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THE RELEVANCE OF TITLE TO FORM AND CONTENT IN THE MATURE WORK OF BARNETT NEWMAN

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VOLUME 1

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Johannesburg March, 1983

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement is given to Mr. Robert Hodgins and Mr. Terry King whose advice and counsel have greatly helped in the writing of this dissertation.

Appreciation is also expressed to those who were interviewed and gave of their time, interest and encouragement, namely: Mrs. Annalee Newman, Professor Lawrence Alloway, Mr. Tony Smith, Mr. Ben Raeburn and Professor Gershom Scholem. Grateful appreciation is expressed to those consulted on specific aspects germane to the research of this work: Professor Kaddari, Mr. Eric Wainright, Mrs. Sonjia Grobber, Dr. Israel Ben Joseph, Rabbi Isaac Goss, Mrs. Patti Kramer.

Thanks is also expressed to the curators of various museums for making research material from their archives available and to many others who assisted in various ways.

The author has been the grateful recipient of a grant from the Human Sciences Research Council which contributed toward the research of this study.

None of the aforementioned persons and institutions are to be held responsible for anything in this dissertation, since this is the sole responsibility of the author.

ABSTRACT

Barnett Newman's mature work i.e. from 1948 - 1970 is characterised by monumental paintings, flat planes of single colour and vertical stripes as the only pictorial element. Despite this severe reduction of form, the titles of these works suggest profound and esoteric concepts. This dichotomy of simple form and complex meaning creates a problem of understanding as there is no obvious correlation between the two. A guide to interpretation is needed and is indicated even more by the wide disparity between the interpretations by different critics. In particular T.B. Hess, in his 1971 book on Newman, introduces references to Kabbalistic themes that complicate the issue further. Newman's widow and some critics reject Hess's premise yet the image of Newman as a Kabbalist artist persists in writings as recently as 1980.

This dissertation examines Hess's theories, rejects most of them and attempts alternative interpretations. Newman was a prolific writer and his stated philosophy may be studied as an index to the understanding of his work. This emerges as concerned with sublime, spiritual and heroic content; and the absence of pictorial, nostalgic references from nature is intended to evoke in the spectator a corresponding spiritual and emotional response. Whether the artist's aims were realized remains unanswered in this work because the title - form relationship is still to some extent, obscure; but it is hoped that lines of research into Newman's work other than those by Hess, are strongly suggested.

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PREFATORY NOTE

This dissertation is in two volumes: Volume I which comprises the main text; and Volume II (the consultative volume, hereafter referred to as c.v.) which consists of reference material germane to the arguments presented and reference sources: a brief glossary of Jewish terms used in the text, references, tabulations of titles, themes and measurements, a graph of comparative measurements, Newman's essay, The Sublime is Now, his catalogue statement on his Stations of the Cross, and the biblical iconography of the 14 stations from Alloway's analysis. In the c.v. as well, are transcriptions of taped interviews with Lawrence Alloway, the art critic, and Gershom Scholem, the Kabbalist scholar and author of many books on the Kabbalah. Note though that although other interviews were conducted with Annalee Newman, Newman's widow, Ben Raeburn, editor of the Horizon Press (and friend of Newman), Tony Smith, the sculptor (and friend of Newman), and Aaron Siskind, photographer (and friend of Newman), and references are made to these later interviews, no transcriptions are included in the c.v. In the c.v. are also the bibliography and illustration of works referred to in the text. When studying the colour illustrations, the problem of accurate reproductions must be taken into consideration. This problem became apparent when original paintings were viewed in the following museums.

The Tate Gallery	London
Stedelijk Museum	Amsterdam
Kunstmuseum	Basel
Detroit Institute of Arts	Detroit
Hirshhorn Museum of Art	Washington
Metropolitan Art Museum	New York
Museum of Modern Art	New York

Other paintings from the private collection of Mrs Newman were viewed in her apartment in New York.

All references are numbered in a new sequence on every page and both page and reference number are given in the c.v., e.g. 2-1, 2-2 refer to page 2, first and second references on that page.

The method of this investigation takes the following form. Firstly the problem is given definition in the introduction. This is followed by a biographical chapter on Newman's life, influences and material germane to this dissertation. A large section of the text deals with an examination of Thomas B.Hess's analyses of Newman's work and of Hess's thesis that Jewish mysticism is dominant therein. An extended investigation is then made of Newman's work in which the formal elements are analysed in relation to the title to ascertain whether this relationship determines the meaning of Newman's work. The final chapter presents conclusions drawn from the evidence presented and enlarges on Newman's aims and intentions regarding his art and its meaning.

As the theme of Kabbalism, dominant in Hess's interpretations, takes different directions, the analyses in this dissertation will often have the same starting point. This results in some unavoidable repetition.

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Even his untitled works are individually interpreted because critics are able to find themes and meanings in Newman's writings. He wrote many essays and articles on different subjects, but mainly they dealt with his approach to art.* His stated philosophy adds an element of profundity to even the most pictorially ascetic works, which can be detected by studying the various concepts postulated in his writings.

In a 1946 catalogue statement, Newman described the notion of metaphysical content in the abstract shapes of primitive art:

> Here, then, among a group of several peoples the dominant aesthetic tradition was abstract. They depicted their mythological gods and totemic monsters in abstract symbols, using organic shapes, without regard to the contours of appearance. So strict was this concept that all living things were shown 'internally' by means of bisection. ... Their concern, however, was not with the symmetry but with the nature of organism; the metaphysical pattern of life.[1]

In 1948 he wrote a widely quoted essay, The Sublime is Now, in which he discusses abstract forms as they relate to concepts of the sublime:**

> The question that now arises is how, if we are living in a time without a legend or mythos that can be called sublime, if we refuse to admit any exaltation in pure relations, if we refuse to live in the abstract, how can we be creating a sublime art? [2]

Specific reference to the sublime in this essay has caused critics such as Thomas B. Hess,[3] Harold Rosenberg,[4] Lawrence Alloway,[5] and Robert Rosenblum,[6] to assume that it is relevant to Newman's own art.

Newman's stated concepts were generalisations rather than specifics, but some critics consider that his writings are an index to the

---

* It is difficult to specify the exact number and dating of these writings as many are unpublished.

** This essay is reproduced in the c.v. p.171

meaning of his work. The premise is that the title is indicative of the particular work and some critics interpret the formal elements of the work according to the title. Such interpretations are subjective and possibly lose the essence of the 'subject matter' which Newman claims to be the central issue of his work. This is discussed more fully on p. 143.

There are few instances when Newman explained or analysed his painting in any great detail. But he did define the meaning of some of his titles, which Hess quotes in his monograph on Newman and his work.[1] Some seventeen titles are discussed in terms of their connotations yet Newman seldom related the title to the physical work. For example, he never explained why he divided a dark red painting into three sections with two vertical stripes and entitled it Covenant (1949). He merely made a reference to the biblical connotations of the title:

> Covenant: What the people promised, "We will do and we will listen." [2]

The title is defined but the relation between the structure of the painting and the defined title remains obscure. Another example is the painting, White Fire (1954). This is neither white nor is there any semblance of fire or flames through colour or form. It is a flat expanse of light aquamarine divided into three rectangles by two vertical stripes. Understanding of the painting is complicated by the title. Without the title, the painting may be understood simply in terms of the formal elements of size, colour and composition. The title adds an hermetic quality to the painting because there is no obvious relation of form to title, which itself is heavy with profound meaning. The words White Fire have Talmudic connotations (Ref. note. 69:1 These two examples define the problem: there is a body of work stripped of all figurative and literal references and reduced to an elemental statement, but with heavily weighted titles that do not apparently describe or relate to the paintings. The problem is exacerbated by Newman's claim that 'the central issue of my painting is the subject matter'. [3] This statement denies his art as being a pure abstract art devoid of representational form, and also devoid of content.

In a number of general statements Newman stressed different themes that could refer to the 'subject matter'.

> .... I am concerned with the immediate and the particular without using a general formula for the painting process with its many particulars.
>
> My concern is with the fullness that comes from emotion, not with its initial explosion, or its emotional fall-out, or the glow of its expenditure.
>
> Color is absolute. It is my subject matter. It is my experience.
>
> It (my work) is full of meaning, but the meaning must come from the seeing, not from the talking.[1]

> What is this clamour over space? ... My paintings are concerned neither with the manipulation of space nor with the image, but with the sensations of time ...[2]

> My paintings are, in fact, a confrontation with Surrealism. Just as they are a confrontation with abstraction.[3]

> The only thing that counts in my paintings is the stripe.[4]

> Drawing is central to my whole concept ... I am always referred to in relation to my color. Yet I know that if I have made a contribution, it is primarily in my drawing ... [5] (see c.v. p.182).

Newman stressed different aspects of his art in these statements, but each one is relevant to his work. He altered the emphasis from one aspect to another in accordance with the specific point he was making in that particular statement and at that particular time.

Newman also stressed the concepts of chaos and the sublime in general terms but never specifically in terms of his own work nor claimed that the 'subject matter' of his own work was sublime. This connection has been made by others, Rosenberg, for example, contends that the sublime is the 'subject matter' in Newman's work.

> For Newman, painting was a way of practising the sublime, not of communicating it.[6]

Other writers have referred to the metaphysical, religious, mystical, or romantic qualities of Newman's 'subject matter'. There is a considerable body of literature concerning Newman's work, and it

is natural that some disparity in interpretation would arise. Newman may have described the philosophy behind his work and expounded on the definitions of certain titles, but he never explained the physical form or even the meaning of his characteristic stripe, even though he claimed that it was 'the only thing that counts'.

Following the problem of interpretation, comes the problem of understanding, and the question of interpretation and understanding is the main issue of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY

Barnett Newman was born in New York on 29 January 1905 to Jewish parents who had emigrated from Russia five years earlier. Eastern European Jewry usually followed the traditional, orthodox way of life but although both Newmans came from this religious background, they did not maintain it once in America. However, they were apparently aware of their heritage and of their responsibilities, and their sons, Barnett and George, were given the traditional Hebrew education decreed by Jewish law. According to this law, young Jewish boys are obliged to study Hebrew and Torah for their barmitzvah (an initiation ceremony into manhood). At the age of thirteen, a boy is expected to accept adult, religious responsibilities and at his barmitzvah and thereafter he is allowed and encouraged to participate in the reading of the Law (Torah) during synagogue services. The standard of Hebrew and learning expected from a thirteen year old boy is intended to be a primary introduction to a life study of Torah. Few boys, however, from heterodox, Westernised Jewish homes such as the Newman home, continue this study after their barmitzvah, unless they intend to enter the rabbinate. There is no evidence that Newman had such aspirations and neither is there any indication that he studied Hebrew on an academic or spiritual level after his barmitzvah in 1918.

Without such extended study, Newman's knowledge of Hebrew was probably on the most basic level. This premise is relevant because Newman's Jewishness and his use of Jewish motifs, particularly in his titles, is given importance by some art critics, particularly Hess. Thus it is important to realise that there is a clear distinction between different Jewish groups within the framework of Judaism. There are those who observe the strict code of Torah in the traditional orthodox manner, and there are others who are partially observant. This second group adheres to certain aspects of Judaism, such as observing the Sabbath, and/or keeping to the dietary laws, and/or attending synogogue either regularly or occasionally. Finally there is a third group who can be classified

as peripheral Jews. They recognise their Jewish birth, some being proud of it, others not, but either way they do not practise the religious laws that Jews are supposed to follow. It would seem that Newman belonged to this third group, a group defined by Joseph Blau.

> ..... Judaism is many roads, all of which combine elements from the body of traditions with novelties reflecting the need of a new age.
>
> From this standpoint, it becomes clear that there is another major alternative open to Jews in contemporary America, that of remaining culturally and ethnically Jewish while holding aloof from most of the organised religious activities of their fellow Jews.
>
> To judge by the complaints of synagogue officials, the "un-synagogued" constitute a substantial segment of the Jewish population. One cannot speak of this class as having left the Jewish community. They are very much a part of American Jewry in their own minds. ..... The point is that there are a number of American Jews who express their religious feelings and satisfy their spiritual needs exclusively through social welfare activities, ethical causes, cultural creativity and even political participation in matters of concern both to the Jewish community and to the society in general.[1]

Newman's adherence to Judaism fits into Blau's definition of this particular Jew, as Newman neither studied Torah nor attended synagogue. Neither did he observe the Sabbath nor the strict conditions governing the dietary laws, yet, according to Hess, he identified strongly with Judaism in his work. In his 1971 book on Newman, Hess notes that Newman went to synagogue twice a year to say Kaddish for his parents. The fact that Newman recited this ancient prayer does not indicate any religious piety; it reflects love and traditional respect for the memory of his parents. The act of saying only Kaddish is a way of identifying peripherally with Judaism - not of practicing orthodox, traditional Judaism.

According to his biographers, Newman was conscious of his Jewish heritage and cultural background and possibly paid homage to it through his work. The number of Jewish themes used in his titles could be both acknowledgement and declaration of his Jewishness which was not evident in a social or religious form. He was also interested in Jewish literature and this interest is substantiated by a number of books by great Jewish thinkers found in his library.

Among these are works by Maimonides and Spinoza, and especially the writings of Gershom Scholem. (Books by these and other Jewish authors were noted by the candidate when she visited Mrs. Newman and was shown Newman's library).[1] Some of the books on Jewish topics that Newman owned were originally written in Hebrew but all of his copies are in the English translation, indicating that he was not a Hebrew scholar. There are no official records to show that Newman belonged to any New York Jewish organisation nor that he was a congregation member of a synagogue.[2] Apparently he did not identify with Judaism on a formal, social or on a religious level.

Having indicated the limited extent of Newman's Jewishness, it is now suggested that he identified rather with the American culture into which he was born. Blau sees this kind of transference of affiliation from Jewish culture as a general Americanisation of the Jew.

> This secular and moralistic version of Jewish identification is American, very American.
>
> A civic moral attitude has become an acceptable replacement for a religious attitude. .....
>
> The Jews in America have certainly been Americanised, not always in the highest sense of that term, but it is also true and worthy of comment that American culture has been Judaised, not always in the best sense.
>
> The Jews have become so well integrated into American life that it is no longer essential to their well-being to have a special life of their own as Jews.[3]

This generalisation might apply to Newman because he was proud of being a New Yorker. As a boy he apparently played in the streets of New York and his speech and mannerisms were characteristically American: even the love of baseball was a serious part of his life. This is described by Hess to emphasise Newman's 'Americanness'.

> He always seemed deeply rooted in the American soil and the New York asphalt. He took baseball seriously - thought about it and spun theories around it. As "America's pastime" it uniquely expressed an aspect of Americanness, and thus to study it was to study himself.[4]

Dore Ashton also refers to Newman as

> '... a real New Yorker' unlike his confrères ... Still, Kline, Pollock, Rothko and de Kooning who came from other parts of America or from Europe.[1]

According to Hess, Newman claimed that as a young boy, he spent many days in the Metropolitan Museum of Art studying the great masters when he should have been in school. Later, but while still in high school, Newman enrolled at the Art Students League. Rosenberg says that Newman's decision to be an artist was probably made when his drawing of the Belvedere Torso was selected for the League's annual Concours, an exhibition of their best students' work of 1922.

> This selection confirms his resolve to be an artist - to him the "highest role a man could achieve".[2]

In 1923, at the age of eighteen, Newman wrote his first manifesto, an indictment of the Barnes Foundation policy, whose collection of French masterpieces was available for viewing only to students at the Foundation school. He began his career as a writer at City College of New York (C.C.N.Y.) with reviews of art and music for the college newspaper. In addition to his studies, writings, and involvement in the college literary society, Newman continued with his studies in art at the League. He also studied philosophy which, he claimed, had a profound effect on him and on his thinking for the rest of his life. The philosophy of the anarchist, Piotr Kropotkin, appealed to him and provided him with an objective political viewpoint, which later isolated him from his friends, who became Marxists.

In 1927, Newman graduated from C.C.N.Y. and during the next twelve years was active in painting, writing, politics, and in teaching art. He also spent some time working in his father's clothing factory and, after 1929, helped through the depression years until the firm eventually went into liquidation. It was during this time, i.e. in the late '30s and early '40s that he produced a number of unpublished writings some of which appear in Hess's 1971 book.[3] These writings are significant because they reflect his thinking and philosophy, which may have been the foundation for the concepts that determined the course that his mature paintings took after 1948.

This was a busy time for Newman but a few particular incidents are worth mentioning here. He was a candidate for Mayor of New York in 1933; he did not expect to be elected but defined his candidacy as a demonstration of 'the strength of the intellectuals of New York'.[1] In 1936 he published a magazine entitled The Answer - America's Civil Service Magazine. Both of these actions reflect his consciousness of civic affairs and place him within the context of the heterodox Jew described by Blau. Rosenberg records that Newman's magazine was well received by the public and the critics, but, because he lacked the funds to continue, he was forced to abandon it.

In addition to his own published and unpublished writings, Newman wrote a number of descriptive forewords for exhibition catalogues. Presumably, his impact on New York in the pre-war years and up to 1944, was through his pen and polemics rather than through his painting.

In 1936 (the year of his short-lived magazine) Newman married Annalee Greenhouse. The depression years of the '30s generally were difficult years for everyone but the strained finances of the newly-married Newmans were relieved by Annalee's working. This meant that Newman, unlike his colleagues, was not compelled to work for the WPA (Works Projects Administration 1935).* This he regretted later - he came to feel that he was left out and overlooked as one of the leading New York artists, precisely because he had not been part of the government programme when Pollock, De Kooning, and others had been members. Hess notes that Newman's reputation may have been affected by this:

> Newman's absence from the project would have a telling effect on his later reputation. The WPA experience became in the early 1950s, a kind of visa to the New York artists' milieu, a necessary credential. Lacking it, Newman was dismissed by many as a stranger, a Johnny-come-lately, even an amateur.[2]

Newman stopped painting in the year in which World War II began

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* Redesignated in 1939 as Works Progress Administration.

but it is not recorded whether he abandoned painting because of the war. Neither Hess nor Rosenberg, his two main biographers, associate the two events, but Brenda Richardson claims that he was affected by the war.

> Newman was somehow galvanized in 1944-1956. It may be that insufficient significance has been attached to the coincidence of his rededication to art-making, and the relevations of Hitler's rise to power, the Holocaust, and the world-wide ramifications of the war and its devastation. These horrors had to have a powerful impact on every individual's sense of self, morality and purpose. It may be, in fact, that the war played a larger role than accredited previously in the sudden breakthroughs in American painting in 1946-1948 ... [1]

Newman makes only the briefest reference to the war in his writings of that time. The central theme of his 1942 article, What about Isolationist Art? is an indictment of American politics in terms of art and does not concern itself with the war.

> Isolationism, we have learned by now, is Hitlerism. Both are expressions of the same intense vicious nationalism ... (Both use) the "great lie", the intensified nationalism, false patriotism, the appeal to race, the re-emphasis of the home and homey sentiment.[2]

In 1942 Newman declared himself a conscientious objector in spite of his 4H classification from the draft board, a classification exempting its holder from military service. He rejected this classification, preferring to exercise his right to be a conscientious objector.

During the war years he continued to be very active in various fields of interest. He studied botany, geology and ornithology, he organised exhibitions and wrote more forewords for catalogues and also two articles for the magazine La Revista Belga.

Newman had many friends at this time, notably the artists Milton Avery, Bradley Tomlin, Mark Rothko, Tony Smith, Adolf Gottlieb, Lee and Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still and Hans Hoffman. Hoffman was important because he was a powerful theoretician whose presence in New York influenced the later New York School and another friend,

Betty Parsons, was an early publicist for, and exhibitor of, that school.*

According to Dore Ashton, the 1939 war in Europe affected most American artists psychologically and spiritually; she claims that

> ... many artists touched bottom spiritually.[1]

All the same these artists went on painting, they did not stop working as did Newman. Yet when they developed individual styles, they came at more or less the same time for all of them - for Newman as well as De Kooning, Rothko, Pollock and Still. Ashton describes how in the '40s they were all affected by the same set of influences, i.e. philosophical aspects of the writings of Nietzsche, Jung, Kant and Ranke, the influx of exiled European artists, and the teachings of Hoffman and his disciples:

> At precisely this point of moral desperation the arrival of some renowned Europeans - energetic and endemically optimistic - made a difference. Not only did they infuse the New Yorkers with a sense of purpose, but they also helped reconcile various esthetic conflicts; for it was not only Ernst, Tanguy, Masson, Seligmann, and other convinced surrealists who trod the streets of New York, there was also Mondrian, Léger, Glarner, Lipschitz and Zadkine, among others.[2]

Ashton notes that two artists, Kandinsky and Mondrian, represented the two directions in which metaphysical, abstract art had developed in Europe: the expressionistic and the geometric. Both artists died in 1944, at about the time that Newman resumed painting. He began with a series of experimental drawings, most of which he later destroyed.[3] These early works were influenced initially by surrealist automatic writing and mark-making. Newman wrote about his art of this time and his experiments with surrealism.

> How it went, ... that's how it was ... my idea was that with an automatic move, you could create a world.[4]

Ashton refers to this period in Newman's life as one of aesthetic rebirth but also as one in which he became a public figure in the

---

* The New York School is also referred to as the Abstract Expressionists. Both terms refer to a group of artists who emerged in the late '40s in New York. They were mainly abstract and gestural artists.

New York art world - again fitting the image of Blau's conscientious, American Jew.

> Like Breton; Newman was a moralist whose primary interest was to find the appropriate means to bring about a total crisis of consciousness. His path was always circuitous, leading now toward philosophical anarchism, now toward practical political action, now toward exalted philosophic speculation, now toward flat hard-nosed logic. His volatility was of great service to the artist community, for they too shifted and feinted to avoid association with a fixed esthetic theory.
>
> Newman began his public proselytizing in 1944 with a catalogue introduction to Gottlieb's exhibition at the Wakefield Gallery, and he followed that up with an important text for an exhibition he himself had assembled in 1946 for the new Betty Parsons Gallery. The show, entitled Northwest Coast Indian Painting, was designed to bring out the ritualistic aspect of primitive painting and, above all, its tendency to abstraction.[1]

Ashton quotes from this 1946 text, which she then criticises. She points out that primitive art had been discussed many years before Newman's catalogue and implies that Newman was not original in his concepts. This is probably true, but for Newman, Indian art represented a revelation of primitive thought processes with which he identified. In a later essay he described Indian art as

> ... a vehicle for an abstract thought-complex, ...[2]

Primitive art was based on certain concepts that were relevant for the Abstract Expressionists and Newman made a study of this ancient art, particularly Pre-Columbian American art. In 1949 he visited Ohio where he saw primitive Indian burial mounds. His earlier study of primitive art reinforced the profound affect the mounds had on him. Primitive art may have contributed towards Newman's search for 'something' meaningful to paint. This 'something' is what he referred to as subject matter, which was what he and his colleagues were seeking when they rejected existing styles.

> In 1940, some of us woke up to find ourselves without hope - to find that painting did not really exist ... The awakening had the exaltation of a revolution ... It was that naked revolutionary movement that made painters out of painters.[3]

Newman apparently decided that he had found (if not his subject matter) something meaningful to paint because in 1946 he began exhibiting his own work.

Still, despite the resumption of painting and exhibiting, he had not yet arrived at his final, individual style. His works of this period are busy compositions of biomorphic squiggles and seed-like shapes. His titles such as, The Slaying of Osiris, The Song of Orpheus, and Gea (all 1946) were drawn from the themes of ancient myths of creation.

In 1947, he wrote an essay for The Tiger's Eye* entitiled The First Man was an Artist. This essay has been quoted by many writers. The following year he wrote the even more widely-quoted essay, The Sublime is Now which reflects his thinking at that time. This essay shows how Newman saw abstract art as relating to the sublime, and that it evolved independently of European influences. By implication this was the art that he and his friends had sought and had discovered 'here' in America - not in Europe.

In rejecting a European influence, Newman also denied any debt to Mondrian's geometric planarity and theosophical philosophy. But Rosenblum claims that the 1945 retrospective exhibition in New York of Mondrian's work had a decisive affect on Newman and on the Abstract Expressionists. Newman had criticised Mondrian as a worldly artist who derived his forms from sense impressions.

> There has been a great to-do lately over Mondrian's genius. In his fanatic purism, his point of view is the matrix of the abstract esthetic. His concept, like that of his colleagues, is however founded on bad philosophy and on faulty logic. Mondrian claims that should we reduce the world to its basic shape, we would see that it is made up of horizontal and vertical lines, the horizontal table-line of the earth, the vertical lines of things that stand and grow on it.[1]

Although Newman rejects Mondrian's geometric art, Rosenblum suggests that Mondrian's aesthetic and spiritual elements acted as inspiration for Newman's mature style.

> But as ultimate as Mondrian's pictorial statement may seem, many of its formal and spiritual goals were to be resurrected in the art of the American Abstract Expressionists, several of whom - Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, in particular -

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* The Tiger's Eye, an art magazine of which Barnett Newman was an associate editor.

> could also envision paintings whose total destruction of matter and whose sense of boundless space locate us on the brink of mysteries as religious in implication as those evoked by Mondrian.[1]

In contrast to Rosenblum, Clement Greenberg argues that Newman's work is not related to Mondrian.

> Though Newman runs bands of color which are generally dimly contrasted in either hue or value, across or down "blank" areas of paint, he is not interested in straight lines or even flat surfaces; his art has nothing to do with Mondrian's, Malevich's, or anything else in geometrical abstraction. His thin, straight, but not always sharp-edged lines, and his incandescent color zones are means to a vision as broad as any other expressed in the painting of our day.[2]

It is difficult to prove or disprove any decisive relation between the work of the two artists, but the similarities of reduced form and geometric planarity cannot be disregarded. Even the spiritual quality claimed for both artists has some parallel although, as Greenberg notes, they are 'far apart in metaphysics'.[3]

Before Newman published his essay on the sublime, he painted his seminal work Onement I in January, 1948, and created the primary image that was to characterise all his work for the next twenty-two years. It could be said that Onement I was the culmination and synthesis of all the experiences and influences of his earlier life up to then: his Jewish background; the New York environment; his regular visits to the New York museums and galleries; his early polemicising and writings; his dissatisfaction with existing cultural, social, civic, and art systems; his intellectual dialogue with other writers and artists; even perhaps a questionable influence from Mondrian.

Rosenberg notes that after Onement I, i.e. about 1948, the tone of Newman's writings changed from making general statements on art and about artists as a group, to more personalised statements replacing the 'we' with 'I'. Rosenberg's contention is reinforced by a statement made by Newman in 1954.

> I do not come with dogmatic beliefs for others, I take full and single responsibility for my work, thoughts and acts.[4]

His biographers - Hess, Rosenberg, Alloway and Rosenblum[1] - are unanimous in claiming that with the creation of Onement I, Newman finally found his aesthetic direction and the form of his 'subject matter' for all his future work. Onement I was painted in January 1948, but many months passed before Newman decided on its title. It was during these intervening months that Newman read the works of various writers and philosophers such as Longinus and Burke in preparation for his essay on the sublime. Rosenberg, Alloway, and Rosenblum have noted that these writers may have significantly affected his approach to art and contributed towards the formulation of a philosophy that corresponded to his new aesthetic sense.

After Onement I, Newman began painting large pictures. Many of his friends in the late '40s, Pollock, Still, and De Kooning, were using large canvases but these works mainly were complex and busy compositions, heavily textured and multi-coloured. Newman's reduced pictorial form and stark, ascetic single-coloured paintings distinguished his work from theirs. An example is the monumental work, Abraham (1949) 210 x 88 cm, an all-black painting in contrasting matte and glossy finish.

While all the artists of the New York School were between them developing individual styles, there was a camaraderie and ideas were discussed, argued, and exchanged. Charles Harrison describes the period when they were all basically concerned with the same set of problems that included the awareness of, and need for greater pictorial space and for 'significant content'.

> What made these problems so intense for the Abstract Expressionists was not so much an ambition to make abstract paintings and to 'flatten' the picture space still further, as a conviction that the making of great art involved the embodiment of significant content. The problem was not what their (abstract) paintings were to look like so much as how to find a vehicle and how to find space for very specific kinds of subject matter in face of the apparent exhaustion of the resources which had sustained painting's traditional representational functions.[2]

It was during the '40s that Newman joined a group of artists who had started a new art school which primarily was concerned with the meaning of their art.

> When a group of Abstract Expressionists founded a school in 1948, they called it, at Barnett Newman's suggestion, The Subjects of the Artists. According to Motherwell, the name 'was meant to emphasize that our painting was not abstract, that it was full of subject matter'.[1]

Harrison describes the collective attitudes of these artists toward problems, as the meaning, and a 'vehicle' to express that meaning was in the use of greater areas of pictorial space. They all used large formats.

Newman had his first one-man show in 1950 at the Betty Parsons Gallery. Included in this exhibition was his first sculpture, Here I. The show was received with some interest and enthusiasm, but Rosenberg records that his second show, in 1951, met with an unfavourable reception from both the press and his fellow artists. He did not exhibit again until 1955. Despite a heart attack in 1957, the years that followed were active years for Newman; he painted, sculpted, made etchings and lithographs, and even, in 1963, designed a model for a synagogue. In addition, he participated in symposia, chaired seminars, gave talks, and interviews. He also continued writing, notably the 1968 foreword to the book Memoirs of a Revolutionist by Kropotkin, a man he had long admired. In the '50s and '60s, Newman was recognised as an artist of note and equally was recognised as an authority on contemporary art. In 1959, the sculptor, David Smith, nominated him as the most important painter of that year and in 1965 he was chosen by the U.S. Department of State to represent America at the São Paulo Bienal.

One of the most significant works painted in these years was The Stations of the Cross, a series of uniformly-sized canvases painted in black and white or on ungrounded canvas. He worked on this series for eight years from 1958 till 1966. (see c.v. p. 178).

Newman was awarded the Brandis University Creative Arts Medal in painting for 1969 - 1970. On July 4th 1970, he died of a heart attack. His plain, starkly simple tombstone was designed by his

friend Tony Smith and is as unadorned and severe as his seminal painting Onement I.*

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* Ben Raeburn, editor of Horizon Press, and friend of Newman, describes the tombstone as a stark black, block of granite.[1]

CHAPTER 2

HESS, NEWMAN AND KABBALAH

2.1 HESS'S INFLUENCE ON SUBSEQUENT WRITERS ABOUT NEWMAN'S WORK

Many writers and critics of contemporary art, particularly in America and Europe, have given interpretations during the past thirty years of Newman's work. These writers can be divided broadly into two catagories. The first consists of those writers who use the title as an arbitrary label, paying little or no attention to its implied meaning. They concentrate on the formal elements of the work only. The second group pay more, or as much, attention to the meaning of the title and the possible content of the work as they do to the form. They are interested mainly in an intellectual interpretation of the title which they relate to the work: the visual elements are explained as, in some way, descriptive of the title. Many of this second group seem to reflect a direct influence of Hess.

Hess was editor of Art News magazine and was the author of Abstract Painting: Backgrounds and American Phase (1951). He also wrote the first book on Willem de Kooning (1959) and the first monograph on Barnett Newman (1969), this for an exhibition at the Knoedler Gallery. In 1971, he wrote a second and more comprehensive book on Barnett Newman for the retrospective exhibition of Newman's work held at the Museum of Modern Art New York. In this book, Hess introduces detailed analyses of the artist's work, relating it to the esoteric teachings of Jewish mysticism called Kabbalah.

Hess's premise, as promulgated in this book, implies that the titles' connotations have Kabbalistic equivalents or sources, and that the work relates to profound and religious concepts. In attempting to substantiate these claims, Hess refers to Kabbalist writings and in particular to the writings of Gershom Scholem. Scholem is one of this century's most authoritative and respected scholars on Kabbalism. By supporting his text with quotations from Scholem's works,

Hess adds weight and an assumed authenticity to his claims for Kabbalistic influence on Newman's work. However, according to Mrs Newman,[1] no writer had previously referred to Newman's work as Kabbalistic. Nevertheless, Hess has succeeded in fixing the image of Newman as a Kabbalist painter. This is indicated by the many writers who also refer to Newman in this way. The following excerpts show how Hess's influence has been widely felt and also indicate the acknowledgement of Hess as an authority on Newman and his work.

