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AN ART OF NO DOGMA: PHILOSOPHICAL ANARCHIST PROTEST AND
AFFIRMATION IN BARNETT NEWMAN'S WRITINGS AND ART

By

ANN SCHOENFELD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art
History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
York

2002

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ABSTRACT

AN ART OF NO DOGMA: PHILOSOPHICAL ANARCHIST PROTEST AND
AFFIRMATION IN BARNETT NEWMAN'S WRITINGS AND ART

by

Ann Schoenfeld

Adviser: Professor Mona Hadler

Notions of freedom, the individual's relation to freedom, and the enactment of freedom pervade most theories of modern art and modern art practice. This dissertation attempts to expand even further the ways in which concepts of freedom have been incorporated into fields of artistic activity. By examining what philosophical anarchism is and how it was adopted by Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman, this dissertation demonstrates that anarchist ideals gave greater meaning to his work.

Specifically, this study investigates Newman's engagement with philosophical anarchism, especially the ideas articulated by a most important theorist, Peter Kropotkin. Newman's writings from the 1920s to 1968 when he wrote an essay titled "The True Revolution is

Anarchist!" are examined in detail, as are particular artworks.

With a lens focused on the instances of anarchist thought, opinions, and metaphors expressed by Newman, this dissertation elucidates a lifetime of interest in the model of Kropotkin. Newman's ongoing complaints against dogmatic systems, one individual speaking for another, his misreading of Mondrian as authoritarian are considered. Newman's 1936, self-published magazine, *The Answer* is examined for the first time to illustrate the complexity and consistency Newman's thought on issues regarding freedom and bettering society. This dissertation also provides research on instances of modern artists and critics' identification with anarchism, especially the influential Herbert Read. The study demonstrates that philosophical anarchism has often been present within the discourse of freedom that has informed modern art.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"If the aspirations of revolutionary change are for greater individuality, greater spiritual growth, for expressions that are humanistic, . . . then certainly part – and a main part – of the struggle of art has been to make an art that is direct, simple, humane, unconnected with powers that be . . ."

Barnett Newman interviewed by Emilio de Antonio, *Painters Painting*¹

"Newman's enthusiasm for and faith in the power of the individual are the foundation of his art."
Gabriele Schor, *The Prints of Barnett Newman 1961-1969*²

"It is hope, not despair, which makes successful revolutions."

Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*³

The fundamental importance of Barnett Newman (1905-70) to later twentieth century art is by now well established. Along with the accomplishments of other Abstract

¹ Barnett Newman interviewed in Emilio de Antonio, "Painters Painting: The New York Art Scene 1940-1940" (film), 1972. De Antonio interviewed Newman a few weeks before the latter's death in 1970. See also Emilio de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984).

² Gabrielle Schor, *The Prints of Barnett Newman 1961-1969* (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1996), p. 34.

³ Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1899), p. 418.

Expressionist artists, his innovations broke decisively with, and his achievements extended the conceptual structures of twentieth-century modernism. Newman's artwork and thought have also influenced generations of younger artists; in fact, his art and ideas have arguably had more continual impact than many of his peers who included Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko.

New studies continue to enrich our depth of understanding of Abstract Expressionism. However, as time passes, research that periodizes these artists risks losing the richness and complexity of an individual as idiosyncratic as Newman.

Therefore this dissertation builds upon an issue particular to Newman that has received limited attention since the 1970s.⁴ I hope to demonstrate that Barnett Newman's vision was fueled, in large part, by a strong adherence to a philosophy of anarchism, especially the theories developed by the Russian anarchist, Prince Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921).⁵ I will suggest that the anarchism

⁴ The first retrospective exhibition in thirty years of Newman's art was held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art March 24-July 7, 2002. Neither the gallery presentation of artworks nor the exhibition catalogue addressed possibilities that anarchism nurtured or as ongoing themes in Newman's writings or art.

⁵ Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) has been called "Prince" because he was born in an aristocratic, court family in

that Newman practiced — in other words his internalization of anarchist ideas — contributed to a certain coherence between Newman's early non-art-based activities and his later artistic ones.

One of the fundamental ideological bases of modern art since at least the mid-1800s has been the concept of freedom. Indeed, the pursuit of freedom arguably became the common ethical and defining principle for modern art.⁶ The language of freedom has been invoked in innumerable instances, for example to support the ideals of independence of thought, individual expression, autonomous art, universal freedom through art, to name a few. Additionally, new explorations continue highlight aspects of freedom that have been previously overlooked, such as a recent study on Hannah Arendt's writings in relation to Abstract Expressionism.⁷

Philosophical anarchism is understood in this dissertation as occupying a place in an all-encompassing

Moscow. Historians have dropped "Prince." This dissertation will refer to him as Peter Kropotkin.

⁶ See Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), part IV, pp.331-545.

⁷ See Steven Zucker, "Art in Dark Times: Abstract Expressionism, Hannah Arendt, and the 'Natality' of Freedom," (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, 1997).

rubric of freedom. Located within the discourse of freedom — 'both freedom from' and 'freedom to'— anarchism shares similarities with the range intellectual content that informs Abstract Expressionism, such as existentialism. By closely examining Newman's philosophical anarchist sensibility, I hope to expose meanings and suggest possibilities that add to a continuing field of study: how mid-century, avant-garde American artists conceived of, invoked, and practiced freedom.

Philosophical anarchism provided Newman with a radical and unique intellectual vantage point. Such a vantage point is also consistent with Newman's avant-garde ideals⁸.

⁸For a discussion of concept of the "avant-garde" see Ann Gibson, "Avant-Garde," in *Critical Terms of Art History*, edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 156-169. Gibson presents the viewpoints of the most important theorists in this area, Renato Poggioli (1968) and Peter Bürger (1984) as well as Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno (1962), Clement Greenberg (1939) among others. Greenberg wrote on the eve of World War II "Avant-garde and Kitsch." He promotes the idea that artists "keep culture moving" by creating art that is not bourgeois kitsch. Although artists are "uninterested in politics," they have the power to save culture from kitsch. Poggioli identified two avant-gardes: one the cultural-artistic and the other sociopolitical. He highlights formal creativity as the main ingredient, rejecting conventional habits and incorporating novelty and even the strange. He also believed the social goals and ideals were always a component of avant-garde art. Poggioli believes that the most effective avant-garde reforms society by "functioning as cathartic therapy for a language of art, music, and literature that had degenerated through thoughtless and

This will be seen in a focused examination of Newman's writings and art within their immediate and specific contexts.

For Barnett Newman, a youthful attraction to anarchistic ideas bolstered his evolving humanistic values, empathy, and social ethics, starting during his college years in the 1920s and through the 1930s. He read some of Peter Kropotkin's work during this period, then underwent a process of developing his anarchist ideals slowly over the years. He studied Western philosophy alongside philosophical anarchism decades before he established himself as a visual artist in the 1950s.

As early as 1925, while in college, Newman wrote forcefully about the rights artist exercise, the risks artists take, and he wrote in favor of the contributions the autonomous artist could make to society. Newman was working out his ideas about modern artistic aspirations, the unique expression of the individual.

habitual formulas." Bürger supports the view that an art institutional framework determines what art is supposed to be and do. Thus the avant-garde cannot be separated from society, but is inescapably implicated in it. Bürger's historical avant-garde attacked the institutions of art. Barnett Newman set himself against conventions and closer to Poggioli, Newman set art within the realm of the autonomous. "It is absolutely indispensable to distinguish the spurious from the genuine avant-gardism which results in art," Poggioli wrote. The need for value judgments, he

Newman's outlook in the 1930s was affected by Kropotkin's principles although he did not usually allude to them by name. Newman wrote texts of the 1930s in which he attacked institutions of political power and authority. Newman promoted essentially anarchist- inspired goals for New York City in his 1933 mayoral campaign literature (fig. 1), but he did not reference role models. Newman advocated for public activities and service that would enhance the quality of life in a peculiarly anarchist way; still a contradiction remains in that the anarchist does not aspire to a governmental position.

It would appear that Newman did not discuss Kropotkin with his friends and colleagues, or that others with whom Newman associated were not interested in anarchism. Newman recollected that the leftist political camps did not accommodate anarchism. He later wrote:

In the twenties and thirties, the din against libertarian ideas that came from shouting dogmatists, Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, and Trotskyite alike, was so shrill it built an intellectual prison that locked one in tight. The only free voice one heard was one's own. The existence of these *Memoirs*, this remarkable work that was Kropotkin himself, telling of himself, broke one's loneliness inside this solitary confinement.⁹

believed, must not be obviated by "nonaesthetic considerations." quoted by Gibson, p. 159.

⁹ Barnett Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist!" in Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York:

As time went on, anarchist principles related more and more to his aesthetic positions, first evident in the early 1940s when, in his writings about art, he advocated for an art that would be free of all "dogmatic" systems. In the essay quoted above Newman also reminisced about the 1940s, specifically the artistic social life in which he participated. He said:

In the 1940s, when artists got together for an evening, there was always someone who insisted on playing surrealist games. I recall one evening when everyone in the room had to say what it was that destroyed him. . . . I said that I felt destroyed by established institutions. I was surprised to hear one of the artists present say that what destroyed him were people. . . . Looking back, I think we were both right, because only those people practice destruction and betrayal who hunger to accept completely the values of the establishment in which they seek a place. It's the establishment that makes people predatory.¹⁰

Newman subscribed to the model of the ideal anarchist society, and over the years attacked established institutions – from political bureaucracies to aesthetic traditions

Peter Kropotkin's writings theorize *communist anarchism*, which conceived of the ideal anarchist society

Horizon Press, 1968), p. ix; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p. 44.

¹⁰ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist!," p. xviii-xix; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p. 51.

as a natural unit within which individuals functioned freely. Freedom was recognized as both freedom from coercion and freedom to live in a manner most individually honest within the community. The goal of such an arrangement was harmony.

The present study's point of departure is a 1968 essay that Newman wrote on Kropotkin. The essay was written on the occasion of the republication of Peter Kropotkin's autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. Newman's contribution was published in that book as the new Foreword. Titled "The True Revolution Is Anarchist!," Newman's essay is the only document in which the artist addressed anarchism directly, and in any depth at all.

He revealed that he allied himself wholeheartedly with the Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin. Newman also mentioned the communist-anarchist principles that had had an impact on him. These include Kropotkin's discussions on mutual aid; freedom from domination by any coercive authority; and placing a high value on spontaneity. The theory of mutual aid, which is the name of the Russian anarchist's biological evolutionary theory, posits that cooperation rather than competition within species ensures

survival of the species.¹¹ Kropotkin described mutual aid as a "correction" of Darwin. In 1968 Newman singled out the theory of mutual aid as Kropotkin's "most important work."¹² Therefore "The True Revolution Is Anarchist!" is the one completely overt statement Newman made about his anarchist philosophy.

Newman was not a political activist, but he was a political thinker. He did not address major events with which activist anarchists were associated such as the Sacco and Vanzetti case during the 1920s or the Spanish Civil War in the later 1930s. He said that he read *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, the Yiddish anarchist newspaper published in New York.¹³ He characterized the paper as "folksy," thereby separating it from radical and intellectual journals that he followed such as *Partisan Review* (and perhaps disassociating himself from *Freie Arbeiter Stimme's* milieu).

¹¹ Kropotkin devised his theory in conscious opposition to social Darwinians whom he believed skewed Darwin's original theory. Nonetheless, Kropotkin praised Darwin's breakthrough regarding the biological bases of evolution and criticized the aspect of intra-species competition.

¹² Newman, "The True Revolution Is Anarchist!," p. xviii; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p. 51.

¹³ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist!," p. ix; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p. 44.

He did not write theoretical political tracts, but he did write protests and position statements throughout his life. The insistence with which he asserted his ideas and continually reshaped them is impressive. Indeed, he criticized institutions ranging from governments to art museums.

This dissertation presents Newman's entire 1933 mayoral campaign statement and his passionate civil service magazine, *The Answer* of 1936 for the first time. In the 1920s and 1930s he attacked (in writing) business people and politicians whom he characterized as parasitical, capitalist power mongers who threatened society with their greed. He considered them enemies of those exceptional people who worked for the common good and who was not motivated by monetary profit. Altruism and empathy figure prominently in anarchism. Newman believed that selfless workers could point the way for others to follow, thus fueling a revolution of consciousness and evolution of society. This emphasis on cooperation, was the primary feature of mutual aid. Newman believed that this aspect of human endeavor must be understood so that it could continually influence, even shape, the present. Indeed, much later, in interviews in the 1990s, the artist's widow, Annalee Newman, repeated time and again that Barnett Newman

was ever passionate about causes and "there was a lot of Kropotkin in everything he did" and "throughout Barnett Newman's life the model of Kropotkin came through."¹⁴

Newman's knowledge of and predisposition toward philosophical anarchism grew in the early 1920s and 1930s. This was long before he developed his painting and sculpture. Later, he easily incorporated anarchistic principles into his art theories and production by constructing arguments against that which he considered restrictive, dogmatic art practice. He also integrated aspects of mutual aid into some his activities during the 1940s, especially in promoting those artists in whom he believed and with whom he identified as a community of like-minded individuals.

In the early 1940s first in his writings, and later in his art, Newman consistently discriminated between what he termed, "real abstraction," opposing it to what he called "formal abstraction." He started making the distinction Newman related it to his understanding of philosophical anarchism. Like his anarchist ideals "real abstraction" arose out of an abhorrence of preconceived, prescribed systems. This meant developing an art of idea rather than

¹⁴ Annalee Newman interview with author April 1990, June 1992, June 1995.

already known "formal abstraction," "an art depicting what defied articulation and graphic representation"¹⁵ as Nancy Jachec described Newman's aesthetic quest of the late 1940s. Real abstraction had an intellectual justification and ethical purpose. The suggestive *Onement* series (1948-53), the paintings *Now* and *Be*, as well as a number of other works whose titles refer to immediacy or spontaneity, presence, and light exemplify this powerful theme, "real abstraction." Some modern art, from Cubism to Purism that sought a detachment from the immediate and spontaneous provided the fuel for Newman's critique.

In his mature paintings, which were finally executed in the years 1948 - 1970, Newman sought to wed revolutionary form to revolutionary thought. Newman consistently insisted on "real abstraction," and he affirmed it in abstraction that resembled a geometrical format but actually subverted it. As if to make clear his allegiance, he refused invitations to exhibit in thematic exhibitions that foregrounded geometric abstraction. In fact he continued to characterize geometric abstraction as dogmatic "formal abstraction."

¹⁵ Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), p.89.

Instead, he hoped that his artworks, produced until 1970, the year of his death, engage the viewer in what he called an "open situation." Indeed, beginning in the late 1940s, Newman exhibited only those paintings which he believed expressed the new, "open situation." Newman may have derived the term "situation" from existentialism, from which Mona Hadler has identified a "changing intellectual climate of the forties"¹⁶ that accommodated Existentialist concepts after World War II. By 1947 New York artists felt the strong presence of Existentialism whether through Sartre's writings or through a series of articles published in the *New York Times Magazine*.¹⁷ Nancy Jachec has noted, ". . . the existentialisms presented to artists were wider-ranging."¹⁸ The term 'situation' refers to a realization of one's own sense of being, a phenomenological relationship between subject and the world that gives meaning to being and doing.

What did the open situation mean to Newman? He used the term for decades to describe temporal circumstances in

¹⁶ Mona Hadler, "David Hare: A Magician's Game in Context," *Art Journal*, vol. 47, no. 3 (Fall 1988), p.196.

¹⁷ See Matthew Baigell, "Barnett Newman's Stripe Paintings and Kabbalah," *American Art*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Spring 1994), p.38, p. 43 n.10.

¹⁸ Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), p.89.

which the potential existed for expansive thinking or doing to occur. His open situation accommodated and welcomed spontaneity, the unintended, in other words, "the freedom to . . ." Newman blended some terms of existentialism with intuitive, impure abstraction, resulting in resolutely abstract painting that allowed multiple readings and made one "given" experience impossible. He explained his goals in both aesthetic and political terms when, in 1970, he said to documentary filmmaker Emile de Antonio:

Some twenty years ago in a gathering I was asked what my painting really means in terms of society, in terms of the world, in terms of the situation. And my answer then was that if my work were properly understood, it would be the end of state capitalism and totalitarianism. Because to the extent that my painting was not an arrangement of objects, not an arrangement of spaces, not an arrangement of graphic elements, was an open painting, in the sense that it represented an open world, to that extent I thought, and I still believe, that my work in terms of its social impact does denote the possibility of an open society, of an open world, not of a closed institutional world.¹⁹

It would seem that the ideal Newman described above depends on a viewer who would think, ponder, construct an internal dialogue or debate in addition to being aware of the act of perception. In the open situation, each viewer

¹⁹ Emilio de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 159.

becomes aware of one's freedom and thus completes the meaning of the artwork in the moment.

