black cube in Mecca; there's the black rock in the dome of the rock in Jerusalem, and what the mediaeval mystic Eckhardt called the Divine Dark. But, as an artist, I wanted to eliminate the religious ideas about black.

Rockman

I've been particularly interested in the question of black because of the relation between colour and emotional expression. And the thing that struck me through speculation and research over many years in this area is that after the Protestant Reformation in the West we tend to get a constriction and a restriction of colour usage, among the upper classes and among men, among all the people who are supposed to be dominant. What seems then to happen is that outerwear at its most formal is black and white, and suggests playing down of personality. But then, of course, you've got the extreme contrast that black underwear, for many men—mean female underwear—is very lascivious and sexy. And all of the things that Ad Reinhardt mentioned are involved with this. The idea of black and good is impossible, in the West—and, of course, this is especially urgent today.

I came across a photograph a couple of years ago of what is believed to be the first black wedding cake—get that, a black wedding cake in the world. Now this is a deliberate attempt to upset these deeply-held associations that we have with black as a symbol. In my research I'm struck by the fact that many Negro cultures in Africa have internalized this same thing of black as evil and white as pure. And I don't know whether we're talking about cultural things or biological things, whether we're talking about the experience of darkness as something to be afraid of (that's a very psychological and biological thing), or whether we're talking about some kind of language thing that's overlaying our experience as responsible for this set of associations. Nowhere can I find positive associations with black, which I find very mysterious.

Snow

My father was blind for the last fifteen years of his life, and I think that's blackness. In my own work I have usually dealt in a way with opposites and tried to balance things. Mr Reinhardt's work is particularly interesting because he's made balances of things where there, in a way, are no opposites. It seems pretty relevant and it may have some relationship to the things that Aldo does. I'm doing a piece in the "Happening Series" at the Expo Youth Pavilion. It's going to be really a sound thing, but most of it is going to be done in the dark. The reason is to emphasize hearing. It's like a radio studio piece for blind people. It involves several tapes which are going through a kind of catalogue of sounds which eventually becomes what is called music. A lot of it
is representational sound, in a sense, things that you can recognize but that have a quality of sound like the sounds of waves, city sounds, things which aren’t identifiable like certain machine sounds, and then sounds that are made in a free way electronically. It isn’t a sort of “total sense” thing; it’s an attempt to make you really concentrate on one sense. There have to be occasional interruptions of light to reinforce the fact that it’s black.

Cowan
So far architects have been scared to death to use black, I think basically for the reason that black destroys scale. When you destroy scale you disorient yourself. When I was younger I painted my washroom black, everything in it except the three fixtures, and if you weren’t sick when you went in, you were sick when you came out. Architects have been working with black by default because, of course, light is a very important part of architecture. And I think even insinuating black spaces could be used. If you are in a very bright place and then you walk into normal light, or vice versa, of course you go through a black sensation, you go through a black space. It’s not a physical space in terms of a space that’s been created, but it is in your mind.

Broomer
I find a parallel between the purely visual properties of black and the music in which I’m involved, music which has the ability to organize and transcend musical artifice. And the use of black, which is darkness, reinforces the effect of a visual event.

Taylor
I think for my first statement I would like to say that the experience is two-fold, and later, I think, you’ll see how the two really merge as one experience.

“Whether it’s bare pale light, whitened eyes inside a lion’s belly, cancelled by justice, my wish to be, a hued mystic myopic region, if you will, least shadow at our discretion, to disappear, or as sovereign, albeit intuitive, sense my charity, to dip and grind, fair-haired, swathed, edged to the bottom each and every second, minute, month; existence riding a cloud of diminutive will, cautioned to waiting
eye in step to wild, unceasing energy, growth equaling spirit, the knowing, of black dignity."
Silence may be infinite or a beginning, an end, white noise, purity, classical ballet; the question of black, its inability to reflect yet to absorb. I think these are some of the complexes that we will have to get into.