Bernard Denver. London Letter (1972)

> Newman's Jewishness has an importance which Hess rightly emphasises ... A large number of his works ... relate directly to such sources.
>
> Newman has achieved a remarkable visual complexity. But much of the significance of the painting is lost without some knowledge of the Torah.
>
> It would be an injustice to Newman and a wilful impoverishment of our understanding of his work to disregard the fact that he consciously willed to impose on the formal values of his compositions elements drawn from Talmudic mysticism, from Aria Luria of Safed and the intricacies of the Zohar.[2]

Charles Harrison. Abstract Expressionism II (1973)

> Newman was deeply affected by traditions of Jewish mysticism. In his introduction to the Tate Gallery Catalogue, 1972, Hess provides considerable and most convincing information to substantiate Kabbalistic interpretations of many of Newman's themes and titles. It seems hard to overestimate the importance to Newman of his Jewish culture.[3]

Garrison Paskus (Dissertation). The Theory, Art and Critical Reception of Barnett Newman (1974)

> Through its title, Cathedra opens for examination something of the literary framework available to Newman. His particular constellation of metaphor here is borrowed once again from Kabbalistic writings.[4]

Paskus quotes a passage from Gershom Scholem's work to corroborate this, and this also reflects Hess's influence because Paskus uses Scholem's writings to substantiate his own Kabbalistic references.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. (1974)

> Gradually he (Newman) moved toward a single band or stripe, which allied to titles like Adam, The Beginning, and The Word, The Command, indicates their Jewish mystical origin.[1]

Robert Rosenblum. Modern painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition. (1975)

In describing the painting The Command, Rosenblum elaborates on the meaning with the following explanation.

> The searing beam that cuts through these fields of primordial stuff may well be inspired, as Thomas Hess has suggested, by a metaphor in the Kabbalah.[2]

In a later description of the painting Onement I, he makes a further reference to Hess's interpretation.

> The symmetry of Newman's Onement series is overt, but as Thomas Hess has proposed, even his overtly asymmetrical paintings may be dominated by a 'secret symmetry' .... [3]

Ellen Johnson. Modern Art and the Object (1976)

> .... Newman's orange line cutting right down the centre of a red-brown field in Onement I 1949 (sic) was as daring, and as seminal, as Malevich's black square on a white ground ....
>
> Newman's thrust is religious.
>
> .... primarily poetic analogies with ancient Judaic myths of creation.[4]

David Marvin Quick. Meaning in the Art of Barnett Newman and three of his Contemporaries: A Study of Content in Abstract Expressionism. (Dissertation) (1978)

> Onement I is not discussed as it was fully discussed by Hess[5]

By implication this statement accepts Hess's interpretation of this painting as being correct.

Beth Hatefutsoth. (1979)

The museum of the Jewish diaspora in Tel Aviv was opened in 1979 and was created to record and preserve the varied aspects of Jewish history and culture of the 'gulut' i.e. the dispersed Jewish people outside of Israel. Documentary films and audio-visual programmes

trace the development of Jewish activity throughout the world in the fields of the theatre, art, science, literature, and politics. In the section dealing with Jewish art, the only artist singled out from the Abstract Expressionist School, is Barnett Newman. This group of contemporary American artists included other famous artists who are Jewish and of equal importance such as Mark Rothko, Adolf Gottlieb, and Ad Reinhardt, yet only Newman was considered worthy of mention. As he is specifically referred to in a film of his work as a Kabbalist painter, this probably qualified him for inclusion in the section on Jewish art.[1]

Tate Gallery Catalogue. (1980)

A description of the painting Adam includes the following statement.

> It would appear, as Thomas B. Hess has pointed out, that his (Newman's) titles often had hidden meanings which were intended to hint at mystical religious experiences and Kabbalistic thought.[2]

Newman himself never claimed to be a Kabbalist and neither did he refer to the Kabbalah in his writings, and as no other writer before Hess ever seems to have thought of him in this way, it appears highly probable that these references have been derived from Hess. His influence was strong as ever in 1980, when commentators still consulted his book as a guide to understanding Newman's work. This is significant, because there have been other writers who refute Hess and yet they have not succeeded in disproving Hess's claims nor in modifying his influence.

2.2 EXAMINATION OF HESS'S INTERPRETATION OF NEWMAN'S WORK IN TERMS OF THE KABBALAH AND THE ISSUE OF SECRECY

In 1971 Hess propounded the theory that Newman had studied the Kabbalah, and was stimulated and inspired by 'his studies' and used the imagery of the Kabbalah in his work. This theory is introduced at the end of his second chapter entitled L'Errance.

> Being Jewish was part of his past and of his present; he was heir to a culture and took delight in studying it - more delight than he did in studying other religions. One could say that all civilizations and sciences were like an enormous museum through which he loved to wander, and among his favorite

> galleries were those devoted to Jewish myths and customs, philosophers and artists, and especially to that remarkable fusion of mysticism and logic that is known as the Kabbalah, ..[1]

Although Newman's interests covered a wide and varied range of subjects, Hess stresses Jewish mysticism as one of Newman's 'favorite interests'. Throughout his book Hess emphasises the Kabbalist theme by applying it to Newman's works. It would seem that Hess chose the works very carefully, and selected only those that would substantiate his premise; in particular, works with titles that were suggestive of Kabbalistic connotations. If Hess is correct in his assertion that the Kabbalah played a major role in Newman's work, it also should have been an important and integral part of his life. There is no evidence whatsoever that mysticism played any significant role in Newman's life, and, in contradiction to Hess, Mrs Newman claims that he was merely interested in the Kabbalah and had read 'one or two books' on it. Hess however gives the impression of 'serious study' of the subject.

> Newman's statement about his synagogue design is the only one of his texts known to me that makes extended, overt references to his studies in Jewish mysticism.[2]

The word studies implies academic learning beyond the casual reading indicated by Mrs Newman. In describing Newman's studio and working environment Hess again suggests a scholastic impression by referring to great Rabbinical and Kabbalistic sages.

> The studio is where he is most at ease, most himself, facing his finished pictures, everybody else's pictures, his works-in-progress.
>
> Where, then, is the place of Jewish mysticism, the cosmologies of Ari Luria of Safed, the discussions between Rabbi Isaac, Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai in all their Midrashlike finery that are recounted in the Zohar, the visions of White Fire, Black Fire, The Gate, The Way, Covenant, Promordial Light?[3]

In this excerpt, Hess interrelates the Rabbinical with the Kabbalistic and with Newman's titles. Many great Rabbis reject Kabbalistic teaching and to relate these Rabbis to the Kabbalah is incorrect. By extending the sentence to include Newman's titles, Hess succeeds in imposing upon these titles, Kabbalistic and Midrashic associations of scholastic references.

Mrs Newman says that if the Kabbalah had had a special interest for her husband, as Hess claims, reference to it would have appeared in his writings. Newman was a prolific writer and polemicist as well as an artist, and Hess has quoted extensively from his many articles. These reflect the artist's philosophy as it applies to aspects of art, society, religion, and politics, and yet, in none of the passages quoted by Hess, is there one reference to the Kabbalah. The 'overt reference' noted by Hess (in the quotation referring to Newman's 'studies') probably is the Kabbalistic phrase Tzim Tzum* used by Newman in a cataloque statement written for his synagogue model exhibit.[1] However, Newman did not acknowledge the Kabbalistic source but merely intimated the connection with the biblical moment of the creation of light. (See Glossary).

Hess explains that the absence of Kabbalistic references in Newman's writings is due to the Kabbalistic tradition of secrecy:

> The Kabbalist's mystical knowledge is his private, even secret affair, ... [2]
>
> Finally, the Kabbalah itself has a long tradition of silence and strict privacy; ... [3]

From this, Hess implies that this secrecy applied to Newman. He also introduces the notion that Newman used 'secret symmetry'; which refers to a hermetic structure in certain paintings i.e. Abraham and Vir Heroicus Sublimis and others.

Hess nowhere states that Newman was a Kabbalist, but in his analyses he introduces Kabbalistic phrases and themes, thus implying that the Kabbalah is the basis of Newman's work. By extension, of course, the implication is that Newman adhered to the mystic faith. However it would be stretching the imagination to find any evidence of Kabbalistic influence in Newman's work. Mrs Newman corroborates the biographical references in Hess's 1971 book as factual but there is nothing in these facts to suggest that Newman was involved in the serious study that is required for sectarian Kabbalism.

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* The correct form is Tsimtsum or Zimzum, both words are discussed later. (see pp. 88-89)

Furthermore:

(i) he had not studied Hebrew in any great depth beyond his barmitzvah days, therefore his knowledge of Hebrew was very basic,

(ii) he had not been under the guidance of a spiritual teacher nor had he been recommended to study Kabbalah by a Rabbi,

(iii) he neither was devoutly religious nor did he conform to the specific conditions of a Talmudic life style required to be followed by a Kabbalist, i.e. piety, dedicated prayer, and study,

(iv) there are many books on the Kabbalah in German and in English (in addition to many other languages), but the highly esoteric nature of the Kabbalah demands a knowledge of Aramaic and Hebrew*. The Kabbalah was originally written in Aramaic,

(v) Newman's reading of Kabbalistic literature was limited to one or two English translations and he would therefore not have the benefit of such esoteric knowledge.

According to the conditions specified, Newman cannot be classified as a Kabbalist scholar as he did not conform to any of the prerequisites required for a serious Kabbalist.[1] Without the esoteric knowledge that is transmitted only to initiated scholars, Newman had nothing to be secretive about. Hence, Hess's claim that Newman did not refer to the Kabbalah because of its private and secret doctrine has no apparent foundation. Newman probably did not refer to the Kabbalah because it was not important or not sufficiently important to his work.

It can be argued that Hess's innuendo that Newman was a Kabbalist may have been determined by the need to justify the many Kabbalist references that Hess used in his 1971 book. Another reason is suggested by Alloway (see p. 76). The substance of these contentions or

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* As Hess specifically refers to the Kabbalah as Jewish mysticism, Christian Kabbalah is irrelevant to this dissertation.

innuendos, is examined by excerpting from Hess's text passages that illustrate how he firstly introduces these ideas by referring to the Kabbalah in general terms. Then Hess's analyses are examined where Kabbalist references are made to specific works.

2.3 HESS'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE KABBALIST THEME IN GENERAL TERMS

Hess devotes more than three pages to an interpretation of the 1948 painting, Onement I. This interpretation is based primarily on an attempt to relate the form and title to the language of the Kabbalah. As already noted Hess suggests that Newman's titles indicate that the Kabbalah played an important part in his work.

> Newman left many clues in his titles, and in at least two statements, that he was well aware of the great poets and philosophical mystics of the Kabbalah.[1]

He continues to say that Newman's earlier works, prior to 1948, were concerned with themes of creation and classical myths. After 1946, according to Hess, Newman abandoned these themes and

> ... turned to the Old Testament, the Talmud and to certain insights and phrases from Jewish mysticism.[2]

He supports this reference to Jewish mysticism, with a description of the bands seen in the 1946 paintings, The Beginning, The Moment, and The Command: (Figs. 38 and 39).

> The idea of a tapering, vertical, beamlike shape could have come from his (Newman's) readings in Jewish Mysticism.[3]

In the second chapter of his book, Hess makes a brief reference to Onement I. This probably is because it is analysed in great detail in the third chapter but it is introduced here because it is linked to the Kabbalah and to Yom Kippur, the Jewish Holy Day of Atonement. Hess refers to the Messianic concept of 'new life' and 'creation' as part of the Kabbalistic content.

> ... Onement, a word which suggests wholeness, harmony, but also, as Newman himself pointed out, refers to At-onement, Atonement, the events of Yom Kippur which is a day of remembrance of the dead, but for the Kabbalists, also was the ideal moment for meditation on the Messianic secret, on rebirth, new life - in a word, Creation.[4]

Yom Kippur is a solemn festival, but is not specifically 'a day of remembrance of the dead'. A memorial prayer is recited on this day but it is also recited on many other festivals and on the Sabbath. In continuing, Hess quotes Mallarmé's phrase, 'glorious falsehood', and links this to Newman in parallelling poet and painter and again with a reference to Jewish Mysticism.

> Jewish Mysticism perhaps became Newman's 'glorious falsehood' perhaps something more. It suggested many ideas he already held; it reinforced and gave a new poetic language to many of his insights.[1]

Hess does not divide his text into numbered chapters but gives each a relevant heading. The first chapter entitled Not There - Here, is mainly biographical. The second chapter called L'Errance, deals with the development of Newman's changes in style from the surrealist, biomorphic forms of the early '40s to the emergence of the vertical stripe and stark compositions of the late '40s. L'Errance also links concepts of the Kabbalah to Newman and to his work in general terms and prepares the way for the detailed interpretations of specific works that appear in the following chapters. This chapter also establishes the idea that Newman's interest in the Kabbalah evolved from his literary and philosophical interests:

> The step from Spinoza's theory of intuition to the insights of Jewish Mysticism, especially as they were given form by the great Kabbalists, seems an easy, logical one ... [2]

In the later chapters Hess explores the complex symbols, meanings, and numerical codes associated with the Kabbalah and applies them to Newman's work, relying to a great extent, on excerpts from the works of Scholem for corroboration. He quotes from Scholem's English translations in his analysis and thus adds the weight of Scholem's scholarly work for Kabbalistic content. He briefly explains the meaning of Kabbalism at the end of the L'Errance chapter so that the reader can follow his use of the term throughout the book.[3] Hess succeeds in his purpose of creating the image of Newman as a Kabbalist painter in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMINATION OF HESS'S ANALYSIS OF ONEMENT I

Onement I (1948) (Fig. 1) is a small red painting (69 x 41 cm) and most critics consider it to be the watershed for almost all of the work that followed it. The artist's definition of the title therefore should be regarded as a relevant and integral part of understanding the work.

> Onement: Harmony, wholeness; the archaic sense of atonement that was at onement.[1]

This one sentence was all that Newman wrote on the meaning of the title but he did not describe or discuss the visual elements of the painting at all. It is this definition that Hess gives in his first 1969 monograph on Newman; it is quoted verbatim without embellishment or interpretation. After the artist's death in 1970, however, Hess suddenly introduces the theory that the painting was influenced by the Kabbalah, a theory extended in his second book on Newman published in 1971. In this book, Hess devotes more than three pages to the analysis of Onement I, the same painting that warranted only two lines earlier.

The later analysis of Onement I is now examined and in particular the extract from Hess's text (see pp. 24-25). Hess discusses the painting in great detail in the third chapter entitled Onement. The title acknowledges the importance of the painting and also pays tribute to it. Hess again refers to Onement I in discussion of other paintings, indicating its continuing importance as a seminal work. Hess first introduces it towards the end of the second chapter, after recording the artist's stylistic development and life history up to that point i.e. 1948. The strategic structuring of the text places this painting at a propitious time in Newman's life, emphasising that it was transitional in that it came at the end of one era and at the beginning of the next. It was Newman's 'break-through', and Hess sees it as the link that bridged the earlier 'experimental' style with the mature final image.

Expanding on Newman's earlier definition of the title, Hess singles out the word Atonement for special emphasis which he develops into a Kabbalist theme.

> The dark-red painting with an orange stripe painted down the middle, which was to provide a starting point for almost all Newman's later work, was titled Onement, a word which suggests wholeness, harmony, but also, as Newman himself pointed out, refers to At-onement, Atonement, the events of Yom Kippur which is a day of remembrance of the dead, but for the Kabbalists, also was the ideal moment for meditation on the Messianic secret, on rebirth, new life - in a word, Creation.* [1]

Hess, here, introduces the Kabbalist motif as though it were an extension of Newman's own concept. The first part of the above paragraph, i.e. up to Atonement was written by Newman, but Hess's juxtaposition of words leads the reader to assume that the balance of the sentence also, is Newman's. In this way, Hess overcomes the problem of falsely attributing the Kabbalist idea to Newman. He admits that

> ... Newman never spoke about such a basis for his art ...[2]

However, he continues to develop the Kabbalistic interpretation of Onement I and, by inference, creates the impression that Newman was alluding to the Kabbalah. Hess then details his analysis of Onement I placing particular emphasis on his interpretation of the Talmudic and Kabbalistic themes in Newman's paintings. The analysis is on three levels:

(a) the formal elements of composition,

(b) Newman's use of colour,

(c) Content by relating composition and colour to the title.

For the purpose of this argument, only Hess's analysis dealing with the content (c) will be examined here, as it is in this section that he developes the Kabbalist theme.

> Finally, Onement I represented an elegant solution to his problem of subject matter. He was to be the celebrant of the act of Creation, of life and renewal - the poet of

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* This analysis has been partially repeated from p. 21 because it is relevant to both discussions.

Genesis; but he was a poet whose words are visual forms, just as the words of the Torah have their own life as visual forms, as letters which were not joined into words until Adam's sin, when, according to Rabbi Eli-yahu, "God arranged the letters before Him into words describing death and other earthly things." Onement I is a complex symbol, in the purest sense, of Genesis itself. It is an act of division, a gesture of separation, as God separated light from darkness, with a line drawn in the void. The artist, Newman pointed out, must start, like God, with chaos, the void: with blank color, no forms, textures or details. Newman's first move is an act of division, straight down, creating an image. The image not only re-enacts God's primal gesture, it also presents the gesture itself, the zip, as an independent shape - man - the only animal who walks upright, Adam, virile, erect. The red-orange stripe on its red-brown field could have suggested another metaphor from the Kabbalists' interpretation of Genesis; red-brown is the color of earth; Adam is the man created by God; the Hebrew word for earth is adamah; and "Adam was made from the matter of earth, literally from the clay". However, as Philo wrote: "It is conceivable that God wishes to create his man-like form with the greatest care and that for this reason he did not take dust from the first piece of earth that came to hand, but that from the whole earth he separated the best, from pure primal matter the purest and finest parts, best suited to his making". Thus the fine cadmium red light of the stripe relates to the cadmium red dark of the field as the body of man relates to the body of the earth. The orange form is fleshy, bodied, with sensuous edges.

Such a reading of Onement as the creation of man and of Adam, newly created, on the earth, finds further elaboration in the Zohar, where it is written:

It is only when he is complete that a man is called "one", but not if he is lacking, and so God when He is made complete with the patriachs and the Community of Israel, then He is called "One". ...

When is "one" said of a man? When he is male together with female and is highly sanctified and zealous for sanctification; then and only then he is designated one without mar of any kind. Hence a man and his wife should have a single inclination at the hour of their union, and the man should be glad with his wife, attaching her to himself with affection. So conjoined, they make one soul and one body; a single soul through their affection; a single body, for only when male and female are conjoined do they form a single body; whereas, and this we have learned, if a man is not wedded, he is, we may say, divided in two. But when male and female are joined, God abides upon "one" and endows it with a holy spirit; and, as we said, these are called the children of the Holy One, be blessed.

Onement thus is another way of saying "Genetic Moment" or "Adam and Eve" and the title celebrates a heroic vision of man and of man's creative powers.[1]

By interrelating form - title - content, Hess creates the impression that Newman was trying to convey a definite, religious and mythical theme. And each element - form, title, content - adds up to the totality of one meaning, which is the 'subject matter'. 'Subject matter', of course, was one of the central issues for the Abstract Expressionist school in the early '40s. Newman and his colleagues were very concerned about the problem of what to paint.[1] In an unpublished monologue entitled, The Problem of Subject Matter, (1944), Newman defines the problem:

> If we could describe the art of this, the first half of the twentieth century, in a sentence, it would read as the search for something to paint.[2]

Harold Rosenberg also stresses Newman's concern with this problem;

> "The central issue of painting," cried Newman again and again, "is the subject matter, what to paint." [3]

Hess claims that in Onement I, Newman found his solution, a claim that is substantiated by other writers and by Newman's own statement

> I actually lived with that painting for almost a year trying to understand it ... I realized that I'd made a statement which was affecting me and that was, I suppose, the beginning of my present life.[4]

The major difference between Hess and other writers lies in the definition or interpretation of the 'subject matter' that Newman had found. Hess explains this 'subject matter' and substantiates his theory with an analysis of the content in which the flat red ground divided by a single line indicates the creation of Adam. This is explained in an etymological discourse in which Hebrew words are used to define the painting.*

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* Many Hebrew words with one meaning derive from a common root called a shoresh. Thus, a verb and a noun may derive from one source and in addition, other nouns that have associative meanings may also originate from this same source. The shoresh consists of two, three or four letters and an example of Hebrew etymology is illustrated in the word, Shechain - dwelling.

Sh.ch.n. (root letters)	Shechain is a neighbour who dwells in a Shechunah which is a neighbourhood Mishchan is the place where the Holy Ark is kept - where it dwells. Shechinah is the Divine Spirit which dwells in the Shechunah.

The interrelation of words and meanings is a fact of Hebrew grammar; and Hess's explanation of man - Adam, red - adom, clay - adomah is quite correct, but it is doubtful if Newman had these ideas in mind when titling the painting or defining it.[1] At the time of painting Onement I, he was primarily experimenting with colour values.

Because Hess had referred to Scholem's work in analysing Onement I, Scholem was asked during an interview, to read this passage dealing with Adam, Adom, and Adomah. He read it and made the following observation:

> Adam, Adom and Adomah having a common shoresh is not Kabbalah. Every Midrash says the same. This can be found in the Midrashim, Sefer Bereshit and Genesis ... Of course Midrashic motifs have been taken over by the Kabbalists. It is obvious because Kabbalists looked at the Midrashic imagery as a source of their own inspiration ... This is a Jewish motif and a Midrashic idea and I deny that it is a Kabbalistic idea.[2]

Scholem rejected Hess's use of this motif and claimed it had been taken out of context.

Hess's elaboration of the Hebrew connotations of Adam, Adom and Adomah are related to the red ground of the painting. If, as Hess claims, Newman used red intentionally because of its meaning, it might explain why he painted three subsequent works in red, all of which are also entitled Onement. But this is contradicted by the two paintings carrying the same title, Onement V and Onement VI, which are painted in blue. Hess does not attempt to explain this dichotomy of colour and neither does he refer to it in his 1971 book. Newman did not necessarily associate the title with the colour red, and probably not with any other colour. Hence, Hess's complex interrelation between colour and the title in the painting cannot be substantiated.

It is also interesting to note that later in his text, Hess discusses the painting Adam (1952), which is also red, but he does not analyse it with the biblical imagery used for Onement I.[3] In terms of the colour, the relation between title and subject applied to Onement I would have been more appropriate had it been used for Adam. But Hess may have felt that this 1952 painting lacked the

historical significance of Onement I and that it did not warrant the same detailed interpretation. Hess believes that the central stripe in the painting represents the biblical 'Adam', and refers to it as a symbol. It is this symbolic reference that Rosenberg attacks in a pointed criticism of Hess:

> Onement I does not 'mean' it confronts.
>
> One thing that Onement I could not stand for was a specific idea - its vertical orange stripe does not symbolize man or earthborn Adam or the deity; nor do the neighboring fields of darker red represent the earth. Instead of invoking symbolic references, the painting calls for blank recognition of itself, as indisputable as "I" or "it". [1]

Continuing with the theme of 'Adam', Hess again turns to the writings of Scholem, possibly to substantiate his theme of Kabbalistic influence. He now elaborates on his interpretation, giving references from the Zohar, which Scholem has discussed at length. Scholem examined Hess's reference to the Zohar and the concept of the male and female being 'one', which Hess relates to Onement I. Initially Scholem was perplexed by the word Onement as he had never heard it before, but confirmed that the concept of 'union' appears in his book on the Zohar. He hastened to add that this concept was not Kabbalistic:

> It is in my book but I do not say that the Kabbalists invented it. The Zohar literally gives this sentence but it has been taken over from the Talmud ... "That man alone is only 'plak adam' " (this is the Hebrew) which means in English that "Man is only half a man without woman." But this is a motif to be found in the Talmud.[2]

Further examination of Hess's analysis shows an analogous interpretation of the word 'void':

> Onement I is a complex symbol, in the purest sense of Genesis itself. It is an act of division, a gesture of separation, as God separated light from darkness, with a line drawn in the void. [3]

Hess's reference to the 'void' probably was inspired by Newman's statement that if an artist is to create a meaningful work of art, he must start from 'chaos', from the 'void'.[4] Hess infers that Newman translated this concept into paint; that his flat expanses of 'emptiness' were symbolic and descriptive of this 'void'. He

suggests that Newman activated this 'emptiness' with his dividing line which becomes analogous to God's creation of light. According to Mrs Newman, such a literal interpretation is completely foreign to Newman's character.[1] Some knowledge of his work and of his writings would place the idea of the 'void' in a broader context and on a more universal and metaphysical level.

Hess's analysis makes no reference to the word Atonement. His lengthy analysis concentrates on religious and biblical subject matter, but Hess omitted Newman's original definition, which was based on the concept of Atonement as quoted in his 1969 monograph. Hess refers to it briefly in the second chapter, L'Errance, but it is not mentioned at all in the detailed analysis in the third chapter. This is an anomaly, because if there is one word or concept that may fit the idea of the 'void' it is Atonement. It carries religious connotations that correspond to the intangible values that have no substance and certainly the 'void' has no substance.

The Day of Atonement is the only festival in the Jewish calender that has no symbolic artifacts; all other festivals have ritual artefacts that are symbolic of some biblical event but not the Day of Atonement.* It is the only festival that concentrates completely on the spiritual aspects of man and therefore, concentrates on the abstract concepts that are 'void' of worldly imagery.[2] Associating the word 'void' with Newman's own reference to Atonement is more logical that associating it with a hypothetical story of Genesis, Adam and themes from the Zohar.

Hess has attributed to Onement I a Kabbalistic substance and over-interprets the formal elements according to this iconography. Hess's interpretation appears to be questionable, and an alternative interpretation of Onement I in terms of its relevant elements follows.

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* There is a ritual performed on the day before The Day of Atonement, the Kapparot which by itself refers to atonement. In this a live chicken is swung around the head of each member of the family. This is practiced by only a few sects today. It is a symbolic act, but it is not a tangible symbol or artifact.

3.1 EXTENDED ANALYSIS OF ONEMENT I

A single glance at Onement I is all that is necessary to register the entire composition: a flat red plane with one stripe down the middle. Nothing could be simpler in terms of pictorial form, yet this image probably is the most important and complex work that Newman ever painted. Onement I is of seminal significance because it was the very first instance where Newman's economy of line and colour was reduced to an almost absolute form. Had the stripe been eliminated completely it would have been reduced to an even purer image, but Newman never abandoned the stripe. This was a revolutionary image for Newman and a personal style that characterised his work from then on. One might even say that Onement I was the source from which all of his subsequent paintings evolved. The later works could be understood as extensions of the one, single theme, i.e. the vertical stripe and flat undifferentiated colour introduced in Onement I.

Rosenberg's book on Newman (1978), includes a comprehensive collection of colour illustrations of Newman's work. These illustrations show only six instances of horizontal stripes. More than 130 paintings have vertical stripes moving from the bottom of the picture to the top. In some twenty-five of these, the stripe comprises a single element, as in Onement I. Even where there are multiple stripes, they are always straight, with one exception - Adam (1952); its internal stripe (or band) is bent slightly.

The single stripe in Onement I is relevant to the group of narrow paintings of 1950 and the Here sculptures that were developed from them. In this group, the stripe emerges as an independent element: a tall, narrow, vertical band, complete and whole and existing for itself. It is not a subservient interjection dividing a flat plane of colour nor is its centrality or position dependent upon a structuring of the surrounding surface area. Rosenberg emphasises the 'actuality' of these works by referring to the sculpture Here I.

> The Here sculptures call attention to their own status as realities. [1]

This explanation also may apply to the five narrow canvases that have no titles so that there is no literal or other interpretative meaning. The single stripe is an autonomous shape that could be understood as a tribute to the stripe in Onement I.

Hess records Newman's own description of the creation of Onement I.

> He (Newman) kept his motifs separate from the backgrounds by masking them with tape. On his birthday, January 29th, 1948, he prepared a small canvas with a surface of cadmium red dark (a deep mineral colour that looks like an earth pigment - like Indian red or a sienna), and fixed a piece of tape down the center. Then he quickly smeared a coat of cadmium red light over the tape, to test the colour. He looked at the picture for a long time. Indeed he studied it for some eight months. He had finished questing.[1]

Newman seems to have been experimenting with colour, and, before removing the masking tape, stopped to examine the image that he had created accidentally. He contemplated it for a long time and then decided against removing the masking tape. The tape, which had been applied as a temporary measure, became a permanent and vital element of the painting. But because the tape originally was temporary and Newman had stopped halfway, Hess calls this an 'unfinished painting' and an 'interrupted painting'.[2]

Rosenberg says that Newman was 'overwhelmed by Onement' and Newman explained that he was puzzled by the painting before realising that he had found the answer to his 'questing' and to his problem of 'subject matter'.

> I actually lived with that painting for almost a year trying to understand it, ... I realized that I'd made a statement which was affecting me and that was, I suppose the beginning of my present life because from then on I had to give up any relation to nature, as seen.[3]

Two significant facts emerge from this statement:

(i) Onement I was not a planned painting; it had been created, one could say, accidently. But Newman recognised that the 'accidental' statement he had made was important to him.

(ii) Onement I was the purest, abstract image Newman had

> painted up to 1948. It was devoid of biomorphic shapes and forms, which could be associated with plants, life, seeds, or nature.

'Subject matter' always had been one of Newman's major problems while he sought for a meaningful art. Onement I solved this problem - he had found his 'subject matter'. Rosenberg explains why this problem was so important to Newman.

> To be able to express feelings on the scale of the events of this revolutionary century, Newman was convinced a new art was necessary. Nor could this new art, in his view, consist of a mere reshuffling of the formal elements of existing art - a new subject matter had to be conceived.[1]

He was dissatisfied with existing art trends, and this was what decided Newman to give up painting between 1939 and 1944. He was convinced that art was dead and he made a direct attack on contemporary art in a statement made to Adolph Gottlieb:

> Painting is finished; we should give it up.[2]

Hess claims that it was Gottlieb who encouraged Newman to

> persist, keep working, seeking; they would find something.[3]

The 'something' for which they were all seeking was 'subject matter': what to paint. Newman describes this period, in terms of his painting, as being in 'limbo' but it was during this so-called, non-productive period that Newman was productive in another significant way. He was not painting, but he was writing, and it was then that Newman turned out a prestigious body of literary work. Even after he resumed painting in 1944, Newman continued to write and these writings reflect his personal philosophy. In formulating his thoughts and clarifying the concepts that structure his writings, Newman was laying the foundation for his mature art work that emerged in the late '40s with the creation of Onement I. Newman established himself as a vigorous and respected exponent of aesthetic and even political polemics, and was recognised for both his verbal and literary eloquence, which Elizabeth Baker implies, outweighed his painting.

> His (Newman's) various writings have sometimes seemed to supersede his paintings ... [1]

Baker suggests that Newman's paintings are less important than his writings. While this may apply to his early work, her statement, (made in 1969) is questionable in terms of his work after 1948. The significance of Baker's statement lies in the acknowledgement and recognition of his status as a writer. Like Baker, Sandler believes that Newman's writings 'anticipated' his later mature work.

> Just as Newman's field painting was anticipated by his writing, so was his kind of line that he came to employ.[2]

Other writers such as Hess, Alloway and Rosenberg also stress the importance of Newman's writings. In Hess's 1971 book, many of Newman's writings such as his Monologues are quoted. Through both his verbal and his written statements, Newman's ability to express himself through his art and his philosophy, demonstrate a clarity of thought that was respected in the art world as relevant and consequential to the understanding of the contemporary art of that time. Newman's ability to write has been stressed as an introduction to one of his most important essays, which may be relevant to the painting Onement I.