This points up an interesting description of the differing terms by which freedom is conceived in existentialism and anarchism:

Existentialist freedom, since it dispenses with all coercion, would seem to be what the anarchists are really after. . . . take the responsibility for your own actions, remake your own essence, frustrate past conditioning, 'nihilate' being-in-itself, objectify the whole world through your own subjectivity . . . The difficulty with all of this is that we already have the kind of freedom the existentialist talks about. Freedom is not something that, in the manner of the anarchists, we have to struggle for; we already have it! We are condemned to have it. . . . The existentialist's freedom can neither be given nor taken away, while the anarchist's freedom is contingent.²⁰

Newman revealed his synthetic sensibility when he explained his political past using similar terminology that, in this case, when he said to Thomas Hess in 1969, "My politics [in the 1930s] went toward open forms and free situations; I was a very vocal anarchist . . .[sic] even learned to read Yiddish so I could follow the anarchist newspaper." He continued: "naturally this led him into violent arguments

²⁰ Gerald Runkle, *Anarchism Old and New* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1972), pp. 298-307.

with the many intellectual communists who were leaders in the art world of the 1930s . . . "21

In the middle and late 1960s Newman was finally able to impart the spirit of anarchist thought to younger artists via his artwork and verbal articulations. He continued his arguments against dogma and for complete freedom. He applied the concept of the open situation to newer developments in art. And for the first time in his life, many people listened. Every one of his art works is both protest and affirmation. Newman's art and influence may be understood better once the fuller nature of his radical sensibility is recognized.

Sketching a Context

As a member of the first generation of Abstract Expressionist artists – sharing their many general aesthetic aims and influences – Newman eventually produced a radical body of work which remains extremely influential to this day. But his art received widespread recognition much later – at the end of the 1950s. Other Abstract Expressionist painters and sculptors' work was taken seriously at least ten years before Newman's. Among these

²¹ Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Walker and Co., 1969), p. 18. It would be interesting to research when Newman started using the word "situation."

artists were his close friends Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, Elaine de Kooning, Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Aaron Siskind, David Smith, Tony Smith, Hedda Sterne²², Clyfford Still, Bradley Walker Tomlin as well as many others.

Most of the artists on this list who were Newman's age, began painting professionally by the early 1930s when they were young adults. Gottlieb had painted in earnest since his late teens and met Newman by 1922 at the Art Students League where both took classes, with Newman still a high school student. Whether one studied, like Gottlieb and Newman at the Art Students League, or whether one studied elsewhere, all art students in 1920s New York City came into contact with European modernism and American contemporary art. Their early role models were artists who were open to a wealth of examples of modern possibilities.

Thus some of the future Abstract Expressionists' views took root in the 1920s. They would carry their teachers' ideas within them as they moved forward, as is well known in the case of Thomas Hart Benton's influence on Jackson

²² Hedda Sterne painted portraits of Barnett and Annalee Newman in 1950. The men on this list recognized the women as serious artists, but also regarded them as supporters of their husbands' efforts.

Pollock.²³ And there was a diversity of artistic sources that the artists of Newman's generation had direct access to. Thus it is essential to realize that even though many artists who taught were not modernists in their own art work, their modern attitudes toward the practice of art impacted Newman and the others tremendously.

Starting out in the 1920s in the United States allied this generation in another important way as well. They took for granted their own positions as social outsiders.

Adolph Gottlieb spoke for many when he said:

When I was a boy studying art, I became aware of and accepted the difficulties of the modern artist. . . . I clearly understood that the artist in our society cannot make a living from art; must live in the midst of a hostile environment; cannot communicate through his art with more than a few people; and if his work is significant, cannot achieve recognition until the end of his life if he is lucky and more likely posthumously. . . .²⁴

Gottlieb and the other artists entered their careers with low expectations of becoming accepted by a wide

²³See Erika Doss, "The Art of Cultural Politics: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism," in Larry May, editor, *Recasting America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989)

²⁴Adolph Gottlieb, "Artist and Society: A Brief Case History," delivered at the College Art Association Annual Meeting in 1954 and printed in the *College Art Journal*, vol. 15 (Winter 1955), p. 96; reprinted in Brad Collins, "Life Magazine and the Abstract Expressionists, 1948-51: A Historiographic Study of a Late Bohemian Enterprise, *Art Bulletin*, vol. 73, no. 2 (June 1991), p. 287.

audience. Thus they explored personal and local subjects in a variety of representational styles as well as modernist modes. Their position on the margins provided freedom of movement.

As the artists matured in the 1930s they adapted to public life of the artist; they were directly affected by the Depression and by the second half of the decade many became active Leftists. Both in Europe and the United States artists conflated their pursuit of free expression with political positions that fostered freedom. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood noted: "By the mid-1930s the valuation of art as revolutionary had come to fulfill much the same function in the discourses of modern art as the discovery of formal significance by the criticism of the previous two decades: It was the principal seal of approval for which the respective advocates and supporters of abstract art, of Realism, and of Surrealism competed on behalf of one tendency or another."²⁵ One thing this reinforces is that political commitment did not correspond to a particular or discrete aesthetic.

Newman could be counted among those artists and writers who wanted to advocate for freedom. And

²⁵ Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, p.338.

although he criticized both Leftists and the Right as "shouting dogmatists" he nonetheless identified with basic tenets of 'partisans' on the Left. It should be assumed he partook of discussions and debates in the 1930s on the pursuit of radicalism in both politics and art. That one of his best friends, Adolph Gottlieb, was a member of the American Artists Congress that convened in 1936 serves as but one example of how he had access to then current art activism.

While Newman would not identify with one camp or the other, he read the *Partisan Review* and became close friends with its writers, most likely in the 1940s. By 1938 'activism' in the pages of the *Partisan Review* produced the clearest statement thus far: the publication of Leon Trotsky's "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art,"²⁶ an event which became a landmark in the history of American intellectual culture of the 1930s.²⁷ This stunning statement aimed for "The independence of art-for the revolution; the revolution-

²⁶ Leon Trotsky and André Breton, "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," reprinted in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, pp.526-529.

²⁷ See Susan Noyes Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930s: Modernism, Marxism, and Americanism* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1999); see Terry Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals* (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1985), pp. 120-145, 225-250.

for the complete liberation of art!"²⁸ galvanized the anti-Stalinist position of the New York Intellectual. One statement in the essay addressed the role anarchism could play in the revolution:

If, for the better development of the forces of material production, the revolution must build a socialist regime with centralized control, to develop intellectual creation an anarchist regime of individual liberty should from the first be established. No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above! Only on a base of friendly cooperation, without the constraint from outside, will it be possible for scholars and artists to carry out their tasks, which will be more far-reaching than ever before in history.²⁹

**Review of Relevant Art Historical Literature: Abstract
Expressionism, Politics, Anarchism**

Various art historians have noted Barnett Newman's interest in anarchism, but a close examination of Newman's ongoing allegiance or involvement has gone largely unexamined. Thomas Hess, in his two early biographies, alluded lightheartedly to Newman's anarchism.³⁰ As Hess's 1969 book is the only monograph completed during Newman's

²⁸ Trotsky and Breton, "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," p.529.

²⁹ Trotsky and Breton, "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," p.528.

³⁰ Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Walker & Co., 1969), 1969 and Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), which accompanied the 1971 retrospective of Newman's work at MoMA.

lifetime and because the book incorporates Newman's comments during many conversations with Hess, it is extremely useful for the present study.

Dore Ashton mentioned Newman's interest in anarchism as early as 1972 in *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*. In her excellent, seminal discussion of the general *zeitgeist* surrounding Abstract Expressionism's first generation, its intellectual and cultural roots, Ashton noted that Newman "partook of the submerged American tradition of anarchism that considered the only true grounds for true liberty 'disconnection, disunion, individuality'." ³¹ Ashton's idea recalls Surrealism's "absolute liberty," and modernism's model of individualism. The interpretation seemed logical to Ashton at the time since "disconnection, disunion, individuality" also pointed toward the Surrealist revolutionary spirit manifested in pure psychic automatism, which was the artistic model for Abstract Expressionist improvisation and spontaneity. Indeed, anarchism dovetails with aspects of Surrealism as well as the philosophy of Existentialism, both of which are crucial for Abstract Expressionism's development. ³²

³¹ Dore Ashton, *The New York School A Cultural Reckoning* (N.Y.: Viking, 1972), pp. 72-73.

³² Hadler, "David Hare: A Magician's Game in Context," p. 197. Sculpture David Hare and Sartre met in New York, and

Ashton, understandably, did not differentiate the anarchist who is a libertarian individualist from the anarchist who seeks to liberate individual consciousness as part of the process of making a better social environment. Her designation reveals a general misunderstanding -- not uncommon -- that could lead to the perception of anarchism as at most a novelty, but more likely a negative force.³³

Annette Cox's *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society* was the earliest dissertation to study the political viewpoints of selected Abstract Expressionist artists and critics. She treated Newman's anarchism as somewhat separate from his artwork, and his mature artwork as following in the tradition of

as Hare was a founder of the Subjects of the Artist school he most like spoke with other artists about existentialism. Barnett Newman also taught at the Subjects of the Artist school.

³³ Herbert Read, *Existentialism, Marxism, and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1950), p. 24. Herbert Read, an anarchist and follower of Kropotkin, noted a similarity between Existentialism and the Right wing, *individualist anarchism* theorized by Max Stirner: In the history of existentialism, where does Max Stirner come in? I have the impression that his name is never mentioned in the popular accounts of existentialism. Sartre may never have read him, but Husserl? The existentialists speak often of Nietzsche's influence on Husserl, and Stirner is recognized as one of the precursors of Nietzsche. But I suspect a more direct liaison. Stirner is one of the most existentialist of all past philosophers, and whole pages of *The Ego and His Own* read like anticipations of Sartre. Buber recognizes his place in the evolution of the existentialist philosophy."

"European utopian abstraction that stretched back to Wassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian,"³⁴ none of whom were philosophical anarchists.³⁵ Cox explained that Newman's goal was to invest his art with "utopian political meaning." She identified modernist utopian abstraction with Mondrian's geometric, and Kandinsky's chromatic models as alternatives to Surrealist influences.³⁶

Cox's insights opened the way to various readings of political content in abstraction. Yet the insights were limited by her strong identification of Newman with European abstractionists, including Mondrian. Newman consciously distanced himself from European abstraction, especially Mondrian's neo-plasticism which he labeled as one form of "formal abstraction". And Newman's intended deviations were as strong as the distinctions he drew

³⁴ Annette Cox, *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1977): 70.

³⁵ This fact does not preclude Kandinsky's awareness of anarchism. The intellectual circle with which Kandinsky was associated in Berlin supported communist-anarchist ideas, including those of Kropotkin. See Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future," *Art Journal*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 38-46. "Anarchistic thought especially supported Kandinsky's abhorrence of artificial rules and his commitment to free choice as a way to enlightenment and as a means of overcoming the limitations of the present age," p. 40.

³⁶ Cox, *Art-as-Politics*, 73-74.

between his mature paintings and Surrealism. Newman was determined not to follow either Surrealism or European utopian abstraction. Despite this effort to individuate himself ideologically, he derived his early imagery from both strands of modernist accomplishment: Surrealism and geometric abstraction.

Artist Eva Cockcroft's pioneering article in *Artforum* in 1974, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," concerned itself with the larger political context in which 1940s and 1950s Abstract Expressionism gained strength. A similar critique had been made by Max Kozloff in 1973 who also considered American art in the Cold War. These authors assume that the artists working in the decade after World War II were not involved with politics. At the time that Cockcroft and Kozloff wrote their articles, this was a fair assumption. After all, art critical discourse contemporaneous with Abstract Expressionist production portrayed the art similarly.

The dominant trend in art-historical research became the reception of Abstract Expressionism and its ensuing ramifications. During the 1980s, studies such as Serge Guilbaut's controversial *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* was widely read. Guilbaut went so far as to propose that particular political circumstances made it

possible for Abstract Expressionism to be sustained, as well as occur. In *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* Guilbaut attributed the postwar dominance of avant-garde Abstract Expressionism to its use as a "weapon against totalitarianism" by various cultural and political entities in the Cold War period. He argued, "Avant-garde art succeeded because the work and the ideology that supported it, articulated in the painters' writings as well as conveyed in images, coincided fairly closely with the ideology that came to dominate American political life after the 1948 presidential election."³⁷ This ideology was inherent, Guilbaut explained, in the concept of freedom.

Once again, as in earlier modern art, freedom became "the symbol most actively and vigorously promoted." For many, Abstract Expressionism then became the perfect "expression of freedom: the freedom to create controversial works of art, the freedom symbolized by action painting, by the unbridled expressionism of artists completely without fetters."³⁸

³⁷ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 3.

³⁸ Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, p. 201.

Guilbaut's work was followed by other contextual studies in Abstract Expressionism. The concept that the artistic and political ideologies of the immediate post-World War II world coincided is inherently interesting; Guilbaut came close to considering this avant-garde community as consciously complicit. The artists may have been willing to have others control political associations of their work. In that case the artists became complicit through their own naiveté and desire for acceptance.

Subsequently, Michael Leja has influenced the study of the social history of Abstract Expressionism strongly in *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*.³⁹ Leja recast the American avant-garde in terms of a hegemonic, bourgeois cultural model. Mid-century bourgeois culture had developed the notion of subjectivity via examples provided by popular psychology, which obviated any possibility of an oppositional, i.e., avant-garde, production. Abstract Expressionists were involved with popular psychology that responded to the traumas of twentieth century history.

Leja identified Gottlieb, Newman, and Rothko as the "Mythmaker" wing of the New York School because their early

³⁹Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

writings drew upon popular notions of the primitive (rather than on the more nuanced constructions of contemporary anthropology), which were invoked to explain the horror and irrationality of the modern world.⁴⁰ Both Leja and Guilbaut examined the way culture and politics defined and influenced an American avant-garde by the time of the Cold War period.⁴¹

Art historian David Craven has provided the most detailed and substantial account to date about Abstract Expressionist artists' identification with anarchism. Well versed in political theory, Craven posited in his 1990 article "Abstract Expressionism, Automatism, and the Age of

⁴⁰ See Andrew Hemingway, "The Two Paths," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1996), pp. 112-121.

⁴¹ Guibault and Leja both wrote their dissertations under T.J. Clark. It would be interesting to speculate how their studies, though very different from each other, are both influenced by Clark's earlier work that examined the very concept of an avant-garde as an ideological structure. Both use the concept of hegemony to frame their explanations (They plot avant-garde values as corresponding to new American patronage. Leja foregrounds the quality of 'subjectivity' as hegemonic and as more pervasive in society than formerly understood by art historians who are interested in avant-gardism. Guilbaut foregrounds the concept of 'freedom' in avant-garde art. government itself adopted and used the new art as a propagandistic tool during the Cold War to equate American freedom with universal personal freedom.

Automation"⁴² that the unique, handmade, improvisational paintings challenged a *status quo* that was adapting to the technological and industrial economy of the Cold War, and the conformist model of the "Organization Man."⁴³

Nancy Jachec immediately responded to Craven. She agreed that the Abstract Expressionist artists "believed their work to be a political gesture" but countered that Craven's claims for anarchism were exaggerated. She ascribed their political orientations to having "direct contact with popularisers of Existentialism" and specifically the editors of *Partisan Review*, who published French existentialists as well as their American interpreters. She explained that Sartrian existentialism "informed their statements as a programme for political action"⁴⁴ in the period 1945-1950.

Anarchism is closely related to certain other, previously studied, intellectual roots of Abstract Expressionism. In Newman's case philosophical anarchism

⁴² David Craven, "Abstract Expressionism, Automatism, and the Age of Automation," *Art History* vol. 13, no. 1 (March 1990), p. 77.

⁴³ David Craven, "Abstract Expressionism, Automatism, and the Age of Automation," p.86.

⁴⁴ Nancy Jachec, "'The Space Between Art and Political Action': Abstract Expressionism and Ethical Choice in Postwar America 1945-1950," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1991), p.26.

takes precedence over psychologically oriented influences. And anarchism resides right beside the metaphysical. One reason is that both the metaphysician and anarchist partake of a moral dimension. A secular political consciousness and a spiritual dimension are not distinct from a strong ethical consciousness.

David Craven connected the Abstract Expressionists attraction to the Sublime with an "invocation of anarchist views."⁴⁵ In a 1998 talk he interpreted the artist's interest in the Sublime as a protest to "the unnatural society in the United States post 1945," where, Craven explained, there was "something unnatural about an ascendant society not housing and feeding itself."⁴⁶ The concept of a primitivist, natural society resounds in and unites in the writings of 19th century anarchists like Kropotkin. According to Craven, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell evoke the Burkian Sublime in the Sublime issue of *The Tiger's Eye* and in their art.

⁴⁵David Craven, "The Abstract Expressionists' Critique of 'Unnatural Society': or, The Intersection of Anarchism and the Sublime in Colorfield Painting," talk at annual conference, the College Art Association, 1998.

⁴⁶David Craven, "The Abstract Expressionists' Critique of 'Unnatural Society': or, The Intersection of Anarchism and the Sublime in Colorfield Painting," talk at annual conference, the College Art Association, 1998. Craven spoke at a session titled "Anarchism and 20th-Century Visual Culture," chaired by Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton.

These painters thus, "bring down modern society to size compared to nature" in their writing and paintings.