**Tambellini**
Black to me is like a beginning. A beginning of what it wants to be, rather than what it does not want to be. I am not discussing black as a tradition or non-tradition in painting or as having anything to do with pigment or as an opposition to colours. As I'm working and exploring black in different kinds of dimensions, I'm definitely becoming more and more convinced that black is actually the beginning of everything which the art concept is not. Black gets rid of the logical historical definition. Black is a state of being blind and more aware. Black is the oneness of birth black which is within totality the oneness of all. Black is the expansion of consciousness in all direction. I believe very strongly that the completely artificial "art" concept and the concept of "non-art" will have to collapse for the very reason they are both on the wrong track.

**Blackness is the beginning of the reenchanting of human beings. I am a strong believer that the word "black power" is a powerful message, for it destroys the old notion of western man, and by destroying that notion it also destroys the tradition of the art concept.**

Let me put it this way: if we think of man's creations and of the era that man lives in, all of a sudden we have a simultaneous idea of all man's endeavors coming to us at once. We have been preserving and magnifying the most decadent objects whether under Louis XV or the contemporary pompous art court, while all around us there is a whole creation going on of forms and concepts, of the atomic era, the space era, the computer era. Ad Reinhardt talks of black in a high...
"There is something wrong, irresponsible and mindless about colour, something impossible to control. Control and rationality are part of any morality." - Ad Reinhardt

I respect what he talks about because he deals with black as an essential concept, but he still retains black within the context of art. In his writing, he says that a canvas should be of a certain size and it shouldn't have this brush stroke, this and that. He still gives very high importance to the object, the canvas, to the act of painting itself. By defining what he does not want he gives it a highly puritanical value. I wish to destroy all that, not just destroy in a negative sense, but to get rid of art as art.

I think Richard Wright wrote a book in the 1950s called Black Power. Unfortunately, newspapers must sell, and I think they give a meaning of the moment to something which has long been in existence. The black artists have been in existence. Black – the black way of life – is an integral part of the American experience – the dance, for instance, the slop, Lindy hop, applejack, Watusi. Or the language, the spirit of the black in the language – “hip,” “Daddy,” “crazy,” and “what’s happening.” “dig.” These are manifestations of black energy, of black power, if you will. Politically speaking, I think the most dynamic force in American political life since the mid-1950s has been the black surge for equal representation, equal opportunities, and it’s become an active ingredient in American life.

The yin and yang symbol traditionally has always been black on white. And, you know, if there was an alternative movement to black or white power movements, it could very well take this symbol. I found listening to Mr. Taylor’s poem a very moving experience, and I was thinking while he was reading it that there are two kinds of blackness that have very, very deep emotional connotations. Mike Snow talked about his father being blind. This is a sort of internal blackness. All right, Mike’s father had been sighted before that, so he could remember what it was like to be in “the white land,” as it were. And then I think of what Cecil Taylor said about the link between black associations and black power and negro-
ness, if you will, and this is a sort of exterior blackness. In other words, the whole negro bit is a creation of the white world. I have speculated that if we had called ourselves light brown and dark brown and medium brown that maybe we wouldn't be in the present hangup.

Reinhardt

I want to object to the introduction of blindness. I think that's a sentimental idea. And then also ideas like space and the sexual terms are really, well, they're all right for some discussion. I think I'd like to insist that the highest possible discussion would be on an aesthetic level, and that it has to do with art and it has to do with an experience or a creation. All the other levels operate on some political or racial or personal or some other level which is alright too, but I think you can go off into too many subjects.

Well, of course, we have enough mixed media here. I just want to again stress the idea of black as intellectuality and conventionality. There's an expression "the dark of absolute freedom" and an idea of formality. There's something about darkness or blackness that has something to do with something that I don't want to pin down. But it's aesthetic. And it has not to do with outer space or the colour of skin or the colour of matter. As a matter of fact, the glossier, texturer, gummy black is a sort of an objectionable quality in painting. It's one reason I moved to a sort of dark grey, I guess. At any rate it's a matte black. And the exploitation of black as a kind of quality, as a material quality, is really objectionable. Again I'm talking on another level, on an intellectual level.