Between painting Onement I in January 1948 and titling it some months later, Newman admitted to a long period of contemplation; a period of 'trying to understand it'. [3] It was then that he wrote the significant essay, The Sublime is Now for The Tiger's Eye (December, 1948). In preparation for this essay, Newman studied various philosophers and writers who had written on the sublime and refers to them in his essay. These include Longinus, Burke, Kant and Hegel but Robert Rosenblum specially notes the importance of the definitions of the sublime given by Longinus and Burke:

> In 1948 Newman published an essay, 'The Sublime is Now', in The Tiger's Eye, which had organized a symposium on the topic of the Sublime. Newman's exploration of this aesthetic category that went back to Edmund Burke and Longinus bore out the experience he had earlier evoked that year in his Onement I .... [4]

Rosenblum links the essay to the painting in terms of a corresponding experience, whereas Alloway goes further and suggests that Newman's concept of the sublime is an extension of his earlier ideas on primitivism:

> Newman wrote his article on the Sublime in the same year that he painted the first and second pictures called Onement. The verbal and pictorial statements coincide exactly, but not all the ideas in the article have their origin at that moment. Aspects of Newman's primitivism are certainly carried into this fresh context.[1]

Newman's essay on the sublime, was anticipated by a number of forewords and catalogue articles on primitive art in which he advocated concepts that can be related to the sublime. In his catalogue statement, The Ideographic Picture (1947), Newman discussed the art of the Kwakiutl Indian in these terms:

> The abstract shape he used, his entire plastic language, was directed by a ritualistic will towards metaphysical understanding. .... To him a shape was a living thing, a vehicle for an abstract thought complex, a carrier of the awesome feelings he felt before the terror of the unknowable.[2]

A similar concept is found in Burke's writings in which 'fear' and a sense of 'terror' are descriptive of the sublime.[3] Alloway contends that Newman's essay on the sublime was a development of an existing idea rather that the introduction of a new idea.

If Alloway is correct in his claim that a primitive 'abstract thought complex' was rooted in Newman's psyche, then the 'accident' of Onement I could be described more aptly as inspired intuition (see p.137). The aesthetic symmetry and severity of the image stripped of all detail and all standardised concepts of beauty may have evolved as a development of the deep-rooted feeling inspired by primitive Indian art. Newman had already painted Onement I when he wrote his essay on the sublime, and in both, natural beauty of nature is rejected. Thus the philosophical theme in the following excerpt clearly corresponds to the aesthetics of the painting.

> I believe that here in America, some of us, free from the weight of European culture, are finding the answer, by completely denying that art has any concern with the problem of beauty and where to find it. The question that now arises is how, if we are living in a time without a legend or mythos

> that can be called sublime, if we refuse to admit any exaltation in pure relations, if we refuse to live in the abstract, how can we be creating a sublime art? [1]

Rosenblum contends that Onement I achieves a state of sublimity because of its departure from traditional aesthetic beauty and Burke also rejected beauty as an element of the sublime and added that majestic dimensions evoke sensations of sublimity.[2] This overpowering sense of 'majestic dimensions' and largeness are certainly evident in Newman's later work, but Onement I is comparatively small.

> Newman's Onement I of 1948, the first of a series by this title, already transmits, in surprisingly small dimensions, the effect of sublimity that Newman would explore and aggrandize until the end of his life. The stark bisection of a colored field with a vibrant vertical shaft of glowing, fiery light suggests again the domain of primal creation.[3]

Don Judd also contends that in spite of its small physical size, Onement I can still be understood as being large-scaled because of the visual elements that create the sense of scale rather than the actual dimensions.

> It's important that Newman's paintings are large, but it's even more important that they are large scaled. His first painting with a stripe, a small one, is large scaled.[4]

Irrespective of its dimensions, Onement I may be regarded as 'large-scaled' and having 'majestic dimensions' precisely because the effect on the viewer which is one of 'awesome dimensions'. Judd discusses the formal elements of the painting only and not the content as it relates to the sublime, but his observation is relevant to this particular conception of sublimity.

It is possible that there is an extended order of events - a sequence in which every incident is contingently related to the next. Firstly there was the painting, stripped of all inessentials to the severest of abstract form and devoid of any representational image. Then there was the essay on the sublime, a subject concerned with grandiose and metaphysical concepts. Finally following the synthesis of painting and essay - the title. The painting and

aspects of the sublime are abstract in form and in concept, the title is abstract or quasi-abstract because it is not a real word. There is a coalescence of all three elements - the work, the concept of the sublime, and the title, all of which combine to form a totality of a particular experience.

3.2 TITLE IN TERMS OF MEANING

Newman never explained the pictorial image of Onement I - not as it related to the title nor in terms of any other meaning. He neither explained the colour nor the stripe - he only described the experience of its creation and gave a definition of the title and its derivation.

> Onement: Harmony, wholeness; the archaic sense of atonement that was "at onement". [1]

Clearly Newman created the title from the word atonement by separating the components of the word. Paronomasiac formation of new words is not uncommon practice in biblical, Midrashic scholarship and, although there is no evidence that Newman studied Torah after his barmitzvah, he may have been aware of this language device. There is some indication that he used it to create or form the word, Onement from atonement. There is a strong possibility that his title was inspired by a specific source because, although Onement generally is believed to be a non-word, it is not necessarily a new word coined by Newman. He seems to acknowledge this in his definition by referring to the derivation of the word atonement as at onement. In the English text of the Chumash a reference to atonement reflects a close similarity to Newman's definition. In the Hertz edition of the Chumash the Hebrew text and the corresponding English translation can be found accompanied by a brief exposition and rabbinical commentaries on the interpretation of the bible. The first reference to atonement is found in the English exegesis of Genesis, 2:7.

> Other Rabbis held that the dust was taken from the site on which the Holy Temple, with the altar of Atonement, was in later ages to be built. That means, though man comes from the dust, sin is not a permanent part of his nature. Man can overcome sin, and through repentance attain to at-one-ment with his Maker.[2]

This text may have been the source for Newman's title and its definition. The words, at-one-ment, in the Hertz commentary, though hyphenated, clearly indicate the same meaning as Newman's definition. In both instances, the words at onement and at-one-ment derive from atonement and the meanings of both variations are related. The biblical term refers to a religious, spiritual, experience attained through repentance and atonement and Newman's term refers to a state of being 'at one with God'. Further discussion of the connotation and complexities of the word atonement is made on page 38, but a short explanation of Newman's extended definition of the words 'harmony' and 'wholeness' is relevant here.

Harmony is defined as,

> Combination or arrangement of parts to form a consistent and orderly whole, agreement, congruity agreeable effect of apt arrangement of parts ... [1]

This word and its connotations are descriptive of the pictorial structure of Onement I. The visual elements of the painting are its scale, colour, divided plane, central band and surface texture which combine to make an orderly 'whole'. There is the sense of 'agreeable' rightness where every element is in accord with the next. Wholeness is an expansion on Harmony, but stresses the quality of completeness or unity of parts: in other words, a total image that cannot be altered without destroying the perfect form. Onement is not a word in the English language nor in any other language, but it can be understood because of its associative sound with the words One and Oneness. Each of these words suggests singleness, completeness, uniqueness, unity, and 'wholeness', thus conveying a specific meaning to the reader.

Rosenberg recognises the abstract form of the word and discusses the title in terms of its abstract meaning:

> The very title, Onement is more abstract and elusive than those of previous Newman paintings. Onement is not really a word; and though its meaning is quite clear - the state of being one - it designates a condition that is ineffable and without qualifications.
>
> Onement adds an aura of indefiniteness to "oneness", the word that comes closest to its meaning. [2]

It seems that Rosenberg was not aware of the fragmented form of at-one-ment found in the Hertz Chumash because he makes no mention of it in his analysis. His interpretation of the title reflects a personal, and possibly a spiritual, experience of the Yom Kippur service. If Rosenberg attended synagogue and participated in the service, as is probable, he would only read from the Hebrew text as few worshippers refer to the English commentaries during the service. In certain temples of unorthodox congregations, an English service is followed but these congregations do not use the Hertz Chumash.

In using this title Newman relates the painting to one of the most spiritual experiences in Judaic liturgy, Yom Kippur, the English Day of Atonement. It is one of the holiest festivals in the Jewish calender: the sabbath is considered as the holiest day of all days so Yom Kippur is called 'the sabbath of sabbaths' to emphasise its holiness. Its significance and moral intensity is defined according to Rabbi Isaac Goss:

> If there is one day in the Jewish calender that speaks most strongly to the Jewish conscience and sensibility, it is Yom Kippur.[1]

That Newman chose such a title may indicate his consciousness of, and his sensibility to, his Jewish heritage.

Yom Kippur falls on the 10th day of the month of Tishri in the Jewish calender which corresponds to late September or early October. It is observed as a solemn day of fasting and prayer by Jews throughout the world as decreed in Leviticus 16: 15-34.

The word Atonement is not a literal translation of the Hebrew Yom Kippur because it has a different meaning. The Anglo-Saxon sense of the word Atonement refers to repentance, the expiation of one's sins and making amends by prayer, fasting, remorse, and seeking of forgiveness. It means also the state of 'being at one with God', and being reconciled with God.

Yom Kippur has a different meaning: the literal translation is the day of covering. The ritual practice also is laid down in

Leviticus 16:15-34 in which is found the ritualistic injunction that the blood of the sacrificial animal be used to cover the altar. This is a symbolic act of man covering (expiating) his sins before God. Both practices refer to the holy day i.e. the practice of fasting and prayer and the practice of covering the altar with the sacrificial blood. Yom Kippur is still observed as a fast day, but the act of sacrifice is no longer practised.

There are many festivals in the Jewish calender and many fast days, but none have the same degree of spiritual significance that Yom Kippur has.

> Only Yom Kippur has no symbols as all other festivals have. It is the only festival that concentrates completely on the spiritual and emotional aspects of man and therefore it concentrates on abstract concepts. In contrast to this, the festival that follows Yom Kippur is Sukkoth which overflows with symbols: Sukkoth is a festival of material and earthly reminders to bring man down from the spiritual level.[1]

Goss defines Yom Kippur as a spiritual experience and specifically notes three pertinent aspects of the holy day:

(i) the absence of concrete symbols,

(ii) Yom Kippur consists of spiritual experiences,

(iii) emotions which are linked to the spiritual are abstract entities.

These three aspects that Goss applies to Yom Kippur echo characteristics integral to Onement I. All three are fundamental to Yom Kippur and equally are fundamental to Onement I. To substantiate this premise, each is discussed as it relates to the holy day, the painting, and to Newman's philosophy as found in his writings.

3.3 THE ABSENCE OF SYMBOLS:

Newman denied that his work is concerned with symbols and claimed that specific motifs should be understood as signs rather than symbols. The distinction between the two words is tenuous but a sign can be understood as a method of indicating a concept or distinguishing a thing. A symbol designates something specific and is used extensively in Jewish ritual and festivals other than Yom Kippur. Sukkoth for example is a harvest celebration and is

known also as the Feast of Tabernacles: the lulav (citron) and the etrog (palm leaf) are symbolic of this festival. Hanukka celebrates the victory of the Maccabees and is known also as the Festival of the Lights because it commemorates the miracle of a supply of oil for one day lasting for eight days after the destruction of the Holy Temple. The menorah, a nine-branched candelabra, is symbolic of this event. Thus the lulav and the etrog commemorate the harvesting of the fruit and the menorah commemorates the miracle of the oil and as such are symbolic constructs. Other festivals include Purim, Pessach Shavuot and Rosh Hashona, each of which have individual associative ritual artifacts which are symbolic of the relative festival. Only Yom Kippur has no such ritual object that is symbolic of the solemn day. It may be promulgated that Yom Kippur has no symbols because it is itself symbolic. In a manner, Onement I is not symbolic of any specific meaning but is itself symbolic. The single stripe is not, according to Newman, a symbol therefore it should be understood in some other way. It could be an active element of the picture plane in much the same way as fasting, prayer, and repentance are not symbols, but contribute active participation in the Yom Kippur service.

Rosenberg rejects Hess's contention that the stripe symbolises 'man or the division of heaven and earth'. He rejects also the idea that the colour 'red' symbolises 'Adam, man or clay'. Rosenberg makes a specific allusion to the stripe as a 'sign' rather than a symbol.

> The band or stripe dividing a rectangle that constitutes the painting was at length recognized by Newman as his Sign; it stood for him as his transcendental self. As he re-enacted the coming into being of the Sign in subsequent paintings, its format would disappear for him as mere format and re-emerge as aspects of the emotional event that inspired the painting, ...[1]

Because Newman claims that the stripe 'stood for him ...' it precisely is a symbol which creates some lack of correspondence between Newman's private use of words and the English language. But the artist's intention was that there are no symbols in Onement I as there are no symbols in Yom Kippur.

3.4 THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF YOM KIPPUR

Goss defines Yom Kippur as a spiritual experience. He distinguishes between 'this Holy day which reaches down to man's deepest emotions and raises him above material things like food and comfort, and all other festivals that concentrate on the material things of life'. The emotional experience is an integral part of Yom Kippur and, according to Newman, emotion and passion were the driving forces behind his work.

> My concern is with the fullness that comes from emotion ... I work only out of high passion.[1]

Emotion and passion relate to the spiritual in man; this relation was an important theme in the Baroque art of Bernini as described by Helen Gardner.

> Bernini shows the Saint (St. Theresa) in ecstasy, unmistakeably a mingling of spiritual and physical passion, ... [2]

This suggests that both emotion and passion form part of the Jewish and Christian experience of their religion and of their art. Thus, the spirituality associated with Yom Kippur may be associated with Onement I.

3.5 THE ABSTRACT FORM

Onement I is abstract because there are no representational elements in the painting that could describe nature nor any biomorphic shapes that relate to life. Goss notes that the emotional aspects of man during Yom Kippur also are abstract because they are intangible and indefinable. In short, the abstract image and concept is descriptive of both the painting Onement I and Yom Kippur.

From this argument it is apparent that parallels can be found that are common to both painting and festival. Newman referred to atonement as a guide for understanding the painting and in the comparison made, one finds grounds for Newman's definition and a reasonable explanation for his choice of title.

3.6 THE PROBLEM OF NEWMAN'S CHOICE OF TITLE

One problem arises from Newman's use of the term atonement when seen in the context of his statement about titles in general.

> My title is a poetic metaphor not to be seen as a guide to the meaning of the painting. The title is intended to create a feeling, an emotional feeling that corresponds to my feeling at the time I painted the work.[1]

To 'create a feeling, an emotional feeling', a title must convey a specific meaning to the viewer. Only if that meaning is clearly understood can the title have the desired effect and evoke in the viewer a positive response. The problem is that while Newman uses a title that is capable of being understood in terms of unity, singleness, and harmony, he complicates its meaning with his definition and its source - atonement. The connotations of the word onement are reasonably clear but the connotations of the word atonement are hermetic and anything but clear except to a small group. Only a Jewish audience or an educated audience may fully or partially appreciate the relation between the painting, the title and The Day of Atonement with its complexity of religious associations. This suggests that Newman directed his definition to that small section of society who would be familiar with the complex significance of Yom Kippur.

This theory that he directed his definition to only a Jewish audience, is open to criticism as Newman identified more strongly with his American background than he did with his Jewish background. It is doubtful that he would be concerned with only a predominantly Jewish audience.

Another explanation may be that Newman qualified his definition with the words Harmony and Wholeness to provide the general viewer with a universal understanding. At the same time the inclusion of the word atonement hints at an esoteric and religious iconography which need not be precisely understood because it creates a spiritual ambience and a suggestion of sublimity. A further possibility is that while creating this universal understanding with the words Harmony and Wholeness Newman was making a personal statement, which

acknowledged his Jewish roots as the inspiration and source for the emotion and passion that he claimed motivated his work. He said that his title is a

> poetic metaphor ... that corresponds to my feelings at the time I painted the work. [1]

By implication, when he created the painting or even when he responded to it after it was painted, these feelings were on a spiritual and exalted level corresponding to those experienced on Yom Kippur.

The significance of Yom Kippur is found in a highly complex and obscure concept upon which Scholem was asked to comment. He rejected Hess's inference that the origins of Yom Kippur are Kabbalistic, but he believed that one may find Kabbalistic ideas in it. Scholem said that the

> meaning (of Onement) could refer to the workings of a mystical mind such as a Kabbalistic one, if Atonement were a process by which 'onement' could be achieved. This would be possible - not necessarily. It could be his (Newman's) own idea, I do not know. Because Atonement is always an act of restitution, and restitution for a Kabbalist is something multiplied into a unity, there could be some relation. A Kabbalist could have thought of Atonement in this sense. This is not impossible. I do not say that it was so for him; it (the sense of unity) could have been his understanding as a Jew. ... This could very well be his own speculation without having any Kabbalistic knowledge. [2]

Scholem saw the idea of unity and oneness as part of Jewish thought and as also part of Jewish mysticism: in both instances it relates to the concept of Yom Kippur. Because of his Jewish background and religious heritage, Newman may have been conscious of this idea.

Newman only titled his painting Onement I, many months after it was painted, which means that the image determined the choice of title. He claimed to have been puzzled by the work and to have looked at it for many months trying to understand it. This indicates that at the time of painting, he had no preconceived ideas of content, meaning, or title. According to his own account, he had no specific theme in mind as he was experimenting with colour at the time, testing the visual interaction between the cadmium-red stripe and the darker-red ground. The stripe was a temporary element formed

by masking tape and it would be pulled off once the effect of the colour had been noted.[1] Ultimately, Newman did not remove the tape, but left the painting in its 'unfinished' state which suggests that he had an intuitive recognition or feeling that the work had some power to evoke a response in him. He claimed that intuition made him leave the tape because the painting was not particularly meaningful to him. Realisation of its meaning only came later.

During the following months he wrote his essay on the sublime and, at some stage, he concluded that something in the painting related to the Jewish Holy Day of Atonement. When he finally titled the painting Onement*, it was because these factors coalesced, but the painting came first, and the concluding statement of the title was the fitting of new ideas to an existing image. Newman claimed that his work derived 'out of high passion and emotion', which constitute the intuitive creativity of the artist. In the case of Onement I intuitive creativity was an act of recognition, in that he came to see the power in an experimental, unfinished work.

3.7 COLOUR IN ONEMENT I

The formal aspects of the painting are its monochromatic ground of dark red bisected by a vertical stripe in cadmium-orange - like red. As noted on page 25 Hess attempts to promulgate the theory that the red of Onement I is symbolically analogous to 'creation' and the biblical 'Adam'.

Another possible explanation relates red to blood. If Newman had conceived the notion that the painting reflected an emotion corresponding to that experienced on Yom Kippur, he may have connected the colour with the blood of the sacrificial animal. This theory is supported by Newman's use of the word archaic, which may indicate the ancient biblical custom of ritual sacrifice:

> ... the archaic sense of atonement .... [2]

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* Originally the title was Onement and later when Newman decided to use the title again, he retitled it Onement I.

Newman claimed that he did not use symbols but red always has been symbolic of blood and therefore has natural associative connotations. Hence red may have suggested itself as the ideal colour because of its association with the covering of the altar with blood on Yom Kippur, but this theory is undermined because Newman did not use red throughout the whole series of Onement. The last two works of the series, Onement V and Onement VI, were painted in blue.* In the examination of Hess's analysis (p. 23f) this fact was used to disprove his contention that the red of Onement I symbolised 'man', in particular 'Adam'. The same argument also could weaken the theory that the red was associated with blood, but there is a difference which lies in the distinction between association and symbol.

Hess says that Onement I is symbolic:

> Onement I is a complex symbol, in the purest sense, of Genesis itself.[1]

A symbol represents some significant and evocative thing or image that the artist wished to stress by means of the symbol; against this, the belief that Newman may have associated red with blood is simpler. There is nothing complex about an association between blood and red; to link the two is intuitive rather than intellectual.

It is possible that the association between blood and its colour may have been the engendering experience that corresponded to Newman's notion of Yom Kippur. The sacrifical blood of Yom Kippur, precedes the concepts of unity and harmony and subsequently may have superseded the need for continuity of colour. Onement I may have accumulated such a wealth of spiritual significance for Newman that he was able to abandon red without detracting from the central theme. Thus the red of Onement is relevant as an initial stimulus only, as Newman's inconsistency proves. The colour ultimately may have expended its original function, and Newman apparently considered that it was incidental to the form and meaning of the subsequent Onement paintings.

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* See Figs. 1-6.

3.8 STRIPE AND SURFACE TEXTURE IN ONEMENT I

The single vertical stripe was not completely new in Newman's work from 1948, as he had previously painted The Word, Moment, and The Command in 1946, and all of these had single vertical stripes. These paintings, however, are heavily textured and painted on bichromatic or polychromatic grounds. Onement I was Newman's first monochromatic painting with one vertical stripe, but even though it is basically a single-colour painting, nuances of tonal change in the ground colour are discernible. In some later Onement paintings this painterliness is more subtle.

Onement II has a semi-matte finish while the surfaces of Onements III, V, and VI have different degrees of painterliness. Available illustrations of Onement IV are in black and white so it is difficult to discern the surface area. Different media may have had something to do with the surface finish of some works as Newman experimented with new paints such as magnum, and acrylic paint that achieves this smooth, matte finish. But all the Onement works are painted in oils on canvas.

The central stripe is uniform in all of the Onement paintings and bisects the rectangle, dividing the plane into two equal areas. The format is always rectangular, irrespective of change in size. In the formats of Onements I, II, III and V, the longer side is the vertical and in Onements IV and VI the shorter side is the vertical. The centred, vertical stripe combines with the flat expanse of colour to make the total image. On a few occasions, in works other than the Onement series, Newman used a horizontal stripe, and sometimes he moved the vertical stripe across the picture plane away from the centre or repeated the stripes to create rythmic intervals of divided, and sometimes uneven, space. He even shifted it to the furthest edge of the canvas leaving an uninterrupted 'field' of colour as in Eve (1950), but he never abandoned the stripe in any subsequent painting. The vertical stripe in Onement I became the constant motif in Newman's oeuvre, reappearing in every drawing and painting he made after 1948.

The vertical stripe of Onement I and the following five Onement paintings, is unique to the series. Although many other paintings have a single stripe, it is never quite in the same position nor with the same constant width. The following examples illustrate this point and should be studied together with the illustrations in the c.v.

End of silence (1949) (Fig. 7)

A central broad band with very thick impasto smeared over it.

Abraham (1949) (Fig. 8)

A single, hard-edged wide band positioned off-centre.

Tundra (1950) (Fig. 9)

A single narrow stripe, positioned approximately one third from the edge of the format.

Eve (1950) (Fig. 10)

A single band shifted to furthest edge of format.

The Way (1951) (Fig. 11)

A central band wider than the two outer areas that it bisects.

These are some of the twenty-five paintings with a single stripe, but none of the paintings reproduced in Rosenberg's book have stripes that approximate those of the Onement series. The stripes in Onement I and Onement III have rough, irregular edges, and the other four paintings in the series have hard-edged stripes; however, all six works have narrow, centred stripes that divide the surface area evenly into two equal parts. Different writers have described this dividing line in various terms, such as stripe, band, and zip, but for the purpose of this dissertation and to differentiate between the widths, 'stripe' is used to describe the fine line and 'band' is used to describe the wider line. Alloway distinguishes between the words 'zip' and 'band' according to Newman's own preference.

> He (Newman) tended to call them bands. He called them 'zips' later when they got tighter and more intense in colour, and there was a more vibrant, visual effect.[1]

The centre stripe in Onement I has rough, irregular edges, but it

also has a tautness and rigidity that creates a certain tension that is present in all subsequent paintings.

3.9 SCALE IN ONEMENT I

Onement I is the first and the smallest in size of the whole series. There is a notable increase in size in the subsequent paintings, but there is no chronological development nor specific pattern in the change of dimensions.

Onement I	(1948)	69 x 41 cm
Onement II	(1948)	152 x 91 cm
Onement III	(1949)	183 x 86 cm
Onement IV	(1949)	84 x 97 cm
Onement V	(1952)	152 x 97 cm
Onement VI	(1953)	259 X 305 cm

This table indicates that the individual size of each painting is arbitrary, and thus there is no evident pattern in terms of size. It seems that the dimensions are not related specifically to the meaning of the painting as understood by the title.

3.10 SUMMATION OF ONEMENT I ANALYSIS

An attempt has been made to translate the whole work, that is, the painting, the title, and Newman's definition of the title, into a total understanding, but Rosenberg believes that the whole is not capable of translation, precisely because it is abstract.

> In Onement I, Newman draws back from symbolism into a pictorial statement that is absolute in itself, that is to say, that it is untranslatable into theoretical or associational references. Onement I does not "mean", it confronts. It must be grasped as a whole, must be felt as a presence. It has the intrusive arbitrariness of an act or an event - .....
>
> Onement was something he had done, not conceived. No wonder the artist himself was baffled in contemplating it.[1]

Rosenberg, of course, is referring to the concrete image of Onement I and not to the title, and it is the painting that is 'untranslatable' because the title suggests a very specific meaning. Finally an understanding of the painting possibly may be achieved and certainly be expanded on, by turning to the artist's own statement about his art in general.

> It is full of meaning, but the meaning must come from the seeing, not from the talking.[1]

Newman evidently intended that his work evoke an emotional response in the viewer on a sublime level. The 'seeing' of the painting would do this spontaneously; but Onement I, without benefit of title, definition, or analytical interpretation presents a simple, geometric composition in colour with no clear indication of meaning. It is the title, in conjunction with the visual work, that is evocative of whatever meaning the viewer bestows upon it. Newman did not intend that either painting or title would symbolise anything. This applies to the Onement series and to most of Newman's mature work made during and after 1948.

Newman specifically intended that his work should be understood by merely 'seeing' it and responding to it and not by 'talking' about it. However, man 'sees' with his eyes and with his tongue; his knowledge, expressed in words, places a 'screen' between his mind and his perception which makes such an abstract or spiritual response difficult to achieve. In spite of this difficulty, Newman still insisted that his painting, in general, was meant to be a 'confrontation' (Rosenberg's term) evolving an ineffable, personal experience. This was the artist's intention, but only if one is armed with some knowledge of Newman's philosophy may the response to Onement I and his later work, be on a spiritual and emotional level that transcends mundane thought and feeling.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPMENT OF THE KABBALIST THEME

The Onement paintings concentrate Newman's breadth of reference but other paintings respond equally to investigation into references and cross references to meaning in content and form relation. The works selected for further investigation are those that Hess has discussed with emphasis on Kabbalistic themes.

1. Abraham
2. Concord
3. End of Silence
4. Vir Heroicus Sublimis
5. Untitled Narrow Paintings
6. Cathedra
7. White Fire and Black Fire
8. Here

4.1 ABRAHAM (1949) Fig. 8

Unlike Onement I, which is not a proper word in the English language, Abraham is a name with specific biblical connotations. The story of Abraham and Isaac is well known to the three major Western religions. He has been a favourite figure with artists; and his name has a richness of meaning and a long history of symbolic content, specially as the father-figure of the three religions.

In Hess's 1969 monograph, Onement I is defined in two lines only but Abraham was given a full paragraph with greater detail.

> Abraham (1949): His first all-black painting; it would have considerable influence on Ad Reinhardt, who helped Newman hang his first exhibition. It was named in honour of his father, who recently had died, and concerns the idea of "the father as a tragic figure", with, in the back of his mind, probably Kierkegaard's celebration of "father Abraham" setting off on his mule* to sacrifice Isaac: the image of the highest - inconceivably high - form of faith.[1]

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* The Bible refers to an ass not a mule. Genesis 22:3

Hess stresses the biblical motif with no hint of any esoteric or mystical iconography. In 1971, however, he relates the painting, as he did with Onement I, to Kabbalistic themes; the biblical explanation is given as above, but he adds a new interpretation by introducing the notion of secrecy. Abraham is the first painting in which he discusses the formal elements in terms of Newman's 'secret symmetry'.

> Two other themes preoccupied Newman in this hectic year. (1949) The first, and the most important is a visual metaphor which I shall call "secret symmetry". Like the Kabbalah, it is a matter which Newman never discussed; he never hinted it (whereas he did offer clues to his involvement with Jewish mysticism), and strangely, it has passed unnoticed in most of the lengthy analyses of his work.
>
> Secret symmetry makes its initial appearance in one of Newman's masterpieces of 1949, Abraham. It is a black on black painting, nearly seven feet high and three feet wide. A shiny black stripe seems to divide a comparatively mat black field off-center to the left. It suggests a "felt" situation - an intuition by the artist that such a placement would be "right" in his general format. And this is how Abraham has generally been "read".[1]

The pictorial structure seems to come from the artists 'intuitive' placing, but Hess then argues that although this is the accepted 'reading', it is incorrect, and his alternative is the correct reading:

> The real action in Abraham, however, is an accurate bisection of the image accomplished by the right-hand edge of the stripe which cuts straight down the center of the painting. It is as symmetrical a division as the overt split in Be I. Furthermore, there is a kind of thematic sub-structure: the width of the stripe is one-third of the width of the right section of the field and half the width of the left-hand part; in other words it is a sixth. (Reading from left to right, the relationships could be expressed as: 2a - a - 3a).[2]

In support of this complex analysis, Hess refers, in a footnote, to a biographical incident that apparently corroborates his theory.

> Some working notes found after his death indicate that Newman calculated the placement of his zips and divisions of the field down to an eighth of an inch.[3]

Hess implies that Newman used mathematical calculations and pre-planned his structure. He elaborates on the use of black as an appropriate 'colour' and refers to a number of contemporary artists as historical sources and comparisons.

> Another precedent for black painting was Picasso's Guernica ... By 1947-1948, ... black as a color - the idea of black as a new basis for painting - was very much in the air. De Kooning had been working on his black and white - but gradually almost all black - abstractions since 1946; ... In 1949, Franz Kline was beginning to formulate his widely influential black and white presences. In February 1948, the first postwar exhibition of Matisse was held ... it included a number of his extraordinary black ink drawings which seemed to be done with a brush as wide as a fist and to progress in slow motions which somehow induced black to suggest the brilliant colors of his neighboring paintings.[1]

Black is the colour of the 'void' - The Greek apairion - that spawned us all - Abraham, too, is the father-figure - the progenitor of all. As we return to the unlimited of the 'void' when we die, so, too, is Abraham's bosom the place where one rests on death. Black, thus, is symbolic of the cycle of life and death.

After noting that the painting commemorates the death of Newman's father and after completing his analysis of the formal elements, Hess again reverts to the Kabbalist theme.

> The concept of secret symmetry, or of a power hidden within a power, announced in Abraham, suggests a further interpretation, clues for which are found in the Kabbalah. The symmetrical zip, as has been suggested, announce Newman's grand subject: Genesis, Creation, the creative act.[2]

Hess again refers to the writings of Scholem and quotes from the Book of Yetsirah and gives a detailed account of the biblical story of Abraham.

> Insight into the creative power of the linguistic elements is attributed to Abraham as the first prophet of monotheism:
>
> "When our father Abraham came, he contemplated, meditated and beheld, investigated and understood and outlined and dug and combined and formed (that is created), and he succeeded. Then the Lord of the World revealed Himself to him and took him to his bosom and kissed him on the head and called him his friend (another variant adds: and made him His son) and made an eternal covenant with him and his seed.
>
> It seems to me that the author of this sentence had in mind a method which enabled Abraham, on the strength of his insight into the system of things and the potencies of letters, to imitate and in a certain sense to repeat God's action of creation."
>
> "The first Man was an Artist", wrote Newman (in the Tiger's

> Eye in 1947), and according to the great tradition of Jewish mysticism, Abraham was the first man to create; he was the godlike artist.[1]

These last two excerpts place emphasis on 'secret symmetry' and Kabbalah and are weighted with biblical, and mystical references. The whole passage on Abraham has this spiritual ambience, but an examination of this analysis reveals a number of discrepancies.

Hess suggests that one must search for 'clues' in the Kabbalah, but he does not define the nature of these 'clues' and neither does he supply references. Hess analyses the formal structure of the painting but does not explain how the 'secret' mathematical calculations of Newman are Kabbalistic, and neither does he say why they are 'secret'. However, the use of these emotionally suggestive terms lends a tone of gnostic understanding to the few who may understand, but there is no substance to support such an interpretation.

One must assume that Hess's reference is to the number-mystique that is used in the study of Kabbalah i.e. gematria, but, Hess does not use the term gematria in his analysis of Newman's work. To infer that Newman used any such structural system contradicts his emphasis that he was

> ... an intuitive painter, a direct painter, I have never worked from sketches, never planned a painting, never 'thought out' a painting. I start each painting as if I had never painted before.[2]

The dichotomy between the two statements creates an epistemological problem; the biographer claims that the artist used specific calculations conforming to a method of 'secret symmetry' but the artist himself claims that he worked 'intuitively', without pre-planning. Hess's book on Newman was written nine years after the artist's statement and it is not likely that Hess was unaware of this statement. It seems as though Hess chose to ignore it as it did not conform to the Kabbalistic image that Hess wished to create.

There is no evidence that Newman ever studied gematria and neither does he appear to have owned or referred to the gematric table and

thus his use of the gematric system or any other secret mathematical system is improbable. Moreover, without knowledge of gematria and without the esoteric knowledge of Kabbalah, Newman had no cause for secrecy. (see ref. no. 20:1).