In his 1999 book, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period*, Craven sensibly argued for the open ended, ambiguous and pluralistic nature of Abstract Expressionist art, art that varies formally in scale, subject, and tone. Continuing along his earlier line of inquiry, Craven considered the artists' oppositional intentions. Craven also challenged the earlier theses that Abstract Expressionists were in any way complicit -- even unintentionally -- with a 'middle brow' bourgeoisie or "the dominant ideological claims of a cold-war 'business liberalism'."⁴⁷ Indeed, the Cold War put pressure on the Left -- Newman and other Abstract Expressionists -- included

In his introduction to *Barnett Newman Selected Writings and Interviews*, Richard Shiff recognized that

⁴⁷ David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 17. The best essay that puts Abstract Expressionism into that context still remains Meyer Schapiro's "The Liberating Quality of the Avant Garde." *Art News*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Summer 1957): pp. 36-42

"Newman continually reestablished his own separateness"⁴⁸ in statements and essays. Newman's "separateness" was related to anarchism. Shiff said that "Newman's anarchist independence and uncompromising attitude contributed to his slow public acceptance, but it was also the force that sustained his art."⁴⁹

Certainly Barnett Newman was not unique in his polemical stances and tenacity of convictions. Throughout the history of modernist art innumerable artists have held idealistic political values and aesthetic visions in common. But Newman may have been unique among his peers and different from earlier generations of American as well as European avant-garde artists by his insistent and frequent written protests. He demonstrated again and again an unwillingness to compromise his principles. He called attention to what he perceived as misrepresentations of his aesthetic intentions or of his words taken out of context. At the time (for about two decades) his protests were not made to gain power or change prevailing tastes, but to

⁴⁸ Richard Shiff, "Introduction," in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc. 1990), p. xvi.

⁴⁹ Richard Shiff, "Introduction," in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1990), p. xxiii.

assert — stubbornly assert — that no other individual could speak for him.

In 1950 Newman drafted a letter to the *New York Times*. He protested the distortions he perceived in art critics' reports of Abstract Expressionism, and affirmed that the public had the right to know the truth:

. . . we cannot tolerate and wish to condemn the lack of responsibility these art critics show as journalists. We protest their lack of responsibility these art critics show as journalists. . . . the public is continually being confused by them and never gets to know the truth concerning the nature of the authentic art that exists in America today. . . .

We wish to condemn these deliberate attempts to ignore, malign and distort the state of art in America in this headstrong drive to promote reaction in art here . . .⁵⁰

Then in 1955, in an unnecessarily spiteful, indeed hyperbolic, r.s.v.p. that may have never been sent⁵¹ to painter Mark Rothko's dealer, Sidney Janis, Newman defended his own integrity:

It was Rothko who in 1950 said to me that he could not look at his work because it reminded him of death. Am I to disagree with him? Why should I look at his death image? I am involved in life, in the joy of the spirit. . . .

⁵⁰ Barnett Newman, "Drafts of a Protest Against Recent Art Criticism," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), pp. 34-35.

⁵¹ Editors, *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), p. 201.

A man's work and the man who makes the work form an equation. The same virtuosity that begs in the work for public approval has been the means whereby moral issues against the philistine world could be juggled. It is true that Rothko talks the fighter. He fights, however, to submit to the philistine world. My struggle against bourgeois society has involved the total rejection of it.

. . . I insist that a man and his work must not only say what he means, but that they also must mean what he says. And it is on this proposition that I stake my life.⁵²

When The Art Workers Coalition protested the selection process of the works of art that were chosen for the Museum of Modern Art's 1969 exhibition, "The New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation," Newman sided with other Abstract Expressionists who supported the Museum. All the same, Newman did not sign the Abstract Expressionists' letter in which they defended their prerogative to donate their artwork to the museum. Instead Newman wrote his own letter accusing the Art Workers Coalition of opportunistic motives and hypocrisy. He said:

" . . . would the Coalition and the public be better served if the show were only a loan show for six weeks and the picture were then sent back to their owners to disappear from public view? . . . And what's all this stuff about the Coalition being concerned with what they say is the

⁵² Barnett Newman, "Letter to Sidney Janis," published in *Selected Writingd* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), pp. 201-202.

morality of the artists." Defending his turf, Newman concluded: "What is interesting and perhaps proves how viable a force the heroic years of the New American Painting are that, having been the target of the Establishment for so long, the work still provokes antagonism and criticism now by those who do not know the work."⁵³

Anarchism

In order to appreciate Newman's interpretation and inclusion of anarchist thought, language, and metaphors in his lifetime and in his life's work, I will now discuss two aspects of anarchism that have an impact on this study. I will explain the late 19th century anarchist movement that Peter Kropotkin supported, and explore 20th century manifestations of philosophical anarchism in the visual arts that Newman would have known about. The latter discussion is not intended to prove cause and effect, but to widen the reader's understanding of the terminology of anarchism and the place philosophical anarchism occupied in the development of theories and interpretations of modern art.

⁵³ Barnett Newman, Open Letter, June 1969, in Annalee Newman's files.

By the time Newman wrote the Foreword for the Horizon Press reissue of *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* in 1968, the Russian-born Kropotkin had been dead for forty-seven years and a viable anarchist movement had been dead, most would argue, since the end of the 1920s.⁵⁴ Nor were anarchists perceived as a threat to society. As Paul Avrich observed, "By the end of the 1920s, the fear which they had previously generated had been transferred to the Communists, still basking in the glow of the revolution."⁵⁵ Anachronistic, then, as Newman's interest may at first seem, his essay revealed his lifelong allegiance to anarchist theory, especially Peter Kropotkin's principles of altruistic cooperation or mutual aid, and spontaneity as components of a natural scheme, and preconditions for a free society.

In addition to Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid, Newman also admired Kropotkin's commitment to complete freedom: freedom from any authoritarian body, freedom without domination. One way that this commitment

⁵⁴ See Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992); Martin Miller, editor *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1970); David Goodway, editor, *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁵⁵ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 415.

manifested itself was in Newman's many protest statements. Newman insisted that he individuate himself: that he speak for himself, defend himself, and point out when others misspoke about him. This represents an extreme anarchistic position: that no one can speak for another. On occasion he would do the same for other artists and friends, but in the main, he spoke up loudly against what he perceived as misrepresentations of himself. He wrote about some art and art world issues with the same self-confidence (and at times arrogance) from the middle 1940s until his death.

The present study has benefited from the opportunity to examine writings that were in the possession of Annalee Newman.⁵⁶ With the publication of *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews* in 1990, more examples were also made available. Throughout his writings one finds a remarkable consistency in the political language, fiery tone, and anarchist point of view for unhindered freedom and against dogma.

⁵⁶ Annalee Newman maintained her husband's papers after his death in 1970. When she died in 2000 the Barnett Newman Foundation assumed full direction. A catalogue raisonné project has been underway, and to the best of my knowledge, the artist's papers have not yet been made available to independent researchers. Future researchers will undoubtedly reveal more of Barnett Newman's anarchism and its relation to contemporary issues.

The 1968 republication date of *Memoirs of a Revolutionist's* corresponded to a political revival of anarchist study among student radicals, which Newman cautiously welcomed.⁵⁷ Newman embraced the notion that artists could play an important social role in an anarchistic revolution of consciousness. It is no coincident that Newman spoke to students via his own essay and via Kropotkin's book.

Memoirs of a Revolutionist was not the only writing by Kropotkin that Barnett Newman knew well.⁵⁸ Newman stated in the 1968 Foreword that he actually regarded "mutual aid" to be Kropotkin's "greatest theoretical contribution."⁵⁹

Newman was attracted to Kropotkin's remarkable life story as much as he admired Kropotkin's theories of anarchism. I will discuss Kropotkin's life to inform and to keep in mind that Newman lobbied for this story to be told in 1968.

Peter Kropotkin was an important anarchist who "had the privilege of presiding intellectually over the movement

⁵⁷ Newman, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, p. xvi.

⁵⁸ There is a copy of *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* in Newman's personal library that was given to Newman in the 1960s. According to Annalee Newman, he did not usually buy books, but often borrowed from libraries. Interview with author, April 1990.

⁵⁹ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist!", p. xii.

in its heyday, between 1880 and 1914 . . . his real contribution was . . . as philosopher, in defining the meaning and direction of anarchism for thousands of adherents and even more thousands of curious people . . ."⁶⁰ Kropotkin exemplified the heroic and empathic individual who holds firmly and enthusiastically to his revolutionary ideals despite adverse conditions.

An aristocrat, Kropotkin was born in Moscow in 1842. His family had close affiliations to the czar's court. Following the educational path expected of him, he studied at an elite school, eventually specializing as a naturalist and geographer. He trained and worked as a high-ranking military officer in service to the Emperor Alexander II. Kropotkin led government-sponsored geographic surveys to the eastern provinces of Russia. Back in Moscow, Kropotkin published his finding and continued to work as a scientist for governmental offices. Yet Kropotkin's politics began to waver, and eventually he switched to anti-Czarist allegiances and movements. Strict laws forbade political free speech and radical actions. All of this is recounted in his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. When he fled Russia after escaping jail as a political prisoner, he

⁶⁰ Richard Sonn, *Anarchism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), pp. 33-34.

settled in Western Europe. He lived in Switzerland, and it was there that Kropotkin became fully committed to anarchism while participating in workers' movements in the Jura mountains. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* ends in the late 1880s. Kropotkin wrote most of his theoretical works after that from his home in England, where he settled in 1886. In 1917 during the Revolution, he returned to Russia where he died in 1921.

In *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* Kropotkin explained the sources of his inclination toward anarchism – his empathy, specifically toward serfs whom he knew during his childhood. Before the czar's 1861 emancipation of the serfs, serfs were landless, regarded as less than human, and were bound to the family who, in effect owned them. Kropotkin's family "owned" serfs who worked the Kropotkin country property. Peter Kropotkin despised this feudal system and its implied degradation of some human life. Kropotkin began to develop his own theories in the 1880s in response to the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin. *Mutual Aid*⁶¹ was published in 1902 after it had run in

⁶¹ Kropotkin based mutual aid and his other theories – economic, political, social – on the logic of empirical methods as well as fieldwork he conducted in eastern Russia 1862 – 1866. Mutual aid sought to rebalance Darwin by emphasizing cooperation instead of competition.

serial format in the British journal, *Nineteenth Century* as an extended direct response to Thomas Huxley's essay "The Struggle for Existence in Human Society," which was also published in *Nineteenth Century*. He thus redirected research from the intra-species struggle to the common struggle of an entire species to survive, despite adverse natural conditions.⁶² Kropotkin believed that naturally cooperative behavior is an instinctual behavior and when reinforced, it becomes a product of evolution.

Kropotkin's ideas were well-known to radicals in the United States and Europe. First of all Kropotkin wrote in English. When his essays were compiled into a book, they were inevitably picked up by an American publisher. Kropotkin's important political essay, "An Appeal to the Young," was anthologized along with other writings, by Roger Baldwin (founder of the American Civil Liberties Union)⁶³. Baldwin's work, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, was published in New York by Vanguard Press in

⁶² See Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 318-319. See Stephen Jay Gould, "Kropotkin Was No Crackpot," in *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co, 1991) for a discussion of Kropotkin's view as representative of 19th century Russian naturalists, "a standard, well-developed Russian critique of Darwin, based on interesting reasons and coherent national traditions," p.332.

⁶³ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, pp. 62-64.

1927. Here Baldwin compiled Kropotkin's numerous essays that explained the roles that professionals, intellectuals, and artists could play in the revolutionary process. Kropotkin included the artist as one type of intellectual. He stressed in "An Appeal to the Young" and in additional writings that all intellectuals and creative individuals could use their "sacred fire" of inspiration to affect others as well. According to Kropotkin, the revolutionary artist knew that " . . . the beautiful, the sublime, the spirit of life itself are on the side of those who fight for light, for humanity, for justice."⁶⁴

For Kropotkin, revolution was first and foremost a revolution of consciousness. And practically by definition then, the avant-garde⁶⁵ artist was a special individual; he or she was equipped to create visions that were at odds with the status quo. Therefore the artist was someone who, potentially, could radicalize his audience.

⁶⁴ Peter Kropotkin, "An Appeal to the Young," *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), p. 273.

⁶⁵ The origin of the term 'avant-garde' dates from the early 19th. By the 1830s it was used in the cultural realm. For a short time (1877-78) Peter Kropotkin took over the editorship of a journal called *Avant-Garde* which was not an art journal, but applied the term to revolutionary figures and individuals in both the anarchist arena and the arts.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries notable avant-garde artists were interested in Kropotkin's views. Each artist expressed anarchist content differently, each in a manner that corresponded to his particular situation.⁶⁶ Camille Pissarro wrote admiringly of Kropotkin's vision of an ideal future society. In the drawing for the title page of *Turpitudes Sociales* he identified a distant rising sun as "anarchy" in an overt reference to the anarchist future.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See Benedict Nicholson, "The Anarchism of Camille Pissarro," *The Arts*, no. 2 (October 1946), pp. 43-51; Robert L. and Eugenia Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 102, no. 692 (November, 1960), pp. 473-483; Michel Melot, "A Rebel's Role: Concerning the Prints of Camille Pissarro," in Christopher Lloyd, editor, *Studies on Camille Pissarro* (London: Routledge Kegan and Paul, 1986); Susan Canning, "The Ordure of Anarchy: Scatological Signs of Self and Society in Ensor's Art of the Eighties," *Art Journal*, 1990; Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future," *Art Journal*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 38-45; Joan Halperin, *Félix Féneon: Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Patricia Leighton, *Re-ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism 1897-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); John Gary Hutton, "Les Prolos Vagabondent: Neo-Impressionism and the Anarchist Image of the Trimardeur," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 72, no. 2 (June 1990), pp. 296-309; Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Socialism in the United States*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁶⁷ Ralph E. Shikes, "Pissarro's Political Philosophy and His Art," in Christopher Lloyd, ed., *Studies on Camille Pissarro* (London: Routledge Kegan and Paul, 1986), p. 47.

Neo-impressionists and anarchists shared a commitment to social improvement, theorizing that the physical harmony of the picture could assure moral harmony.⁶⁸ Paul Signac believed that there could be no prescribed anarchist aesthetic, no "look" that an artist who declared him or herself an anarchist could, *a priori*, attempt to achieve. Nor was there a system of iconography that was symbolic of anarchism. Signac wrote: "The anarchist painter is not one who will show anarchist paintings, but one who . . . will struggle with all his individuality, with a personal effort against bourgeois and official conventions."⁶⁹ Indeed, historian James Joll noted a ". . . paradox that anarchist painters don't necessarily paint anarchist art, but that, all the same, everything they do can be seen somehow as an expression of anarchism."⁷⁰

As a young man, Picasso was influenced by anarchist ideas as they were formulated in Spanish periodicals 1895-1904 and later included anarchist themes in newspaper clippings pasted in his early collages. According to

⁶⁸ See Robyn S. Roslak, "The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neo-Impressionism, Science, and Anarchism," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 78, no. 3 (September 1991), pp. 381-390.

⁶⁹ Paul Signac in James Joll, "Art and Anarchy," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 36, no. 18 (November 23, 1989), p. 38.

⁷⁰ Joll, "Art and Anarchy," p. 41.

Patricia Leighton, in doing so he subverted both traditional art logic and perceptions of the ordinary world when he "juxtaposes private with public madness in a setting of extraordinary violence wrought on images of the everyday world."⁷¹

Vasily Kandinsky used the term "anarchism" as an example which could clarify his "determination to change society not only by exploring religion . . . but also by examining other attitudes, such as anarchism, that were also considered taboo."⁷²

19th Century Anarchist Traditions With An Emphasis On Kropotkin

What follows is a general discussion of the tradition of nineteenth and early twentieth-century philosophical anarchism. Anarchism is a social philosophy that rejects authoritarian government and maintains that voluntary institutions are best suited to express the natural social tendencies of human beings. When anarchism was formally theorized in nineteenth century Western Europe, it co-existed with other emerging revolutionary ideas. Like other socialist movements, anarchism arose in opposition to

⁷¹ Leighton, *Reordering the Universe*, p. 142

⁷² Long, "Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future," p. 41.

the emergence of the modern state and of capitalism.⁷³

Martin Miller, the historian of anarchism, observed that "It is not accidental that the revolutionary extremity of opposing all civil authority did not arise until nation-states in Europe had become completely consolidated, until the organizational framework of political and economic centralization had become predominant in Europe, . . . "⁷⁴

As a movement, anarchism took on a mass character and influenced thousands of people across Europe, in the United States, and Russia between 1860 and 1930, enjoying a heyday between 1880 and 1914. For David Goodway and other historians examining anarchism's emergence, "It has long been . . . clear that classical anarchism was a direct response to nineteenth-century developments."⁷⁵

The three major theorists upon whose work the anarchist movement was based were Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who influenced the generation of the revolutions of 1848;

⁷³ See *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan Company and The Free Press, 1967), pp. 111-115. See also George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962, 1975).

⁷⁴ Martin Miller, *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1970), p. 2.