Rockman

May I ask you this question, sticking in the realm of aesthetics, which you believe is the highest level, why do you find glossy black objectionable?

Reinhardt

Well, it reflects, and it has unstable quality for that reason. It's quite surreal. If you have a look at a shiny black surface it looks like a mirror. It reflects all the activity that's going on in a room. As a matter of fact, it's not detached then,
Blackball (black-ball) v. 1770. [See prec.]
1. To exclude from a club, etc., by adverse votes, or by placing black balls in the ballot-box, or in other ways.
2. To exclude from society, taboo. 1842. 3. To blacken with blackball.
4. To deface, defile, defile.
5. A composition used by shopkeepers, etc., and also for taking rubbings of brasses and the like: a black-ball.
6. A black ball of wood, etc., dropped into the urn to express an adverse vote; hence, an adverse secret vote. 1869.

The scullions and kitchen-knives of a royal or noble household, who had charge of pots and pans, etc., 1868. 17. The servants and camp-followers of an army. Also fig. 1720. 20. A guard of attendants, black in person, dress, or character. Also fig. CL. 2-1745. 20. A street-shoe-black; a 'city Arab'—1755. One of the criminal class; hence, an unprincipled squirelet. (A high opprobrious term.) 1736.

7. A kind of snuff. Also called Irish 1754.
8. A Hue which has been blacked on the face of a soldier. Also called the black front of a guard of an army. 1739.
9. Smoked black which is shipped. 1756. 2. A guard in person, dress, or character. Also CL. 2-1745. 20. A street-shoe-black; a 'city Arab'—1755. One of the criminal class; hence, an unprincipled squirelet. (A high opprobrious term.) 1736.

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10. A hue which has been blacked on the face of a soldier. Also called the black front of a guard of an army. 1739.
blackguardly -ly, adj. BLACKGUARDLY, adverb, characteristically of a b.,

2. Blackguard (bläk'gär'd), v. t. & i. To treat as a blackguard; to abuse or revile in scurrilous terms 1823.

Black head (blak' hed'), 1633. A name of certain black-headed birds.

Black hole, Black Hole. 1728. (Beside obvious application to any black hole.) 1. MIl. The punishment cell in a barracks; the guardroom. (The name has become historic in connection with the Black Hole of Fort William, Calcutta, into which 450 Europeans were thrust for a whole night in 1756, of whom only 23 were alive next morning.) 2. gen. A place of confinement for punishment 1821.

Black ink (blāk' ink), 1631. [L. BLACK.]

The action of making black 1699.

Lamp-black 1914. Any preparation for making black; e.g. for giving a shining black surface to boots and shoes 1621.

Blackjack, black-jack. 1512. A large leather beer-jug, coated with tar. TGL. 1594.

2. Mining term for zinc sulphide or blende 1747. 3. U.S. A kind of oak (Quercus nigra) 1856. 4. Fer. A black leather jerkin; see JACKET 1620.

Blacklead, black-lead, black-clude. 1583.

1. A black ore of LEAD. 2. Name of the mineral plumbago or graphite, consisting of a soft, black, or blackish substance, purest kind most pure carbon with a little iron; it is chiefly used in the form of pencils, and as a polishing or iron-work. (The blacklead is almost the knowledge of its composition.) 1683. 3. A pencil of this substance 1676. Also attr. Hence blacklead v. To colour or rub with, or draw in, blacklead.

Black-leg, -legs. 1792. A disease in cattle and sheep which affects the legs. (Better black-legs.) 2. A turf swindler; a sharper generally 1771. 3. Operative term for: A workman wishing to work for a master whose men are on strike. Hence blackleg v., to take the place of a worker on strike. Black-leg, -legged, prep. or adv. or par. of blacklead.

Black-letter, black letter, blackletter. i. A name (dating from c 1400) for the type used in the first printed books, a type of which is still in regular use in Germany, and, as 'Gothic' or 'Old English', in occasional use in England. Another thing is in print. Any 1811. 3. attrib. (Usual, w. hyphen, or as one word.) 1791.