Hess refers to Scholem's writings on the Book of Yetsirah to corroborate the Kabbalistic themes used in his analysis of Abraham.

> The symmetrical zip, as has been suggested, announces Newman's grand subject: Genesis, Creation, the creative act. Scholem writes of the Book of Yetzirah: Insight into the creative power of the linguistic elements is attributed to Abraham as the first prophet of monotheism: ... [1]

Scholem rejected this particular reference to his writings and maintained that Hess had taken the idea out of context. Scholem stated that the Kabbalists used many motifs from the Talmud but this motif is not Kabbalistic, it is Talmudic.[2]

Alloway also rejects Hess's premises:

> .... I think that he (Newman) did go in for some kind of grid ... But it was a grid not so much done in secret, but fairly simple grids, like for example, dividing a painting in the middle but then painting from the central line to one side, so that a picture is centred but off-centred, with a departure from symmetry.[3]

Further, he doubts whether Newman ever used any kind of hermetic, gematric table.

> That is the point at which I'm not convinced. I see it as a physical dividing-up of the area because if you're going to put a stripe where are you going to put it? It would give him a settled decision of where to put the stripe if he's done a bit of geometricising of the canvas. But the idea that these referred to imponderable, symbolic properties does not necessarily follow.
>
> Newman was not a person given to that kind of planning.[4]

These statements indicate Hess's interpretation of Abraham, in terms of 'secret symmetry' and the Kabbalah is unsubstantiated.

4.2 CONCORD (1949) Fig.12

This was one of the few green paintings that Newman made and is much larger than the earlier Abraham painted in the same year.

Hess does not offer a lengthy discussion of this work, but once again he emphasises the biblical and Kabbalist source for the painting.

> Concord, where the masking tapes are exposed as they are in Onement, is one of the artist's most relaxed, pastoral pictures. He interrupted it because it came to a finish sooner than he had planned. The title hints at Adam and Eve before the fall, and at the Kabbalist vision of a 'primal space full of formless hylic forces'.[1]

The formal elements of the painting are not examined and the active brush marks of the surface and the nuances of change in colour are not given the pictorial analysis that they deserve. Hess does not discuss the painterly stripes, which seem to move optically in and out of the picture plane: his main concern is to analyse the title (as in Onement I) in terms of the creation story and the Kabbalist theme. The dictionary defines the word 'concord' as:

> 'Agreement, harmony, between persons or things: ....'* [2]

Such agreement and harmony does apply to the state of idyllic bliss between Adam and Eve, as Hess suggests, but could apply as easily to any peaceful moment experienced by the artist himself. Hess implies that the biblical story of Genesis was uppermost in Newman's mind, yet there is nothing in this painting nor in the title to support Hess's interpretation. He uses the words 'relaxed' and 'pastoral', which conjure up images of rural tranquillity and peacefulness, but, apart from the colour green, there are no evident pastoral elements. The painting does not have a 'relaxed' quality; the surface texture and the optically moving stripes are even disturbing, more so than in the majority of Newman's other works from this period. Hess does admit that there could be an alternative interpretation:

> Concord also refers to the American Revolutionary battle site and the village with its beautiful trees in the June light which Barney and Annalee had visited on their honeymoon.[3]

This possibly is closer to the truth than the theoretical imagery of pastoral relaxation, Genesis, and Kabbalah. The dichotomy

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* Onement I has similar connotations.

between name and event probably appealed to Newman because of the dual and slight ambiguity of the dichotomy. This is reinforced by the knowledge that Newman occasionally turned to historical and contemporary events for his titles, e.g. Vir Heroicus Sublimis and Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley. The one is a tribute to President Truman and the other is an indictment of Mayor Daley, the 'boss' of Chicago.

4.3 END OF SILENCE (1949) Fig. 7

In the 1969 monograph, Hess gives Newman's brief definitions for the following two paintings.

> The End of Silence: (1949) Another way of saying "the voice".
> The Voice: (1950) The human utterance.[1]

These two titles clearly are related in meaning and although initially one may tend to associate The Voice with the 'voice' of God, Newman's definition explicitly refers to 'man'. Likewise, End of Silence refers to 'human silence'. In his 1971 book, Hess makes no mention of these earlier references for this painting:

> Newman's titles are apt to give autobiographical hints as well as clues to subject matter. End of Silence, for example is a small picture which repeats, but in a masterful fashion, the theme of Onement I; the title could refer to the very beginning of the Genesis; the first act of God, and the centered stripe, painted in the fast bravura motion, could be the capital 'I' of "In the beginning ....". [2]

Hess suggests here that the title and form relate to the theme of Onement I and thus implies that the same Kabbalistic and religious images refer also to End of Silence. The idea that the title hints at an autobiographical fact is possible because the 'human utterance' might be Newman's 'voice', but there is no reason to connect it to motifs from Genesis or the Kabbalah.

Hess, as in the case of Concord, provides an alternative definition;

> More likely, I believe, is its allusion to Newman's own return to active painting, his new confidence in speaking through his art, after years of silent search and frustration.[3]

However, Newman resumed painting in 1944 and End of Silence was

painted in 1949. While time is not an important factor to an artist, it seems highly unlikely that he waited for five years before making this declaration. Hess also stresses the creation theme, and includes it in the analyses of both Concord and End of Silence and again in Onement II. Through this constant reiteration Hess conveys the idea that the biblical creation is a constant theme in Newman's work. Newman did use numerous titles with biblical connotations, but those referring to the act of creation are few. Genesis (1946) and Genetic Moment (1947) may be references to the bible but he also used titles from other myths of creation, such as The Slaying of Osiris (1944) and Gea (1945). The Beginning (1946) also suggests creation as does the later Primordial Light (1954).

Table 1 (c.v. p.153f) shows that Newman often used the same title for different paintings, presumably because that particular title expressed something of significance to him. If titles referring to Genesis and the biblical creation theme were as important to Newman as Hess believes, one would expect to see them reappear in later works in the same way that Onement is repeated six times. Neither Genesis nor Genetic Moment reappear in later works. Newman certainly was interested in the act of creation as he mentioned it in many of his articles, but he was more concerned with the act of the artist as a creator.

> ... it can be said that the artist like a true creator is delving into chaos. It is precisely this that makes him an artist for the Creator in creating the world began with the same material, for the artist tries to wrest truth from the void.[1] *

In this passage the artist is analogous to God as Creator, but the artist's act of creation is the major theme of the passage. Hess spiritualises this concept of human creativity and weights it with biblical allegory but Newman's references do not support this premise.

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* This quotation is more fully given on p. 140.

4.4 VIR HEROICUS SUBLIMIS (1950-51) Fig. 14

This is one of the few paintings where the precise date of the titling is known, as well as the artist's reason for giving it this title. It is one of the few important paintings that Hess does analyse in his 1969 monograph. He neither explains the meaning of the title nor does he describe the formal elements. He concentrates only on the anecdotal facts that led Newman to name this work as he did.

> Vir Heroicus Sublimis (1950-51): He was working on this 18-footer when he heard over the radio the announcement that President Truman had recalled General MacArthur. When Newman describes the incident he laughs and flings a fist upward, like a tribune of the people commanding the revolution to begin. "Truman fired MacArthur; I said, 'Vir Heroicus Sublimis'."[1]

Hess made only this brief reference in 1969, but he devotes almost five pages to the painting in 1971. Hess first introduces the painting in terms of 'secrecy', and then, following a process similar to that used in the analysis of Abraham, he continues with a formal explanation of mathematical substructures and colour effects. He then elaborates on the development of the Kabbalistic theme and the concomitant theory of 'secret symmetry'.

> In Newman's mural-size Vir Heroicus Sublimis, this hidden structure is fully articulated. Before he embarked on it, however, he probably completed the second white-on-white painting, The Name II ....
>
> The Name II is divided into thirds by two vertical zips that give the effect of a square to its slightly vertical format - the motion of the vertical section across the surface gives a horizontal pressure to the image which slightly swings it into an appearance of having equal sides.
>
> These secret squares may be conjectural, but not the one in Vir Heroicus Sublimis, Newman's first attempt at a very large painting.[2]

Hess is emphatic and unequivocal in attributing 'secret' squares' to Newman's work and specifically to Vir Heroicus Sublimis. He continues with a lengthy discourse on the size and scale of Newman's work in general in the historical context and as it applies to Vir Heroicus Sublimus. He ascribes hidden squares to this monumental painting as he makes mathematical dissections of the format in a golden-section-like way. Any rectangle or square can be divided

into small components, a method that Hess used to find 'secret squares' in the rectangles between the stripes in Newman's painting. There is nothing hermetic or secret about such divisions and calculations had Newman used them but Mrs Newman denies that her husband did. She insists that Newman structured his shapes, rectangles and stripes intuitively and that his divisions were based on aesthetic judgement.

> ... he (Newman) often insisted that size was a product of feeling.[1]

Hess apparently ignored the artist's statement, as he still discusses the painting's dimensions as being the result of calculated planning.

> Newman decided to stretch the format, and after a long process of interior reasoning, arrived at two eight-foot squares, plus two feet, that is, a canvas eight feet high and eighteen feet across.
>
> Annalee Newman remembers how pleased he was to find these dimensions, for the pictorial solution also implicated his number, 18, heth yud, Hai, life.[2]

Newman originally did not strive for dimensions conforming to the number 18, he did not plan the size of the canvas, he was merely working towards a monumental scale. After stretching the canvas, he realised, according to Mrs Newman, that he had arrived at a dimension of 18 feet. This is quite explicit except that Hess refers to the number 18 as <u>his</u> (Newman's) number, implying that 18 had a special and personal significance for Newman. There is no evidence to corroborate this, but on the strength of his contention, Hess continues with a weighted discourse on the use of 18, stressing its biblical connotations.

> There is more to 18 than a bit of folklore and a happy custom. For "eighteen" is Shemoneh Esreh, which is also the name of the prayer that is most important, because of its antiquity, in the three daily services of the temple.
>
> Philip Birnbaum writes:
> Originally, the Shemoneh Esreh, denoting eighteen, consisted of eighteen benedictions; in its present form, however, there are nineteen. The addition of a paragraph concerning the slanderers and enemies of the people was made toward the end of the first century (A.D.) at the direction of Rabban Camaliel II, head of the Sanhedrin at Yavneh.

> The Talmud offers a variety of reasons for the number eighteen. It corresponds to the eighteen times God is mentioned in Psalm 29 as well as in the Shema. The three patriarchs of the Jewish people, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are mentioned together eighteen times in the Hebrew Bible. The number eighteen is also said to correspond to the essential eighteen vertebrae of the spinal column (Berakhoth 8b)..[1]

Hess's contention that the 18-unit measurement was important to Newman is undermined by the fact that the canvas was not quite eighteen feet. Barbara Reise describes Vir Heroicus Sublimus as

> ... an almost 18-foot width ... [2]

Newman was alive when this was written, and it may be assumed that he would have corrected this statement had it been wrong especially as he was known for his attention to detail. Furthermore the final measurements are probably larger than those Newman started with as a result of stretching. Don Judd gives the dimensions as $213^{1}/_{4}$ inches which is $2^{3}/_{4}$ inches short of 18 feet.[3] Goosens also refers to the dimensions as a

> calculated width with a difference of two inches.[4]

Even Hess gives the size as being $2^{3}/_{4}$ inches under 18 feet but does not again refer to this when he stresses the significance of the number 18. The painting is not a full 'eighteen feet', a fact, which weakens the case for Hess's numerical interpretation.

The religious passage on the Shemoneh Esreh, that Hess quotes, introduces a biblical tone to the painting; and it becomes necessary to refute any special relation between Newman and the number 18 particularly in a religious and personal context. Scholem explained that the number 18 has a special significance for all Jews and flatly rejected Hess's implication that it was specifically important for Newman and he questioned the Kabbalistic references used, (see p. 61). He believed that Hess had taken the Kabbalistic theme out of context and had 'overused' it.

> There are things that are innovations of the Kabbalists and things which are developments of older motifs of the Talmudic, Midrashic age:
>
> This applies to 'chai'.

> Every Jewish ritual uses it; if you give 'zdoka', charity, a Jew who knows nothing about Kabbalah or even about his own religion, gives $18, 18 cents, 18 shekels. He will give 18 as a number of charity because it means life. Therefore, for instance, if a first-born child is a boy, according to Jewish ritual, after thirty days, one must bring a Kohen to the house and give him a tithe.
>
> Because of the law, one must give the Kohen $18.[1] *

In addition to the ritual uses of the 18, given by Scholem, it is customary for relatives who say prayers for the dead, to donate a symbolic 18 units of their currency to charity in memory of the dead relative. Gifts are also given in units of 18 on the occasion of a birth or a barmitzvah thereby wishing life to the recipient. There is nothing esoteric, certainly not specifically Kabbalistic, in the use of the number 18. Although it is used, and is important, in the Kabbalist numerical system of gematria, it originated in the Talmud.

Because the number 18 is recognized as a lucky number by all Jews, Newman would naturally be pleased by the coincidence of his stretched canvas measuring (about) 18 feet but it is as well to remember that it was coincidental. Hess, however, maintains that Newman used the number 18 consciously.

> In examining Newman's oeuvre, it is surprising how many times eighteen or a number evenly divisible by eighteen occurs. Granted that if the artist was thinking in feet, eighteen inches, as one and one-half feet, would be a common divisor. Even weighing this fact (and it is evident that Newman almost always used feet as his unit), it should be noted that well over a third of the artist's paintings contain the eighteen-inch unit.[2]

Tables 1 and 16 show that less than a quarter of Newman's paintings have measurements comprising the 18 inch unit, not 'over a third' as claimed by Hess. He probably would not have made such an error

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* The ancient biblical law which is still in practice today, decrees that the first born son be dedicated to the service of God. A token sum of eighteen coins redeems him from this service and a Kohen has the authority to conduct this ritual on behalf of the Temple.

on purpose, and must assume that his arithmetic was determined by his intention, which is to create a mystical image around Newman's work. Tables compiled to examine this theory indicate an arbitrary use of the 18 inch unit (see c.v. pp. 164-168).

The section dealing with the number 18 is followed by Hess's detailed analysis of the formal elements of the division and placement of the stripes in Vir Heroicus Sublimis. As this analysis is irrelevant to Hess's development of the Kabbalist theme, it is not discussed here, but at the end of this passage, Hess adds another reference.

> Such has been the common interpretation of Vir Heroicus Sublimis; it has been analyzed by formalist critics into systems and methodologies that sanction the "Ah-h" by tying it to the picture plane, or to the expression of the framing edges, or to an "advanced" elimination of graphic gesture and surface episode. Nor did Newman ever contradict such interpretations, although he always insisted that he was interested in subject matter and that "formalism is a dirty word". Nor indeed are such readings of the picture wrong; the sense of a strong emotion (or esthetic reaction) emanating from the color and from the calm, clean surfaces of Vir Heroicus Sublimus is a fairly accurate metaphor for what happens in the painting.[1]

Hess continues with a discussion of the general or 'common interpretation' of the work and claims that these 'interpretations' have missed the essential meaning of the work.

> What it misses, however, is the richness and ambiguity of Newman's metaphor. He had taken his image of Genesis, of the creative act, of the artist as God, and expanded it into an ardent, pulsing glow of color.[2]

Hess returns to the theory of 'creation' and 'Genesis' and reiterates the major theme towards which he has been moving.

> The secret symmetry that informs his structure that was his starting point on the blank canvas and that opened up a space for him to paint in, was as invisible as the God to whose actions it alludes and to whose presence the Kabbalists testified in ways as private and as hermetic as Newman's.[3]

Hess again refers to both 'secret symmetry' and Kabbalah quotations from Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, in order to buttress his claims:

> The method which the Kabbalist mystics used, according to Scholem, was "to extract, I may even say distil, the

> perpetual life of God out of life as it is. This extracting must be an act of abstraction. It is not the fleeting here and now that is to be enjoyed, but the everlasting unity and presence of Transcendance." [1]

Hess intersperses his analysis with Kabbalistic quotations and references from the works of Scholem; and invests the painting with a religious and mystical ambience. At the same time, he links the abstract image of the painting to the 'act of abstraction', a metaphysical esotericism, and with a speculative reference to God.

> For Newman, it could be said that God was art. The long hours of concentration and exercises with the infinite possibilities of shapes, proportions and colors comprised for him, indeed, a distillation, an act of abstraction, in search of a unity and a transcendental presence for his image.[2]

Before continuing with his next analysis, Hess makes a final reference to the Kabbalah.

> Nor was Newman turning the Kabbalah upside down in order to find the image-maker in himself; he was not committing an act of heresy or even impiety. The Kabbalists themselves often used such dramatic intuitions and daring reasoning.[3]

Mrs Newman rejects Hess's implied Kabbalistic interpretation and believes that his analysis of Vir Heroicus Sublimis is hypothetical. She contends that he has neither understood the painting, nor Newman's ideas behind the painting.[4]

A study of Hess's text reveals that he never claims that Vir Heroicus Sublimis is a Kabbalistic work, but does so by implication. The inclusion of Kabbalistic references in the course of his analysis, creates this impression. Hess could not interpret the title in terms of the Kabbalah because of its specific Latin form and meaning i.e. Exalted Hero. In his analysis of Onement I, Hess was able to develop the Kabbalist theme convincingly as the indefinite meaning of the title lends itself to imaginative interpretation even though such imagery lacks credibility under close examination. The title Vir Heroicus Sublimis cannot be linked to any Kabbalistic source or interpretation. Possibly this is why Hess discusses the Kabbalist themes on a general level; he makes profound assertions without applying them to specifics but which leaves the reader with the impression that Newman's work is mystical. A close and careful

study of his text, reveals that Hess has created the tone for a Kabbalist reading, but there is no substance to support such a reading.

4.5 UNTITLED NARROW PAINTINGS (1950) Fig. 15 a,b,c,d & e

The idea of secrecy seems to have captured Hess's imagination because he applies it to other works after his analyses of Abraham and Vir Heroicus Sublimis. Newman made a group of narrow paintings which are believed to have been influenced by the stripes in Vir Heroicus Sublimis:

> After finishing Vir Heroicus Sublimis, Newman said that he "felt intoxicated with scale", and in reaction, and to test further the range of his vision, he began a series of six very narrow pictures.
>
> Newman's friend Tony Smith has another version of how he began these thin paintings but it also connects them to Vir Heroicus Sublimis. A museum curator saw the big painting, according to Smith, and announced that he had finally understood it; it was just a relationship of shapes - Bauhaus! Newman growled that the only things in the picture that "count" are the stripes, and to prove it he made paintings just of them.[1]

Whether one or even both of these stories are true, clearly Newman's primary concern was to emphasise the stripe as an autonomous, independent structure. It is doubtful whether Newman had anything else in mind when he made these narrow paintings as he did not title them which indicates that he associated neither the form nor the colour with any intellectual theme. This premise is substantiated by Alloway's unpublished conversation with Newman:

> What he told me was that he painted the narrow paintings because people tended to think of the narrow areas in the larger paintings as lines whereas he wanted to emphasise that they were also color. By painting them in these very narrow strips, he showed that the line itself had substance as plane and color. So it was to emphasise not the directional quality of line but the planar existence of color. I think this was one of the reasons that they were painted.[2]

Without titles Hess could not easily link the paintings to any biblical, Judaic or Kabbalistic, theme but he attempts to make the connection through the notion of 'secrecy':

> The next painting is four feet high and five and one-quarter inches wide, with a 'secret' trisection, and dark vertical on the right

> being one-third of the width, the lighter color to the left filling the remaining two-thirds.[1]

Mrs Newman rejects this interpretation and claims that there is nothing mystical nor 'secret' about these paintings, they exist for themselves as pure form and in their visual totality.[2] Newman's own statement adds weight to this claim:

> As a matter of fact, after I did the large paintings that I did, I had to almost test myself as part of my own education because in the end I am involved in my own education. I had to see whether I was just being beguiled by the big expanse of colour and I did a painting eight foot high by one inch and a half wide to see if I could make that narrow space, and by the way, that painting was a stretched painting, to see if it could contain the sense of scale that I was involved in and also that it would have the <u>feeling</u> that my big paintings have.[3]

It appears that Newman's primary concern in the narrow painting, was the formal properties of space, scale, shape and colour. He also refers to the <u>feeling</u> of the 'big painting' indicating an emotional involvement.

Thus the narrow paintings can be understood as existing for themselves but also, as the artist intended, they call for an emotional response from the viewer, an awareness of the form in correspondence with the unusual 'scale' and structure. The idea of a 'secret trisection' has no foundation and may have been included in Hess's analysis to strengthen his Kabbalist theme.

4.6 <u>CATHEDRA</u> (1951) Fig. 17

In 1969, Hess gave Newman's own description of this painting - it explains why the artist chose this specific title.

> <u>Cathedra</u> (1951): "I felt it was a very full painting ... all that blue", and the title refers to Isaiah (6:1). "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" or, in Newman's recollected translation from the Hebrew: "the fold of his mantle filled the tabernacle". <u>Cathedra</u> is the chair, the throne of God; His blue robe fills the holy space. It reminds me of Baudelaire's Beauty, who says, "Je trône dans l'azure ..." [4]

Newman associated the wide expanse of deep blue with an image of the vision of Isaiah. In addition to the biblical imagery a literary

image, that is specifically secular, is given. The two analogies are quoted in 1969, but Hess, in 1971, does not refer to the secular image at all but quotes the first image fully and elaborates on the theme adding more mystical references.

> Cathedra means chair or throne, and Newman said of the picture: "I felt it was a very full painting ... all that blue", and the title invokes, according to the artist, Isaiah's vision (6:1): "I saw also the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His mantle filled the Temple" (or, in Newman's own translation, included in his statement for the synagogue project, 1963, "His trailing robes filled the Temple"). The two pale verticals standing like sentries on the edges of unseen (secret) squares in Cathedra guard the "place", Makom; "the place", Hamakon - God - where the Lord is and where man stands in ecstatic contemplation of the Throne, the Throne of Glory, surrounded by angels singing His praise. The intellectual energy and passion of the mystic are devoted to his ascent through the spheres which divide the earth from heaven; he must find The Way and The Gate that are appropriate to him - to the Throne, Cathedra.
>
> One distinction between Christian and Jewish mysticism, as been mentioned, is that "in Judaism", as Buber points out, "there is no unio deo" ("union with God"). Scholem adds, the Jewish "mystic who in his ecstasy has passed through all the gates, braved all the dangers, now stands before the throne; he sees and hears - but that is all". In Cathedra, the zips are not divisions between shapes, but rather exist in their own right, with the expansive blue field, nor are they apart from it, as a background is behind the foreground. They are, in pictorial terms, together, on the same plane. Here Newman was working along the same lines as his friends De Kooning, Kline and Hofmann, who also integrated background and foreground into dynamic locking tensions. But there is no doubt, after examining the many hints Newman gave us in his titles and in certain statements, that he was also looking beyond the picture plane - above it, so to speak, to a place where ideas transcend methods and deal with the highest experiences and insights.[1]

This passage makes a number of references to religious images and sources but the central theme stressed is Jewish mysticism. In 1971, the reference to 'Baudelaire's Beauty' is not mentioned and it is asumed that Hess omitted it because it would lessen the mystical emphasis of his premise. As Hess again refers to Scholem's writings in this analysis, Scholem was asked to comment on it.

> I do not know in what sense Mr Newman used that title: Cathedra is not necessarily a Kabbalistic motif. Cathedra is a Greek word used very much in the Midrash - in Aggadic writings.

> It depends on the content of the painting as to whether he (the artist) means by this a throne of God or whether it means something else like the place on which Moses sat on Cathedra for instance. The word Cathedra is nothing in itself, it is like Cathedra in English, it is taken from the Greek word.[1]

Scholem explained that the word Cathedra does not appear in the Book of Isaiah and also the quotation given by Newman is not from the Kabbalah but is a translation of the biblical passage. Hess gives this source, Isaiah 6:1, but he expands on it within the context of Jewish mysticism which Scholem said is misleading. Hess connects Jewish mysticism to Cathedra, but there is nothing in the title, in the painting, nor in Newman's own definition to support this. Newman obviously had some religious concept in mind because of his reference to the biblical Isaiah and to 'holy space': but the spiritual dimensions of Judaism do not automatically embrace Jewish mysticism. This is where Hess seems to have taken Newman's idea out of context and added a Kabbalistic interpretation to the biblical motif.

4.7 WHITE FIRE (1954) (1960) (1964) (1968) Figs. 18 & 19
BLACK FIRE (1961)

Unlike Cathedra in which Newman links the meaning of the title to the pictorial elements in terms of colour, his definition given for this group of paintings in the 1969 monograph is concerned only with the meaning and the origin of the titles. There is no reference to the form and Newman does not explain why he chose these particular titles. In the early description they are paired together with one definition.

> White Fire and Black Fire: There is an old Hebrew legend that before the Word was invented, there was white fire and black fire, and they joined to form the Word.[2]

In 1971 Hess elaborates on these titles and expands on the earlier reference in terms of a Kabbalistic content.

> White Fire and Black Fire, two of Newman's later titles, refer overtly to Jewish mysticism and to a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud (fourth-sixth century A.D.) which discussed one of the central issues of Kabbalist thought, the genesis of the Bible

> itself: "The Torah given by God was made of an integument of white fire, the engraved letters were in black fire, and it was itself of fire and mixed with fire, and hewn out of fire and given from the midst of fire".[1]

Scholem commented on this interpretation after reading the relevant passage in Hess's 1971 book.

> White Fire and Black Fire is in a text from the Zohar which I have included in the book he (Hess) mentions here, but he refers to an edition. It is not an edition; I did an anthology and the title is Zohar The Book of Splendour Schocken Books ... Yes, it is a Kabbalistic title but it does not mean that the work is Kabbalistic. It means that he (Newman) has read something that has kindled his imagination ... Ginzberg of course mentions White Fire and Black Fire because they are Talmudic motifs.* I mentioned it in a Zoharic passage but the Zoharic passage which he (Hess) certainly read in my anthology, because he mentions it, is based, as many Kabbalistic things are, on a Talmudic motif. The Talmudic motif, which is not Kabbalistic, comes from the third century, from Palestine and was written by a famous Talmudic Rabbi, Shimon Ben Lakish, who said,
>
> > 'The Torah is pre-existent because the Torah was the instrument by which the Lord created the world, and is the cosmic plan of creation. The Torah was written with black fire on white fire ... '
>
> It is an Aggadic motif and from this motif comes the Kabbalistic interpretation.[2]

Newman may have drawn his titles from Scholem's book Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, which he had on his bookshelves, but could as easily have taken them from the Midrash. The source is unimportant because Newman did not use the titles as descriptive labels but for other reasons which remain unexplained. Hess however has attempted to explain them by attributing Kabbalistic motifs to them.

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* Louis Ginzberg: 1873 - 1954. Professor of Rabbinics at the Jewish Theological seminary New York from 1902 till his death. He was recognized as one of the great and outstanding Talmudic scholars of our age. His important works are Gaonica, Legends of the Jews and Students, Scholars and Saints. He was also one of the editors of the Encyclopaedia Judaica.
Ginzberg expounded on the Talmud, not on the Kabbalah.

Hess does not attempt to connect the formal elements of the paintings to the titles because this relation would be difficult to substantiate. The five paintings in this group have different sizes and different colours and in each case the stripe or stripes vary in width, texture, and position. The common factor is the title.

White Fire I	1954	aquamarine	
White Fire II	1960	ungrounded canvas/black	244 x 203 cm.
Black Fire I	1961	ungrounded canvas/black	290 x 213 cm.
White Fire III	1964	ungrounded canvas/black	203 x 183 cm.
White Fire IV	1968	White on White	335 x 127 cm.

Hess claims that the titles 'refer overtly to Jewish mysticism' which he relates to the Jerusalem Talmud suggesting that the two sources are closely linked. This is not exactly true. Torah existed long before the advent of the Kabbalah and, as noted in the glossary, Kabbalism was introduced as an interpretation of the Torah. It follows that everything in Kabbalah initially was drawn from the Torah. Louis Ginzberg's The Legends of the Jews is primarily an exegesis of the Midrash, not of the Kabbalah. He refers to both White Fire and Black Fire indicating that one need not look to the Kabbalah to find these references.[1]

4.8 HERE I (1950) Fig. 35

Newman's first sculpture is discussed by Hess in 1969 mainly in terms of the formal elements. According to this early analysis Newman's main concern in creating his vertical sculpture was to solve the problem of how to release the sculpture from the floor and from the force of gravity.

> He approached sculpture as he had painting: with an eye out for the enemy. In painting he had concentrated on the wall - "I want to move away from the wall, destroy it ... make a painting hostile to the environment". The problem in sculpture he deduced, was the floor, in other words, the base, the element that gets the work up into the air. Here could be called two zips, a thin one made from a machined wood-board painted white, and a wide plank coated with plaster roughly built up and squeezed in at the edges, almost the marks of a child modelling with warm tar: a fast light thin shaft, and a slow heavy wide blade. Both were embedded in a rough mound shape, like an old piece of cement that had fallen off some modern construction and become pitted by showers of rain

> and gravel as it hardened. And the mound was set on a platform a few inches off the floor.[1]

The analysis is structured partially on analogous imagery as there is no reference to hidden meanings nor to any esoteric iconography. It is a straightforward if somewhat picturesque description of the formal elements. Hess continues the analysis with a brief allusion to the Indian ruins in Nevada as the inspiration for the form of the sculpture and as it derived from the stripe in the paintings.

> The standing vertical looks like the mesas, buttes and chimneys in the Navajo country of Nevada but they are informed by Newman's paintings.[2]

These two excerpts reflect Hess's understanding of the sculptures in 1969 and presumably Newman advised and contributed towards this understanding. In 1971 Hess again wrote about this same sculpture but his later analysis again incorporates the Kabbalistic theme.

In his later version, Hess propounds a complex and elaborate theory beyond the earlier analogy of the mounds and now it is given a mystical tone. There may be, as Hess suggests, some foundation for linking Newman's writings to the sculpture, because Newman stated in his writings, that he was affected by the sense of the 'Here and Now' when he visited the Indian mounds. This experience of 'place' became an integral part of Newman's philosophy which he defined in a 1967 congress.

> What matters to a true artist is that he distinguish between a place and no place at all, and the greater the work of art the greater will be this feeling. And this feeling is the fundamental spiritual dimension. If this doesn't happen, nothing else can happen.
>
> The Jewish medieval notion of Makom is where God is. No matter what is said against the vocabulary of the present day aesthete or the present day theologian, it's only after man knows where he is that he can ask himself "who am I?" and "where am I going?" And I think some places are more sacred than others, and that depends, it seems to me, on the quality of the work of art, on its uniqueness, on its rigor. It's not an issue of taste. It's not even an issue of style. But only in the issue of the highest sensibility. And I think that the young sculptors are trying to do that. Some succeed, and some make designs, but some do make something where if you stand in front of it you know that you're there.[3]

An examination of the following excerpt from Hess's text, indicates how he expands Newman's own concept to formulate a different image from that presented by the artist.

> The sculpture had been in his mind for more than a year, probably since a visit to Akron in August 1949. He had gone to meet Annalee's family and to explore Ohio, where he discovered the Indian-mound country. He wrote some notes about it in an unpublished monologue titled "Prologue for a New Esthetic": "Standing before the Miamisburg mound, or walking amidst the Fort Ancient and Newark earthworks - surrounded by these simple walls made of mud - I was confounded by the absoluteness of the sensation, their self-evident simplicity ... "
>
> Later, in a conversation, he described the experience as that of "a sense of place, a holy place. Looking at the site you feel, Here I am, here ... and out beyond there (beyond the limits of the site) there is chaos, nature, rivers, landscapes ... but here you get a sense of your own presence ... I became involved with the idea of making the viewer present: the idea that 'Man is Present'."
>
> Newman evidently was alluding to the Jewish concept of Makom, of "place" or "location" or "site" (he refers directly to this in a 1963 statement about his model for a synagogue, in which the temple itself is designated as Makom, and he calls the "place" where members of the congregation stand to read from the Torah a "mound").
>
> Early Jewish mysticism, Scholem points out, is a kind of "throne worship"; through processes of insight, meditation and logical speculation, the devout man rises from sphere to sphere until he stands before the Throne of God where he "hears a voice speaking from the celestial fire like a voice of many waters, like the sound of the sea in its uproar", and where he sees how:
>
> With a gleam of His ray he encompasses the sky and His splendor radiates from the heights. Abysses flame from His mouth and firmaments sparkle from his body.
>
> Unlike mystical experiences in Christian and Eastern religions, the Jew stands in front of the Throne as a man; he experiences the reality of being there; it is an objective condition and not a sense of grace or of the ineffable.
>
> Newman seems to have related his epiphany among the Indian mounds in Ohio to the Kabbalist's before the Throne.
>
> Makom is place; Hamakom is, literally, "the place". It is also one of the secret names of God and one of the many poetic locations which the Torah uses to avoid pronouncing His name or spelling out its letters. Thus Moses would not say "The Lord spoke to me ..." but "The Place spoke to me ..."
>
> For the early Kabbalists, as for Aristotle, "place" and "space" were identical. There was no such thing as an abstract metaphysical "space". Everything was "place",

even heaven, and for the Jews "the place" is imbued with the transcendental presence of God.