⁷⁵ David Goodway, ed., *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 3. Also see Martin Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) and Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Mikhail Bakunin, who competed directly with Marx for followers in the 1860s and early 1870s; and during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin's theories developed out of Proudhon, Bakunin, and his own experiences.

Kropotkin's ideas represented one collectivist position. As mentioned earlier he was a nobleman whose life had been one of privilege; his ideas necessarily evolved little by little. Settling in London in 1886, he wrote most of his important articles and books there. The subjects he opened to anarchist analysis included economics, science, and ethics. In 1898 he began serializing a chronicle of his life story in *The Atlantic Monthly*,⁷⁶ then followed up with the published book form in 1899 entitled *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*.

Barnett Newman may have read *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* as early as the 1920s since that is when he discovered Kropotkin. Newman was captivated by *Memoirs of a*

⁷⁶ The project started as a result of lectures Kropotkin gave in Boston in 1897. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* was published first by Houghton, Mifflin, & Co. in 1899. For more information on Kropotkin's two visits to Canada and the United States see Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 79-106; Roger Baldwin, editor, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover Press, 1970), pp. 25-27; George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 275-281, 284-287.

Revolutionist in two ways. He wrote that *Memoirs* contained all of Kropotkin's arguments for anarchism. Newman also praised the book as a compelling and engaging story of a supremely ethical individual.

Memoirs of a Revolutionist is neither theoretical nor propagandistic. It is written as a descriptive narrative that highlights the writer's growing sensitivity, during his childhood and early adulthood, to state-mandated oppression. In *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* Kropotkin told his life story up to 1886.

Kropotkin received the commission to write the article on anarchism commissioned for the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In this 1905 article Kropotkin describes anarchism as a political philosophy and provides a history of the precursors of anarchist thought. He states that at anarchism's core is the belief that a maximum of individual freedom and voluntary cooperation among individuals provide the foundation for a just society. In the just society every person would:

obtain the full development of all his faculties, intellectual, artistic and moral, without being hampered by overwork for the monopolists, or by the servility and inertia of mind of the great number. He would thus be able to reach full individualization, which is not possible either under the present system of individualism, or

under any system of State socialism in the so-called Volkstaat (popular State).⁷⁷

Kropotkin's emphasis on individualization rather than individualism is key to understanding his, and Barnett Newman's, points of view. One common misunderstanding many thinkers have is that anarchism's goal is individualism. Early mention of Newman's anarchism, it will be seen, described it as individualist.

Indeed, an individualist ideology characterizes some anarchism, therefore Roger Baldwin's clarification is useful here. Baldwin wrote the Introduction to Kropotkin's collected *Revolutionary Pamphlets* (previously mentioned) and explained to American readers how Kropotkin differed from the individualist stream of anarchist thought. Baldwin stated that Kropotkin found the individualist anarchism of Benjamin Tucker and Max Stirner ". . . hopelessly conservative, committed only to winning personal liberty without a revolutionary change in the economic system."⁷⁸ In fact, Kropotkin was alarmed by the "ferocity of his [Stirner's] teachings." Baldwin contrasted Stirner's

⁷⁷Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchism" reprinted in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970): 285. (This book is a reprint of 1927 Vanguard Press, Inc.)

⁷⁸ Roger Baldwin, editor, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (N.Y.: The Vanguard Press, 1927), p. 5.

"egoist" anarchism against Kropotkin's communist anarchism. Kropotkin said of individualism in general, so often misconceived as the leading principle of anarchism:

"Individualism, narrowly egocentric, is incapable of inspiring anybody. There is nothing great or gripping in it. Individuality can attain its supreme development only in the highest common social effort."⁷⁹

George Woodcock, an historian of anarchism, agreed with Baldwin that Stirner's individualist ideas were in conflict with the notion that the human species is naturally inclined toward the social collective. For clarification then, it is important to reiterate that Kropotkin saw artists as capable of using their art "toward the goal of the higher, common social effort."⁸⁰ This sheds light on Barnett Newman's startling comment that if people understood his abstract art, it would mean the end of capitalist society.

In order to articulate the relevant features of anarchism, another misconception must be addressed. One of the ways in which the term "anarchism" is most commonly

⁷⁹ Baldwin, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ See George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p.280-281; Donald Drew Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts* (New York: Knopf, 1970), pp. 220-226.

misunderstood, is in its immediate association with violence, unconstrained chaos, and wholesale refutation of any law. While anarchism advocates revolution, it does not always advocate violence. Martin Miller pointed out a most striking paradox, "anarchist theory posits a belief in man's reason, goodness, and perfectibility while in practice it gave birth to such illegitimate offspring as the terrorist excesses of assassination and a strong current of anti-intellectualism among many of its adherents"⁸¹ in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Kropotkin himself believed the revolution would be gradual and condemned violence (in most circumstances) in service of revolution. Instead, as already mentioned, he believed that *revolutionary change occurs through a change in consciousness.*

Mutual Aid

Newman stated that he believed *Mutual Aid* was Kropotkin's most important book. It was written in 1899. Newman was not alone in his assessment. Many historians of anarchism agree.

⁸¹ Miller, *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, p. 4.

Historian Martin Miller called the theory set out in *Mutual Aid* a first rate resource to the key ideas in Kropotkin's thinking.

His social theory, its faults notwithstanding, is a moral protest against the inhumanity of the modern world. Its strength is a tribute to Kropotkin's moral indignation at the exploitation, inequality, and subordination which burdens the majority of society. . . . The metaphors and image of his argument hold together primarily because they are infused with a passionate moral concern. This is Kropotkin's enduring appeal-his ethical humanism, his devotion to the cause of uplifting man. His assumptions about man, which remain a crucial part of each section of his theory, are consistent with this morality. . . . It was a magnificent attempt to reshape a terrible reality in his own beneficent image and to convince the world of the goodness and hope which he saw in it.⁸²

Mutual aid continued the eighteenth-century tradition of Rousseau — believing in the essential goodness and simplicity of man before he was corrupted by institutions. This is an important association that anarchism makes with primitivism. Indeed, happiness is the goal of the ideal anarchist society. Kropotkin explained in the basis of the principle of mutual aid:

But it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience-be it only at the stage of an instinct-of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each

⁸² Martin Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 196.

man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual, as equal to his own. Upon this broad and necessary foundation the still higher moral feelings are developed.⁸³

This idea of sociability, that society is the natural condition for man, is important for understanding a context for Newman's "struggle". Not for a moment did he think of himself as absolutely alone. He presupposed his position to be part of the role that the artist plays in society. This concept is relevant when distinguishing Newman from the Existentialist ideal, and the idea of isolated or rather alienated, individual.⁸⁴ The anarchist believes in a collective humankind, drawing strength from like-minded individuals. And yes, is alienated from the bourgeois *status quo*. Yet this was exactly the relationship a serious artist expected to have with the complacent bourgeoisie.

An Interpretive Tool: The Dialogical Principle

In discussing Newman's mature art, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical principle will provide a useful interpretive tool. Dialogism theorizes the way that communication takes

⁸³ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (Middlesex, England: Pelican Books, 1939), pp.xiii-xiv.

⁸⁴ The concept of Existentialist alienation derives from alienation as understood in Marxism.

place. According to this model, communication results within and from a series of, or a plurality of, conversations between artwork and audience. Indeed, a work of art is not complete until it is "performed". In other words, until interaction with the viewer, reader, or audience occurs a work of art does not communicate. This puts the emphasis on reception without negating the artist's intentions.⁸⁵

Bakhtin's theories were first translated into English in the 1960s, making it highly unlikely that Barnett Newman knew them. Nevertheless Newman would have been sympathetic to Bakhtin's ideas. Newman would have, no doubt, seriously considered Bakhtin's literary theory, Dialogism, since it claims that "language derives its meanings from dialogue."⁸⁶ (Newman would have also been sympathetic to Bakhtin's life

⁸⁵ This is still lacking in David Craven's *Abstract Expressionism As Cultural Critique*, as art and cultural historian Erika Doss pointed out in a book review. She said that Craven's "primary look at the paintings, centers on the analysis that their handmade and automatist aesthetic challenged the dehumanizing sphere of post- World War II industrial and commercial labor, an analysis which, however plausible, could just as easily be applied to any variety of handmade objects and imaged (like folk art)." See Erika Doss, "Review," www.caareviews.org/reviews (1999).

⁸⁶ Stanley Aronowitz, *Dead Authors Live Theories* (N.Y.: Routledge, 1994): p. 140. See also, Katarina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Ma: 1984); Michael Holquist, editor, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

story because of the circumstances under which Bakhtin wrote. Despite oppressive circumstances imposed by the Soviet government, Bakhtin never veered from his life's work. Bakhtin's theories were not well known in the West before the 1980s. Stanley Aronowitz astutely recognized that since the 1980s, with the increasing number of translations and analyses available, "Bakhtin is one of the giants of the twentieth-century social and cultural theory."⁸⁷

Dialogism has recently been interpreted in light of anarchist theory. In 1998 Robert Barsky noted: "The critical link . . . between anarchism in general and Bakhtin's approach — is the belief, explicit and implicit in the corpus . . . that maximal freedom of interaction, movement, and intermingling is a vital and invigorating element of human development, that any attempt to limit human diversity and freedom is an impediment to this development. . . ."⁸⁸

In *The Social Production of Art*, 1993, Janet Wolff explained how Bakhtin contrasted the dialogic and polyphonic against the monologic novel. Bakhtin spoke of

⁸⁷ Aronowitz, *Dead Authors Live Theories*, p. 139.

⁸⁸ Robert F. Barsky, "Bakhtin As Anarchist?," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 97: no.3/4 (Summer/Fall 1998), p. 625.

"The plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses and the genuine polyphony of full-valued voices" when he analyzed the effects of Dostoevsky's novels. He continued: "It is not a multitude of characters and fates within a unified objective world, illuminated by the author's unified consciousness that unfolds in his works, but precisely the *plurality of equal consciousnesses and their worlds*, which are combined here into the unity of a given event, while at the same time retaining their unmergedness."⁸⁹ Wolff then concluded that, for Bakhtin, "The importance of the polyphonic novel is that it recognizes the complexity of the modern world, the dialogic nature of human consciousness, and the 'profound ambiguity' of every voice, gesture, and act."⁹⁰ One is reminded that philosophical anarchism stresses maximum freedom, autonomy, and interdependence.

On a number of occasions Newman repeated his audacious answer to the question of what his painting meant. He said, "that if you understood my work, it would be the end

⁸⁹ Mikail Bakhtin quoted in Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, 2nd edition (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 127.

⁹⁰ Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, p. 128.

of state capitalism and all totalitarianism."⁹¹ Newman believed that it was possible to experience maximal freedom when one encountered his art, which he also defined as the open situation. For Newman, the phrase "open situation," (which derives from existential philosophy) alluded to the anti-dogmatic nature of his art. He explained what this means in relation to one specific audience, other artists who looked at his art:

I think, it seems to me that the conversation or the dialogue in painting, in the arts, is this crucial question: what is the nature of human feeling? I feel that I'm free to make any kind of line. As a matter of fact my earliest works had every type of line you can imagine. Somehow I found this way. Not because I chose a line; it's because I think what's happened is, in my own work I have perhaps found for myself a new way of drawing and it's never been examined, even objectively by those who are concerned with that problem. And in this new way of drawing I have perhaps created some sort of freedom that, in that sense, as helped a lot of artists reexamine the whole question. Now, I think the issue in the end is the issue of freedom. . . . I do not have a dogmatic position in relation to painting as a style. It's my personal way. It's my way. And at the same time I don't insist that the only way you can make a painting is to draw this kind of a line, or to handle this kind of an edge, or handle this kind of a surface. As a matter of fact I'm against this sort of thing in relation for example to the talk that I hear that I've had, you know, a good deal of influence on other painters. I think it's precisely because I have not pre-insisted

⁹¹ Barnett Newman, "Interview Transcript of Barnett Newman," March 20, 1966, Allen Solomon Papers, Archives of American Art, Roll 3923, frame 306.

[sic] on a dogmatic situation. Somehow what I've done has, I think, inspired, maybe, other people to free themselves of these conventions. . . . Whatever has happened in relation toward my work has happened on its own.⁹²

⁹² Newman, interview with Allen Solomon.

Chapter 2

1920s: The Student and His Worlds

During the 1920s Newman flirted with what Thomas Hess called "a heretical but blithe anarchism,"¹ attended college and art school, and wrote his first reviews. He also became friends with men he would know his entire life including photographer Aaron Siskind, music critic Max Margulis, and painter Adolph Gottlieb. Newman's academic culture and the art world of the 1920s are significant because of their formative role in Newman's and his friends' development as self-described, culturally sophisticated "modern young men."²

Barnett Newman became interested in anarchism during his undergraduate period. He stated that he read Kropotkin when he went to college, but he never indicated exactly what he read.

Newman was a philosophy major at City College which he attended from 1923-1927. Led by Morris Cohen, the philosophy department was the most popular department on

¹ Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (N.Y.: Walker and Co., 1969), p. 12.

² Aaron Siskind, interview with author, April 16, 1990.

the all-male campus. Much credit for the popularity goes to Professor Cohen who was a major figure in American intellectual discourse in the 1920s and 1930s, and who established himself as one of the most forceful personalities on the faculty.³ Cohen was a consolidating agent in the formation of the secular, ethnically diverse, left of center City College intelligentsia that was to become institutionalized by the 1940s. He was a mentor during the 1920s and '30s to, among others, Paul Goodman, and philosophers William Barrett, Sidney Hook, and Paul Weiss.⁴

In 1928, the year after Newman graduated, students paid tribute to Morris Cohen. Paul Weiss (class of '27) said, "He refuses to spread gospel so that he may breed thinkers."⁵ Weiss described the esteemed professor's method as follows: "He asks a simple question. The answers are

³ David Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen and the Scientific Ideal* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1975), ix-xii.

⁴ Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen and the Scientific Ideal*, p.x.

⁵ *A Tribute to Professor Morris Raphael Cohen Teacher and Philosopher* (New York: "The Youth Who Sat at His Feet," 1928), 101. Students felt great pride about being part of Cohen's flock. It is said that on weekends City College students gathered at Cohen's home. Annalee Newman remembered visiting her friend Leonora, Cohen's daughter. The young men focused all of their attention on their professor, thereby disappointing the young women. Annalee Newman, interview with author, June 1994.

skillfully analyzed until all the implications are revealed. Issues are stripped of confusing details and stand out clearly in their essential character. . . . Every situation is taken on its merits; no solution is urged because it fits in with an acknowledged system. . . . There is no Cohen school; there are no Cohenians. Few of his former students accept his position and few of his students know what it is."⁶ Indeed, Cohen encouraged dialogue in his classroom and stepped back from imposing his own world view out of "respect for the individual personality of the student."⁷

Cohen's attitude and ideas may have reinforced Newman's sense of being an enlightened, modern young man. The one City College instructor Newman spoke highly of was Scott Buchanan. Nothing in the curriculum at City College suggests that an entering philosophy student would leave and become an anarchist. Certainly many philosophical positions that were taught at City College reinforced the importance of the moral, thoughtful man as an antidote to a materialist society. Still, Kropotkin may have been

⁶ *A Tribute to Professor Morris Raphael Cohen Teacher and Philosopher*, p.102.

⁷ Morris Cohen quoted in Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, *How We Lived 1880-1930* (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1979), p. 208.

included in classes at City College at this time as well. The syllabus for a class at The People's Institute on modern political thought included a lecture on Kropotkin.⁸ Scott Buchanan taught and worked as Assistant Director at the People's Institute during the mid-1920s. Using various locations in lower Manhattan, such as Cooper Union for its activities, The People's Institute offered adult education classes and forums.

When Newman took Buchanan's class at City College, he became excited about the prospect of seeing modern European art, and proposed a group visit to the newly formed Barnes Foundation.⁹ Newman's first protest statement was against the exclusivity of a private collection of modern art. From the beginning, Newman realized that anarchism was compatible with his own attitudes toward modern artistic practice. the Barnes Foundation rebuffed Newman's inquiries because only those who took art classes there were admitted to view the collection. Fuelled by disillusionment and angry at the rejection, Newman wrote a statement that

⁸ Course description, "The Dreams of Social Redemption, Can They Ever Come True?," Papers of the People's Institute, Special Collections, The Cooper Union Library, New York.

⁹ Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1978), p. 229.

decried the policies of the Barnes Foundation¹⁰ Newman's ire is evident in his hyperbolic declaration: ". . . in Pennsylvania a school has grown up which besides stirring up false artistic creation has committed a gross crime against humanity."¹¹ Newman perceived the problem as one of elitist restrictions at the expense of public opportunity. He also believed that Barnes' desire to impose a 'one line' interpretation of the artworks on anyone was a foolish constraint. Newman continued, "Mr. Barnes has closed his collection to the public [because] it is unbearable to have anybody peer over the shoulders of the student concentrating on the profound study of Mr. Barnes's 'textbooks,' the dozens of Cézannes and Renoirs . . ." ¹²

Scott Buchanan may have encouraged Newman's protest because Buchanan himself later revealed his commitment to fine arts. In 1967 he recalled: "I taught aesthetics for quite a number of years when I first began teaching. We took it very seriously. This was for me not just a little side

¹⁰ Barnett Newman, "Concerning Objective Criticism," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 57-58. The essay may have been titled by the editors of *Selected Writings*. For discussions of Barnes' theories see Milton Brown's seminal *American Painting From the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 96.