2. The champions in the blackletter Asseveration are: as distinguished from e.g. a scribe's day, in contrast with the vernacular, the 
younger sort, from c. 1400. Blacklist the entry in a blacklist.

Blackmail. 1881. A name for blackmail.

Blackmail. [M. F. mail, rent, tribute.]

1. Hist. A tribute formerly exacted from small owners in the border districts of England and Scotland, by freebooting chieftains, in return for immunity from plunder. 2. Hence, Any payment exacted by intimidation 1840. 3. Law. Rent reserved in labour, produce, etc., opp. to 'white rents,' reserved in white money or sil
er 1768. 4. The boldest of them will never steal a hoof from a cow they pay blackmail to; it is the law to pay it. Hence Blackmail'd, v. to levy blackmail upon; to extort money by the threat of the use of a criminal or physical power, or of political influence or vote. Black-mailer.

Black Maria. 1842. A prison van for the conveyance of prisoners.

Black mark. 1845. A mark made against the name of a person who has incurred censure, penalty, etc. Also fag.

Black Monday: see MONDAY.

Black Monk. see MONK.

Black moor, more; see BLACKMORE.

Black-mouth. 1642. A black-mouthed fish, as a cod or conger. So Blackmouthed a, having a black mouth; also faggy.

Blackmouth. 1812. short for Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, so called from his symbol of office. The present gentleman usher of the Lord Chamberlain's department of the royal household, and also usher to the House of Lords, and to the Chaplain of the Garter. Also, a similar office in colonial legislatures.


Black sheep; see SHEEP ab. a.

Black-shirt. 1833. [tr. It.] = Fascist.

Blacksmith (bläk'smît), 1485. A smith who works in iron or black metal, as opp. to an 'ironsmith' who works in tin.

Black-snake, black snake. 1688. A name for dark-coloured snakes; as in U.S. The Coluber con
testor and C. Alleghaniensis; in Jamaica the Bothrops atra, a. S. A. The whip-lash 1883.

Black-tail. 1611. a. Unsex sea fish; the aulurus, of ancient writers. 2. A name by various of the species.

Black-thorn, ME. 1. A common thorny shrub, bearing white flowers before the leaves and very small dark red plums; the Sloe (Prunus spinosa), a. Walking-stick made of the stem of this 1849. Also altricta. 2. U.S. Altricta, a. 1884.

Blackwash. 1818. a. Med. A lotion of colo
nial and lime-water. 2. Any composition used for washing over blackening 1818. Hence Blackwash v. to wash with a black liquid; fag. to calumniate.


Blackwood, black-wood. 1621. A name given to various trees and their dark-coloured timber.

Blacky (black'i), sh. college. Also -ly, -ey. 1815. A black, negro. Cl. darky.

Blackly, a. 1594. [f. BLACK a.] Blackish.
And then all of a sudden this cosmonaut from the U.S.S.R. gets out in space and says he sees this whole sensation again in black. He made this beautiful statement, "Before me - blackness, an inky-black sky studded with stars that glowed but did not twinkle; they seemed immobilized." Here again is a primitive man, a caveman, but he's the caveman of the space era. I see him as the most important man. It's immaterial who he is; it's even immaterial what his name is. But that's what our children are going to be, and this is what the extension of man has to go to. He's got to get rid of this whole concept of black pictures or of black anything as a physical object. He's got to realize that he is black right now.

Man himself is completely in this darkness; he's a moronic human being right now - dictated to by the capitalist structure which reduces him completely to an unthinking object. But he's got to break out of this blackness. He's got to push into this dimension and every time he discovers something he's still in the darkness. This is what science proves to us - we discover, we search, we find, and we still know less and less all the time. And this is more or less what creation is involved with. I can no longer see creation involved with the act of painting, the act of sculpture, or the act of whatever you want to call it which is being categorized during history. It is the act of creating. I don't give a damn if a man makes poetry, or makes sounds, or he makes space ships. In other words, Leonardo broke all the rules a long time ago - and we still talk about this departmentalization, black shining or black not shining, or black on this or black on that. Black is definitely the beginning stages of man. This is what he begins from.