In Newman's fragmentary "Prologue for a New Esthetic", after invoking his experience among the mounds, that is, his sensation of Makom, he went on to attack the idea of "space" as a cliché in modern criticism and art jargon. Newman's connections to Kabbalist thought often reinforced his thinking about painting and sculpture. They are, in a sense, harmonic images from a sphere in the past, and their role is to sustain and enrich the artist's radically modern esthetic formulations. Newman wrote:

"Everybody says that painting is a space art. The story of modern painting is always told as a struggle for and against space - deep space, shallow space, flat space, positive and negative space, cube space, the space of "infinity", etc. What is all the clamor over space? It is all too esoteric for me as if the crucial essence in music was the fact that composers, that Mozart wrote in 3/4, 2/4 or in no specific rhythm; or that poetry really depends on whether it is written in Alexandrian, blank verse or free verse. Is painting crawling over the canvas in a great paroxysm of intoxicated improvisation like a collection of hot jazz players?

Everybody says that the important thing in painting is the image - the real image, the imagined poetic image, the whole image, the nostalgic image, the automatic image of chance, the broken Surrealist image, the pure, universal image of the material itself, the coup-d'oeil image.

My paintings are concerned neither with the manipulation of space nor with the image, but with the sensation of time. Not the sense of time, which has been the underlying subject matter of painting, which involves feelings of nostalgia or high drama; it is always associative and historical ..."

And here his "Prologue" ends.

He probably would have gone on to raise the issue of "timelessness" - one of his high ambitions for art, but I believe that Newman, whose many interests included modern physics, also would have defined time in Einsteinian terms as the essential, defining measure of "space", thus returning space from the sentimental lingo of modernist esthetics to the old Judeo-Greek concept of "place" - Makom: something that is there, where a man stands. No matter how spiritual a man's experience may be, his vision will be saturated by the human scale. This, I believe, is what his first sculpture is about, and it is no coincidence that it is titled Here - of this time, in this place.

It is about eight feet high - the same height as the zips in Vir Heroicus Sublimis. One of the elements is straight, thin and hard - a machine-tooled one-by-three-inch board, simply painted white. The other element is wider and thicker, made on an armature of wood and chicken wire with white plaster roughly piled and fingered into it (making it may have reminded Newman of his childhood modelling with hot tar). Both verticals

> are stuck into mounds stepped up from a flat plaster base, which in turn is lifted off the floor on a wooden milk-bottle crate, which fits flush beneath the sculpture.
>
> The rough, squeezed element corresponds to Newman's sensuous, smeared verticals in Onement I, Joshua, The Wild and the untitled vertical work that had preceded The Wild. The thinner, smooth white vertical is like the knife-edged zips in Onement II and in many of the other works that followed it. The pairing of both was first established in The Promise and elaborated in the first of the untitled vertical paintings that led up to The Wild. (Fig. 16).
>
> His technical problem, he once explained, was to make his sculpture lift off the floor, that is, to establish its independent presence apart from an extraneous architectural context (just as in painting he always wanted to have the work "move away from the wall"). In Here I this was accomplished by mounding up the base to receive the verticals, by organizing a man-made landscape as their context. The manscape, in turn, was raised off the floor by the crate, roughly painted white in smears and drips, which differentiated it from the gallery floor. (The base complex was cut down when, in 1962, Here I was first cast in bronze; it has now been replaced).
>
> The motive, then, was to lift the verticals out of the painting, to solidify them, place them on the earth, relate them only to themselves and to the spectator. They assume independent presence, larger than man, but in a size comprehensible by man. We see them, but they are above us. They mark their place, fill it. We see them, but they are witnesses - solid, objective witnesses - to something else, a vision beyond the "here and now", as if to prove that from Here, the hero can contemplate the radiance of man's ultimate vision: the Throne.[1]

Hess's lengthy text contrasts with the simplicity and brevity of the earlier (1969) reference not only in quantity but also in content. By injecting Scholem's writings and Kabbalistic references into this passage, Hess adds a mystical tone to the sculpture. Hess stresses the Hebrew 'Makom', which Newman referred to in his writings, but Hess also introduces Kabbalistic themes as if they also are part of Newman's writings. In doing so, Hess interrelates Newman's concepts and the Kabbalah with the sculpture without ever categorically claiming that Here I is a Kabbalistic sculpture. This results in the reader assuming that the Kabbalistic references are relative: they tend to overlook the structure of the text which implies rather than states.

Hess uses passages from Newman's prologues to link the Ohio experience to the sculpture and implies that when Newman said

> ... a sense of place, a holy place. Looking at the site you feel, Here I am, Here ... and out beyond there ... is chaos, ... [1]

he was talking about one thing, but thinking about something else.

> Newman evidently was alluding to the Jewish concept of Makom, of 'place' or 'location' or 'site'. He (Newman) refers directly to this in a 1963 statement about his model for a synagogue, in which the temple itself is designated as Makom, and he calls the place where members of the congregation stand to read from the Torah a 'mound'. Early Jewish mysticism, Scholem points out, is a kind of 'throne worship' ...[2]

Mrs Newman claims that Newman 'always spoke his mind and if he had something to say he said it'. Had he wished to refer to 'Makom' and Jewish mysticism he would not have 'alluded' to it but would have said so.[3]

Rosenberg contends that the title refers to 'here' in America, where it is all happening.

> ... Here represented a kind of battle slogan in the years after World War II, as artists in New York became determined to create out of their own environment instead of being obliged to remove themselves to Paris, or to feel as if they were there.[4]

Charles Harrison supports this contention.

> Newman (referring to Here) makes a strong distinction between European art and American art.[5]

Mrs Newman repeated a statement by Newman which she claimed was relevant to the understanding of the sculpture Here I.

> Man must know where he is even before he knows who he is.[6]

This describes Newman's concern with 'man's sense of place' and Mrs Newman believes that

> Newman knew where he was, he was 'here' in America, he was 'here' in New York or he was 'here' standing before the Indian mounds in Ohio.[7]

According to Mrs Newman that 'place' was not the place of 'Jewish

mysticism' where:

> ... the Kabbalistic Jew stands in front of the throne ...[1]

Finally Alloway describes how Newman chose the title Here for his sculpture.

> I remember him talking one evening, speculating about possible titles, because he wanted to emphasize the sculpture's ineluctable presence before us. He went round a lot of words: 'right here', 'now', 'this is it'; almost making lists.[2]

These phrases reflect a contemporary and idiomatic American style of talking and thinking - there is no indication here that Newman was thinking along other lines, for example, of Kabbalah or Torah.

While Hess relates the sculpture and its title to Jewish mysticism, Mrs Newman, Rosenberg, and Alloway claim that Here I is about a specific geographical place. On the basis of their claims, it can be assumed that Newman's sculpture and its title were intended to signify a place that Newman identified with, possibly on a spiritual level, 'here' in New York and 'here' in America, or any place where he happened to be.

4.9 SUMMATION OF THE EXAMINATION OF HESS'S CHAPTER, ONEMENT

This chapter has been devoted to the examination of Hess's analyses of specific works that have been linked in various ways to the Kabbalah. Hess developed this theme through many works of Newman's, starting with a detailed interpretation of Onement I. He appears to have structured this chapter so as to create an image of Newman as a Kabbalist painter. At no time does Hess specifically refer to Newman as a Kabbalist but his text insidiously propagates the impression by means of hints, and propinquity of words, phrases, and quotations. The last three pages are devoted to bringing together into a coherent whole, the various Kabbalistic motifs introduced in the different analyses. The references to Jewish mysticism are included in this final section in such a way that the reader assumes that they apply to Newman and to his work. Consequently, Newman emerges as a Kabbalistic painter and his work is linked to Kabbalistic concepts and sources. The manner in which Hess implies rather than

states his theme of Kabbalism is evident from the three pages that conclude the Onement chapter. The subtlety with which the symbols are allocated to Newman should be noted. (see c.v. p. 175f).

Terms such as 'privacy', 'secrecy', and 'mystery' used by Hess contribute to the mystical image that Hess has created. Those who knew Newman will claim that he was gregarious by nature rather than introverted and secretive. Both Mrs Newman and Alloway believe that Hess has not reflected his character and neither do Hess's analyses reflect the character and meaning of his work. Newman was certainly conscious of his Jewish background, and his religious and spiritual heritage may have formed the basis of his work, but Hess has changed Newman's consciousness of his Jewishness into an acute awareness of Jewish mysticism. Hess's contentions of Kabbalistic content in Newman's work are rejected by Rosenberg.

> In interpreting specific paintings in terms of Kabbalistic concepts and numbers symbolism, Thomas Hess, for example, in his book issued in connection with the Newman retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1971 - 72, commits the critical indiscretion of detaching the origin of these paintings from Newman's intellectual physiognomy as a whole and relating them to an impersonal system. ...
>
> Regardless of their sacred associations, Newman's concepts are secular in meaning, and his thought can be understood only in the language of contemporary experience; his consciousness of the Hebrew God as One, whose "Glory fills the Universe", is pertinent to his paintings only as an aspect of his passionate continuation of the tradition in modernism - from Emerson and Kiekegaard to Mondrian - that holds both inner unity and coherence in practice to depend upon reducing, concentration, and repetition.[1]

In conclusion, Alloway speculates on the possible explanation for Hess's emphasis on Kabbalistic themes.

> Thomas Hess devoted the first part of his writing life to the adulation of William de Kooning and later he continued to feel as he did about De Kooning but added Newman. I think that between them he thought these two artists covered the world, one Jewish and one not Jewish and so here was De Kooning, the blonde European, and here was Newman the American Jew; I think he sort of ghettoized Newman - to keep him apart from De Kooning.[2]

CHAPTER 5

THE STATIONS, SYNAGOGUE MODEL AND SCULPTURE

5.1 THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS 1958 - 1966 (THE STATIONS) (Fig. 36)

Newman intended that the fourteen paintings of this group should be seen as one indivisible work.[1] All fourteen have uniform dimensions and basically use a uniform 'colour', black, white and/or ungrounded canvas. The structure varies from painting to painting. Although each work has a stripe or band on the left-hand side, no two paintings are the same.

Newman seldom explained his work in great detail but he wrote a fairly comprehensive essay on The Stations. This was included in the catalogue when the work was exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in 1966, (reproduced in the c.v. p. 178f).

In 1969, Hess made a relatively brief reference to The Stations and to Newman's catalogue essay,

> In 1958, he painted a black and white picture on unsized canvas, then a second on the same theme. Two years later, two more pictures were added to the series. Newman decided that he would do fourteen and title them The Stations of the Cross, with the subtitle Lema Sabathani, "Why did you forsake me?" It is "the unanswerable question of human suffering", Newman wrote in the catalogue to the exhibition of the Stations at the Guggenheim Museum (1966). And it seems probable that these eloquent, inventive pictures are his sublimation of, and memorial to, the black years of 1955-56. The edges of the black zip, or white zip defined by black edges, jangle and tremble, drips of black are shaken off; the critic-poet Nicolas Calas has compared them to Christ's blood thrown from His agonized body. I think they are paint, but maybe they are paint about Newman's private tears.[2]

The only addition to the artist's original concept is the suggestion that the subject matter is the expression of Newman's personal suffering during his 'black years'. Alloway tends to agree with Hess in relating the subject matter to Newman's personal life and problems.

> Thus the subject matter is not only a source to Newman but, in addition, a parallel with aspects of his own life, so that the original event and the paintings are related like

> type and antitype in the Testaments.[1]

Rosenberg disagrees with this idea and with Hess's theory:

> One hesitates to think that Newman indentified the mission of the Son to save mankind from sin and death, and his rejection, with the mission of the artist and his rejection by the art world.[2]

Hess, Rosenberg and Alloway, have written extensively on Newman's work and all three have written about The Stations. Alloway's analysis is a clearly defined and detailed examination of the formal elements and includes a comprehensive reference to the Christian iconography. (see c.v. p.181).

Rosenberg is more concerned with the title and pays less attention to the formal elements. He is clearly critical of Newman's choice of title and anticipated a misunderstanding of its meaning. He warned Newman of the danger of using a private language that had connotations for the artist that differed from those generally held by his society.

> To my mind, the title The Stations of the Cross was a mistake, and I argued against it with Newman on the ground that an event held sacred by a cult and standing for it as a symbol ought not to be appropriated by outsiders and given changed meanings. Confident of the limitless applicability of his abstract idiom, Newman defended amalgamating this most extreme instance of human abandonment with the pathos of the artist. The harm of the title lay, it seemed to me, not so much in invoking the impenetrable concept of the "why" of human suffering as in associating the question with Christian lore, to which the artist was essentially alien. The Stations, with their overload of mystery and sacred references, exposed Newman, on the one hand, to febrile charges of intellectual pretentiousness, as by John Canaday; on the other hand, they subjected him to exaggerated visual and theoretical exegeses by ambitious commentators (e.g. the "screeching zip").[3]

Rosenberg does not specify who the 'ambitious commentators' may be, but in the fourth chapter of Hess's 1971 book there is a 'theoretical exegesis' and an 'intellectual commentary' on The Stations. This chapter is entitled The Stations of the Cross and like Onement, it possibly pays tribute to the work, and much of the text is devoted to a discussion of the paintings.

Starting with the anecdotal development of the 'series', Hess suggests that the work evolved from one of the first paintings Newman made after recovering from his heart attack in 1957.

> His first painting was done at the apartment, a narrow, vertical canvas related to the pictures which had led him to The Wild. It is a heavily smeared green and dark blue form - the action of the paint is emphatic, although the pigment itself is thin, and the gesture is rigidly contained in the tight, viselike format. He called it Outcry. A shout of despair? A call for help? A protest? The title would be explained by his next works.
>
> Around February 1958, he picked out two canvases, stretched to six and one-half by five feet; and without even bothering to prepare the cotton duck with glue, started to work. He chose Magna paint - much easier to use in an apartment because it dries so fast - and restricted himself to black. Black is what an artist uses, he said, when he is trying to break into something new, when he is clearing the decks for experiment, when he wants to find a new way to his image and a way out of the restrictions his old paintings have imposed. Uriel, as we have seen, was such an impasse. Using only black, then, he began to divide his canvas into a new set of relationships.[1]

Hess claims that the first two Station paintings were developed from the narrow canvas, Outcry, and that all three works reflect the artist's anguish and thus are autobiographical. This is followed by a description of the formal elements and the mathematical divisions of the format. Hess suggests that the first two paintings were unique and compares them with some of Newman's other works having uniform dimensions.

> Why did he paint two works, one right after the other, same size, same format, same black and white medium, and in such a hurry that he did not wait to prepare the canvas (untreated duck is as fragile as spun glass; any fingermark embeds dirt so deeply in the weave that it takes a professional conservator to remove it)? He had done pictures using the same dimensions before - Vir Heroicus Sublimis, Cathedra, Uriel, for example, and Adam and Achilles and Ulysses and Prometheus Bound - but this was usually a sign that the image would drastically shift. In The Voice and The Name II, identical dimensions are used, but widths and heights are swapped. He also had used similar images, but usually in drastically changed scale, color and dimensions.[2]

Having posed a question as to why Newman painted the two first works 'one after the other', Hess prepares the way for his answer and for another reference to 'secret symmetry'. He referred to

this system in his analyses of Abraham, Vir Heroicus Sublimis and the Narrow Paintings and now attributes it to The Stations.

> I suggest the answer lies in Newman's understanding that using his new triadic system, the only way to re-establish a secret symmetry and with it the frontal, big-impact, epic quality to which he felt his art must aspire, would be to work in some sort of series. The separate pictures, repeating and varying his shapes, establish a larger unity and a heightened scale. They are secretly symmetrical in the sense that they echo each other in time - the time taken to see one, then the other, then both, then to recognize that one repeats the other. With only two paintings, however, the division of thirds breaks up the larger image by insistently implying a narrative sequence moving from left to right, even though the right-hand element of the pair (the white on gray zip in the second painting) was given a firm anchoring or braking shape. Newman studied both paintings for months and decided that he would have to make at least two more.[1]

Hess reinforces his assertion of 'secrecy' by introducing an esoteric relation between the first two paintings. He suggests that 'secret symmetry' was the purpose of the series and is achieved by the idea of time and repetition. But this theory lacks conviction. That one painting 'echoes' or repeats the other is obvious because they have similar pictorial elements and there is a natural time lapse or interval between looking at them. Why this is 'secret' is uncertain and there are no records to substantiate such a claim. Hess says the first four paintings constitute a conscious application of Newman's 'secret symmetry' and links them in a planned series. But Newman decided to 'expand' them into a series of fourteen works only after he had completed the fourth painting:

> He returned to his two paintings begun in 1958, adding two more; after studying them, he decided to expand the number to fourteen and title them "The Stations of the Cross". "It was after the fourth that he realized the number and meaning of the work on which he was engaged", wrote Lawrence Alloway, in his important and penetrating essay in the cataloque of the exhibition of The Stations at the Guggenheim Museum in 1966.[2]

Later Hess again suggests that The Stations are an autobiographical expression of the artist's personal trauma.

> It is possible to interpret the series as an autobiographical metaphor of Newman's "blackest years" of neglect and despair, of his heart attack and confrontation with death. It would

> also follow logically that this artist, who had made Genesis and the creative act his subject matter, would now turn to resurrection, to life after death - for what else, after all, is the subject of The Stations, which begin with Christ condemned to death and end with the Entombment? [1]

Hess presents the tragedy of The Stations and the final end - the death of Christ, as a natural corollary to the act of creation - Genesis. This infers a controlled sequence of thought which Newman has denied repeatedly. Newman claimed that he never planned a painting and neither did he start a painting with preconceived ideas.[2] This statement is somewhat undermined by Newman's admission that after he had completed the fourth painting he decided to develop a series of fourteen. He may have started each painting with a fresh and unplanned approach but each painting conforms to standard elements of 'colour' and size and all have a left-hand stripe which indicates some systematic thinking.

In his lengthy analysis, Hess includes an excerpt from a 'conversation' held with Newman during the Guggenheim Museum exhibition.

> Newman:
>
> I was trying to call attention to that part of the Passion which I have always felt was ignored and which has always affected me and that was the cry of Lema Sabachthani, which I don't think is a complaint, but which Jesus makes. And I always was struck by the paradox that he says to those who persecuted Him and crucified Him, "Forgive them for they know not what they do". But to God, and Jesus is projected as the Son of God, He says, "What's the idea!"
>
> Later in our "Conversation":
>
> I felt that to the extent that Jesus was crucified and did physically say Lema Sabachthani in relation to that drama, that it was more appropriate for me to be concerned with the Sabachthani (... forsaken me). Also since there is a tradition of Stations, as a painter I felt I could make the point more viable within that framework ...
>
> Hess: It's like doing a sonnet, a given number of lines, and you fit into that form?
>
> Newman: Well, to the extent that a sonnet is an arbitrary poem, and to the extent that the Stations form an arbitrary (number of) paintings, I felt that it was appropriate to do it.[2]

The chronological sequence of events that led to Newman linking the

paintings to a Christian iconography is not recorded, so it is difficult to determine whether he had this concept in mind after the fourth painting or whether it was evolved later. Alloway notes that the first painting was titled Station and subsequently 'reproduced as The Series'. He also explains how the work evolved 'through a process of self-recognition'.

> Newman worked, first, without preknowledge of group or cycle; then, as a result of developing possibilities within the work itself, he accepted a definition that partially determined the future course of the series.[1]

Continuing with the 'conversation' Hess quotes Newman's explanation of his use of black.

> In a large tragic theme of this kind, when Picasso does Guernica, he cannot do it in color. He does it in black and white and gray. I couldn't make a green Passion or a red one. I mean you wouldn't want me to make a purple Jesus or something like that? It had to be black and white - I was compelled to work this way ... Could I get the living quality of color without using color?[2]

Towards the end of his analysis, Hess links The Stations to Newman's painting Be II and it is important to study this passage in order to correlate the various levels of interpretation that Hess presents. Hess also arrives at a final explanation of the work with an implied 'Kabbalist parallel'.

> Culminating the Stations is a fifteenth picture, larger than those in the series, with an impastoed cadmium red light edge to the left of the canvas and a black, hard one to the right, and, in between, white paint replacing the bare canvas. At first it was nicknamed (not titled) at the suggestion of Tony Smith, Resurrection. Newman began it in 1961 and added some finishing coats of paint in 1964. He also gave it his own title, Be II.
>
> There is an important key here, I believe, to an understanding of the Stations. It has been said, and it may be true, that the Stations are Newman's confrontation with death, and that to him the meaning of the Passion is Resurrection: life triumphant over death. I think that even if Newman had such an idea at the beginning (and this is doubtful), he changed his mind later. Be is the imperative of God of the Jews. Man should be; he should work in the Lord's ways in order to be able to stand before Him - as a man, in a place (Makom), just as the orange stripe - the color which for Newman represented man since Onement I, 1948 - stands across the white field from its severe counterpart in black.

> The large vertical center-left area of the Stations - which generally takes up three-fourths of the image - contracts and expands slightly from picture to picture, as if suggesting Luria's image of the Tsimtsum (it contracts most sharply in the Seventh and Ninth Stations). The Tenth and Twelfth Stations are flooded with light, as the universe was after Tsimtsum, in the moment of creation. One could apply Kabbalist parallels even more closely here, but the crucial element is the command Be, which is both Jehovah's "let there be ..." and the Kabbalah's admonition to Be.[1]

Hess does not distinguish between 'Jehovah's' command and the Kabbalist's 'admonition', but merely introduces it as an (unexplained) 'Kabbalist parallel'. He also refers to 'Luria's image of the Tsimtsum' as a connection between The Stations and the Kabbalah. Again, as in previous analyses, Hess does not claim that this work is Kabbalistic but an assumed relation is created by the use of Kabbalistic references. Hess's references are at variance with Newman's text, and in addition he claims that Newman is announcing the coming of the Messiah, a fresh variation and extension to the original motif.

> Finally, there is one man who can say he has "more permission to be born" than anybody else: the Messiah. Newman is telling us that He is yet to come.
>
> This, I believe, is the ultimate daring in Newman's Stations. He raises them to a philosophic enquiry on the nature of agony, on the nature of his art and on the life of man-as-an-artist. Fused with the pictorial structure of the black paint and the raw canvas and the serial nature of the image is the symbolic structure of his subject matter, which contains - secretly, although Newman always leaves hints and clues - his own ontological insight, with its parallels to (or metaphors from) the spiritual visions of the great Kabbalist.[2]

A major difference between Christianity and Judaism lies in their attitudes to the Messiah. Christianity recognises Jesus as the Messiah, who was born, died, and will return. The word 'Christ' comes from the Greek word 'Khristos' and means the 'Anointed One' which is a translation of the Hebrew, Messiah (one anointed with oil). Judaism believes that the Messiah is still to come. Hess propounds the theory that Newman is using the essence of Christianity, the story of the Passion, to declare the essence of Judaism, that the Messiah is "yet to come". There is no evidence to suppose that Newman had these ideas in mind. Moreover to equate the Passion

story with Judaic scripture and Kabbalism disregards the historical, religious, and cultural polarity of the two religions.

There is no foundation for Hess's claim that The Stations represent Newman's declaration of the coming of the Messiah, although Newman said that they were an analogy of the Passion story. As such the titles are descriptive and anecdotal to a public who have been nurtured on the Christian narrative. As noted, Rosenberg anticipated a problem with a title that had connotations for the artist that were different for society. Newman may have written his catalogue statement to stress its universal message and to avoid the sort of misinterpretation that Hess has given.

Newman seems to have used this title to depict man's bewilderment and inability to comprehend the 'why' of human suffering. In the light of this statement, the overt meaning of The Stations can refer to the Passion but the intrinsic message is not about the Messiah, 'secret symmetry', nor about the Kabbalah; it is about the eternal question of man's existence and 'human suffering' which Newman claims is unanswerable.

> Lema? To what purpose? - is the unanswerable question to human suffering.[1]

The series needs no other interpretation.

5.2 SYNAGOGUE MODEL (1963)

This dissertation argues generally that Hess's claims of a Kabbalistic content in Newman's paintings is speculative and unsubstantiated, but there may be some foundation for associating Kabbalistic concepts with the model for a synagogue that Newman designed in 1963. It may be postulated that he drew the idea of the structure's zigzag glass walls from the Kabbalist idea of Tsimtsum. But the use of concepts that relate or seem to relate to the Kabbalah need not necessarily identify Newman as a Kabbalist artist. This is what Hess generally attempts to do in his 1971 book, and particularly during his discourse on the model of the synagogue. Initially, he concentrates on the historical facts of Newman's involvement in method and structure.

> Newman's first ideas were in the form of sketches, about fifty of them, many on Schrafft's napkins, done after late breakfasts. In his final plan, the zigzag walls, now all of glass, are placed at the left and right sides of the building. The men sit below them in "dugouts", like baseball players on the edges of the field. The women are at one end, in the seats like a ballfield's bleachers. At the center is a (pitcher's? Indian burial?) mound - the place from which the Torah is read aloud during services. Opposite the bleachers is the Ark of the Covenant where the Torah is kept.
>
> The basic form of the structure, then, is a rectangular box, with the Ark and the bleachers at opposite ends of the long axis; the accordion-fold windows are on either side; the dugouts are below the windows. The front and back walls are planned as solid, massive stone masonry. The side walls are light, made of glass, steel and plaster.
>
> The problem of getting into the building was solved by adding a narthex behind the bleachers; Newman was not happy with this extrusion, but there had to be someplace for the congregation to hang its coats and prepare to enter the synagogue space.
>
> The model is symmetrically placed on a large board. In building the model, Newman and Murray started from scratch: "We did everything backwards", Murray recalls. Instead of buying some simple architectural textbooks to determine what is the best height for the riser of a step, for instance, or how a window is fitted into a bay, Newman conducted Murray on study tours of his favorite buildings in New York: they measured the great carriage entrance to the Twenty-sixth Street Armory (where the 1913 Armory Show was held), to see how the steps and ramps joined. Then they would go back to the studio and wrestle with the model.[1]

This passage records Newman's ideas and how he constructed his model with his young sculptor friend Robert Murray. Mrs Newman has verified most of these facts as accurate.

Hess then analyses the content and meaning as it applies both to the title and to the structure of the model. He begins with Newman's statement which was included in the catalogue for the exhibition of synagogue models held at the Jewish Museum New York in 1963.

> The impression that today's popular architecture creates is that it has no subject. It talks about itself as if it were only an object, a machine or an organic object; or one of new materials, new forms, new volumes, new spaces.
>
> The subject of architecture is always taken for granted, that somehow it will supply itself or what is worse, that the

client will supply it, that a building automatically becomes a work of art.

In the synagogue, the architect has the perfect subject because it gives him total freedom for a personal work of art. In the synagogue ceremony nothing happens that is objective. In it there is only the subjective experience in which one feels exalted. "Know before whom you stand", reads the commandment. But the concern seems to be not with (A)
the emotion of exaltation and personal identity called for by the command but with the number of seats and clean decor. We have broken out of the Alhambra. Is it only to fall into a new one? The synagogue is more than just a House of Prayer. It is a place, Makom, where each man can be called up to stand before the Torah to read his portion. In the Amsterdam (B)
synagogue tradition, man was put on a stage to become an actor and the women were put behind silk curtains. In the Prague synagogue, the women were even put behind walls. In the new synagogue, the women are there, sometimes even sitting with the men, but they are there as members of the Ladies' (C)
Auxiliary.

Here in this synagogue, each man sits, private and secluded in the dugouts, waiting to be called, not to ascend a stage, but to go up to the mound where, under the tension of that "Tzim-Tzum" that created light and the world, he can experience (D)
a total sense of his own personality before the Torah and His Name.

The women are also there, as persons and not as wives and mothers. Here the women are out in the open, sitting not in any abstract connection with what takes place but as persons, distinct from their men, but in the full clear light, where they can experience their identity as women of (E)
valor.

My purpose is to create a place, not an environment; to deny the contemplation of the objects of ritual for the sake of that ultimate courtesy where each person, man or woman, can experience the vision and feel the exaltation of "His trailing robes filling the Temple".[1]

Hess elaborates on Newman's text and extends the (Tsimtsum) Tzim-Tzum concept into a complex theme full of Kabbalistic imagery.

The zigzag windows, then, filling the hall with light and thrusting into the light-filled space, enact the Luriac drama of Tsimtsum that took place between Day before One (F)
and Day One. They are oriented across the nave so that point faces point, angle rushes away from angle, to heighten the feeling of Divine "contraction", also articulated by the heavy stone walls which act as piers between which the windows are compressed.

Makom is the "place", the locus where man stands, face to face with the Torah, with "The Word", with "White Fire" and (G)
"Black Fire" - it is a mound, reminding us of Newman's

epiphany at the mound-builders' sanctuary near Akron and also of the mounds into which are thrust the vertical elements in his first sculpture, Here I. The total vision invoked by the artist, "the exaltation", is expressed with the same lines of poetry from Isaiah that Newman associated with Cathedra.

Newman obviously, and characteristically, carefully researched the synagogue and its history. Of all the models in The Jewish Museum's synagogue exhibition, his was the most imaginative - and the professional architects could claim that his freedom came from the fact that he had no client (Newman always claimed that as far as he was concerned, temperamentally, it would be impossible for him ever to accept a commission) - but on the other hand his is also the most respectful of tradition. (H)

Only his model, for example, follows the Zohar's rule that there should be twelve windows, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. His substitution of the Makom for the more recently conventional Bimah (or platform, from which the Torah is read) is liturgically sound, as is his orientation of the Ark and the congregation. Although Newman does not specify it, we can deduce that his edifice is designed to face east (toward Jerusalem), because we can assume that his first idea for a zigzag wall-window structure would open to north light. (I)

The separation of men and women also is basic to the historical tradition. Kabbalists explain this division of the congregation in terms of the Sefiroth ("the ten spheres of divine manifestation in which God emerges from His hidden abode" - Scholem). Directly beneath the Sefiroth or sphere of Kether Elyon, the "supreme crown" of God, are the Sefiroth of Hokkmah, or the male element (to the right), and Binah, the female (at the left). The male expresses itself in perceptions of intuition, in flashes of genius; the female in meditation, analysis, synthesis; the male is the Sefiroth of "wisdom" or the primordial idea of God; the female is that of understanding or the "intelligence" of God. Without their union, nothing can be accomplished. However, as men and women respond to God and create their prayers in different ways, according to their own temperaments, it is better that they worship Him with the freedom which separation encourages. (J)

There is nothing derogatory to women in true Kabbalist thought. (K)

Newman's reference to "women of valor" suggests that he was thinking of the Sefiroth. Furthermore, in the Kabbalah, the ten spheres are often diagrammed as a tree with interconnected branches moving in and out from a central trunk, at ninety-degree angles from each other; it is possible, I believe, that the step from a zigzag wall on which to show pictures to the wall of his synagogue was facilitated, if not inspired, by this image, which Newman surely knew from a sixteenth-century woodcut, a reproduction of which was in his library.

Newman's statement about his synagogue design is the only one of his texts known to me that makes extended, overt reference to his studies in Jewish mysticism.[1] (L)

In the light of Hess's analysis, different points in both Newman's and Hess's texts are discussed: these points are identified by letters alongside the relevant references.

In a personal interview, Scholem commented on Hess's text (F) and Hess's analysis of Newman's reference to the word Tsimtsum (D). He was asked whether the word Tsimtsum was a Kabbalistic term and, in replying, expanded on this theme.