¹¹ Newman, "Concerning Objective Criticism," p. 57.

¹² Newman, "Concerning Objective Criticism," p. 57.

show in philosophy; it was the new world coming through."¹³ Newman's friends in City College's literary club, Clionia, remembered Newman's infuriation with perceived injustices. Aaron Siskind and Max Margulis described Newman as fiery in his opinions."¹⁴

Newman first published art review appeared in City College's literary magazine, *The Lavender*, in 1925. Titled "Critic Turned Artist" it is an essay about the exhibition of paintings by formalist critic Roger Fry held at Joseph Brummer Gallery on East 57th Street, January 19 -February 7, 1925. The one-man show included twenty-three paintings and twelve watercolors and drawings.

Primarily a dealer in Greek, Romanesque and Gothic sculpture, Brummer also exhibited both modern European and American art. "He saw himself as intermediary between the artist and the public" who presented major exhibitions in 1924 of Matisse (March) and Seurat (December).¹⁵ The Americans he showed were a variety, including Abraham

¹³ Scott Buchanan, in Harris Wofford, ed., *Embers of the World: Scott Buchanan's Conversations With Harris Wofford, Jr.* (Santa Barbara: The Center for the Study of Democratic Insititutions, 1970), p. 140.

¹⁴ Aaron Siskind, interview with author, April 1990, and Max Margulis, interview with author, June, 1996.

¹⁵ Susan Platt Noyes, *Modernism in the 1920s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Rearch Press, 1985), p.30.

Walkowitz, Alfred Maurer, and Bernard Karfiol. He exhibited School of Paris artists as well as German Expressionists. According to Aaron Siskind, Newman and his City College friends visited Brummer Gallery as well as with a few other galleries frequently.¹⁶ Characterizing the art galleries that interested Art Students League students in the late 1920's Dorothy Dehner wrote that the League instructors (in this case Jan Matulka) recommended galleries where modern art was regularly shown. The galleries were J. B. Neumann's New Art Circle, Valentine, Brummer, and Reinhardt.¹⁷

Newman's writing was especially prescient, demonstrating characteristics that would remain consistent in most of his writing. Of primary importance, he passionately defended Fry's "right to express an individual vision."¹⁸ Newman's tone was partial, almost polemical. He actually structured his review as a fight for the underdog -- Fry, the artist -- who was pitted against New York's

¹⁶ Siskind, April 1990.

¹⁷ Dorothy Dehner, "Memories of Jan Matulka," in *National Collection of Fine Arts, Jan Matulka 1890-1972* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), p. 78.

¹⁸ Barnett Newman, "Critic Turned Artist," *The Lavender*, March 1925, p. 24; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 54-56.

closed ranks of professional critics. Newman essentially attacked the critics who had attacked the exhibition in their newspaper columns.

At the 57th St. gallery, portraits, landscapes, and still-life subjects were exhibited by Roger Fry. Newman admired some of Fry's paintings and used Fry's own critical vocabulary to analyze them. For example, Newman described a particular still life as, "Constrained, yet dynamic, it vibrates with its effusion of powerful forms. It is the best organized of his works, achieving an indissoluble organic unity."¹⁹ Newman found that the best paintings achieve organic unity and significant form, which he termed "drama of form".²⁰ Appraising the exhibition objectively, Newman also included discussion of unsuccessful paintings: He called one painting "very stupid."

Newman's essay has not previously been examined by art historians, yet its ideas, language, and tone are

¹⁹ Newman, "Critic Turned Artist," p. 24.

²⁰ Newman may have read Fry's and Clive Bell's criticism. He would have known Bell's term "significant form" from *Art*, first published in 1914 and continuously reprinted. *Vision and Design*, Fry's collected essays, was published in 1920. It included chapters on primitive art, modern artists, and artists in history. Fry and Bell were closely identified with promoting formalism. Formalism provided a means of analyzing universal aesthetic quality in any artwork, regardless of culture or era of production. See Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), pp. 78-86, 113-116.

remarkably prescient. Significantly, Newman structured most of this essay as a protest against other reviews of Fry's exhibition. He read newspaper accounts of the exhibition and added his opinion to the mix. Using terms that he found in another article, he began with a subtle but sarcastic reference.

The New York Times reviewer had used the word 'dull' a number of times to describe a certain quality in Fry's paintings. He said: "The new paintings are perhaps a little dull" then qualified "they have the beauty of dullness," and specifically, a "charming dullness."²¹ The reviewer drew his own double-edged sword: he both criticized it in relation to French masters and welcomed it in relation to "a season of what is called barbaric color but of what is not barbaric color; of what is on the contrary color of a civilization so toughened by shocks of contrast and crudity that only violence has power to stimulate the optic nerve." In this way the reviewer reveals his aversion to modernism's increasing presence in New York City. He concluded:

²¹ "The World of Art," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1925, Sec. 4, page 18.

Everyone else is bright," said the wisest of Chinese philosophers. "I alone am dull, so dull."²²

Newman honed in on the reviewer's theme and started his own essay with the words: "Out of the mass of dull art exhibitions there recently emerged one intensely interesting . . ."²³ After this, Newman continued with what can only be seen as somewhat resentful comments. He suggested that New York critics visited the exhibition "not with open minds, to see and to appreciate. They brought with them preconceived notions which were not lost even after they saw the pictures -- if we are to assume that they were present at the galleries at all."²⁴ The established art reviewers represented to Newman authority figures who could not accept the famed formalist critic, Fry, crossing disciplines to create art.

Newman refuted the critics who judged Fry's paintings. For more than half of his article he defended Fry as if Fry had been cruelly and mercilessly beaten down by critics. Newman contended that critics held so much prejudice against Fry that they were unable to view clearly. Defending Fry

²² "The World of Art," Sec. 4, page 18.

²³ Newman, "Critic Turned Artist," p. 24.

²⁴ Newman, "Critic Turned Artist," p. 24.

throughout the rest of the essay, Newman pointed out time and again an unfairness he believed the critics leveled against the artist. For one thing Fry was accused, Newman said, of appearing derivative of other artists. To Newman, this was absurd:

Influence can not spoil a painter so long as he does not become an automatic copyist of his predecessor. Certainly Mr. Fry is not that. Whether good or bad, he is absolutely individual. His forms are not Cezanne's or Poussin's or those of anybody else. They are his own.²⁵

Essentially, Newman came up with his idea that the press disapproved of Fry's very decision to paint. Therefore they were *predisposed* to viewing the paintings unsympathetically. In fact, the most important aspect of Fry's exhibit was neither form nor content of the paintings, but rather the mere fact that Fry expressed himself as an artist. The New York press went to the exhibition with a set of a priori notions which, in Newman's opinion, did not allow an unprejudiced encounter with the art works. Newman defended Fry against the critics as he would throughout his entire life for himself, colleagues, and art that he believed in. Newman defended Fry's rather conventional art with this pronouncement,

²⁵ Newman, "Critic Turned Artist," p. 24.

"Whether good or bad, he is absolutely individual. His forms . . . are his own."

Newman had most likely read *Vision and Design*, which was published in 1920, since he introduced Fry as, ". . . famous for his contributions to the science of aesthetics, for his additions to our knowledge of primitive art, for his opinions of men and schools, and for his work in the modern movement . . ." According to Newman, Fry had "no pet theories." According to Newman, Fry believed that aesthetics were for all time and universal. For Newman, writings focused on "those things which every great artist has known and felt, but which none has been able to put in words."²⁶ In fact, Fry was to be commended for going further than any critic previously had, and actually painting.

²⁶ Newman, "Critic Turned Artist," p. 24. Possible sources for Newman's point of view could be Sheldon Cheney's *Primer of Modern Art* (1924), the first survey of modernism published in this country. Cheney combined his understanding of expressionism with the ideas of Clive Bell and Roger Fry, coining the term "expressive form." "Expressiveness . . . arise[s] from three sorts of intensification: of the essential or structural quality . . .; of the artist's subjective emotion, of the "image" emotionally conceived out of his passion for absolute . . . aesthetic . . . it is the subjective, emotional expression, which is at the heart of the matter. Sheldon Cheney, as cited in Susan Platt Noyes, *Modernism in the 1920s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985).

The *New York Times* article mentioned above was tepid. A *New York Herald Tribune* was less charitable. Its reviewer said of Fry, ". . . his handling is inert, his tones are often wooly, and he leaves altogether the impression of an amateurish phase of technique."²⁷ The review gave Newman more reason to defend Fry.

Henry Schnakenberg, an important instructor at the Art Students League, also wrote a review, which appeared in the March 1925 issue of *The Arts*.²⁸ Schnakenberg, in effect, praised Fry for the same reasons that Newman did. Although not wildly enthusiastic, Schnakenberg liked Fry's paintings because they were not stagnantly reliant on influences. "Mr. Fry's canvasses are with few exceptions, impressions of various parts of France which despite the French scene and evidence of influence of French artists, . . . remain thoroughly British."²⁹ He then stated: "The greater artist can incorporate any amount of knowledge with no loss of individuality, but the lesser man will either be intimidated by the overpowering of what has been done or will be in the rather ambiguous position of a medium . .

²⁷"Random Impressions In Current Exhibitions," *NY Herald Tribune*, January 25, 1925, part IV, p.20.

²⁸ H.E. Schnakenberg, "Roger Fry," *The Arts*, March 1925. P. 173.

²⁹ Schnakenberg, "Roger Fry," p. 173.

.³⁰ Thus Schnakenberg drove home the point that individuation is an important goal for modern artists. Schnackenberg's idea contains elements that were important to art students at the League. The same idea was reinforced by the League's diverse instructors. It is also a concept crucial to modern art, and would be explained in a more comprehensive and sophisticated text decades later by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*. (Bloom's very argument in *The Anxiety of Influence* in turn, encapsulates the struggle Newman waged to define himself as an artist in the 1940s and 1950s.)

In the early 1920s Newman's formative education began in earnest. He attended the Art Students League in 1922-23, when he was still in high school and intermittently during his college years, 1923-1927.³¹ He took his artistic cues from the Art Students League's instructors and from the atmosphere of unfettered freedom pervading the League's studios. The Art Students League was a magnet for ambitious, aspiring artists from all parts of the United States, as well as for those art students native to New York City. If not necessarily known for their pictorial

³⁰ Schnakenberg, "Roger Fry," p. 173.

³¹ Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*, p. 229.

modernism, the instructors were notable for their ideas regarding artistic freedom and individuality. Such was the case of at least two of Newman's teachers, John Sloan and Harry Wickey.

One of the most significant instructors at the League, Sloan was known for his realist style. Nonetheless Sloan introduced his students to modernist art, such as Cubism, and he inspired students with his lectures about developing an individual vision. Sloan taught hundreds of students from 1916 to 1932 and from 1935 to 38. He encouraged the rich variety of creative attitudes that each individual manifested, among whom were Reginald Marsh, Alexander Calder, David Smith, and Adolph Gottlieb. Newman studied with John Sloan at the Art Students League only at the end 1920s while Gottlieb, whom Newman met in 1922, studied with Sloan much earlier.

Sloan stressed that art students need to feel maximum freedom to find their own expression. Drawing on his experience in radical politics, he commented that Ferrer Center leader and anarchist Emma Goldman's view of the artist's subjects was too narrow. She recommended that artists represent life in a realistic style. Sloan compiled his thoughts for art students in *The Gist of Art*.

He spoke of the artist's position in society — as both inside of it and outside of it. He told his students:

We live in a complex world in which we are mutually interdependent. But the artist must be independent. . . . The artist has always had to fight for his life, for freedom of expression, for the right to say what he believes.³²

and that:

An artist is a product of life, a social creature. Of necessity he cannot mingle with people as much as he would like, but he reaches them through his work. The artist is a spectator of life. He understands it without needing to have physical experiences. He doesn't need to participate in adventures. The artist is interested in life the way God is interested in the Universe.³³

Sloan's ability to reach out to all young artists, no matter what their stylistic proclivity, impressed Newman and Gottlieb strongly. Others were impressed as well. A 1929 student, Aaron Bohrod, reminisced:

My first view of John Sloan came when he quietly entered our classroom, looked about a while at the easels which held the canvases started the day before, planted himself in the middle of the studio floor and talked. He spoke for an hour. He spoke, it seemed to me, of everything under the sun. . . . Finally, close to home, he talked of painting; conservative painting, modern painting, modernistic painting. He explained wherein the distinctions lay.³⁴

³² John Sloan, *The Gist of Art* (New York: American Artist Group Inc., 1939), p. 190.

³³ Sloan, *The Gist of Art*, p. 189.

³⁴ Aaron Bohrod, "On John Sloan," *College Art Journal*, vol. 10 (Fall 1950), pp. 3-4.

Sloan may have taught techniques, but his inspiration came from the advice he gave.³⁵ He recommended: "Draw everything you see or *imagine* or *dream* of, and draw in every conceivable way" because his goal was to help "the student make his own road through the jungle of art trends."³⁶ Indeed, in 1933 Barnett Newman named John Sloan as one of the contemporary artists whom he most admired.

Another League instructor who emphasized freedom and individual expression was Harry Wickey. Newman also studied "Life Drawing and Painting" with him. Both Sloan and Wickey had visited the Ferrer Center frequently during the 1910s where they partook of anarchist activities and anarchist-inspired classes. Wickey attended Robert Henri's art classes at the Ferrer Center and described them enthusiastically. Wickey, perhaps attracted to the Center's lively bohemian atmosphere appreciated his experience thoroughly. Sloan, taking the advice of his friend and mentor Robert Henri, attended Emma Goldman's lectures there.

³⁵ Mary Davis McNaughton, *Adolph Gottlieb, A Retrospective*, (N.Y.: The Arts Publisher, Inc., 1981), p.12-14 discusses the range of influence Sloan had on Adolph Gottlieb beginning in 1921. He helped shape Gottlieb's early style and thinking in terms of traditional methods, newer techniques, and open-minded attitudes.

To follow this lineage more closely for a moment, Robert Henri influenced numerous artists at the Ferrer Center. Paul Avrich, an historian of anarchism, wrote in *The Modern School Movement* that the Ferrer Center was founded by anarchists Emma Goldman and Harry Kelly early in the 20th Century "when anarchists, syndicalists, and socialists mingled together on friendly terms." The Center, with its myriad classes, lectures, and social events was a magnet for activists, artists, and intellectuals. As one of its leaders said: "Here we found a civilized socialism which had in it the spirit of freedom and was devoid of dogmatic principles that soon dissolved into doubts."³⁷ Not surprisingly, the anarchists' "chief ideological mentor" was Kropotkin, who had made a strong impression on American radicals.

Henri taught art at the Ferrer Center "virtually throughout its entire existence," from 1911 through 1918. Besides those mentioned above, students in Henri's classes included Rockwell Kent, Man Ray, Max Weber, Abraham Walkowitz, Samuel Halpert, Adolff Wolff, William and Marguerite Zorach, and numerous others. He also team-taught with George Bellows.

³⁶ Bohrod, "On John Sloan," p. 7.

³⁷ Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 19), pp. 128-135.

Attesting further to the diversity of what constituted the "modern" in early 20th century American art circles was that fairly conservative formal solutions were acceptable if the ideas spoke to the modern man. Henri's *The Art Spirit* was widely read and has remained in print since it was first published in 1923. In the midst of discussing ways to use brushstroke and color to achieve liveliness that stirs the sensitive eye's imagination, Henri interrupts himself to speak generally of the modern artist:

. . . I do not mean by my "modern man" anyone who is in or out of the "modernist school" or in or out of any school. I mean the modern man whoever or wherever he may be. Nor am I speaking of the generality of work as it appears in our exhibitions. I am speaking of something of which we have a glimmer, sometimes very faint, here and there.³⁸

The Art Spirit is studded with appreciation of a modern sensibility interspersed among Henri's advice regarding technique. He included in *The Art Spirit* a short essay that he had originally published, in 1909, titled "Individuality and Freedom in Art." It begins:

It seems to me that before a man tries to express anything to the world he must recognize in himself an individual, a new one, very distinct from others. Walt Whitman did this and that is why I think his name so often comes to me. The one great cry of Whitman was for a man to find himself, to understand the fine thing he

³⁸ Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1923), p. 63.

really is if liberated. . . . every single person in the world has evidence to give of his own individuality, providing he has acquired the full power to make clear this evidence.³⁹

Henri's overall goal in *The Art Spirit* is inspirational, to impart the totality of the art-making experience to readers, those readers being art students. And throughout he emphasizes freedom. He calls good painters inventors and poets.⁴⁰

Henri was known for his anarchist tendencies, and he first sought out Emma Goldman after he heard her speak in Toledo and New York. He introduced himself, then told her "I enjoy your magazine [*Mother Earth*], especially the articles on Walt Whitman. I love Walt, and I follow everything that is written about him."⁴¹ His rapport with Goldman led him to teach art at the Ferrer Center. Henri even painted Emma Goldman's portrait.