Reinhardt

Well, I suppose the end is the beginning and vice-versa, if you want to talk that abstractly. But I would object to your romanticism in throwing everything together. The reason for the involvement of darkness and blackness is, as I said, an aesthetic-intellectual one, certainly among artists. And it's because of its non-colour. Colour is always trapped in some kind of physical activity or asser-
tiveness of its own; and colour has to do with life. In that sense it may be vulgarity or folk art or something like that. But you'd better make sure what you mean by emotion, that's what I would say.

Taylor
Would you give us a definition?

Reinhardt
Well, Clive Bell made it clear that there was an aesthetic emotion that was not any other kind of emotion. And probably you could only define that negatively. Art is always made by craftsmen – it's never a spontaneous expression. Artists always come from artists and art forms come from art forms. At any rate, art is involved in a certain kind of perfection. Expression is an impossible word. If you want to use it I think you have to explain it further.

Taylor
In pursuit of that perfection, once it is attained, what then? What is your reaction to that perfection?

Reinhardt
Well, I suppose there's a general reaction. I suppose in the visual arts good works usually end up in museums where they can be protected.

Taylor
Don't you understand that every culture has its own mores, its way of doing things, and that's why different art forms exist? People paint differently, people sing differently. What else does it express but my way of living – the way I eat, the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I think, what I have access to?

Reinhardt
Cultures in time begin to represent what artists did. It isn't the other way around.

Taylor
Don't you understand that what artists do depends on the time they have to do it in, and the time they have to do it in depends on the amount of economic sustenance which allows them to do it? You have to come down to the reality. Artists just don't work, you know, just like that – the kind of work, the nature of their...
involvement is not separate from the nature of their existence, and you have to come down to the nature of their existence. For instance, if they decide to go into the realm of fine art, there are certain prerequisites that they must have.

Tambellini

This guy floating in space has more to do with the reality that I’m living in than some idiotic place with walls and pictures in it. This man made one of the most poetic statements I’ve heard in my life. And furthermore I recognize the act he performs out there; he’s destroying every possible square idea I’ve ever known, every possible notion that man can any longer be up and down. In the tradition of Mondrian you have the floor and the top; the tradition of Egyptian and western man is in the horizontal and vertical. I don’t work with that concept, I work with the concept of this space guy. He doesn’t make the concept, it is the concept of nature. But he’s telling me what’s going on there. When the black man breaks out of his tradition, he’s telling me what he’s feeling, he’s telling me what western man has done. He’s telling me about segregation, he’s telling me directly “see what your museums are, preservation of your own culture,” “see what the radio is, the propaganda for your own culture,” “see what this newspaper is, the propagation of your own . . .” and this space guy says to me, “see what the universe is up there, something which has no ups and downs,” “see what space is, total darkness.” He’s telling me something I have to deal with. I have to create some kind of images.

Reinhardt

This hasn’t anything to do with your day-to-day problems.

Taylor

Day-to-day problems? What do you mean by day-to-day problems?

Reinhardt

That an artist has a day-to-day routine.

Taylor

What is that routine specifically?

Reinhardt

It is a boring, drudging . . .
Taylor
My work gives me pleasure. But the minute I walk outside there is enough that is evil and ugly and full of that which I call drudgery and boredom for me not to want it in my work and around me. Poverty is not a very satisfying thing. Aldo said it very clearly, western art is involved and has been involved with one perspective, one idea, one representation of one social-racial entity and aesthetic; and I'm saying that I must be aware of that, in what that has meant to black men or to the Indians. I have to be aware of the social dynamics of my society in order to function. I don't only have a responsibility to myself, I have a responsibility to my community.

Reinhardt
As a human being, not as an artist.

Taylor
Now look, you are not the one, you are positively not the one to talk about human beings, since you rule out the human element in your art. That kind of dichotomy is very common in the West, and it has resulted in paranoia. And so, therefore, I'm involved in making people aware of the black aesthetic. That fine art which you talk about is an exclusive art, and it excludes not according to ability, but according to wealth.