> Tsimtsum means contraction. It is not strictly a Kabbalistic term, it is strictly a non-kabbalistic term as used in the Midrash. But in the sense it is used by the Kabbalists it is not the same as used in the Midrash. The Midrash says God contracted his glory into the Holy of Holies. It is said several times. It's a famous Aggadah. It will also be found in Ginzberg.[1]
>
> The Midrash says, in a famous passage, that God concentrated, as it were, himself into this place, into the Holy of Holies. But the Kabbalistic idea is exactly contrary. They use the same word but with a different meaning. "He contracted himself into this place".
>
> The Kabbalistic idea which is new, is that God contracted away from himself to make possible the existence of something which is not God. How could there be anything which is not God. If God, according to this definition, is everything, how could the perfect thing exist without God. That was the question of the Kabbalists, to which the rationalists say that the Kabbalists are idiots, which we are no longer sure of.[2]

Scholem then defined the Kabbalistic idea of Tsimtsum in greater detail. He pointed out that he had devoted five pages to this concept in his book,* Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, thus establishing the importance with which he viewed it. What emerged from Scholem's discourse, was, that the concept, whether in the Midrash or in Kabbalah, is highly complex and esoteric and not simply a matter of contraction. He was asked whether the term Tsimtsum, if used by an artist, necessarily had Kabbalistic connotations.

> Yes of course. If the term Tsimtsum is used by someone, clearly there is no problem. It is a Kabbalistic motif which he could find in my book. It would not mean that he was a Kabbalist but it would mean that he was a man impressed

---

* Scholem corrected the term 'book' and explained that it was an anthology.[3]

by Kabbalistic notions. Why not - if he was a Jew? [1]

Scholem was emphatic that one could use Kabbalistic motifs without being a Kabbalist and one did not need to study Kabbalah for this. His book was available for $2 to any one who was interested. Scholem stressed the point that such knowledge although esoteric was not secret; it was available to everyone, and such knowledge was not an entrance to the Kabbalist sect.

> The imagery of Tsimtsum has had a great history in Jewish tradition since it came up in the Kabbalah. It came up very late. The Zohar has no Tsimtsum but it is a Kabbalistic notion. A man who uses this term is one whose imagination has been fired by the notion of the Kabbalah. An artist uses it because it is a Kabbalistic notion, not because he is a Kabbalist.
>
> An artist uses all kinds of things. If he uses an Indian motif about Shiva or about Krishnu it does not make him an Hinduist.
>
> Here you have clearly a Kabbalistic idea without any doubt and I only say that he (Newman) was clearly inspired by it but it does not mean anything else.[2]

Rosenberg also rejects the idea that Newman was a Kabbalist merely because he used Kabbalistic motifs.

> We have seen that Newman adopted ideas and phrases from biblical, Greek, Christian, Talmudic, and Kabbalistic sources when he found them to match his own thought. The mode of this adoption is crucial in regard to the Jewish affiliation claimed by some for his art and his thinking. That his philosophy was an individual fabrication, and had little to do with Jewish or any other orthodoxy is convincingly demonstrated by his model for a synagogue and his commentary on it - he makes it plain that for him the Kabbalistic Makom, central as it is in his conception of meaning, is synonymous with such other privileged "places" as Indian burial mounds in Ohio and the pitcher's mound at Yankee Stadium.
>
> In 1963 Newman, having been invited to participate in an exhibition at the Jewish Museum, New York, of "Recent American Synagogue Architecture", applied his transcendental idea of Place ("not an environment") and proffered a boxlike structure with zigzag glass walls on the left and right sides - an anticipation of his Zim Zum I sculpture - beneath which the male worshippers were to sit "in dugouts" like ball players waiting to come up to bat. In the rear of the synagogue were seats for the women in accordance with the Orthodox practice of separating the sexes, and in the center was the

> bimah, or high place, from which the Torah was read. Newman's explanation of his synagogue contains the following: "Here in this synogogue, each man sits, private and secluded in the dugouts, waiting to be called, not to ascend a stage, but to go up to the mound where, under the tension of that 'Tzim-Tzum' that created light and the world, he can experience a total sense of his own personality before the Torah and His Name".
>
> This description is a unique mixture of contemporary individualism, personal symbolic identifications ("dugouts", "the mound"), and traditional phrases. In no way can it be reconciled with an actual synagogue. Jews at worship are not "private and secluded"; the essence of the synagogue is its use by the kohal, or congregation, with its minimum requirement of a minyan - ten adult males - for prayer. The worshippers do not "wait to be called", they pray. They are not substitute ball players crouching in a dugout or batters waiting their turn at the plate. Nor is the bimah a mound, neither Newman's Indian burial mound nor his pitcher's box - nor, to head off other exegetists, the mound of Venus. To close the list of Newman's nonconformisms, the Jew does not go to the synagogue to "experience a total sense of his own personality" (this is Protestantism rather than Judaism). He goes to submerge his personality in his tie with the "nation of priests" to which he belongs by birth.[1]

Rosenberg's criticism reflects an understanding and knowledge of synagogue worship and ritual whereas it is doubtful if Hess had such knowledge. According to Mrs Newman Hess was a non-practicing Jew who neither identified with, nor acknowledged, his Jewishness. This would explain why he misunderstood certain synagogue procedures. Rosenberg's criticism of Newman, however, raises the fundamental question of Newman's knowledge. Both Hess and Rosenberg stress Newman's Jewishness as relevant to his work; Hess claims that Newman attended synagogue services at least twice a year to say Kaddish for his parents. Newman officially did not belong to any synagogue congregation,[2] but in participating in the occasional service, should have been familiar with the basic tenets of Judaic worship. But the catalogue statement introduces ideas that are foreign to Jewish thought and practice. Newman possibly was creating a kind of sculpture rather than a viable structure for a synagogue; Rosenberg notes that the model anticipated Newman's sculpture Zim Zum I. (see p. 98).

Rosenberg's critique stresses Newman's use of contemporary and secular 'nonconformism' and attacks his ideas as 'irreconcilable' with 'an actual synagogue'. He is correct, for example, about the conditions for synagogue worship which require a quorum of ten adult men, i.e. a minyan, for congregational services. A Jewish man does not pray in isolation, he is a member of a unified group. Furthermore, not only does he pray in a group but his prayers often are in the plural rather than in the singular. One of the most solemn prayers in Judaic liturgy is Kol Nidre, intoned before the commencement of the Yom Kippur service. It is the prayer of confession but forgiveness is asked for 'us' not for 'me' and the sins confessed are sins wherein 'we' have sinned. Thus the Jew is part of the congregation in a synagogue, he is not, as Rosenberg has pointed out, one who prays alone or in private, because Judaism is a collective religion.

Newman had some knowledge of Talmudic and Kabbalistic literature and his use of specific references indicates an awareness of some Kabbalistic terminology. Hess, however, has altered the image of Newman from a casually interested reader into a serious, knowledgeable authority on Jewish mysticism. The last line of Hess's text, point (L) refers to 'his studies in Jewish mysticism', implying that Newman studied Kabbalah. Obviously, there is a distinction between one who studies a subject and one who is 'merely' interested in that subject and reads 'a book or two on it'. [1] There is no evidence to substantiate Hess's promotion of Barnett Newman from interested reader to academic scholar, but there is evidence to disprove it.

Newman's initial sketch plan of the synagogue model (reproduced on p. 94), reveals an error that is repeated in his text. He writes the word Tzim-Tzum as two hyphenated words with capital letters (D). Hess refers to the etymological difference between the words used by Newman and those used by Scholem, indicating that there are three ways of spelling the same word.

> Newman used the spelling Tzim-Tzum and later Zim Zum; I have used Gershom Scholem's transliteration, Tsimtsum; all three are correct.[2]

Any form of phonetic spelling is acceptable if it corresponds to the sound of the Hebrew word, but Hess is wrong in saying that 'all three are correct'. He ignores the meaning of the word used in this particular context. Had Hess found that Newman had used the word incorrectly, as is possible, then his premise that Newman was a Kabbalist scholar is wrong because he would know that a restructuring of the word into Tzim-Tzum (D) is incorrect and even sacrilegious.* Tsimtsum is not two words with capital letters but one indivisible word. (see glossary). Similarly, the title of Newman's zigzag sculpture is Zim Zum, fragmented from Zimzum. It is possible that Newman changed these words to create new words for titles as he created Onement from Atonement. Both Tsimtsum and Zimzum have the same meaning; they are variations of the one word, which when used in the Kabbalistic sense, has a spiritual and holy significance. The word according to the Kabbalists is a metaphor for God so that Newman's fragmentation of the term desecrates its meaning and subtracts from it the holy essence of God. To distort or change the name of God in any way is an act of sacrilege. No Jew would consciously desecrate the holy name: religious Jews even avoid any unintentional desecration by using the written form of G-d in case the paper on which it is written should be damaged or destroyed. Nor will they use His name, but only Adonai. Newman was an aware Jew even though he was not a religious man, and an awareness coupled to a lack of reverence is contradictory. He would not consciously have profaned the name of the Lord and consequently it can be assumed that he fragmented the word Tsimtsum because he did not understand the significance of its meaning. Only students of Judaic theology might understand the sacred connotations of the word when used in the context of the Kabbalist doctrine. Clearly Newman does not fall into this category.

Newman also states that the injunction, 'know before whom you stand' was a commandment. (A), This is incorrect as it does not appear in the Torah, but in post-biblical literature** and

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* Because of the taboo imposed by the commandment, 'thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain', one cannot change the form of any term that denotes God.

** Newman displays a lack of knowledge because this injunction appears in the Pirke Avot, (The Sayings of the Fathers).

consequently cannot be designated as one of the commandments which is found only in the Torah. This argues strongly against Hess's claims that Newman's intellectual equipment was based on Jewish scholarship. Newman was far from being a Kabbalist scholar and the implications of his fragmentation of the words Tsimtsum and Zimzum, and his casual understanding of Talmud and of traditional synagogue procedure shows that his knowledge was on a very basic level.

Newman's text indicates that he had some knowledge of architecture as noted in point (B). Newman refers to the Amsterdam and the Prague synagogues which means that he had investigated synagogue architecture. Murray claims that Newman did not use 'architectural textbooks'. This is contradicted by the facts. As Newman was known for his attention to detail, he may have made a careful study of historical and contemporary architecture before starting his model. Hess makes a direct reference to Newman's study as noted in point (H).

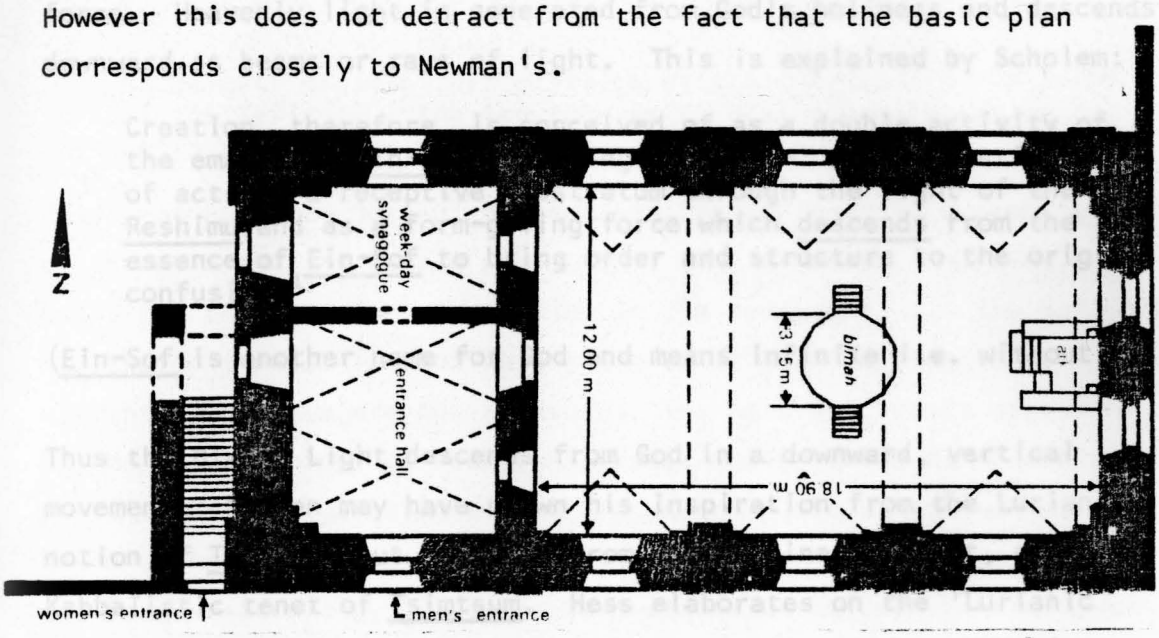
> Newman obviously, and characteristically, carefully researched the synagogue and its history.

This contention is substantiated by the numerous books on architecture in Newman's library,* which would have provided him with a strong historical background. Although Newman refers only to two European synagogues in point (B), this indicates a more comprehensive study and knowledge from which these two were drawn. His architectural research may have brought the 1644 Cracow Synagogue to his attention as well as the others. The Cracow groundplan may have been a source of inspiration because the diagram suggests a visual image of the Kabbalist concept of Tsimtsum. The two illustrations, (p. 94) Newman's rough plan and the Cracow plan, show a close similarity to each other. During a study of synagogue architecture (made for this dissertation) no other plan was found that approximates the unique

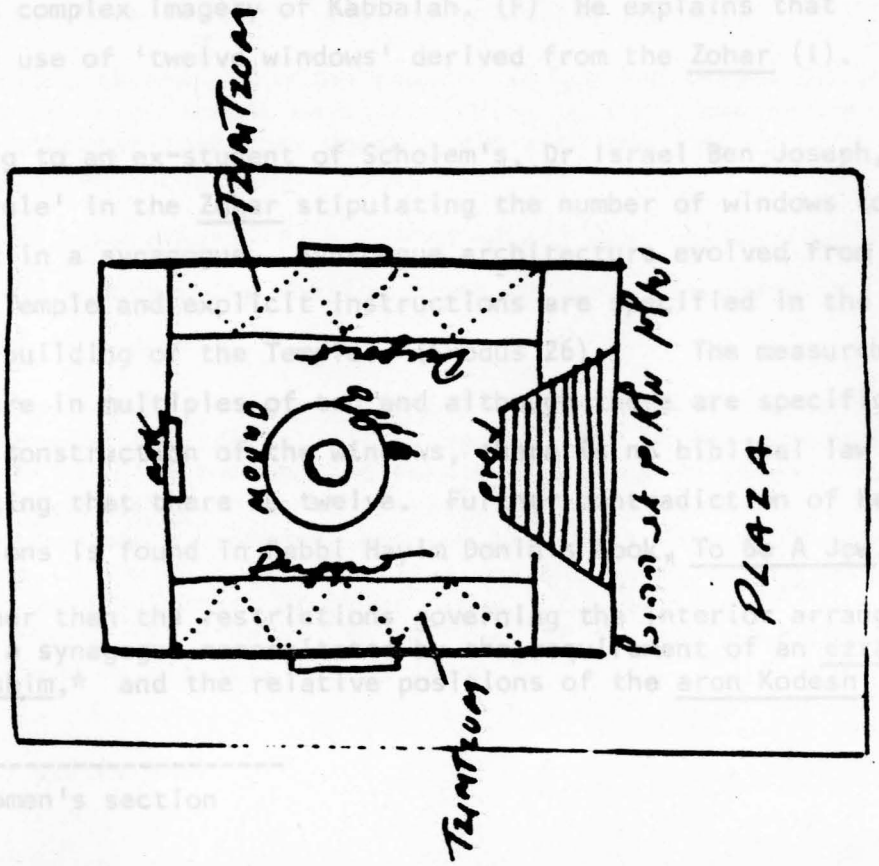
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* When candidate visited Mrs Newman, the many books on architecture were pointed out as an indication of Newman's interests as distinct from only two books on Kabbalah found there.

design of the Cracow plan. To connect the two may be speculative but the similarity between them cannot be overlooked. Had Newman based his own plan on the earlier Polish one it would reflect a perfect correlation of concept and form. The concept of contraction and expansion as described by Scholem (c.v. p.209) finds a visual expression in the zigzag shapes of the old synagogue plan. These shapes do not represent windows, but a barrel-vaulted ceiling. However this does not detract from the fact that the basic plan corresponds closely to Newman's.



The Isaac Jacobowicz synagogue at Kazimierz in Cracow, 1644.[1]



Newman's rough ground plan [2]

Newman's translation of the Tsimtsum concept in the zigzag windows does not wholly conform to the Kabbalist idea of Tsimtsum. In his model the light moves inwards from the two side-glass walls in a horizontal direction as noted by Hess who describes the light as

> ... thrusting into the light-filled space. (F)

This ignores the spiritual manifestation of light as a vertical force. Heavenly light is generated from God's holiness and descends downward as beams or rays of light. This is explained by Scholem:

> Creation, therefore, is conceived of as a double activity of the emanating Ein-Sof following on Zimzum: The emanation of acts as a receptive substratum through the light of the Reshimu and as a form-giving force which descends from the essence of Ein-Sof to bring order and structure to the original confusion.[1]

(Ein-Sof is another name for God and means infinite i.e. without end).

Thus the Divine Light descends from God in a downward, vertical movement. Newman may have drawn his inspiration from the Lurianic notion of Tsimtsum but deviated from the original concept, and Kabbalistic tenet of Tsimtsum. Hess elaborates on the 'Lurianic drama of Tsimtsum' as more than mere inspiration and expands it into the complex imagery of Kabbalah. (F) He explains that Newman's use of 'twelve windows' derived from the Zohar (I).

According to an ex-student of Scholem's, Dr Israel Ben Joseph, there is no 'rule' in the Zohar stipulating the number of windows to be included in a synagogue. Synagogue architecture evolved from the ancient Temple and explicit instructions are specified in the Torah for the building of the Temple. (Exodus 26). The measurements mainly are in multiples of ten and although there are specifications for the construction of the windows, there is no biblical law stipulating that there be twelve. Further contradiction of Hess's contentions is found in Rabbi Hayim Donin's book, To Be A Jew.

> Other than the restrictions governing the interior arrangement of a synagogue necessitated by the requirement of an ezrat nashim,* and the relative positions of the aron Kodesh

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*omen's section

> (closed recess or cupboard where the Torah is kept) and bimah, there are no other distinct architectural patterns required for the interior or the exterior of the building.[1]

In his catalogue statement, point (C), Newman explains that men and women are separated in the synagogue. This is the traditional custom practiced by orthodox Jewry. Hess refers to this separation of the sexes as 'basic to the historical tradition' but adds a Kabbalistic interpretation.

> Kabbalists explain this division of the congregation in terms of the Sefiroth ("the ten spheres of divine manifestation on which God emerges from His hidden abode" - Scholem). Point (J).

Hess propounds the notion that because the Sefiroth is a combination of the male and the female elements of God, it forms some kind of basis for the practice of division in the synagogue. In the Sefiroth, and the primordial idea of God, there exist both male and female elements but these are not separate; the male and female aspects of God are co-joined to form the perfect whole: there is no real division. The separation of men and women in the synagogue has a history that goes back to the destruction of the Second Temple and the Babylonian exile. This was many centuries before the emergence of Kabbalistic literature: the reason for the division is very explicit but Hess's theory is alien to Judiac thought.

> However, as men and women respond to God and create their prayers in different ways, according to their own temperaments, it is better that they worship Him with the freedom which separation encourages. Point (K).

This speculation clearly is based on Hess's own, subjective, ideas, whereas the academic explanation given by Donin is based on historical development:

> A women's section (ezrat nashim) is an ancient and distinctive feature of the traditional synagogue. It follows the pattern established in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem which provided an ezrat nashim so as to prevent light-headed levity, immodest and unbecoming behaviour between the sexes that might take place in the holy Temple. At times, the ezrat nashim took the form of a balcony; at other times, of a distinctly divided section on the side or, to the rear of the men's section, on the same or slightly raised level.[2]

Hess also states that,

> There is nothing derogatory to women in true Kabbalist thought. Point (K)

This statement implies that this is a Kabbalist idea, but although this may be, it originated in the Torah. Respect for women is a fundamental priori of Jewish thought and philosophy. The Torah is explicit in the injunction that,

> ... the gracious woman ('eshet chen') be honoured. (Proverbs 11:16).

Eshet Chayil is a popular hymn sung on Friday night, on Shabat, to honour women.

> A woman of valour who can find,
> And her prize is far from pearls
> The heart of her husband trusts her ...[1]

Newman defines neither his reference to 'the women of valor' point (E) nor that to the 'Ladies Auxiliary' point (C), but Hess again implies that Newman 'was thinking of the Sefiroth' point (K). He explains this word in terms of the division of the sexes in the synagogue, and suggests that the origin of the division is the Kabbalah. Hess's reference to Scholem's work again adds weight to this premise. Hess gives no reference or source for relating the Sefiroth to the ezrat nashim and there is no reference to such a relation in Scholem's works. As the ezrat nashim was introduced many centuries before the Kabbalah came into being, it is questionable whether it was derived from the Sefiroth. Furthermore, Newman's reference to 'the women of valor'* as noted is drawn from Proverbs 11:16 and not from any Kabbalistic source.

Hess suggests that the female congregants have an equal place in synagogue worship but particularly in the Kabbalist philosophy, women play no part either in scholastic study or in religious worship. Scholem observes that the Kabbalah is strictly for men.

> Both historically and metaphysically it (Kabbalah) is a masculine doctrine, made for men and by men.[2]

Women have never played a role or participated either in the study

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* Gracious woman.

of Kabbalah or in traditional synagogue ritual.*

Newman's catalogue text implies that his design conformed basically to the traditional requirements, but that he had charged the structure with a new spirituality. This is a not-too-delicate hint that existing, regular synagogues are not spiritual but are more concerned with 'the number of seats and clean decor'.

There are many ancient and modern synagogues that are beautiful, but Jews do not need architectural beauty to create a spiritual 'place' or 'environment' in which to pray. Many orthodox congregations worship in the simplest, unadorned and often uncomfortable places. Such synagogues are numerous in modern Israel and in the diaspora and are often no more than small rooms. A plain four-walled room becomes sanctified, a place of worship, the moment the Torah is brought into it.

Newman evidently had a spiritual concept in mind when he made his catalogue statement, but it reflects a lack of experience, knowledge or comprehension of traditional worship. Hess has used this section on Newman's synagogue model to, again, reinforce his premise for Kabbalist scholarship which again is unsubstantiated.[1]

5.3 ZIM ZUM I (1969) Fig. 28

In his discussion of the sculpture, Zim Zum I, Hess concentrates mainly on the formal elements, merely mentioning that it had been evolved from the model of the synagogue.

> Newman's next large sculpture, Zim Zum I, 1969, connects directly in its shape as well as in its title to his synagogue project. It was planned originally as a "walk-through" sculpture, twelve feet high, but as Newman wanted to send it to an international sculpture exhibition in Japan in 1969, and as the specifications for shipboard cargo put a limit of eight feet on the piece, he scaled it down to that size - also the height of

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* There are many contemporary women who now study Kabbalah on an academic level i.e. not on a rabbinical level. In certain ultra-reform American congregations, women play an active part and are even ordained as rabbis.

> Vir Heroicus Sublimis. (He had worked out the exact proportions by playing with the six-fold announcement of his exhibition at Knoedler). The second, and definitive, version is still to be executed.
>
> Zim Zum adapts the ninety-degree windows of the synagogue into sculpture. There are two walls, each composed of six Cor-ten steel plates, each eight feet high, set at right angles to each other in a zigzag line. The zigzags face each other so that the opening plate of one faces the first right angles of the other. Each plate is thirty-seven inches wide, and the two zigzags are separated by a distance of thirty-seven inches, measuring from parallel faces. In other words, the spectator walks through a corridor of compressions, which, seen from overhead, would be read as a progression through six perfect squares. (In the twelve-foot scale, each element would be fifty percent larger, and the plates, fifty-five and a half inches wide and as far apart). The presentation of hidden squares in a sequential experience reminds one of Newman's strategy in Vir Heroicus Sublimis. The "perfect" square is there, obviously there, and yet is invisible. The static quality of geometry has been drained from the shapes, just as a strict sonnet form in the hands of a master will hide the chiming rhymes in enjambments.
>
> In Zim Zum I, for the first time in Newman's sculpture, there is no base. The structure stands directly on the ground and invites the participation of the viewer. He may consciously admire the physical proportions, the rich density of material, the tensions between the two shifting walls as he walks between them, but he will also experience a force of contraction and symmetry, and what Paul Valéry called an "intuition of order", which, the poet felt, was a sign of the "new society".
>
> Although Zim Zum I is rooted in Newman's synagogue of 1963, its direct, plain, open approach to the viewer is more characteristic of his later paintings than of those done while he was still working in and out of the Stations of the Cross.[1]

Hess does not analyse the title and neither does he analyse the form in terms of the Kabbalah or of any other meaning. He had used the Kabbalistic imagery in his analysis of the model and he may have felt that further discussion and elaboration was unnecessary. No Kabbalistic theme is ascribed to the sculpture, but Hess introduces a sense of mysticism by referring to 'hidden squares'. This implies an hermetic structure as suggested in Vir Heroicus Sublimis (which he also refers to in this passage) thus connecting the sense of mystery and secrecy in the painting with the sculpture. Hess again hints that Zim Zum I also, is about Jewish mysticism without specifying any Kabbalistic content.

If there was any one work of Newman's that could be linked to the Kabbalah, it is this sculpture. However, as the title has been abstracted from the word Zimzum, and the word has been changed, with the change of form, there is a change of meaning. The sculpture may have been inspired by the Kabbalah and relate to the Kabbalah through form and title, but the 'error' of fragmenting the title places the sculpture outside any authentic Kabbalistic context.*

This concludes the examination of Hess's analyses and it is hoped that his Kabbalistic premise has been shown to be unsubstantiated and that Newman's work be interpreted as intended by the artist, and not as described by the critic.

CHAPTER 6

EXAMINATION OF NEWMAN'S WORK AND ITS MEANING

Newman claimed that his work was 'full of meaning'. If that meaning is not related to the Kabbalah as claimed by Hess and others, an attempt must be made to find another explanation.

There are two aspects of Newman's art that must be considered in determining its meaning: the title and the form. The form includes the elements of colour, size, composition, and technique. Colour can be understood for itself; red and blue irrespective of shade or tone are familiar and recognisable elements. Similarly, size and vertical lines are plastic forms that present no barrier to understanding. The title usually is grasped because it derives from the language and generally indicates a familiar idea or known concept. Confusion arises when these aspects are linked together and are presented as a meaningful work of art. As the purpose of this dissertation consists of an attempt to understand the meaning of Newman's art through the title-form relation. These elements are examined as they relate to one another and particularly as the form relates to the implied meaning of the title.

6.1 MONUMENTAL SCALE

> In 1949 and 1950, I began in terms of the 'inner necessity' of my work to move in terms of size. In those years, independently, Pollock was making these large paintings, I was making the large paintings and ... looking back at it now, it's very logical that it was an 'internal necessity'. There was Pollock moving the way he did; he had to move in terms of the wide expanse, just as moving the way I did, I had to move in terms of that same wide expanse to see if I could get something that would be, you might say, symphonic rather than isolated as a single device. Well, the thing about the large painting is that I feel that scale, which is what I am involved in, is a felt thing ...[1]

This statement (from a televised interview) tends to ignore other sources and influences that may have contributed towards Newman's development of the large painting aside from his 'inner necessity'.

Large paintings emerged at the end of the '40s and during the '50s in the work of many New York artists more or less simultaneously. Size became a stylistic characteristic of the Abstract Expressionists who also have been called the New York School and the Action Painters by different critics like Ashton[1] and Rosenberg.[2] Whatever the label, Barbara Rose contends that all these artists were influenced by the same social, historical, political and economic conditions.

> Abstract Expressionism was born of two catastrophies: a depression and a world war. The first, by means of the WPA, provided new opportunities for professionalism and cooperative ventures among artists; the second brought the leading figures of European avant-garde to America, where their attitudes and their works served as an example to American artists.[3]

The economic crisis of the '30s and the depression that followed, affected thousands of artists who were given employment by the creation of the government's Public Work's Administration (PWA) and the later Works Progress Administration (WPA). * Many projects called for large wall murals on public buildings and although the social realism of the subject matter was abandoned later, the concept of 'bigness' and of working on large areas of space remained. Another important influence was the politically orientated Mexican muralists of the '30s, particularly the revolutionary Siqueiros who had a studio in New York. Siqueiros used all kinds of painting media to cover large areas quickly, and exercised an influence on the Abstract Expressionists (including Newman) in making them sensitive to media, paints and their behaviour. Siqueiros was a pioneer in using synthetic paints and used an aerograph instead of a brush. He and other Mexican artists introduced new techniques and resources, which were later used by the large-scale painters of the '40s and '50s.

Another important influence on the Abstract Expressionists was the 1939 exhibition at the Valentine Gallery of Picasso's Guernica:

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* 3 700 artists were employed, producing between them more than 15 000 works. (PWA)

> Without question Guernica drew, both from the press and from the general public, the widest comment any modern art had ever had in America. More seriously, it stirred the artists profoundly. Picasso showed the way for many to resolve the conflicts that had made the nineteen-thirties unbearable for so many artists. By offering symbolic and mythological reference, which allowed for necessary universalization, yet maintaining the specific topical significance of his theme, Picasso indicated how a painter might bring together the archetypal symbol advocated by the surrealists and the expression of social consciousness of the artist.[1]

Artists studied the subject matter and the flatness of the picture plane in the Guernica. They were impressed by the monochromatic greys and blacks and also its large size, unusual at that time, (350,5 x 782,3 cm).

The large easel painting that emerged in the '40s was not totally new to America as monumental, historical, narrative, and landscape paintings were very popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These mammoth-sized oil paintings were executed with a realism that recorded the grandeur of the American landscape. Rosenblum describes Church's 1857 Niagara Falls (158 x 285 cm), as an example of this work and refers to the American painters

> Trumbull and Vanderlyn to Fisher and Church who studied its (the American landscape) terrifying grandeurs in situ and who tried to expand their pictorial imaginations ... even the actual dimensions of their canvases in order to encompass such sublimities.[2]

Alloway also acknowledges the geographical stimulus for the large painting.

> Connections between an experience of place and pictorial space have a long history in American aesthetics.[3]

Bigness and vast spaces underlies the American way of life: Americans are used to travelling great distances and are comfortable in wide, open spaces like those found in the mid-west prairieland. Many Abstract Expressionists came from such extensive rural areas, with Newman being a notable exception.* The effects of open space in

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* Pollock came from Wyoming, Still came from Dakota and Reinhardt from Buffalo.

Pollock's paintings tend to move both vertically and horizontally - one experiences this kind of space in prairielands, which extend out in every direction. On the other hand, Newman's canvases suggest a defined space enclosed within the vertical stripes. This can be compared with the confined space of Manhatten. Tall, high-rise buildings line long straight streets defining the space between them. Space in this crowded city seems to move only in an upward direction, above the towering buildings. Similarly, Newman's space also seems to move in an upward or perpendicular direction; both the top and the bottom of the painting is 'open' suggesting an ongoing, boundless space.

There also was a need by the Abstract Expressionists to extend physically beyond the small frames of earlier works. To provide room and movement for their new individual techniques, larger areas of space were needed. Harrison relates Pollock's technique to the size of the canvas.

> It was not merely a matter of inadequate space between the four borders of the canvas; there was not enough room between the surface of the canvas and the source of the movement which the brush was to trace upon it, i.e. (by this date) the painter's shoulder. This sense of 'lack of room to paint in' may well have been in a very direct way a consequence of that quality of actual physical violence which Pollock brought to the activity of painting ... [1]

Others were less concerned with the physical action of painting, yet they, too, needed larger formats to express the new direction of their individual styles.

> Willem de Kooning's pictorial dilemma is spatial. Contours are opened to allow flesh and environment to flow into one another, and anatomical forms themselves have been fragmented; hence there is no clear statement as to where the figure is located in space ...
>
> In the paintings of the early '50s there is a new violence, aggressiveness, and brusqueness of attack as the paint is hurled on the canvas in the heat of execution. Such an attack, in which the loaded brush is allowed to drag and sweep across the canvas trailing meteoric splashes and drips, came to be identified as the characteristic means of execution of gestural abstraction ... [2]

Rose describes the physical dimensions of De Kooning's technique

as spreading out into space, while Harrison explains De Kooning's need for larger areas of space to accomodate his 'line' or 'drawing'.