Barnett Newman was, of course, too young to attend the Ferrer Center or experience Henri directly. Henri's influence on Sloan and American art of the next generation was tremendous. The filter through which Newman learned the

³⁹ Henri, *The Art Spirit*, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Henri, *The Art Spirit*, 137.

⁴¹ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1931), (reprint New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), vol. 2, p. 529.

sensibility of modern art was saturated with Henri's calls for freedom, self-knowledge, and individuality. Henri's thought also had tremendous influence at the Art Students League where he taught from 1912 until 1928, a year before his death at age 64. Adolph Gottlieb attended his lectures in 1921⁴²; perhaps Newman sat in during the mid-twenties.

The Art Students League instructors were prime sources for Newman's viewpoints. John Sloan's ideas still held great currency, and in fact Newman most likely studied with him as late as 1929-30. He explained the value of modern art in a 1930 radio broadcast that was soon excerpted in *Art Digest*. Sloan maintained that:

The modern movement, besides restoring to their places of first importance the mental viewpoint, plastic realization and the use of signals or signs rather than the visual imitations, has even gone so far as to eliminate any recognizable representation — thus forcefully pointing to the fact that representation was never a matter of primary aesthetic importance in the art of the past and was used as a carrier or cover for the fundamental aesthetic qualities and the underlying technical principles.

⁴² McNaughton, *Adolph Gottlieb, A Retrospective*, p.11. She relates that, "Henri's non-academic approach to painting, which he espoused in these lively talks, left its imprint on Gottlieb. He was especially affected by Henri's advice to paint directly on the canvas, instead of from a preliminary sketch."

Sloan believed the modern art movement was the "salutary and effective medicine" needed to cure the "disease" of academic art.⁴³

This was in direct contrast to the traditionally academic City College art department. Newman took an art class during his last semester at City College, so he was in a position to contrast the academic atmosphere in his City College art class against the atmosphere of freedom at the League. Thomas Hess recounted Newman's story:

Once he was drawing from a plaster cast of Juno, and had pulled the image out across the whole sheet of paper, when the professor came in and in scandalized tones began to set the young amateur straight. Newman gave him a hostile look and said, "You don't understand; this is *modern art*!"⁴⁴

But what exactly did "modern" mean? During the 1920s and 1930s concepts of modern art in the United States were still, at best, in flux, and at worst, in contention. One encounters in reading terms such as modern, modernistic, ultra-modern, advanced, extremist and of course, the modern movement. Newman was certainly interested in modern art. Newman was certainly devoted to modern art. And to him, modern art meant Matisse, and it also meant the art discussed at the Art Students League as well as Roger Fry's

⁴³ John Sloan quoted in "Painting by Eye," *The Art Digest*, vol. 5, no. 7 (January 1, 1931), pp. 27-28.

paintings. As an irregular contributor to his college's tri-weekly newspaper, Newman wrote about musical performances taking place in New York City. In one instance he glowingly compared some musical phrasing to Matisse's linear simplicity. In 1933 he named John Sloan as one of his favorite artists. "Modern" was understood in various ways. American artists heatedly discussed the concept of the modern. Any exact meaning remained unresolved. During these early years the terminology used to describe current and new art forms was being constructed.

One thing was certain, and that was that Newman was concerned about the modern artist as much as he was concerned about modern art. He shared his enthusiasm with a coterie of young men, mostly fellow City College students. The group fervently believed in the necessity of art and even considered the modern artist to be an inspired person. "We saw the artist as a supreme person who saw the world with calm objectivity. All in our group had this high regard for the artist," explained photographer, Aaron Siskind. Siskind was a City College English major who wrote poetry and published it in *The Lavender*, the same journal where Newman's art review appeared. Both Siskind

⁴⁴ Hess, *Barnett Newman*, (1969), p. 14.

and Newman participated in Clionia meetings, their college literary society. Others with whom Newman remained friends included music aficionado Max Margulis; these students discussed the latest literature and stayed abreast of art exhibitions in New York City. Many of the fellows whom Newman knew, especially those in Clionia, became his lifelong friends, including Aaron Siskind, William Lipkind, Leo Yamin, and Max Margulis. They considered their tastes to be ahead of their professors. They made it a point to be current by visiting museums and galleries together, attending concerts, and reading. They recited and critiqued T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound. This is the group to which Newman brought Adolph Gottlieb. Though Gottlieb was not a college student, he took part in their discussions and also made long-lasting friendships. Gottlieb later painted portraits of Aaron Siskind (ca. 1927) and Max Margulis (ca. 1935). His *Alex With the Balalayka* (1930) is a portrait of Alexander Borodulin, one of Newman's best friends. Borodulin was Newman's running mate in the mayoral campaign they publicized in 1933.

The *Lavender*, their literary magazine, had a high tone but writing definitely identifiable as student work. Paul Weiss, who edited *The Lavender* in 1926 put it in perspective when he thought back and described himself and

his friends as "equally ignorant, equally hungry."⁴⁵ Aaron Siskind published poems, Yamin wrote short stories. Their intentions, ever serious, provided the impetus to explore the arts and letters.

Scott Buchanan was popular among the students in Newman's circle. *The Lavender* (lavender is City College's school color) published a talk he delivered to the Philosophy Club. Buchanan demonstrated the relevancy of philosophy in the contemporary world as a humanistic antidote to a scientific culture. "Like an epic or a dream, a great scientific theory objectifies our experience. It gives us perspective, psychic distance and disinterestedness, in a word, objectivity." He wrote in favor of scrutinizing science with a critical eye, giving it a "philosophic overhauling." He concluded: "Philosophy is the seasoning of our intellectual food to be found in art, science, the life of all practical men and perhaps most purely in the critic."⁴⁶

The campus publication demonstrated the students' high level of accomplishment. They wrote essays on many topics: they analyzed literature, published their own fiction.

⁴⁵ Paul Weiss, interview with author, March, 1993.

⁴⁶ Scott Buchanan, "A Grain of Salt," *The Lavender*, November 1924, p. 11.

Where one issue included a short story by Leo Yamin and William Lipkind, Aaron Siskind's translation of a French poem, and an essay on a contemporary drama, another issue carried a student's essay proclaiming that "something has been found in our spiritual life that binds us together, from one end of the country to the other, something energising and vivifying, our highest common denominator - Jazz!"⁴⁷

Newman was also remembered as being a bit different from the other students. He identified closely with the non-students, Adolph Gottlieb and Alexander Borodulin. They remained a trio and Max Margulis, who remained friends with all of them, noted the "fiery, anti-establishment attitude that trio had, especially Borodulin and Newman," toward political institutions. Additionally Barnett Newman developed a sense that the artist is a free individual who is vital to the life of a society. He synthesized myriad ideas and convictions that were compatible with his further reading of anarchism over the following decades. When he critiqued 'politics as usual' in his 1933 mayoral campaign

⁴⁷Aaron Traister, "America Steps Lively," *The Lavender*, March 1925, p.21.

he fused the values of art and politics by defining himself and running mate Alexander Boroudulin as "men of culture."

CHAPTER 3

Writings of the 1930s: Fighting For Principles

This section covering the 1930s traces a selection of Barnett Newman's activities relating to the art and artists in his circle in New York, to the development of his intellectual and political thought, and his interpretation of philosophical anarchism.

Newman did not successfully develop his own painting during the 1930s -- at least not to his own satisfaction. He will forever remain the ultimate judge of this since he destroyed the art that he had made during this time. He and Adolph Gottlieb shared a studio on East Broadway in lower Manhattan in the early 1930s, but it is not known whether he made visual art or wrote there. Newman took classes at the Education Alliance, also located on East Broadway. His father's business, where he worked during this time, was located in the nearby City Hall neighborhood. Visitors to Newman's and Gottlieb's studio, such as Gottlieb's close friend Paul Bodin, did not recollect Newman painting there.¹

A wide range of American art was produced and exhibited in the thirties. Additionally, with the opening

¹ Paul Bodin, interview with author, June 1991. Sally Avery also made the same observation in an interview with author, August 1992.

of A.E. Gallatin's Gallery of Living Art at the Washington Square campus of New York University in 1927 and museums such as The Museum of Modern Art in 1929, a greater range of modern European art was available publicly. This was a complex period, a period when young artists flocked to the Art Students League from around the country, when major European artists such as Hans Hofmann and George Grosz in 1932 left their homelands to seek refuge in the United States (both were sponsored by the Art Students League)², and a period when many artist groups and associations were formed. In 1933 Newman said the artists whom he admired most were "John Sloan, Picasso, Kuniyoshi and the less-known Adolph Gottlieb and Tom Nagai above other artists."³ His choices represent the variety of modernist positions available. The diversity of artistic styles that the artists worked in did not establish grounds for contradiction or paradox in 1933.

Newman taught art in public schools. From 1931 he taught art as a substitute high school teacher. Newman applied for many full-time high school teaching positions.

² The decisions to support the artists caused dissention and disruption among Art Student League members and board. John Sloan led the fight to bring Grosz and Hofmann in to teach at the League.

³ A.J. Liebling, "Two Aesthetes Offer Selves as Candidates to Provide Own Ticket for Intellectuals," *New York World-Telegram*, November 4, 1933, reprinted in Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1978), p. 231.

In 1929 and throughout the 1930s he took the New York City Board of Education's required tests to teach fine arts, free-hand drawing, English, and Hebrew. He did not pass the exams to qualify for a full-time position, but did pass the requirements for substitute teaching.⁴ He worked in the art department at Grover Cleveland High School in Queens. His friends from college also became public school teachers. This kind of profession was a good alternative for college graduates, creative young men from immigrant families, who had just a few years earlier been writing poetry and translating French.

In 1933 Newman published, along with his best friend Alexander Borodulin, a manifesto "On the Need for Political Action by Men of Culture." They used the manifesto in their write-in political campaign: Newman "ran" for mayor of New York in 1933. Newman was articulate, sure of his convictions, and idealistic. He did not expect to win his bid for mayor.

The 1933 mayoral election was an especially important turning point in the city's politics. Ready for change, New Yorkers decisively turned their backs on Tammany Hall by electing Fiorello LaGuardia, who ran on the Fusion ticket against two candidates, John P. Obrien, a Tammany man who had replaced Jimmy Walker in 1932, and Joseph McKee

⁴ "The Board of Examiners Applications for License," on file with the Information Division, New York City Board of Education, New York.

of the recently-formed Recovery Party. LaGuardia received 40% of the vote while O'Brien received 27%, and McKee garnered 28%.⁵

The fact that Newman ran the year that reform was already taking place spotlights his mistrust and disaffection with all politicians. He was not satisfied with the choices for change which he envisioned as business as usual.

Describing himself as an artist, and more generally as a "man of culture" Newman implied that he was intellectually and morally different from the very kind of individual who sought power. Interviewed by a young A.J. Liebling for the New York *World-Telegram*, he called for a "mutual agreement of artists and men of culture on a single distinct cultural issue, whose validity none can deny. And this not with a hope for political victory, but as a show of political strength and action by all men who understand and value not the lower but the higher principles of human society."⁶ Even though some of his friends treated the mayoral bid as a joke⁷, Newman meant to

⁵ August Heckscher, *When LaGuardia Was Mayor* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), p. 30.

⁶ Liebling, "Two Aesthetes Offer Selves as Candidates to Provide Own Ticket for Intellectuals," in Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*, p.231.

⁷ Bodin, interview,, June 1991. Bodin was a good friend of Gottlieb's and he saw Newman often during this period. Bodin indicated that Gottlieb and he both considered it a joke. He also recalled that Newman asked Gottlieb to run on the ticket with him.

jar complacent voters to think seriously. Newman characterized political leaders as "powerful materialists and the maniacs of dogma," as politicians ruled only by greed. He meant his statements and positions as a challenge to all politicians and as a wake-up call to all citizens. Newman argued:

. . . though it is true that the artist labors and suffers like a worker, in his nature he is profoundly opposed to the principle of the worker. The worker creates for use, but the artist definitely does not. It is only the slave psychology of masses in chains, given expression in the Marxian parties, that insists that art must be useful. The worker recognizes the true creative artist as his enemy, because the artist is free and insists upon freedom.⁸

Kropotkin's essay "An Appeal to the Young" may have fueled Newman's ambitions. Kropotkin's premise is that everyone has a place in the social revolution. Addressing "intellectuals" specifically, Kropotkin calls on scientists, doctors, teachers, and artists to come to the "great cause of social emancipation." He urges them to, "Tell us what a rational life would be, if it did not encounter at every step the follies and the ignominies of our present social order." He adds encouragingly, "You

⁸ Barnett Newman and Alexander Borodulin, "On the Need for Political Action by Men of Culture," New York (1933), n.p.n. The political platform statement is reprinted, but not in its entirety in *Selected Writings*, pp.4-8. The present author referenced the original text in Annalee Newman files, New York.

will see that your every effort on this path bears with it fruit in abundance, and this sublime harmony once established between your actions and the dictates of your conscience will give you powers you never dreamt lay dormant."⁹

As is true of every public stand Newman would take, he did so on principle. He based this campaign on a cultural program that he said would improve the quality of life of every citizen. He and his good friend, running mate Alexander Borodulin called for:

. . . the establishment, maintenance, and development of every institution and activity that will add to the cultural life of the city. This means more extensive education, a greater emphasis upon the arts and crafts, and the fostering of cultural living conditions.

They proposed this be carried out via programs for education, programs for the arts, and programs for cultural life. The descriptions of the programs all call for free institutions, civic and municipal artistic groups, public policy that emphasized environmental priorities and public leisure services. This is an agenda for social harmony reminiscent of Kropotkin's idea that leisure is a goal for the harmonious society. Newman and Borodulin proposed

⁹ Peter Kropotkin, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, ed. Roger Baldwin (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927; reprint New York: Dover Publications, 1970), pp. 278-279.

opening the city to free cultural experiences, from a planetarium to a civic art gallery with non-juried exhibitions, from a civic, non-commercial art movie studio to closing right-of-way on certain streets for the use of street cafés.¹⁰

Newman concerned himself with local politics and public issues continually during the 1930s. From presenting himself as a write-in candidate in the 1933 mayoral election, to curating an art teachers' protest exhibition at ACA Gallery, Newman acted on numerous fronts. Throughout this decade he defined causes and brought passion to every activity along with a strong sense of personal mission and social responsibility. He attacked conventional politics and bureaucracies from the viewpoint of a self-defined "man of culture," an "artist-citizen." Indeed Newman's relationship to the New York City school system at that time was crucial, since many of his interests derive from first-hand knowledge as an educator and public servant.

Newman taught as a substitute art teacher in New York City public high schools. Education had traditionally been an upwardly mobile occupation for sons and daughters of

¹⁰ Newman and Borodulin, "On the Need for Political Action by Men of Culture," n.p.n.

immigrants in New York City since at least 1880. Newman's intellectually-driven friends from Clionia at City College were also teachers, including Aaron Siskind¹¹ and Leo Yamin. Yamin's wife Alice taught Adolph Gottlieb's wife Esther, whom he married in 1932 and was also a teacher. Many others whom Newman had known in College and throughout the 1920s became teachers. Newman's sister Sarah taught. Annalee Greenhouse and Barnett Newman met in 1934 at the high school where both taught. Most of his friends found jobs soon after college graduation, while Newman did not look into teaching right away. Instead, he worked in his father's tailoring establishment, Biltwell, after graduating college in 1927, then first applied to teach in 1929. He worked for his father until he liquidated the struggling business just after his father's death in 1937.

Throughout the 1930s Newman applied for regular public high school teaching appointments, even though he continually had trouble getting the jobs he wanted. During the first half of the 1930s Newman filed five applications to teach various subjects in New York City high schools. He applied in 1929 and 1930 to teach freehand drawing; also in 1930 as a substitute teacher for freehand drawing; in 1934 for fine arts; in 1935 for Hebrew, and also in 1935 he

¹¹ Photographer Aaron Siskind taught in the New York City

applied to teach elocution.¹² He was granted the Substitute License for high school freehand drawing in 1931, so he subsequently taught in that capacity. On his February 1935 application to work as a "regular" fine arts teacher he noted that he had three-and-a-half years of teaching experience. In fact in the one school year 1931-1932 alone, Newman logged 155 days as a substitute.¹³ From 1936-38 he filed five applications: each one was for either fine arts or English.¹⁴ Each high school subject area required filing a separate application and passing an exam.

Substitutes in the 1930s were overworked and underpaid. Newman continued to apply while he taught on a daily basis at Grover Cleveland High School. During the 1930s Depression the Board of Education was restrictive in granting full-time licenses. At one point a hiring freeze was put into effect. Newman suffered from his failure to pass the licensing exam *in every subject* for which he applied. Thus he could not qualify and was prevented from

elementary schools full-time until 1949.

¹² "The Board of Examiners Applications for License," New York City Board of Education, New York.