Tambellini
I don't even go to the god damn museums any more. I get the creeps, god damn it, I get depressed for months -- it reminds me what the fucking black man must feel when he walks in the damn upper class of this society. I see the god damn slums in this country. I know how it feels to be black and walking the streets of a white society and as a white man, I feel what this damn ruling class is doing to anybody creative. They are set up there to destroy, because I can not go along with this intellectualization of protecting this particular class, this particular structure.

Reinhardt
There was an achievement in separating Fine Art from other art.
I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me...

**Taylor**
The Russian ballet masters took the peasants and made them fine dancers; but the spirit of the ballet comes from the peasant.

**Reinhardt**
Tambellini suggested that we may abandon the historical approach to art, and get into a kind of simultaneity in which you have all twenty-five thousand years of art and you have to think about it. Quoting an astronaut isn’t meaningful.

**Tambellini**
To me it’s essential and meaningful.

**Reinhardt**
Not you as an artist, but maybe as a human being. It is certainly interesting to me as a human being.

**Taylor**
It is interesting to me as a musician, because it has to do with space, and space automatically implies time. Like I’m involved with rhythm, and rhythm is like the marginal division of time. Of course Reinhardt visualizes blackness as some kind of technical problem. I visualize it as the quality that shapes my life, in terms of the quality of the acceptance that my work gets or does not get based on the fact that it is from the Afro-American community.

**Reinhardt**
But your art should be free from the community.

**Rockman**
Reinhardt makes objects for museums.

**Broomer**
I’d like to make museums for Reinhardt. I am concerned with the perceptual difficulty that Reinhardt imposes on his work because Michael Snow and myself, Aldo Tambellini and Cecil Taylor are all involved in bombarding the passive participants senseless. And yet there’s an underlying compatibility, actually, in achieving order in what we are involved in — in what Reinhardt is involved in. In viewing a Reinhardt painting there’s such a blanket of grey or black — whichever you wish to call it. This interests me because it forces the passive participant in the act of creation to go to such lengths
to formalize what is actually being done in the work.

**Rockman**

Reinhardt's difficulty, it seems to me, is the difficulty that Gustave Mahler had to face. Mahler was desperately striving to break out of grand romantic symphonic form and he never quite made it. Now Reinhardt is in the same sense desperately trying to break out of everything that he understood as formal painting, but he's still stuck with that form. In other words, the rectangular canvas, the object. And the rest of what we were talking about, black, with all its other connotations and the fusion kind of aesthetics that I think most of us are interested in, Reinhardt can't accept because black for him is only a palpable object that is there on the wall and that you respond to.

I think that Harvey Cowan would see the same thing in architecture. There are architects who feel that a building is a "made" form that's there, whereas there are other architects — Otto would be a very good example, or the Archigram group in England — who don't see this thing as fixed structure. And so if we talk about black, again you can start talking about black spaces that might be there one time or not there another time — that will depend just as much on the lighting of the space itself as the inherent colour of the materials or the shape of the space. Or one could conceive of spaces that are ever-changing, that have black qualities or light qualities.

**Cowan**

Impermanence is the big new thing in architecture rather than design forever — say, like the designs Mies van der Rohe did; you might equate his architecture to black painting. The new concept in architecture expressed by the Metabolist group in Japan and others is to let things live and die natural deaths.

**Rockman**

There's a sense in which black (I'm thinking now in spatial terms as we experience it), when we think of black night and darkness, is all-enveloping. Even if it's temporary it has the quality of evoking in us a fear that it might be permanent. You know, I suspect that this is at the bottom of a lot of our experience of black,
that there might be order in that blackness, but how can we ever know? You can't see anything. Whiteness can be just as disorderly: “white noise” is a good metaphor for this, in which you have a completely random mixture of all frequencies; and yet it's not threatening in the same way.

**Broomer**
The idea of black is a continuing form. It's also highly spongelike the way it absorbs other colours and eliminates them. My musical horizons are a little different than Mr Taylor's because of the peculiar experiences from which he comes. But I'm interested in all musical artifices, all manners of musical expression, being absorbed into a single totality. And for me this totality has the formal quality of blackness.