> De Kooning's enlargement of the scale of the canvas, to a point at which a stroke with a house-painter's brush is read as the nearest thing to 'line', favoured painting procedures even in contexts where there appeared to be a delineating function.[1]

Similarly, HH Arnason describes the large dimensions of Franz Kline's work and his need to move into larger formats.

> Kline's first large-scale black-and-white abstractions are dated 1950. Among their unique qualities are the large, ragged, but controlled brush stroke; the powerful, architectural structure; and in the paint texture as well as in shaping of forms, an insistence on the equivalence of the whites that prevents the work from becoming simply a large-scale black drawing on a white ground.[2]

In addition to Pollock, De Kooning, and Kline, this group of painters included Rothko, Motherwell, Still, and others. All developed personal, individual styles but common to all is the monumental painting. They were all using the big canvas, but their canvas surfaces predominantly were heavily articulated, busy, and/or sensuous compositions. In comparison, Newman's paintings were reduced to a severe form so as to eliminate almost every pictorial device that had been used in previous painting styles up to then. It was the simplified form and flat undifferentiated colour in Newman's work that distinguished his paintings from those of his contemporaries.

In tracing Newman's development of the large canvas from earlier, smaller works, a definite pattern emerges. When Newman resumed painting in about 1944, his work was mainly experimental, in water colours and mixed media on paper. These were limited in size because of the nature of the format. Large sheets of paper are impractical as they tear and buckle and are fairly difficult to obtain. His early oils also were relatively small and the significant Onement I is only 69 x 41 cm. Don Judd nevertheless regards this work as large-scaled, despite the actual measurements. (see p. 35) He explains this anomaly by relating the stripe to the ground area in which scale is determined by the relation of one

connects it to a spiritual and metaphysical force.

> The rectangles became "real things" with unruffled surfaces pressing toward their edges in rhythms determined entirely by energies of color. ...
>
> In the last analysis, singularity is their subject, a singularity beyond human reach. In sum, Newman's paintings are a short cut to the unattainable.[1]

Alloway defines the effects of Newman's colour in a detailed analysis.

> His paintings depend, basically on one field, whether of color or of bare canvas. This field is controlled in various ways: by the intensity of a single color, by the extent to which the tracks of the brush, the hand's most intimate extension, are visible within the color: and by the bands, usually vertical. ...
>
> The exhilarating or ominous all-over color of Newman's paintings are not simply sensational. On the contrary, the color embodies an act of order.[2]

Most critics recognise the powerful effect that Newman's use of colour has on the spectator. Greenberg for example explains this effect as the impact of a scale that is contingent on colour.

> Size guarantees the purity as well as the intensity of hue needed to suggest indeterminate space: more blue being simply bluer than less blue. This too is why the picture has to be confined to a few colors.[3]

Large areas of intense colour have an effect of purity that is not achieved by the use of smaller areas of colour. Thus, says Greenberg, scale and colour become indivisible. Alloway develops the idea by suggesting that colour and scale function on a semi-scientific level by referring to

> Newman's edge-to-edge planes. His field is wholistic, but phased, like, say, the phases of the moon, parts of one movement. ...
>
> Such a continuous plane, like a magnetic or electric field in physics, contains all potential force within it and it is important to bear in mind that an order of this nature is implicit in Newman's art. He presents the field and its phased modification, both as a finite visual image and as a statement of continuous potential order.[4]

> ... deliberately monumental piece in the grand manner, of tremendous presence. [1]

Monumentality also is created by the impact of large works when placed in an environmental situation that evokes in the spectator an awareness of comparative size and scale. Newman's over-life-size canvases occupy great areas of wall space in confined gallery rooms and they have the effect of invoking the overpowering feeling of being monumental.

The development of size in Newman's work is now examined and reference to specific works illustrate this development.

6.1.1 Monumentality and the sublime

Onement I represents the first step; the simplified form and chromatic reduction to a single colour lent itself to the image that dominated the larger canvases that followed it.

The preparation for Newman's essay The Sublime is Now can be seen as step two. In the months following the painting, but still in 1948, this preparation required a study of various great thinkers and philosophers on the subject such as Aristotle, Longinus, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Burke. These writers were concerned with aspects of the 'sublime' and many of them described great size and monumental scale as visual forms of the 'sublime'. Constant reference is made to these concepts in the writings of Burke.

> Visual objects of great dimensions are sublime.
> Magnificence is a source of the sublime.
> Without a strong impression nothing can be sublime. [2]

From Burke, then, sublimity is associated with magnificence and tremendous size. Alloway stresses the relevance of 'sublimity' in Burke's writings as it relates to Newman's work.

> Burke's "artificial infinity" is a possible description of the effect of Newman's huge expanses of colour, taller or longer than a man's reach. The big picture that is unified in colour, in which drawing is reduced to modification rather than interruptions of a single field of colour, gives a sense of grandeur. The spectator's proximity to such a

> work calls forth the feeling of awe. On another level Newman's titles are clearly clues to the sublime.[1]

The titles that Alloway links to the sublime are, Covenant, Tundra, Dionysus, Prometheus Bound and Eve. Although these titles reflect a diverse range of subject matter, each title refers to a sublime concept and each painting is large. (Figs. 30,9,10).

Even before Newman completed his essay on the sublime, he was painting larger pictures as evidenced in Onement II 152 x 91 cm. and Two Edges 122 x 91 cm, both are considerably larger than Onement I 69 x 41 cm.

Step three is the final essay (published December, 1948) with its emphasis on the grandeur of the 'sublime'. (See c.v. p.171).

The fourth and final step in the development of Newman's large works is the creation in 1949 of the monumental paintings, Abraham 210 x 88 cm., Concord 229 x 137 cm., and Be I 239 x 193 cm. (Figs. 8,12,32).

Thus monumental paintings can be understood as an aesthetic expression for sublime subject matter. Alloway sees this relation between the sublime and large works as characteristic of all the Abstract Expressionists. Referring to Still, Newman and Rothko, he notes that they all strove for a sublime art: they all

> painted enormous canvases which were not divisible into smaller areas, but in which the whole work was a single unit ...
>
> It is through the artist that the sublime is reached. That is to say, the sublime is not an existing category or state which bestows on the artist, if he wins access to it, ready-made aesthetic rewards. The sublime is not the known, but the unknown. On the other hand, it is clear what is not sublime: beauty, mass taste, habit are not. The artist's capacity is the measure of sublimity. It is not the artist's job, however, to decipher celestial riddles. Mystery is shifted from the unseen to the world of work, to the reality of the artist's achievement. A sublime painting is mysterious, but not because it is the image of a higher, hidden reality. It is mysterious because it is a non-utilitarian object, the product of a creative will, and so shaped that it resists the usual terms in which we analyse and discuss works of art.[2]

6.1.2 Monumentality and spectator response

In addition to the concern for large-scale and 'sublime' content, Abstract Expressionists were aware of the spectator response to their work. This is noted by Alloway and other critics but it is an aspect also discussed by the artists themselves. At a 1951 exhibition, Newman 'pinned a note to the wall' with instructions for the viewing of his work and encouraged the spectator to participate in the experience of the painting through close proximity.

> There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance.[1]

When standing close to the surface of a large work such as Newman's Vir Heroicus Sublimis, the effect of the 455 cm. wide expanse of colour tends to extend beyond the lateral limits of human vision. This creates the feeling of endless space and metaphysical infinity upon which Alloway expounds in greater detail.

> Large, one-color paintings, viewed close up, produce effects of space as magnitude (as external coordinates diminish), of engulfment by color; in short a participative space. This reduction of optimum spectator distance from the work of art is comparable to the reduction of formal elements in his (Newman's) paintings, avoiding diversification and elaboration to preserve the wholistic character of each work.[2]

Harrison also refers to spectator perticipation and notes that this gives the spectator a sense of privacy:

> They (Rothko and Newman) expected, in certain respects, to be solitary (as, in a very real sense, they were) and they knew their work would reflect this. The transaction between painting and spectator was envisaged as essentially private and intimate. The 'man-sized' paintings which Rothko and Newman painted from 1949 onward were designed to be seen from close to in a context which encouraged silence and absorption.[3]

Elaborating on this aspect, Harrison quotes Rothko whose statement indicates how various artists of the Abstract Expressionist School, shared common goals:

> ... I realize that historically the function of painting large pictures is painting something very grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them however - I think it applies to other painters I know - is precisely because I want to be very intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside experience, to look upon an experience as a

> stereoptican view or with a reducing glass. However you paint the larger picture, you are in it.[1]

Reise contends that spectator response is stimulated by the wide painted surface of Uriel, and a close viewing of Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III creates an optical illusion.

> In its over-all effect, Uriel's internal scale is less important than its total scale of pigmental surface directed externally to the viewer; ...
>
> Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III. This painting 'works' only when the viewer is in the place pre-determined by the painting: centred, and close enough so that the painting's blue and yellow lateral edges hit the lateral extremities of one's visual perception. At this point, the eliptical nature of human sight bends the painting's rectilinearity into a solid surface bulging forth from the wall through the aggression of its central cadmium red.[2]

This is a semi-scientific explanation of the response from looking at large, monumental paintings where colour and scale become inter-dependent. Reise apparently is uninterested in the possible content of the painting and focuses her attention on the formal elements and the impact of large works on the viewer.

Newman aimed at an even greater spectator participation; he wanted an emotional involvement which he attempted to achieve through monumentality and colour continuity. Newman said that the large format was generated by an 'inner necessity' and indicated that there was a personal, and metaphysical, stimulus. He also was interested in creating large works that would oblige the viewer to 'plunge' into the painting and to experience its 'complete' totality.

6.1.3 Monumental scale and the title

Onement I is the first step in the development of the large-scale work in Newman's ouevre, and it was noted that it was one of his most important paintings but it is relatively small, 69 x 41 cm. Despite its small size, the title suggests great and profound concepts. (p. 35). Judd refers to Onement I as visually monumental because of its structure and impact. The title, subject matter, and form coalesce to form the grand scale, but not in size. The titles of other paintings suggest meanings that clearly relate both to size

and to scale, such as Abraham and Vir Heroicus Sublimis. In both instances the concept and the dimensions are equally and relatedly large. The name Abraham has biblical connotations that make the viewer connect the title to the Father of Nations and the sheer size of Abraham overawes as the Father figure towers over the spectator and engulfs him in its infinity of grandeur.

Similarly, the monumental Vir Heroicus Sublimis has a grand title that pays tribute to 'a grand man'. (see p.58). Newman claimed that the effect of large, continuous planes of colour in this painting was derived from a conscious endeavour to create the sense of infinite space. It was intended to create an aesthetic experience that would overwhelm the spectator through the size and majesty of its heroic dimensions.

Size makes the link between the title, subject, and monumentality: a majestic title, a majestic meaning, and a visual impact of majestic dimensions. Other titles with overtones of grandness and infinite space are Tundra and L'Errance. The 'Tundra' is a great barren region of flat, treeless, land in Northern Russia and Alaska that seems to stretch away endlessly. The word 'L'Errance' suggests interminable wanderings within the sempiternal rhythm of timelessness. One also may relate the idea of boundless space with the titles, Horizon Light and Galaxy which imply immense distance and the universality of the space-time continuum. All these works are large-sized.

Some large paintings may link size to the title, but there is no evidence that dimensions delineate the meaning of the title. A study of the following groups of paintings show that, whereas each group has a common title, the paintings within that group have different measurements.

Onement	(Figs. 1-6)
1948	69 x 41 cm
1948	152,4 x 91,4 cm
1949	183 x 86 cm
1949	84 x 97 cm

Onement (cont.)

1952 218 x 196 cm

1953 259 x 305 cm

White Fire (Figs. 18, 19)

1954 121 x 151 cm

1960 249 x 203 cm

1964 203 x 183 cm

1968 335 x 127 cm

Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue (Fig. 33)

1966 190 x 122 cm

1967 305 x 259 cm

1967 244 x 544 cm

1969 274 x 605 cm

There is no relationship between the size of these paintings and the title's implied meaning.

6.1.4 Table of Comparative Measurements

Table I (c.v. p. 153) includes all of the works by Newman that have been recorded* and reflects a chronological development of change in scale and increase in size. Monumental scale became an integral part of his work, and was not a sudden or spectacular innovation. The scale graph (c.v. p.170) charts the increase in size according to date and measurements. Both the largest and the smallest paintings completed in each productive year have been selected. For convenient grouping, approximate measurements have been used as most works have different measurements.

A study of the graph and its accompanying table have led to the following conclusions:

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* Mrs Newman has corroborated that the reproductions in Rosenberg's book on Newman (1978), comprise a comprehensive coverage of Newman's works.

(a) Newman followed no consistent pattern in developing the large format.

(b) The largest painting that Newman ever made was Anna's Light 1968: all subsequent works are smaller.

(c) During most years Newman worked on both large and small formats.

(d) There were years when Newman made no paintings either because of ill health or because he was working on sculpture and/or graphics.

6.1.5 Narrow Paintings Figs. 15 & 16

In 1950, Newman made a series of paintings that are very high and extraordinarily narrow. Despite their great height, the effect of monumentality of these works is questionable. With the exception of The Wild, 243 x 4 cm, they are untitled, indicating that, as far as this group is concerned, Newman considered only form, colour and height important. Without a title, no literal or extraneous meaning can be linked to the works and are unlike The Wild which lends itself to a wide range of possible interpretations.

A number of regular-shaped canvases in various sizes also are untitled and indicate that there is no definite pattern linking size and shape to the title.

Mrs Newman claims that her husband stretched his canvases before starting a painting, creating its image or giving a title: the large size was the result of intuition. Thus it can be reasonably postulated that, with few exceptions, the meaning of the title is not related to the shape or size of the painting.

CHAPTER 7

THE RELEVANCE OF COLOUR

From 1948, Newman's paintings are mainly variations of the 'one-idea' theme: a flat undifferentiated plane consisting of a single colour spread across a large surface area with a dividing stripe (or stripes) as the only pictorial element. The surface treatment varies from a painterly, resonant quality to a matte, single-coloured, and even plane. He limited his 'palette' to a few favourite colours, red - blue - black and he also treated the natural tone of unprimed and/or ungrounded canvas as a colour. Other colours that were used less frequently are cadmium orange, green and aquamarine blue, but, with few exceptions, he seldom used pastel colours like pink, sky blue, pale green, lilac, or lemon. He made one painting in yellow entitled Yellow Painting but it is a strong, vibrant yellow and not a soft or delicate hue.

Newman varied his techniques and methods of painting, depending on the media with which he was experimenting as described by Hess.

> In order to achieve the desired density of color, Newman almost always put many coats of paint on his pictures, sometimes using undercoats of different colors to arrive at a particular deep or luminous hue. The use of oils necessitated long periods of waiting for each coat to dry, and he arranged to keep working on several pictures, so that while one was drying, he would work on another. Often he alternated mediums for what he called "separating coats" of paint - for example, egg tempera on oil. In this way, he could increase the opacity and weight of his colors - especially those which usually are transparent. He continued this practice throughout his life, even when, in the 1960s, he made a more extensive use of fast-drying plastic paints.
>
> He also often used shifts in medium within a single picture to contrast a shiny oil surface with a mat, egg-tempera, or acrylic coat - a subtle parallel to the soft-stroke versus hard-edge dualism already mentioned in his painting. [1]

Newman also varied the finish and texture of stripes, which ranged from the rough impasto with uneven jagged edges to flat, hard-edged ones. The function of the colour in the stripe also varied from painting to painting. Sometimes as a tonal change of the ground

colour: sometimes in contrast to the ground colour.

He acknowledged colour to be an integral part of his work and thus it was one of its most important elements.

> Color is absolute. It is my subject matter. It is my experience.[1]

This statement could be misunderstood: the term colour is used to the apparent exclusion of all other elements such as scale, stripe and content. It is unlikely though that Newman intended the reader to believe his subject matter was unequivocally and only colour. This contention is given weight by another statement Newman made.

> My canvases are full not because they are full of colors but because color makes the fullness.[2]

This suggests that colour is the catalyst for the 'fullness' and, possibly, for the subject matter; or, to put it another way, colour is a part of the subject matter.

Although critics are divided on meaning in Newman's work, there seems to be complete agreement on the question of colour. Hess, who is at the centre of the iconographical controversy, recognises this fact.

> By reducing composition to the equivalent of zero, Newman also raised color to its highest power. When much later, Newman was recognized by critics and collectors, color was the element they praised: [3]

Clement Greenberg, who disregards any attributed metaphysical content in Newman's work, stresses that the formal use of colour is central to the aesthetics of his painting.

> Newman's emphasis is predominantly color, which in his case is sensuous without being soft. ...
>
> His (Newman's) thin, straight, but not always sharp-edged lines, and his incandescent color zones are means to a vision as broad as any other expressed in the painting of our day.[4]

It was Greenberg who coined the phrase 'fields' in terms of colour which he used to describe Newman's work.[5]

Rosenberg also acknowledges the power of Newman's use of colour but

connects it to a spiritual and metaphysical force.

> The rectangles became "real things" with unruffled surfaces pressing toward their edges in rhythms determined entirely by energies of color. ...
>
> In the last analysis, singularity is their subject, a singularity beyond human reach. In sum, Newman's paintings are a short cut to the unattainable.[1]

Alloway defines the effects of Newman's colour in a detailed analysis.

> His paintings depend, basically on one field, whether of color or of bare canvas. This field is controlled in various ways: by the intensity of a single color, by the extent to which the tracks of the brush, the hand's most intimate extension, are visible within the color: and by the bands, usually vertical. ...
>
> The exhilarating or ominous all-over color of Newman's paintings are not simply sensational. On the contrary, the color embodies an act of order.[2]

Most critics recognise the powerful effect that Newman's use of colour has on the spectator. Greenberg for example explains this effect as the impact of a scale that is contingent on colour.

> Size guarantess the purity as well as the intensity of hue needed to suggest indeterminate space: more blue being simply bluer than less blue. This too is why the picture has to be confined to a few colors.[3]

Large areas of intense colour have an effect of purity that is not achieved by the use of smaller areas of colour. Thus, says Greenberg, scale and colour become indivisible. Alloway develops the idea by suggesting that colour and scale function on a semi-scientific level by referring to

> Newman's edge-to -edge planes. His field is wholistic, but phased, like, say, the phases of the moon, parts of one movement. ...
>
> Such a continuous plane, like a magnetic or electric field in physics, contains all potential force within it and it is important to bear in mind that an order of this nature is implicit in Newman's art. He presents the field and its phased modification, both as a finite visual image and as a statement of continuous potential order.[4]

Hess does not refer to the scientific aspects of colour but defines the visual effect of large 'fields' of colour.

> A red six yards wide is a totally different color from the same red six feet wide and has a different effect.[1]

All these writers express the same idea: the response of a spectator to large areas of colour is different to the response to small areas of colour. Furthermore, it is generally accepted, that the emotional or intellectual effect of colour is determined by the intensity of hue and the extent of the visual field. Thus a large expanse of a single colour generates optical vibrations, which Greenberg describes as

> A new kind of flatness, one that breathes and pulsates ... [2]

Rosenberg associates the chromatic movement of colour with the movement of the sea and uses this analogy to describe Emily Genauer's* experience of Newman's colour.

> Emily Genauer, hard-crusted foe of expressive abstraction, was plunged by a Newman retrospective at the Museum of Modern art into a "sea of resonant color" by which she might have been swept away had it not been for the lifelines provided by Newman's vertical bands.[3]

Alloway describes this chromatic movement in another way.

> The large expanses of color in Newman's earlier work induced compensatory retinal color, but slowly, in a way that was held down by the specifics of textural changes on the surface. In this and other late pieces, however, the even paint dematerializes the surface, stimulating optical flickering.[4]

Baker links Newman's colour, in his paintings of the '60s, to a physical rather than a metaphysical sensation.

> A new physicality is most apparent in stunningly huge expanses of a single full-strength primary color, unmodified by stripes, less nuanced and less perceptibly worked (although still considerably so) than before. ...
>
> The color now projects a palpable surface or substance as it pushes to the front.[5]

While Greenberg, Rosenberg, Alloway, and Baker all refer to the

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* Art critic.

optical illusion in Newman's wide expanses of colour as a formal factor, others relate it to the metaphysical essence of art and to the 'sublime'. Irving Sandler described this idea in his analysis of Newman's work.

> Newman's colour suggests his private vision of the sublime.[1]

Newman's own writings suggest, and those of critics such as Sandler, to some degree, agree, that colour is associated with a 'sublime' content. This notion does not replace scale as the expression of 'sublimity', but adds colour as a corollary to scale. If the subject matter in Newman's work is related to the 'sublime', both scale and colour should be understood as visual expressions thereof. This is not a new idea: Edmund Burke claimed that only strong, intense colours have the power of 'sublime' content, whereas 'pretty colours' are more suitable to the idea of natural beauty.

> Colours soft and cheerful are unfit to produce grand images.[2]

Mrs Newman claims that Newman was concerned primarily with colour as a physical expression of light.[3] That colour is dependent on light is a scientific fact recognised by Newton as early as the Seventeenth Century, and defined by Burke in the Eighteenth Century.

> All colours depend on light.[4]

Mrs Newman's assertion is given added weight by the evidence of Newman's titles. Table No. 6, includes works with titles that are related to light: there are fourteen of them. Hess even connects the colour 'red' in Onement I, through an analogy with God's Creation, to light.

> Let there be ... says the artist.
> Light replies the painting.[5]

He said of Onement I, that the high and low notes on the cadmium scale - vibrated with light.[6]

Light implies movement and time, but Newman was not concerned with the Impressionists' interest in capturing the transcience of time. He claimed to be concerned with the immediate, with the awareness of time.

> My paintings are concerned neither with the manipulation of space nor with the image, but with the sensation of time ... [1]

Matthew Baigell has studied the artists' interest in time and he traces references to time in different art movements.

> For the last one hundred years, time has been intimately bound up with the various art movements.[2]

After describing the approaches and philosophies of 'time' by the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Cubists, Futurists, Constructivists, Fauves and German Expressionists, Baigell distinguishes between them and the Abstract Expressionists.

> It would appear that Abstract Expressionism marked the apogee of cinematic time in the history of modern painting, ...
>
> In regard to contemporary abstract movements, the best color-field and hard-edge paintings of the early 1960s seemed to be those in which a sense of stasis was achieved, ...
>
> One of the major characteristics of American painting in the early 1960s was the loss of the third dimension, the desire on the part of artists to make shapes without depth.[3]

Baigell links the idea of time or timelessness with space or spacelessness; he claims that these artists were not interested in the movement of time and neither were they concerned with limited or defined space. He refers to the Op artists and also applies this concept to Newman.

> In his "best" canvases, therefore, Newman equalized the cues for brightness, size and overlapping, and a sense of spatial stasis is achieved.[4]

If colour in Newman's work represents 'light' it is not the natural 'light' of time and movement, but possibly a metaphor in which 'light' corresponds to the spiritual experience of the 'sublime'. Newman seldom painted 'soft and cheerful' colours; his chromatic preferences tended towards strong powerful colours like 'hot reds' and 'deep blues', which evoke the sense of the 'heroic grandness' described by Burke.

Large areas of continuous, intense colour are the emotive stimuli for the 'sense of grandeur' and the feeling of 'awe' described by Alloway as he relates Burke's concepts to Newman's work.[5] Newman's

colour is disturbing because of the overwhelming impact of its intensity and quantity. The combination of great size and a single flat colour achieves this effect, thus making ambiguous Newman's statement that colour was his 'subject matter'. Both colour and monumental scale were Newman's means of evoking an emotional response in the spectator, and both contribute to this 'subject matter'.

In his interview with Dorothy Gees Seckler, Newman described his vast 'spaces' of colour as 'space-domes'. (see p.142). Standing in a pre-determined position, in close proximity to the painted surface, the concave effect of a 'dome' may be experienced through an optical illusion and the extended dimensions of colour may have the power to create a spiritual feeling. Newman claimed that one should experience a 'sense of exaltation' before his paintings.

Newman's use of colour functions on various levels; the formal properties of hue and pigment, monumentality, spectator participation, 'sublimity', an expression of 'time' and 'light', which all coalesce as Newman's vehicle for a spiritual experience.

It now remains to determine the relation between colour and the titles of specific paintings. Monochromatic paintings emerged in Newman's work about 1946, and Alloway traces this colour change by referring to specific paintings.

> Between 1944 and 1946 he (Newman) used colors rather than color, vivid but unrelated arrays of hue. In the next two years a potential for monochrome emerged in his work, as in The Command 1946, which led to the decisive Onement I 1948, the orange-red of which remained his preferred color through 1952, as in Tundra, Eve, Vir Heroicus Sublimis, Day One, and Achilles.[1]

Works prior to 1946 were mainly colourful, busy compositions in the surrealist style but as noted by Alloway, after 1946 there was tonal change rather that colour change. The Break (1946) is in tonal gradations of blue and Moment (1946) in variations of brown. These works still have pictorial forms and textured surfaces which disappear with the creation of Onement I, the first one-colour painting. Even in this work, there are still nuances of tonal

change in the mottled dark-red ground colour. Later paintings such as the White Fire and the Who's Afraid of Red Yellow and Blue series have matte surfaces of opaque or solid colour, but the 'red' introduced in Onement I remained Newman's favourite colour. Irrespective of texture or shade, it emerges in various paintings as a continuous theme for the twenty-two years following Onement I. Excluding ungrounded canvases, Newman used a dominant 'red' in approximately 33 works out of a total of some 80 coloured pictures. This is about 40% of all his painted works. Alloway links this preference for 'red' to Newman's ties with earth.[1]

A study of some of these paintings reveal a wide range of titles alluding to many different themes.

Onement I	derives from the Day of Atonement.
Horizon Light	suggests the rising or setting sun.
Argos	refers to the ancient mythological Greek city by this name.
Galaxy	is the more distant part of the island universe which contains this solar system.
Eve and Adam	are the first woman and man.*
Be I	refers to existence but is unspecified.
The Wild	has a wide range of possible references but is unspecified.
Vir Heroicus Sublimis	the 'exalted hero' (refers to Truman).
Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue	Newman's confrontation with Neo-plasticism (according to Baker) also may refer to 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?' **
White and Hot	unspecified but has an idiomatic sound.
Anna's Light	titled in memory of Newman's mother.

All these paintings are predominantly 'red' but all have different titles and with the exception of Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue, none have meanings that refer to the colour 'red'. This indicates that when Newman titled a painting dominated by 'red',

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* Reversed procedure as Eve was painted first.

** Suggested by Mrs Newman.

the common colour itself did not suggest anything that was common to and in the titles.

The next dominant colour noted in Newman's work is deep blue. Between 1949 and 1970, Newman completed about 10 paintings in various shades of dark blue. Like the red paintings, they have a wide and diverse range of titles seemingly unconnected to the literal meaning of the title as noted in the following examples.

By Two's	unspecified but suggests the biblical Ark and the pairs of animals.
Queen of the Night	Newman referred to the Magic Flute, (by Mozart). "Her high note in the Magic Flute aria".[1]
Cathedra	refers to the 'Heavenly throne'.
Profile of Light	unspecified but has connotations of light in some form.
Onement V	derives from the Day of Atonement.
L'Errance	refers to 'wanderings'.

These titles also are unrelated to one another; some of them are, however, associated with blue such as Queen of the Night and Cathedra. Newman described this last painting with a specific reference to blue.

> I felt it was a full painting ... all that blue, [2]

In 1954 Newman painted a number of canvases in light aquamarine blue and the close chronological grouping of these works indicates an apparent interest in the formal values of the colour. He also was interested in the formal arrangement associated with the colour such as divisions of planes and the interaction of other colours with aquamarine, i.e. black, brown and Prussian blue. Again one finds the titles of this group are arbitrary, with no obvious relation to the ground colour.

Right Here	suggests the geographical location 'here' in America, (also idiomatic).
White Fire	has biblical connotations. (see ref. no. 69:1).
The Gate	is unspecified but has a wide range of possible references.

The Word	could refer to the word of God or to the word of 'man'.
Uriel	was the angel of 'light' as found in the Talmud.

With the exception of Right Here, the other four titles suggest mystical or biblical themes which may be linked by both meanings and colour but the relation between the meaning and the colour is vague. There is no evident connection between aquamarine blue and any biblical motif. There is no explanation for Newman having used this colour nor his having titled these paintings as he did.

A greater possibility of a title-relation is seen in the three orange paintings Newman made in 1962, 1964 and 1965: The Third, Tertia and Triad; all are painted in cadmium-orange with some tonal variations, and all have titles relating to the number three. However all have different sizes: the first is the largest and the last work is the smallest, (257 x 120 cm, 198 x 90 cm, 89 x 127 cm). All three have a white stripe on the left-hand side with a broken, painterly edge, but in the first two paintings there also are yellow stripes while in the last painting there is only one black stripe. It is difficult to link the meaning of these titles to the colour. Orange is a secondary colour not a tertiary colour. (Figs. 23, 24, 25).

Newman apparently experimented with green in 1949 as he painted three works in various shades of green but he rarely used the colour in later paintings.*

Concord	is a sombre green with a textured surface.
Dionysius	is a horizontal format in a vibrant emerald green with a matte finish.
End of Silence	is described as green but as available illustrations are in black and white, the actual hue cannot be discussed.

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* Outcry (1958) is described as 'Green and blue' by Hess but there is no colour reproduction to define the colour.

1949 seems to have been a year for experimenting. In addition to the green paintings, Newman made the Yellow Painting (which is the title and the colour) and also a grey painting, The Name I. Neither yellow nor grey appear in subsequent paintings. The dark, sombre earth reds such as in Onement I and Covenant (also 1949) are not repeated, as later reds generally are vibrant and 'hot' such as Be I and Anna's Light.

Black as a 'colour' was being explored by many of Newman's contemporaries in 1947 and 1948. De Kooning, Motherwell, and (Frans) Kline were painting with black as the dominant theme, but the innovatory black on black in Newman's monumental Abraham (1949), was a forerunner to his later black canvases. Excluding The Stations of the Cross, 16 works feature black grounds or incorporate black as the dominant motif. Using black for Abraham was a natural choice of 'colour' with its traditional associations with death and tragedy. (See p. 50).

Other black paintings have titles where the meaning is less obviously related to the 'colour'.

The Promise	unspecified but with possible biblical connotations.
Joshua	has a specific reference to the biblical hero. (Fig. 22)
The Way	unspecified
Primordial Light	clearly a reference to the blackness of chaos that existed before the creation of light.
Black Fire	has a biblical reference (see ref. no. 98:1)
Jericho	relates to the biblical story of Joshua. (Fig. 21)

Joshua and Jericho are black paintings, the first is rectangular and the second is triangular and they also are different in size, but both have a single red stripe. Joshua 91 x 64 cm has a stripe on the one side with blurred edges. Jericho, 290 x 269 cm was painted 18 years later and the stripe is a narrow, hard-edged line positioned off-centre. There may be a biblical and colour link between these two paintings but there is a disparity in time, shape and size. Many of Newman's black paintings seem to have titles that are

related to biblical themes, but exactly how the colour reflects the meaning of the title again is vague.

Some groups of paintings of the same colour have inconsistent titles, and the following list serves to show that other groups of paintings with the same title have different colours.

Onement I	Red
Onement II	Red
Onement III	Red
Onement IV	Red
Onement V	Deep Blue
Onement VI	Cerulean Blue
White Fire I	Aquamarine Blue
White Fire II	Ungrounded canvas
White Fire III	Ungrounded canvas
White Fire IV	White on White
The Word I	Ochre and Grey
The Word II	Black, Aquamarine, Blue
Be I	Red
Be II	Light blue/grey*
Be I Second version	Red

Ungrounded or unsized canvas was not an innovation in 1958 when Newman started to use it, but possibly he was the first to use it consciously as a colour.

> ... I had to make the material itself into true color - as white light - yellow light - black light. [1]

Alloway describes The Stations of the Cross as painted on 'raw canvas' but as it is not known whether Newman treated or primed the canvas in any way before painting, the term 'ungrounded' is used here. In addition to The Stations, a number of other works were painted on ungrounded canvas. They all have different titles, but many of these titles refer in some way to 'light'. (This supports Mrs Newman's assertion that Newman was primarily interested in 'light').

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* Reproduction problem of colour fidelity prevents accurate description.