¹³ "Record and Certification of Substitute Service," on file with the Information Division, New York City Board of Education. This is the one service record on file.

¹⁴ "The Board of Examiners Applications for License," New York City Board of Education.

teaching on a full time basis. He soon embarked on what would become a years-long protest against the unfairness he saw in the test for art teachers. But instead of working with a union to reform the testing process, Newman criticized the test itself as fundamentally flawed; he believed that no test could evaluate artists. Tests 'measure;' artists cannot be measured. Newman's experience galvanized him to "direct action" — he wrote articles, published *The Answer* in 1936, organized an exhibition within the educational community — to prove art teachers' worthiness.

Kropotkin most likely inspired confidence in the young man, and In the 1968 essay "The True Revolution is Anarchist" Newman looked back in retrospect on the 1930s and recalled Kropotkin He also remembered Emma Goldman as the most important anarchist voice. Goldman's autobiography *Living My Life* was published in 1931, and Newman owned the 1934 reprint.¹⁵

Newman may have learned about other anarchists as well. Anarchist Alexander Berkman's ideals (Goldman's closest friend and colleague) may have also provided some steam for Newman's burgeoning anarchism. Berkman wrote a lively "primer" in 1929, *ABC of Anarchism*. Berkman

¹⁵ It is not known when he acquired the book.

described what anarchism is not, and then what it is.

Newman may have considered Berkman's book to help establish himself as a person who wanted to contribute to principled, harmonious society.¹⁶ Berkman says of anarchism:

It is not bombs, disorder or chaos.

It is not robbery and murder.

It is not a war of each against all.

It is not a return to barbarism or to the wild state of man.

Anarchism is the very exact opposite of all that.

Anarchism means that you should be free; that no one should enslave you, boss you, rob you, or impose upon you.

It means that you should be free to do the things you want to do; and that you should not be compelled to do what you don't want to do.

It means that you should have a chance to choose the kind of life you want to live, and live it without anybody interfering.

It means that the next fellow should have the same freedom as that everyone should have the same rights and liberties.

It means that all men are brothers, and that they should live like brothers, in peace and harmony.

That is to say, that there should be no war, no violence used by one set of men against another, no monopoly and no poverty, no oppression, no taking advantage of your fellow-man.

In short, anarchism means a condition of society where all men and women are free, and where all enjoy equally the benefits of an ordered and sensible life.

"Can that be?" you ask; "and how?"

Well, let us talk it over. Maybe I can show you that we can be decent and live as decent folks

¹⁶ *ABC of Anarchism* is in Barnett Newman's library and it is not known when he acquired it.

even without growing wings.¹⁷

"Anarchism is a condition of society" as Berkman put it, towards which Newman worked. His position also finds sympathy with Kropotkin's economic ideas outlined in *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*. Kropotkin advanced the view that the community is the economic unit. Communist anarchism is achieved when all individuals' work and production benefits all others' in a selfless manner. Each contributes that which he is best capable of doing.

Years later, in "The True Revolution is Anarchist" Newman recalled that his anarchism was kept alive in the 1930s by Kropotkin's autobiography. Explaining his position, he characterized other leftist positions in the '30s as ". . . shouting dogmatists, Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, and Trotskyite alike . . ." who dominated the political and intellectual landscape, Kropotkin's and Emma Goldman's writing as well provided solace for Newman. "The existence of these *Memoirs*, this remarkable work that was Kropotkin himself, telling himself, broke one's loneliness inside this solitary confinement."¹⁸ The pronouncement

¹⁷ Alexander Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1929), p. 2.

¹⁸ Barnett Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist!," in Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York:

above did not distinguish the differences between the widespread intellectual positions that were critical throughout the later 1930s. For example, Newman did not mention the crisis that was the Spanish Civil War, which appealed to the Popular Front and some activist anarchists in 1936. And instead of noting the split in leftist intellectual commitment to the Soviet Union vs. anti-Stalinism that *Partisan Review* announced in December 1937¹⁹, he simply lumped both Communist and Trotskyite leftists together as "dogmatists."

Newman, unlike most of the artists he knew, did not ally with any of the artists' groups even though he

Horizon Press, 1968), p. ix; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p. 44.

¹⁹ See Griselda Pollock and Fred Orton, "Avant Gardes and Partisans Reviewed," *Art History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (September 1981), pp. 305-327, reprinted in Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, editors, *Avant Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1996). See Terry A. Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p.144-150. The premise of the 1937 rebirth of the *Partisan Review* was that the journal was no longer an official Communist publication (the organ of the John Reed Club), but rather radical and "unequivocally independent." Trotskyite in its ideology, the *Partisan Review*, according to Cooney, "associated modernism with high literary standards and intellectual sophistication . . . that allowed them to see in modernist literature, and by extension in themselves, a radical marginality that was nevertheless rooted in an "intellectuals' tradition": of resistance to conventional culture. . . . "It is coming to be something of a revolutionary act simply to print serious creative writing." Cooney, p. 149.

remained friends with artists. He did not join the Artists' Union, American Artist Congress²⁰, he did not apply to work on New Deal projects, he did not join his friends Adolph Gottlieb and Marcus Rothkowitz (later Mark Rothko) when they formed an exhibiting group in the late 1930s known for its expressionism, "The Ten." Nor did he join the American Abstract Artists founded in 1936 to promote exhibiting opportunities for American artists who explored geometric abstraction.²¹ Newman told art critic Thomas Hess that on principle, he had not wanted to participate in the Works Progress Administration. Speaking to Hess years later in 1969, Newman said that he was against any government acting as official patron of the modern artist; he thought the government belittled the artist and he was not one to participate in what he "considered official handouts given to the artists by their traditional enemy, the State."²²

²⁰ Even such an apolitical and independent artist as Milton Avery became involved with the American Artists Congress.

²¹ See Sandra Kraskin, *Pioneers of Abstract Art: American Abstract Artists, 1936-1996* (New York: Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, 1996). Overlap among modernist positions in the visual and literary arts is intriguing. American Abstract Artist member George L.K. Morris wrote catalogue essays for the group's exhibition, advised A.E. Gallatin, and wrote about abstract art for *Partisan Review*. He provided the financial support for *Partisan Review*.

²² Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Walker and Co., 1969), p. 17. Newman did not comment here on the National

Even though Newman comments were consistent with his numerous protests against the State, in fact he did not qualify for the WPA because his wife's salary disqualified them.

Singular anarchist voices did exist in the 1930s. When Newman mentioned that he admired Emma Goldman, he implied a difference between the anarchist and the 1930s American Marxists. Goldman based her philosophy of anarchism on Kropotkin's.²³ Goldman visited Kropotkin soon after she arrived in the Soviet Union. This was the climax of a kind of pilgrimage for her.²⁴ She reported her disappointment with the Bolshevik's new institutions of power in the Soviet Union, that she and her lifelong friend, anarchist Alexander Berkman, experienced, as early as 1921. Thus, in the 1930s would continue to be reinforced in writings by the passionate anarchist, Emma Goldman.

In 1934 Goldman published an article in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, "Was My Life Worth Living." The article

Endowment for the Arts, which was legislated and funded in 1965.

²³ See Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman in Exile* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Richard Drinnon, *A Rebel in Paradise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). Drinnon's biography provides a concise and sympathetic portrait of Goldman's life, career, and personality.

is inspirational in tone and attests to Goldman's consistency of program and purpose. Her words could have easily affected Newman's developing anarchist sensibility, including his distrust of the political environment.

Goldman wrote:

Anarchism alone stresses the importance of the individual, his possibilities and needs in a free society. . . . Anarchism insists that the center of gravity in society is the individual—that he must aim of Anarchism is that every individual in the world shall be able to do so. . . . Of course, this has nothing in common with a much boasted "rugged individualism."

She also pointed out:

I consider Anarchism the most beautiful and practical philosophy that has yet been thought of in its application to individual expression and the relation it establishes between the individual and society. Moreover, I am certain that Anarchism is too vital and close to human nature ever to die. It is my conviction that dictatorship, whether to the right or to the left, can never work—that it never has worked, and that time will prove this again, as it has been proved before.²⁵

Emma Goldman was granted permission to enter the United States for ninety days in 1934. While she received

²⁴ See Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1931; reprint New York: Dover Publications, 1970), pp. 863-869.

²⁵ Emma Goldman, "Was My Life Worth Living?," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 170 (December 1934); Reprinted in *The Emma Goldman Papers*, <http://sunsite.Berkeley.edu/Goldman/writings/essays/lifework.html>

frontpage newspaper and national newsreel coverage,²⁶ the editors of Harper's described the anarchist's position thusly: "Now she fights almost alone for what seems to be a lost cause."²⁷

²⁶ The Emma Goldman Papers,
<http://sunsite.Berkeley.edu/Goldman/writings/essays/lifework.html> Goldman was allowed to lecture "on the condition that she limit her lectures to topics involving literature and drama."

²⁷ Editors, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*,
<http://sunsite.Berkeley.edu/Goldman/writings/essays/lifework.html>

The Answer — Newman's 1936 Publication

Introduction

In January 1936 Newman published one issue of *The Answer*, a magazine that he also initiated, wrote, and edited. *The Answer's* subject was the defense and advocacy of the civil servant. Newman, himself a civil servant at the time, worked as a New York City public high school substitute teacher.

The overall function of *The Answer* was to act as mouthpiece for principles, a principled way of life, one that would make possible an equitable, harmonious society. The predominant feature Newman proposed was what he believed was an innate impulse toward altruism. Opposing this was dogmatism, favoritism, and exploitation. Throughout *The Answer* Newman affirmed the social benefits civil service workers selflessly provide, and he protests special interests and patronage. Throughout *The Answer* Newman contrasted service against greed.

The Answer shed light on Newman's concerns during the 1930s. It also displayed his colors as a critic, reformer, and polemicist. The magazine stood out as the one major written statement that Newman made during the 1930s, yet has not been available in its entirety to researchers before now. What Newman wrote during this period provides

important insights into his ongoing intellectual and political, if not artistic, development. Newman taught art, but destroyed the works of art he produced during this period.²⁸ For that reason alone, *The Answer* is an invaluable resource for the present study. This section provides a detailed description and analysis of *The Answer*.

The magazine's theme is the promotion of civil service. It is twenty-eight pages long and includes seven articles, two photographs taken by Aaron Siskind, and three illustrations. Newman contributed no visual material. Hugh Conde Miller drew two lithographic illustrations, and Jack Raymond drew one. The articles -- all but one written by Newman -- include: an editorial, news about heroic feats by fire fighters, an open letter to the Secretary of the American Olympic Committee protesting the U.S.'s planned participation in the Berlin Summer Olympics, an article about the need for inspired, creative public school teachers, and an appeal for subscribers and a vow not to carry paid advertising.

Subtitling the magazine, "America's Civil Service Magazine," Newman announced that *The Answer* would address issues that all civil service employees "should be aware of

²⁸ Early on Newman told interviewers that he destroyed his paintings. Hess said in 1969 "the world has been spared . . ."

and understand." *The Answer* was to fill a gap; he said, "by not focusing on the specific or the mundane" — it would highlight "the one truth . . . the principle of Civil Service, in the principle of merit, rather than in any specific enterprise of the Civil Service."²⁹

He conceptualized civil service employees as a class, and the individuals who made up this class as special kinds of person who deserved recognition and who stood out as role models for others. According to Newman, neither a crass business person motivated by profit nor a WPA worker (one had to prove indigence to be eligible for the WPA), the Civil Service employee, to Newman, should believe in the social force of his effort, the work he chose for the social good.³⁰

Newman presented himself as the spokesperson for the civil service worker. Up to now it has been impossible to gauge the extent of Newman's political concerns during this era because he did not join any of the groups and associations that so many artists, including his friends, had failed. Newman's publication has a definite partisan tone. It stood for the rights of specially trained

²⁹ Barnett Newman, "Notes and Comments," *The Answer*, p. 5.

³⁰ Barnett Newman, "Civil Service — The American Way Out," *Selected Writings*, p. 14.

workforces — civil servants of whom Newman was one — to job security based on performance. Newman's point of view was clear from the beginning. The magazine portrayed the civil service underdog, exploited by greed and power brokers.

The Answer developed from Newman's conviction that the cultural and intellectual citizen has a role to play in raising consciousness, from his experience as a teacher, and also out of his experience working at his father's business, Biltwell. Biltwell was located in New York's city hall area, on Nassau Street. Customers included city employees, and occasionally, politicians. Biltwell was described a "kind of custom tailor." During the thirties, Abraham Newman tried to stay afloat, without success, making uniforms for civil service workers. He had problems collecting outstanding installment payments, and eventually went out of business.³¹

Alexander Berkman wrote The ABC's of Anarchism which was published in the United States in 1929. The book elucidates the compatibility of Newman's arguments with anarchism. In his chapter on "Consumption and Exchange," Berkman praised and addressed the very working person about whom Newman was concerned. He went further than Newman

³¹ Aaron Siskind, in interview with author, February, 1989.

though, since Berkman theorized that the kind of person who might go into civil service might also be the kind of person who had revolutionary potential. Berkman believed: "An ideal, in short, which wakens the inherent social instincts of man, feeds his sympathies and fellow-feeling, fires his love of liberty and justice, and imbues even the lowest with nobility of thought and deed, as we frequently witness in the catastrophic events of life. . . . Acts of heroic self-sacrifice, of brave rescue and of unstinted aid demonstrate the real nature of man and his deep-felt brotherhood and unity."³² He concluded: "It is this human nature, this idealism, which must be roused by the social revolution. Without it the revolution cannot be, without it, it cannot live. Without it man is forever doomed to remain a slave and a weakling."

Newman may have agreed with Berkman's sense that anarchists will lead others by their example. "It is the work of the anarchist, of the revolutionist, of the intelligent class-conscious proletarian to exemplify and cultivate this spirit and instill it in others. It alone can conquer the powers of evil and darkness, and build a new world of humanity, liberty and justice."³³

³² Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism*, p. 72.

³³ Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism*, p. 73

Given the conditions of the period, perhaps Newman's remedy for the political and municipal problems against which he reacted were not as contradictory as they seemed at first. In fact, they were more compatible with man's natural instincts for cooperation within society. Newman was reacting to corruption, to the tradition of Tammany. For Newman, civil service was an expression of mutual aid.

Thoreau

Sometimes referred to as a precursor of anarchism, Henry David Thoreau has always found great favor with the anarchist and anti-authoritarian Left.³⁴ Thoreau wrote many essays in the 1840s and 1850s that addressed the self and society, the most well known of which is "Civil Disobedience." This essay expressed his conviction that a citizen should oppose the accumulation of power by government and the stifling of individual freedom. Thoreau's well known writings made him one of the moral guides for generations of leftists at least through the 1960s.

³⁴ See George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975); Eunice Shuster, *Native American Anarchism*, (Smith College Studies in History, vol. 18, 1932; reprinted (New York: De Capo Press, 1970).

Barnett Newman was attracted to Thoreau's ideas, including those described above. Newman also paid close attention to Thoreau's strident critiques of materialism. In the 1854 polemical essay, "Life Without Principle,"³⁵ Thoreau argued for "making a life" rather than living to make a living. This supported Newman's viewpoint so much that he used it in *The Answer*. Newman quoted a passage above *The Answer's* table of contents. The passage comes from "Life Without Principle" first paragraph:

This world is a place of business.[sic]
Yet I think that there is nothing, not even
crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy,
aye, to life itself, than this incessant
business.

Thus Newman's epigraph introduced the reader to *The Answer's* stance as a mouthpiece for moral principles.

Thoreau criticized the way most people live their lives as vulgar and superficial. He chastised them for becoming completely foolish. He then suggested that jobs

³⁵ Published in the October 1863 *Atlantic Monthly* as "Life Without Principle," the essay actually went through various title changes. Thoreau's original title, when he wrote this for a lecture in 1854 was "Getting a Living." See *Thoreau's Vision: The Major Essays*, ed. Charles R. Anderson. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 26-27.

should go to "him who does it for the love of it"³⁶ and not to the person who works merely for money because

there is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living. All great enterprises are self-supporting. The poet, for instance, must sustain his body by his poetry, as a steam planing-mill feeds its boilers with the shavings it makes. You must get your living by loving.³⁷

In other words — loving what one does. Thoreau would restore health to a society that had gotten sick from its greed and complacency by offering this tonic: Seek higher values in the experience of living, strive for higher, intangible aims rather than monetary gain. Those aims and experiences Thoreau equated with life itself.

Newman saw parallels between Thoreau's insights and the current situation. Thoreau's essay is an important link that helps one understand and gain insight into Newman's ideals and moral commitment to reform society. "Life Without Principle" is not like Thoreau's more familiar cry for the solitude of the woods and or appreciation for one's neighbor. Instead, he warned against succumbing to the one value most people care about — that is, making money. The

³⁶ Henry David Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," in *Thoreau's Vision: The Major Essays*, ed. Charles R. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 170.

³⁷ Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," p. 180.

"incessant business" that Thoreau referred to was the lowly, banal, "dyspeptic" condition that most 19th century people had become caught up in – living only to make a living.

To counteract the bad,

Getting a living vs. making a life.