**Cowan**
Rather than a rainbow?

**Broomer**
It's at once a rainbow and black too. I think the non-reflecting quality that black has is also not dependent upon these absorbed forms. The consistency of black as a form is much more oppressive to me than anything.

**Cowan**
I'd like to clear up the idea of soft space. We have soft sculpture and we have hard space, but I think black space makes soft space. There's a building under construction in Brasilia by Oscar Niemeyer, a cathedral. It looks like a glass tent, and it's quite a high-ceilinged space. In order to get into this space you enter a few hundred feet away into a hole in the ground and you go through what I hope is a very dark tunnel and then up into this dazzling space. And I think this is an instance of a soft experience and maybe a cleansing experience to disorient yourself from the outside to approach a religious experience. I wonder if Tambellini and Reinhardt really are saying the same thing, because Tambellini says black is birth, it's the start of something; but Reinhardt's art is also the start of something.
Before me — blackness: an inky-black sky studded with stars that glowed but did not twinkle; they seemed immobilized. Nor did the sun look the same as when seen from Earth. It had no aureole or corona; it resembled a huge incandescent disc that seemed embedded in the velvet black of the sky of outer space. Space itself appeared as a bottomless pit. It will never be possible to see the cosmos the same way on Earth.
— Aleksei Leonov, the first man to walk in space, 18 March 1965

cover Aldo Tambellini's lumagram from hand-painted slide for Black Zero
page 2 Aldo Tambellini, round poem
page 4 Photo: Jessie Fernandez, New York
page 5 Photo: Michel Lambeth, Toronto
page 7 (left) Ad Reinhardt, Black Diptych, 1965, oil on canvas, 60" h. x 30" w. The Jewish Museum, New York. Photo: Gretchen Lambert, New York.
(right) Element of Japanese calligraphy, emblematic of "painting". Anonymous


Black Zero, Internal Sequence: Calo Scott on amplified cello with hand-painted slides projected on black balloon. Photo: George Eherlich.
notebook page, 1967: idea for simultaneous projection of a movie and slides on air-suspended, spherical forms.
Aldo Tambellini and his poem "to be enveloped by black." Photo: Diane Dorr-Dorney.

(upper right) Michael Snow, Atlantic, 1967, tin and sequential black and white photographs of the sea, 5" h. x 6" w. x 20".
(lower right) Michael Snow, detail from Atlantic.

page 13 (left) Oscar Niemeyer, model of cathedral in Brasilia
(right) Robert Markle, Burlesque Series: New York City Redhead, 1963, tempora, 35" h. x 23" w. Collection: Mr Jack Creely. Photo: Isaacs Gallery, Toronto

page 14 (clockwise from upper left) Satan gives the Adepts a Black-Book in Exchange for the Gospels, from Guccius, compendium maleficarum, 1626
Specimen of the Book of Spirits, a Black Book, from Frances Barrett, The Magus, 1801
Jose Guadalupe Posada, Death's Head, 1940.
Hand of Glory, from Secrets merveilleux de la magie naturelle et cabalistique du Petit Albert, 1722.
Jose Guadalupe Posada, The Serpent Woman

page 15 (clockwise from top left) The Creation of the World According to Occult Doctrine, from Robert Fludd, Utriusque cosmic majus . . . , 1619
Stu Broomer, Black Magic, lines chosen at random from African myths, 18 August 1967
Aubrey Beardsley, India ink drawing for The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, 1894-95
Jose Guadalupe Posada, The New Comet

page 16 Quotation from The Song of Solomon, I, 5-6
George Laithwaite, (d. 1956) The Queen of Sheba, cement over armature made of iron from old farm machinery, approx. 3' high, Goderich, Ontario. Photo: Don Vincent

page 17 Black Panther symbol for Black Power movement

page 18 Aldo Tambellini, seed black poem

page 19 Astronaut Aleksei Leonov floats in space. Reproduced from colour film taken by Leonov's colleague aboard their space vehicle, 18 March 1965. Photo APN, from The Unesco Courier, June 1965