White Fire II
Noon Light
Shining Forth (To George)
Shimmer Bright

As it is necessary to depend on reproductions for information and these are often inaccurate, it is not possible to list all the works in this category. Many paintings that seem to be white or light grey may be ungrounded canvas and these often are not adequately described by the writer of the book in which they appear. In addition, ungrounded canvas is not always the same colour but varies according to the particular quality, weave and 'colour'.

From the facts presented in this examination of Newman's use of colour, the following conclusions may be drawn. With few exceptions, colour appears to function on an arbitrary level rather than on a symbolic level. It does not seem to relate to any specific size or form in terms of the title's implied meaning. However, the viewer sometimes relates title to colour, shape, and size to arrive at a subjective symbolic interpretation. There is some indication that Newman was interested in the formal properties and structure of colour as he often concentrated on certain colours at one time. It seems as though he wanted to explore the full potential of one colour at a time reflecting a conscious realisation of that colour's values and resonance. As Newman constantly insisted that his work was intuitive, any planning of composition or colour would contradict this claim. But the consistent use of a single colour at a single period of time suggests some sort of working pattern. He certainly used colour to obtain a strong visual impact and to evoke an emotional participation from the viewer. Many critics have interpreted Newman's work and/or its 'subject matter' as being sublime and, if colour is a declaration of the sublime, it might explain Newman's statement:

> Colour is absolute. It is my subject matter. It is my experience.[1]

CHAPTER 8

THE RELEVANCE OF THE TITLE

From the examination of different aspects of Newman's work certain assumptions may be drawn. There is little evidence of any intended relation between the meaning of the title and the visual elements of the work. Neither colour, scale, nor composition generally correspond to the title and the title also does not describe the painting. In spite of this dichotomy of title and form, some link between them is indicated because, according to Mrs. Newman, the titling of a work was a serious matter for Newman. She also explained his method of titling.

> Barney was not a calculating person. He never calculated his titles, he never anticipated them with deep thought but he would sit in front of his painting and feel an emotional response to it and this would conjure up an idea which he would then relate to the title,[1]

Mrs Newman describes how he spent many hours and even weeks contemplating a work before arriving at a relevant and suitable title. She claims that he was deeply committed to solving this problem and might sit before a painting for many hours before asking her how she liked the sound of a particular word or phrase. If she showed the slightest uncertainty or was unenthusiastic, he would discard the idea and start again. According to his friend Tony Smith, the sculptor, this striving for perfection was an intrinsic characteristic of Newman's. Smith (explained and) compared Newman's ideas on titling with his own.

> There were long discussions between Rothko, Still and Newman which I remember about titling but then they were all into religious titles at the same time. They used numbers too. Barney was cross with me because I was not interested in the importance of the title, it is just a name for a work and has no meaning beyond this. Unlike Newman, I am only interested in the form, not the meaning.[2]

Smith stressed the intensity with which Newman argued this point with him, which also is referred to by another close friend, Ben Raeburn. According to Reaburn, Newman had a keen sense of humour but was never flippant about his work or his titles. Raeburn also discussed Newman's intuitive approach to titling, and gave an analogous parallel.

> I don't know whether you know that wonderful line that E.M. Forster gave to an old lady character of his in which he said
>
> 'How do I know what I mean until I see what I've said?'
>
> Recently I heard an interview with Spender and he was asked about this very question about how he went about writing a poem and he said
>
> 'on occasion a line would come into his head and that was it'.
>
> He could go no further, until he had thought as carefully as he could about what he was feeling when that line came into his head. What he was feeling may have had very little connection with the line but in order to proceed with the poem he had to be able to recall as precisely as he could what his state of mind was when the title came to him. It may indeed be that having painted a painting that Barney must have reflected later on whatever feelings or sensations he had as he was painting, things that went through his mind may have fed him his titles.[1]

A comparison between the poet, Stephen Spender's sensations and feelings and those of Newman's is an understandable parallel and Hess also refers to such intuitive stimuli.

> He himself (Newman) said that he named his pictures after - sometimes long after - they were finished, "to make the title a metaphor that describes my feelings when I did the painting".
>
> Annalee Newman borrowing Wordsworth's phrase, describes the process as "emotion recollected in tranquillity." [2]

The similarity between the concepts of poet and painter is evident; in both cases, feeling or intuition played an important role in the creative process. Newman drew on his experience and knowledge for inspiration for the different themes and motifs he used for his titles.

Most of his titles derive from biblical, mythological, and literary sources acquired from his wide range of reading interests. Newman's method of titling, according to his wife and friends, was from an emotional response to the painting, but the words of the titles were derived from his culture and intellect.

Alloway's contention that the title has other functions does not contradict the concept of intuitive titling but rather expands on it.

> His titles, whether classical or Hebraic, tend to have a sort of mythological grandeur, a cultural grandeur, about them. It might be that the title is part of the signal system by which we can separate them - his paintings - from previous paintings ..., he was very anxious that his kind of abstract art shouldn't be likened to the pro-technological, geometric abstract art that preceded it. So it might be the title would be part of predisposing us towards the dimensions of meaning in his work.[1]

According to Alloway the title is a means of separating his work from that of Mondrian and of other abstract art which was aesthetically similar. Newman claimed that the distinguishing factor between his work and that of others was the 'subject matter' and to stress the heroic grandeur of this 'subject matter' he sought for titles that would possess a similar sort of grandeur. He hoped that the title would be a guide to the understanding of the 'subject matter' and explained this in a statement about titles.

> I think it would be very well if we could title pictures by identifying the subject matter so that the audience could be helped. [2]

Newman wanted the associative meaning of the title to convey a specific idea to the spectator, an idea that described the 'subject matter' or meaning of the work. As there is no obvious form-title relation in terms of a literal meaning, comprehension of the 'subject matter' is complex, and is distanced from the mere etymological understanding of the words of the title. Newman apparently acknowledged and realised that the 'subject matter' is unclear because it needs indentification.

Theoretically, the idea may be sound and Newman's intention may be to 'identify', but the choice of some titles sometimes leave the viewer as uninformed and even confused as if there were no title. The viewer must recognise and understand the title before being in a position to understand its relation to the picture, but if the title is esoteric such understanding is impossible. Ad Reinhardt rejects the use of ambiguous or complex titles for this reason.

> If a title does not mean anything and creates a misunderstanding, why put a title on a painting? ...
>
> The only objection I have to a title is when it is false or tricky, or is something added that the painting itself does not have.[3]

While one cannot accuse Newman of using 'false' titles, their lack of clarity might be described as 'tricky'. Newman claimed that his titles describe the 'subject matter' and therefore they would not 'add' something that the painting does not have. By implication, they would be part of the painting but the connection between the part and the whole is vague or obscure.

8.1 THE FUNCTION OF THE TITLE

Paintings before the Twentieth Century generally were understood because the pictorial elements were figurative images, i.e. familiar and recognisable forms from nature. Titles usually functioned as a means of identification and for classifications because a Madonna, Crucifixion, Venus, or a Bacchanal feast are self-explanatory and are well-known themes needing no interpretation. Many important works were titled by art historians rather than by the artist himself, e.g. Titian's Man With a Glove. [1]

With the emergence of abstract art, the title gained in importance and assumed an added function: in many cases it became an integral part of the work. When confronted with an abstract painting, i.e. a non-representational work, the spectator's natural tendency is to refer to the title of that work for guidance to its understanding. Non-representational art is difficult for a non-informed viewer to understand as it is detached from any worldly experience or recognisable forms. In the absence of such recognisable forms man seeks other means of understanding whereby an intermediate interpretation is indicated. The title, which is usually a familiar word or phrase, generally is the means of this interpretation. In certain instances, an untitled work or enigmatic title causes the spectator to resort to personal interpretation by looking for clues within the work. He may attempt to identify shapes and colour with the objects known from his own experience and will see them as distortions or variants of nature. Through either title or form, most abstract art is usually understood as being a symbolic reference to a known concept or image.

Many American artists of the '50s and '60s, in attempting to create

a 'pure art' that was free from all figurative and nostalgic images from nature, introduced a system of numbering. Numbers replaced titles for cataloguing but Alloway believes the main limitation of a system of numbering is its inability of 'recall'; a number has no image for the artist.

> It was an experience of the Abstract Expressionists that when they numbered their pictures, they couldn't retrieve them. They couldn't remember which was which ... they tried it for a while and it was a very unsatisfactory method.[1]

At an art symposium held in New York in 1950, titling was an important issue and the question of numbering as an alternative to titling was discussed. Ralph Rosenberg claimed that the title always is arbitrary

> because we deal with unseen audiences; the reason for a title is that every Tom, Dick and Harry has to have some link. Once I had a show where I had numbers from one to twenty and when it came to a question of reviewing, the critics found that number six was better than four etc. I hope that the onlooker will make up his own title! [2]

Richard Pousette Dart also favoured numbers.

> I think if we could agree on numbers it would be a tremendous thing. In music they don't have this dilemma. It would force people to just look at the object and try to find their own experience.[3]

Jimmy Ernst disagreed with the numbering system - his views being closer to those of Newman.

> I would object to doing any such thing as that - such as numbering a picture. I don't particularly care what people classify me as, or whether people understand the title or not. It suggests something to me, or something may pop into my head - so I give it that title.[4]

This concept finds a parallel in the creative ideas of Spender the poet. (See p.128).

Reinhardt suggests a reason for artists replacing titles with numbers.

> The question of abandoning titles arose, I am sure, because of esthetic reasons. Even titles like "still life" and "landscape" do not say anything about a painting. If a

> painting does have a reference or association of some kind, I think the artist is apt to add a title. I think this is why titles are not used by a great many modern painters - because they don't have anything to do with the painting itself.[1]

Reinhardt's ideas may clarify to some extent, the problem with Newman's titles; they often suggest a theme that does not seem to relate to the work of art.

Alfred H. Barr claims that the title indicates to the public the artist's emotional involvement in the work of art.

> The general public is very much interested in that factor of the work. How did the artist feel when he did the thing? Was it painful? Was it a matter of love or fear, or what not? Very often he gets no guidance at all from looking at the picture. That's where the factor of titles comes in. At the same time the title may distort the picture a great deal.[2]

This idea seems to relate to Newman's concepts of emotional involvement yet Newman, at the same symposium, disagreed with Barr's contention.

> About specifying - if you specify your emotions - whether they are agony or fear, etc. - I believe it is bad manners to actually say one is feeling bad.[3]

This suggests that Newman used a certain discretion and reserve in his titles yet elsewhere he claimed that they reflected his feelings when he did the work. This creates an anomaly but also emphasises the complexity inherent in his choice of title. At this session, Newman defined his general attitute to the use of titles:

> I think it would be very well if we could title pictures by identifying the subject matter so that the audience could be helped. I think the question of titles is purely a social phenomenon. The story is more or less the same when you can identify them. I think the implication has one of two possibilities: (1) We are not smart enough to identify our subject matter, or (2) language is so bankrupt that we can't use it. I think both are wrong. I think the possibility of finding language still exists, and I think we are smart enough. Perharps we are arriving at a new state of painting where the thing has to be seen for itself.[4]

A title functions primarily as a means of communication but, as noted by Newman, the title depends on language and existing language may be inadequate for this purpose. This factor is given greater definition by Allen Leepa who discusses the dynamics of communicating meaning in art:

> We need to start with the role of language because it is basic to the formulation of ideas: what happens to language, how it is organized, and the way in which it is used affects the nature of meaning. When we consider that language is the symbolic representation of experience, that it is essential to communication and the process of recall, we can understand how fundamental it is in forming our perceptions of the world.[1]

The 'process of recall' is essential to the clarity of meaning but titles such as Onement, White Fire and Primordial Light do not have that clarity. They might suggest some possible image or concept, but the words and their multiplicity of meaning are arbitrary rather than specific.

Other aspects of the title are the sound of the spoken word and its aesthetics. Irrespective of meaning, the verbalised title has tones, like music or poetry, that may fall upon the ear in a rhythmic and melodious way. Onement and Cathedra are examples that have a certain metric rhythm through the change of syllabic stress and accent. The relevance of the written title has a caligraphic impact and was an important issue with Chinese and Japanese artists for many centuries: they were as concerned with the aesthetics of the word as they were with its meaning.[2]

Newman was aware of these aspects; Mrs Newman describes how he would verbalise a possible title or phrase aloud over and over again to assess its sound and effect. He also would often write a title out many times, studying it from all angles. Thus, he was clearly conscious of the audio-visual impact of a title on the spectator.

8.2 TABULATION OF TITLES (See c.v. pp 153-164)

Fifteen tables have been compiled of all Newman's known and

recorded works after 1944. The main sources are the writings of Rosenberg, Hess, and Richardson.

Table 1

All recorded works are listed in chronological order with titles, ground colour, and dimensions.

Tables 2 - 15

Reflects groups of titles having common themes. Many titles refer to more than one category, and a method of cross-reference is used by alphabetical letters.

Untitled works, lithographs, and sculptures have been excluded as irrelevant to this exercise. The purpose of this compilation is to illustrate Newman's consistency of specific themes and motifs and to show that his interests were wide and varied.

Conclusions drawn from this tabulation illustrate the following: Specific names found in Tables 7 - 8 are never repeated, they are only used once, whereas titles with abstract or indefinite references are repeated. The largest category is found in Table 6 which deals with biblical themes, but those marked with an asterisk are not clearly biblical and they may have other references. Only ten titles are unequivocally biblical, the others by implication only. Table 4 indicates that mythological subjects still interested Newman after 1948.

With the exception of specific names of places and personages, most titles are indefinite and abstract concepts. But almost all Newman's titles have a grandiloquence of content that Alloway relates to the grandeur of Newman's 'subject matter'.

> I ... take the titles as an index to general sublimity and the resonance of great thoughts.[1]

Alloway's premise may explain the gaps in Newman's titles and range of references, which exclude his other interests such as ornithology, baseball, botany, and geology. It seems as though Newman intentionally separated one side of his life from the other. He drew his titles from his intellectual pursuits and not from his extraneous activities

and hobbies.

It seems that Newman titled his paintings from the experience of an emotional response to the finished painting or sculpture but his choice of title was determined by specific factors.

(a) He wanted a title that described heroic dimensions and corresponded to the elevated concepts such as the sublime.

(b) Titles with intellectual connotations distinguished his work from that of Mondrian and other abstract art that was aesthetically similar to his.

(c) Newman's titles reflect his culture and his intellect.

(d) In few writings or statements, does Newman relate the title's meaning to the concrete art work as he did briefly with Cathedra and, in greater detail, with The Stations of the Cross. There may be vague connections in other references but generally there is no clearly defined linking of form and title.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Newman's art cannot be explained nor understood from a single viewpoint and neither can the issue be defined as a single problem.

> To comprehend Newman's art its triple nature must be grasped in a single movement of the mind.[1]

Although the effect is one of total unity, there are three main streams of Newman's creative substance channelled into one direction and under one umbrella term labelled 'art'. The one stream is the intellectual, cultural and conceptual flow of ideas expressed in his writings and statements; the second stream is the emotional, spiritual experience of the artist; and the third stream is the physical, concrete art work. The title may be considered as the unifying link between the three streams particularly by critics who refer to it as an index to the understanding of the work. Because a critic's interpretation depends on the use of language and the title generally is the only linguistic element in the art work, the title assumes an added and integral importance for the critic. This dichotomy of the art work and its related and descriptive literature, usually provided by the critic, is defined by Marcel Duchamp:

> ... the work of the artist is based on emotion and the work of the critic is based on an intellectual translation.[2]

A translation generally loses something of the original form and Duchamp's differentiation between artist and critic distinguishes between the two. The comprehension of the artist is a 'felt thing' - he intuitively knows it is right but this 'felt thing' does not always have a corresponding verbal form of expression. Without such specific definition, the critic and viewer invariably resort to the only source of understanding available to them - the title. But the spoken and written word is ineffectual in defining feelings and emotions which are essentially abstract because language reflects a knowledge of the conscious mind, and known concepts.

Carl Jung recognises this and notes that there are two fundamental

realities, the known and the unknown, both of which he believes function as complex parts of the human psyche from which creative concepts emerge.

> We find this in everyday life, where dilemmas are sometimes solved by the most surprising new propositions; many artists, philosophers, and even scientists owe some of their best ideas to inspirations that appear suddenly from the unconscious.[1]

This theory corresponds to those of both Newman and the poet Spender (see p.128). In every form of art there is a degree of creative intuition, which springs from the unknown or subconscious. Jung explains how creativity develops from the unconscious:

> ... subliminal material can consist of all urges, impulses, and intentions; all perceptions and intuitions; all rational or irrational thought, conclusions, inductions, deductions, and premises; and all varieties of feeling.
>
> It is, in fact, normal and nesessary for us to "forget" ... in order to make room in our conscious minds for new impressions and ideas ... just as conscious contents can vanish into the unconscious, new contents, which have never yet been conscious, can arise from it.[2]

Whether the artist acknowledges the source of his creativity as emotion, intuition, or inspiration, it is an indefinable manifestation fundamental to all the arts and to all new concepts. The problem lies in the limitations of human language to communicate adequately the expressions of any creative source. When Newman claimed 'meaning must come from the seeing not from the talking' (see p.143) he suggests that the meaning of his art cannot be expressed in language and thus is indefinable in these terms.

Representational art communicates its message through familiar forms with which the spectator can identify. The spectator has been educated into this tradition and expects to understand contemporary art in the same way; thus he looks for specifics with which he can identify, and for the message he presumes it contains. This form of art, then, is a vehicle to communicate intelligible ideas from the artist, by means of the art work, to the spectator. But primitive art is different. It functions more as a vehicle for spiritual and abstract 'feelings' rather than for specific ideas. It is a 'pure' art uncontaminated by subjective additives and

worldly materialism because it is concerned primarily with the absolute essence of life. This is why according to William Zorach,* artists constantly refer back to the basic elements of primitive art for inspiration and direction.

> Primitive art is to the modern artist like a fresh wind blowing into a warm, stifling room. ...
>
> ... The sudden realization of art existing in other lands and other times was a revelation that has transformed and expanded the whole art of to-day.[1]

Newman studied primitive art and the abstract thoughts embodied within its visual form. Hess records that many of Newman's writings, especially the early unpublished Monologues (1943 - 1945), revolve around this theme. For example Newman wrote about contemporary artists' interest in primitive art:

> The artist today has more feeling and consequently more understanding for a Marquesas Island fetish than for the Greek figure. This is a curious paradox when we consider that we, as the products of Western European culture, have been brought up within the framework of Greek esthetic standards - the tradition of the Greek style, and have had no intimate contact with the primitive way of life. All we concretely know of the primitive life are its art objects. Its culture patterns are not normally experienced, certainly not easily. Yet these art objects excite us and we feel a bond of understanding with the primitive artists' intentions, problems and sensibility, whereas the Grecian form is so foreign to our present esthetic interests that it virtually has no inspirational use.[2]

In 1946 he developed some of these ideas in a catalogue essay:

> It is becoming more and more apparent that to understand modern art, one must have an appreciation of the primitive arts, for just as modern art stands as an island of revolt in the stream of Western European aesthetics, the many primitive art traditions stand apart as authentic aesthetic accomplishments that flourished without benefit of European history. .....
>
> Here, then, among a group of several peoples the dominant aesthetic was abstract. They depicted their mythological gods and totemic monsters in abstract symbols, using organic shapes, without regard to the contours of appearance.

---

* American artist and writer. 1887 - 1966

> .... Their concern, however, was not with the symmetry but with the nature of organism; the metaphysical pattern of life.[1]

Newman defines the modern artist's ability and inclination to identify with primitive art without recourse to logic, reason, and the accepted notion of intellectual understanding. The artist does not need to understand the literal meaning because he senses or 'feels' the 'bond' of intuitive understanding. On its indefinable level, it is an abstract concept and it is the basis of all creativity, but, because it is abstract, there is no known linguistic form to describe it and as Newman implied, it need not be described but understood or 'seen for itself'.

Other referants that are applicable to, and derivative from, primitivism and mythology are 'mystery', 'chaos' and 'sublimity'. All relate to the primordial state before the creation of the world and were recognised by the Abstract Expressionists as fundamental to their art. These also are concepts of the 'unknown' and, as postulated by Jung, become sources for the creative force of both primitive and modern man. Newman enlarges on this theme in one of his earliest monologues:

> The subject matter of creation is chaos. The present feeling seems to be that the artist is concerned with form, color and spatial arrangement. This objective approach of art reduces it to a kind of ornament. The whole attitude of abstract painting, for example, has been such that it has reduced painting to an ornamental art whereby the picture surface is broken up in geometrical fashion into a new kind of design-image. ....
>
> The failure of abstract painting is due to (a confusion similar to the confusion) (sic) that exists concerning the understanding of primitive art ...
>
> It is now a widespread notion that primitive art is abstract, that the strength in the primitive statement arises from the tendency for abstraction. ....
>
> All artists whether primitive or sophisticated have been involved in the handling of chaos. The painter of the new movement clearly understands the separation between abstraction and the art of the abstract. He is not concerned with geometric forms per se but in creating forms which by their abstract nature carry some abstract intellectual content. ....

> The present painter can be said to work with chaos not only in the sense that he is handling the chaos of the blank picture plane but also in that he is handling the chaos of form. In trying to go beyond the visible and the known world he is working with forms that are unknown even to him. He is therefore engaged in a true act of discovery in the creation of new forms and symbols that will have the living quality of creation. ... [1]

Newman also shows that he is aware of the theories of Jung and other psychologists.

> No matter what the psychologists say these forms arise from, that they are the inevitable expression of the unconscious, the present painter is not concerned with the process. Herein lies the difference between them and the Surrealists. At the same time in his desire, in his will to set down the ordered truth, that is the expression of his attitude towards the mystery of life and death, it can be said that the artist like a true creator is delving into chaos. It is precisely this that makes him an artist for the Creator in creating the world began with the same material, for the artist tries to wrest truth from the void.[2]

In this passage Newman rejects the surrealist concept (popular in the '30s and '40s) of creating from the subconscious, where art emerges as a process of experience, recording, and anamnesis. He advocates the idea of creating from nothing, that is, without recourse to any reference to the known world, to create from the 'void'. Rosenberg sees this as a reaction to existing styles but notes that this was a general trend in New York in the mid '40s: 'beginning from scratch' was not Newman's prerogative.

> In America "beginning from scratch" has always been the alternative of artists fed up with prevailing aesthetics.[3]

Even before the advent of Abstract Expressionism artists, as noted by Ashton, were concerned with this problem. She discusses Paul Klee's philosophy and his preoccupation with primitivism, cosmology, and an awareness of creating from 'choas'.

> I begin logically with chaos, (he (Klee) wrote in one of his lectures for the Bauhaus) that is most natural. And I am at ease because at the beginning I myself may be chaos. Chaos is an unordered state of things, a confusion. 'Cosmogenetically' speaking, it is a mythical, primordial state of the world from which the ordered cosmos develops, step by step or suddenly, on its own or at the hand of a creator.[4]

These ideas of mythical, primordial confusion, and 'chaos', later used by the American painters, are pronounced in Newman's writings.

> In an exhibition catalogue of 1947 The Ideographic Picture Barnett Newman declared that art must make "contact with mystery - of life, of man, of nature, of the hard, black chaos that is death, or the greyer, softer chaos that is tragedy". At the time he wrote, art in New York was bound up with myth and primitivism and undoubtly these themes, manifesting themselves as an interest in archaic writing and primitive sign systems, can be connected with the exhibition.[1]

Titles relating to mythological themes appear in Newman's work during the early '40s such as The Slaying of Osiris (1944), Gea, and The Song of Orpheus (1945). Newman's later titles reflect a wider range of references but mythological titles still appear in 1949 and again in 1952 with Argos and Dionysius followed by Prometheus Bound and Achilles. The mythological and primitive concepts in Newman's writings, reflect the metaphysical thoughts that he was evolving and which eventually would shape the significant essay, The Sublime is Now (1948). It relates to the ideas of awe, terror, the metaphysical and especially to the 'void' and 'chaos' of primordial existence. These sensations and feelings are important for the understanding of the meaning of Newman's art and this is supported by critics such as Alloway, who compares Newman's ideas with those of Burke.

> Burke's intention of taking art away from trivial and sensual causes and basing it instead on momentous and powerful ones is analogous to Newman's. Qualities which Burke considered as arousing the sense of the sublime include "greatness of dimensions", "Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude, and Silence," and "Infinity". ...
>
> The links between Burke's and Newman's sublime are not stylistic. They result from the desire to put art into relation with "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[2]

Primordial 'chaos' can be related to ideas of 'vacuity' and 'infinity' from which comes the extended concept of the 'void'. This is important to Newman's work, but he apparently anticipated some misinterpretation of the term as he attempted to clarify his ideas with greater definition.

> I have always hated the void and in certain of my work of the Forties I always made it clear. In my work of that time ..., I had a section of the painting as a kind of void from which and around which life emanated - as in the original creation - for example, Gea done in 1945 and Pagan Void, 1946.
>
> When I started moving into my present concern or attitude in the mid-Forties, I discovered that one does not destroy the void by building patterns or manipulating space or creating new organisms. A canvas full of rhetorical strokes may be full but the fullness may be just hollow energy, just as a scintillating wall of colors may be full of colors but have no color. My canvases are full not because they are full of colors but because color makes the fullness. The fullness thereof is what I am involved in. It is interesting to me to notice how difficult it is for people to take the intense heat and blaze of my color. If my paintings were empty they could take them with ease.[1]

Newman's statement reflects his sensitivity to the dangers of creating a pictorial 'void' that is visually 'empty'. He claimed to have solved this problem by his use of colour. Yet the concept of the void has been ascribed to his work. Newman seemed to realise this and differentiated between the 'void' and 'space'.

> I have always been aware of space as a spacedome ... For me space is where I can feel all four horizons, not just the horizon in front of me and in back of me because then the experience of space exists only as volume.....
>
> Is space where the orifices are in the faces of people talking to each other, or is it not between the eyes as they respond to each other? Anyone standing in front of my paintings must feel the vertical dome-like vaults encompass him to awaken an awareness of his being alive in the sensation of complete space. This is the opposite of creating an environment. The environment is separate from the painting. A painter friend, Kamrowski, said it well; he said my paintings are hostile to the environment. The room space is empty and chaotic but the sense of space created by my painting should make one feel, I hope, full and alive in a spatial-dome of 180 degrees going in all four direction. This is the only real sensation of space. At the same time I want to make it clear that I never set out to paint space-domes per se. I am, I hope, involved in much more.[2]

Thus Newman's flat fields of undifferentiated colour do not describe emptiness and neither do they symbolise physical or measurable space, precisely because they were not intended to create an environment. Newman defined the meaning of his painting and what it was that he was 'involved in' was 'a sense of place':

... One thing that I am involved in about painting is that the painting should give man a sense of place, that he knows that he's there, so he's aware of himself. In that sense he relates to me when I made the painting because in that sense I was there. ... That the on-looker in front of my painting knows that he's there and to me the sense of place has not only a mystery, but is that sense of metaphysical fact. I have come to distrust the episodic and I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone, as it did me, the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality, and at the same time of his connection to others, who are also separate.[1]

He also attempted to explain what he meant by 'subject matter':

The central issue of painting is the subject-matter. Most people think of subject-matter as what Meyer Schapiro has called "object-matter". It is the "object-matter" that most people want to see in a painting. That is what, for them, makes the painting seem full. For me both the use of objects and the manipulation of areas for the sake of the areas themselves must end up being anecdotal. My subject is anti-anecdotal. An anecdote can be subjective and internal as well as of the external world so that the expression of the biography of self or the intoxicated moment of glowing ecstasy must in the end also become anecdotal. All such painting is essentially episodic which means it calls for a sequel. This must happen if a painting does not give a sensation of wholeness or fulfillment. That is why I have no interest in the episodic or ecstatic, however abstract. The excitement always ends at the brink and leaves the subject, so to speak, hanging there like the girl in "The Perils of Pauline". The next painting repeats the excitement in a kind of ritual. One expects the girl to be saved finally, but she is again left hanging on the brink and so on and on. This is the weakness of the ecstatic and the episodic. It is an endless search for a statement of personality that never takes place. The truly passionate exists on a different level.

It is easy to be a fast worker. I have great admiration for raw, boundless energy but I cannot work out of boredom, to keep myself busy or only to express myself. Or to tell the story of my life. Or to find my personality in painting by acting out some character. I paint out of high passion and although my way of working may seem simple, for me it is difficult and complex.

It would be easy for me now to talk about the transcendental, the self, revelation, etc. All painting worth anything has all this. I prefer to talk on the practical or technical level. ....

It is full of meaning, but the meaning must come from the seeing, not from talking. I feel, however, that one of its implications is its assertion of freedom, its denial of dogmatic principles, its repudiation of all dogmatic life.

> Almost 15 years ago Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possibly mean to the world. My answer was that if he and others could read it properly it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism. That the answer still goes.[1]

Newman claimed that his work is 'full of meaning' but implied that it is a meaning that no words can express. This suggests that his subject matter is unrelated to known concepts or is related to concepts that have no language of expression.

Such concepts are intrinsic to Judaic thought and are found in the spiritual dimensions experienced on Yom Kippur which have been discussed on pp.38-43. Concepts that cannot be expressed in any language are Judaic, metaphysical and primeval. Arthur Cohen explains this by a reference to the works of Martin Buber:

> Buber argued for a resurgence of primal religious forces which would enable modern man to recover the sense of the Absolute. Inherited religious categories of thought and action had to be abandoned, Buber argued, if man was to live before the face of the divine.[2]

A variation of this idea is found in the writings of Maimonides who describes the strength of the biblical prophet as one with

> an imaginative faculty, i.e. the faculty of receiving sense-impressions, and retaining and combining images of them. ....
>
> If he be of the highest order, his imagination will represent things not previously perceived by the senses.[3]

In referring to the source of prophesy, Maimonides also defines the Jewish idea of creativity which corresponds to the source of abstract aesthetic, creativity.

It is arguable that consciously or unconsciously, Newman as a Jew inherited the realisation and acceptance of abstract emotions pertaining specifically to an abstract God. Rosenberg claims that

> Newman called upon his rabbinical heritage, as he did in his desire to transcend chaos without resort to representations, symbols, or "graven images". [4]

No visual image, literal description or symbolic reference is required to prove God's existence, He is an abstract entity

in the same way, that emotions and feelings of spiritual worship are abstract entities.

A fuller discussion of Jewish art per se would require greater space than is allowed for this dissertation, but it is relevant to this argument that more Jewish artists have moved to the forefront of contemporary abstract art than ever before. This is particularly noticeable in America where one sees that in the past forty years, Jewish artists are among the leading exponents of avant garde art. Some of these are; Newman, Rothko, Gottlieb, Reinhardt, Morris Louis, and Louise Nevelson but there are many more, some of whom may have lost their Jewish identity within the American culture. Whatever their present religious beliefs or practices, they would still have benefited from their Jewish roots and culture. Few of these artists would admit to adhering to the precepts of the second commandment, 'Thou shalt not make graven images' but their inherited tradition forbids the depiction of the human form. The absence of such forms in the work of these artists is too frequent to be merely accidental. Hence the Judaic prohibition may have been a significant fact. They would tend to an abstract art that reflected the abstract concepts of Judaism and Rosenberg suggests that Newman's art in particular reflects the spiritual dimensions of these concepts possibly more than any other artist of his earlier generations:

> Were it not for the inevitability of misunderstanding, one might describe his (Newman's) canvases as the first Jewish religious paintings.[1]

It can also be argued that the phenomenon of the emergence of the modern Jewish artist was stimulated by the emergence of abstract art. Even though the original abstract artists, Malevich,* Kandinsky and Mondrian were not Jewish, the non-representational form of this art may have been the stimulus to Jewish artists to develop their own characteristic abstract styles.** Earlier

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* Malevich's religious background is not known and his inclusion here is by assumption.

** Many contemporary leading art critics and art dealers in America are also of the Jewish faith. Hess, Rosenberg, and Greenberg have been influential in promoting American abstract art.

Jewish artists did not have this advantage and Gail Saul believes that

> Jewish artists today do not stand at the end of an art tradition - they are merely at the beginning.[1]

Whether the general understanding of his work and spectator response to it, (at which Newman aimed) will ever be achieved, is patently a problem for future research and investigation as new material may become available. For the present time, as Rosenberg says,

> Newman's art must remain partly inaccessible.[2]