Those things which now most engage the attention of men, as politics and the daily routine, are, it is true, vital functions of human society, but should be unconsciously performed, like the corresponding functions of the physical body. They are *infra-human*, a kind of vegetation. I sometimes awake to a half-consciousness of them going on about me, as a man may become conscious of some of the processes of digestion in a morbid state, and so have the dyspepsia, as it is called. Why should we not meet, not always as dyspeptics, to tell our bad dreams, but sometimes as eupeptics, to congratulate each other on the ever-glorious morning? I do not make an exorbitant demand, surely.³⁸

Subscription Solicitation: "Free as the Seas"

Newman's sense of personal freedom, autonomy, and zeal never waned throughout the pages of *The Answer*. It is especially evident in his appeal to potential subscribers:

WE are free! Free of any and all political, financial, commercial, party, Republican, Democrat, Socialist, Communist, propaganda, department or organization influence!

We are not the mouth-piece of any politician or office-seeker looking for power!

³⁸ Henry David Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," p. 192.

We are free even of the vicious though subtle influence of ADVERTISING!

We know and you know that any dependence on advertising must endanger the policy, the freedom, the honesty of a journal dedicated to the Civil Service.

We shall not, therefore, carry a single line of paid commercial advertising!

We are a free press, as free as the seas, owing allegiance to no one except the principles of the merit system.³⁹

And he spoke to the readers about their own sense of social responsibility:

"If, therefore, you understand and value freedom, if you think you need a journal that will fearlessly protect the merit principle-the basis for your functioning, if you think you need a journal that will explain it to the world as a concept, teach it as a social philosophy, preach it as a way of life, so that you may be respected as an honest, thinking individual . . ."⁴⁰

Three Editorial Statements: Are We Servants?; An Advertisement; An Epigraph

An editorial, "Are We Servants?" captured the urgency of current events and developments as Newman saw them. In this article he continually called for reform. He first asserted: "Men steal while men sleep.. . . Throughout the

³⁹ Barnett Newman "Free as the Seas," *The Answer*, New York (January 1936), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Newman, "Free as the Seas," p. 3.

world evil forces have laid bare the anguish and shame of men who have devoted their lives to serve an exacting public only to find themselves the victims of mad patriotism, crackpot utopias, and selfish greed."⁴¹ Newman believed that civil service had fallen prey to cruel and fanatic "spoils systems" across the world. He mentioned Fascist Germany and Communist Russia, and the Capitalist United States. Expressing a basic distrust of government, Newman declared:

In New York, so-called friends of the people, puffed up with self-righteous hypocrisy [sic], crying "Honesty in Government Means Economy" (as if there can be honesty in government and that if there were that it would be economical) are trying to instill the psychological excuse among its citizens to make it possible for certain wealthy taxpayers to impoverish and destroy Civil Service functions and rights to their own selfish advantage. What can be their success if not to establish a personal spoils system? What can be the result except a reduction of community services, education, protection and welfare to the private profit of men who do not need such services?⁴²

At this point it is necessary to explain just what is meant by the "spoils system" that Newman so vehemently opposed.

⁴¹ Barnett Newman, "Editorial," *The Answer*, New York (January 1936), p. 4.

⁴² Newman, "Editorial," p. 4.

Etched in New York City's history is the tradition of Tammany Hall, the practice by which government jobs were bought and sold for votes. Even though Fiorello La Guardia's mayoral election in 1933 signaled the end of the machine government of the Tammany organization, the spoils system was still perceived as engrained in the system. Newman also associated the corruption and unfairness of the spoils system with Huey Long in Louisiana and with New Deal "relief" programs — he described them as the "spoils system in Washington of such magnitude, its size overshadows the Civil Service structure" comparing the relief system to totalitarianism. The civil servant -- exploited and oppressed -- has "the only honest membership in the entire social structure."⁴³

The civil servant participated in the maintenance of our infrastructure. Newman viewed this as essentially altruistic, and thus praised the nobility of this group of working men and women who toiled for the betterment of society, not for personal profit. These heroes chose employment that did not produce or promote useless consumer products.

⁴³ Barnett Newman, "Are We Servants," *The Answer*, New York (January 1936), p. 5.

His message pounded its way through every article on every page of *The Answer*. Newman also awakened his readers to the threats looming in the form of false friends who would take away their jobs.

Newman's editorial, "Are We Servants?" interpreted international events. "With religious fanaticism, Russia rivals Germany with its airtight, foolproof spoils system."⁴⁴

It was this spoils system that fueled corruption and oppression in farflung places as well as in New York City. Newman was convinced that every program was instituted only for the benefit of the politician who wished to seize power. Governments easily lulled, swayed, and robbed the people of their natural tendency to achieve, that is, as that natural, altruistic tendency is expressed in *The Answer*. The people who worked in a system of merit earned every right to govern themselves.

Besides international dangers, Newman saw national movements similarly. Newman warned against false prophets/messiahs in the United States. He warned of a danger lurking in the example of Huey Long. Newman viewed Long's national political organization, the National Share

⁴⁴ Newman, "Are We Servants," p. 4.

Our Wealth Committee (its slogan was "Share Our Wealth") as similar to fascist and totalitarian Europe:

Clowns crying "Share the [sic] Wealth" have made it the signal and excuse to substitute dogma and demagoguery for merit and honesty. Proudly comparing itself with Fascist Europe, Louisiana's Share the Wealth has made every Civil Service employee lose his share of American freedom and liberty, has made him lose his share in serving the community of Louisiana in order to better serve the foul purpose of one man and his henchmen."⁴⁵

Long promoted a redistribution of wealth which Newman saw as one mere thinly veiled bribe to lull the masses and win their votes. Newman's observations were echoed by New Deal historian William Leuchtenberg, who observed that Long "clowned his way into national prominence" to feed his "ambition for national power."⁴⁶ (p. 97)

Essentially, *The Answer* promised to function as a voice, a mouthpiece for the individual who worked for the common good. This individual performed services essential to the organic functioning of a society. From Newman's point of view, this individual demands full respect and

⁴⁵ Newman, "Are We Servants," p. 4.

⁴⁶, William, Leuchtenberg, *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp.77- 100. Long proposed, in essence, to liquidate all personal fortunes above a certain amount and to give to every family enough to buy a home, an automobile, and a radio; old folks would receive pensions, and worthy boys would be sent to college.

refuse to become easy prey or a servant to the forces of demagoguery.

Thus Newman, the reformer (not a revolutionist), surveyed the world situation around him, making comparisons between the municipal jobs system in New York City and developments across the entire European continent.

"Teachers' Exams-- What Is Wrong?: A Solution of the Problem of Finding the Inspired Teacher"

Newman took up the cause of his co-workers in an article titled "Teachers' Exams-- What Is Wrong?: A Solution of the Problem of Finding the Inspired Teacher." He discussed the kind of public school teacher the Board of Education should aim to attract. In his essay, he portrayed school teachers similarly to the way he would portray artists a decade or so later.

Newman emphasized the importance of teachers to society and suggested that the main criterion for hiring should be to find the "inspiring" or "unusual" teacher who would teach creatively, and thus "train children to become thinking people."⁴⁷

How would this type of person be found? Newman proposed that the exams should, in essence, take the entire individual into account in order to find "the teacher with

⁴⁷ Barnett Newman, "Teachers' Exams-What is Wrong?", *The Answer*, New York (January 1936), p. 23.

a soul as against the teacher with a fact-absorbing brain. One must be *understood*, the other can be marked on a graph to the point of a decimal."⁴⁸ Newman's examination process would include:

. . . thought-provoking questions concerning the entire range of cultural experience, social, aesthetic, and educational, besides the subject matter. Its questions concerning subject matter should not be mere questions of fact, but should evoke an understanding of their underlying philosophic implications.⁴⁹

These ideals sound similar to his subject in later decades -- that later subject being the artist.

He contrasted the ideal above with the real. The New York City Teachers Union also emphasized the importance of teachers to society, but with an emphasis on policy and equity. Battling the problems faced by teachers throughout the Depression, the union tried to save the public schools by saving jobs and improving salaries for teachers, especially substitute teachers.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Newman, "Teachers' Exams-What is Wrong?", p. 25.

⁴⁹ Newman, "Teachers' Exams-What is Wrong?", p. 25.

⁵⁰ See Celia Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union 1916-1964: A Story of Educational and Social Commitment* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), pp. 128-133. The Teachers Union was one advocacy group among many such as the Joint Committee of Teachers Organizations and the Unappointed Teachers Association. It had a small membership. During the 1930s salary cuts and other cost cutting measures were mandated by the City and State legislatures. Zitron says

Newman was concerned with the ideal and moral principles. Curiously, he criticized the contemporary method of testing prospective teachers for its reliance on an *objective* format, questions that test the applicant's knowledge of whatever the subject she or he is applying to teach. This he termed a *scientific* method of testing which was quantitative, but not qualitative.

Curiously, this idea bore a resemblance to Newman's thoughts on art that he would articulate with great force. He would soon begin his aesthetic crusade by pointing up the inadequacies of any view of life that equated the *scientific* with true knowledge or the *objective* with understanding. He would describe the artist as he described the teacher here, and he would describe the artistic process and reception as he described the classroom here. He said that finding the right teacher would also "create an atmosphere where real learning will take place, an atmosphere that will be spontaneous, unprejudiced, and immediate." The ultimate outcome would

on p. 128, "Every year, the Board of Education pared its budget requests with an eye to the city's demands for economy. Every year, the Citizens' Budget Commission pressed for further cuts, and the Board of Estimate reduced the board of Education's request. Such was the procedure during the corrupt administration of Mayor Walker. It did not change under the honest administration of the politically liberal and pro-labor Mayor LaGuardia."

be a "nobility of feeling and thought and upon whose influence any hope for a better society must depend."⁵¹

"It Must Be Destroyed! The TRUE Story of the Citizens' Budget Commission, Inc."

The longest and most urgent article in *The Answer* is an exposé that Newman's investigative digging brought to the surface. It concerned the Citizens' Budget Commission, an independent body of businessmen formed in 1932 to make fiscal recommendations to New York City government. When it was founded, this non-profit organization described itself as a "permanent body designed to bring about reductions in the mounting costs of city government and to study possible sources of new revenue." The sponsors also stated that "the obvious motive in this undertaking is to save money for the city. A less pressing but more important reason is to stop a trend in municipal government which is a growing menace to the stability of our institutions."⁵² According to Thomas Kessner, an historian of the Fiorello La Guardia era, the Citizens' Budget Commission was a group of reputable businessmen who

⁵¹ Newman, "Teachers' Exams-What is Wrong?", p. 25. Research that relates the influence of John Dewey's progressive education philosophy to Newman's developing sensibility would be interesting.

⁵² "City Leaders Unite to Control Budget and Combat Waste," *The New York Times*, June 13, 1932, n.p.n.

organized against the overt corruption of Tammany Hall. They stood for efficiency in government and acted on their concerns by issuing reports and recommendations. The Citizens' Budget Commission had, and still has, no statutory authority.⁵³

Newman understood the Citizens' Budget Commission differently. To him, it was a group comprised of real estate and banking interests, among others, determined to receive tax cuts for themselves at the expense of the jobs of hard working citizens of New York City.

The Commission opposed mounting costs that translated into too large a city payroll. For example, in 1932 the City was threatened with not meeting its debt obligations for the first in its history. The 1933 New York City budget froze wages as an emergency measure and the Citizens' Budget Commission sought to freeze taxes on real estate and impose them (if necessary) on other services.

The Commission also saw itself as a watchdog against corruption in local government. During the thirties, the

⁵³ Prof. Thomas Kessner, in interview with author, September, 1993. Today the Citizens Budget Commission's primary undertaking is the analysis of New York City's fiscal policy. Documents that mention the Citizens Budget Commission were examined by the author in the offices of the Commission.

press followed the activities of the Commission closely and regularly.

By 1935 the Commission had produced many reports, aided the enactment of legislation, and published widely distributed monthly pamphlets free of charge to the "man-in-the-street." It was seeking to reclassify many of the City's civil service workers. Counted among these were teachers. On November 7, 1935 Nicholas Murray Butler⁵⁴, president of the Citizen's Budget Commission, recommended to an audience of business groups a 20-25% reduction of Civil Service employees.⁵⁵ Newspapers regularly carried stories about the Commissions' recommendations. *The Daily Worker* described Board of Estimate hearings:

Yesterday's heavy artillery came for the most part from various civic organizations representing real estate interests. . . . Most of the organizations proposed downward revision of the budget by cutting salaries of city employees and reducing expenditures for socially necessary institutions. . . . The [Citizens' Budget] Commission is a creature of large real estate and business interests in New York whose main function is the fight to reduce taxes in the behalf of these commercial groups. . . . [The Commission stressed that] . . . mandatory increases for teachers, firemen and policemen be suspended, [and] that the wages paid by the City to mechanics

⁵⁴ Butler was also then President of Columbia University. Newman characterized Columbia as tax-free and notes that Butler's "institution holds the enormous land wealth that is the bottom of Radio City!", p. 19.

⁵⁵ Press release, Citizens Budget Commission, November 8, 1935, p. 3.

and laborers be 'properly adjusted,' or, in plain language, reduced. . . Referring to previous pay raises, the Commission representatives stated that "the most favored were the artisans, the teaching forces of the Department of Education and the uniformed forces of the Police and Fire Departments." Further proposals for the shortening of vacations and lengthening of hours of city workers were also introduced by the Commission.⁵⁶

Newman, closely followed the story, responding immediately and directly in *The Answer*. He printed an interview with Harold Riegelman, the general counsel for the Commission. On December 18, 1935 no fewer than three newspapers carried Riegelman's story as published in *The Answer*.⁵⁷ *The Answer's* publisher, B. Barnett Newman, was quoted at length.

In "It Must Be Destroyed! the TRUE Story of the Citizens' Budget Commission, Inc." Newman launched an all-out assault by stressing two main themes to his readers. The first was that the Commission was disingenuous and dishonest, masquerading as a friend of the Civil Service and deliberately misleading citizens. The second powerful

⁵⁶ "Employers' Groups Demand Pay Cuts to Reduce Budget," *The Daily Worker*, October 26, 1934, n.p.n.

⁵⁷ "Staff Cut Urged on Civil Service," *New York Times*, December, 18, 1935; "Riegelman Urges Slash in Civil Service," *New York Sun*, December 18, 1935, n.p.n.; "5% Cut In Staff Urged to Improve Civil Labor," *The New York Post*, December, 18, 1935, n.p.n.

idea was that this body posed "the greatest menace to Civil Service and to the welfare of the public"⁵⁸ as it sought to lay off selfless workers in hopes of lowering taxes solely for business' selfish gain. The article included a list of the twenty-eight officers and trustees, and their numerous business affiliations, concluded: "their lives are motivated by a principle that is the direct enemy of the merit principle. They are motivated by business, whereas the Civil Service man lives by Service."⁵⁹

He dissected the organization's name to show the distance between the facade it assumed and the truth. He pointed out that the use of the word "Commission" created "the illusion that they are not only a public body but an *official* body as well, appointed by some unknown authority," and continued, "they clinched the hypnotic power alive in social slogans by calling themselves a *Citizens'* commission. At once they became one with the common people. At once they became unselfish, non-partisan, honest. At once they struck the proper communal note. . . ."⁶⁰ In Newman's eyes, this body's ultimate goal

⁵⁸ Barnett Newman, "It Must Be Destroyed! The TRUE Story of the Citizens' Budget Commission Inc." *The Answer*, New York (January 1936), p.20.

⁵⁹ Newman, "It Must Be Destroyed!," p. 20.

⁶⁰ Newman, "It Must Be Destroyed!," p. 18.

was "to impose a super-government over the people of the City of New York."

Civil servants were thus alerted to the danger of the Commission, itself posing as a friend while it was truly a foe. The body was described with great emotion for example. as a "subtle campaign to poison the mind of the public against you."⁶¹ Newman also warned that the Commission was distributing pamphlets intended to turn the general public against civil service and cause it to sympathize with the goal of the Commission. Newman explained how each "informational" pamphlet criticized those who tendered public service: the nurse, police officer, teacher, etc. These businessmen manipulated the facts to make it appear that the fiscal problems of the city were due to these expenditures. Instead, Newman pointed out, the Citizens' Budget Commission was at fault for spreading "atrocious stories."⁶² It was if a "monster that has escaped from the bankers' cage to stalk through the halls of the Board of Estimate yelling furloughs, pay cuts, and the end of mandatory increases . . ."⁶³ and was causing alarm in the wrong quarters. It was in the

⁶¹ Newman, "It Must Be Destroyed!," p. 13.

⁶² Newman, "It Must Be Destroyed!," p. 15.

⁶³ Newman, "It Must Be Destroyed!," p. 15.

business of "vilifying the Service . . . fills the columns of the newspapers with poison so that education, fire-protection, police-protection, health-protection and sickness-prevention be curtailed."⁶⁴

Why was this cause such an urgent one? How much of a threat was *The Citizens' Budget Commission* to Newman and his colleagues? The issue addressed here was raised at a time before public employees had collective bargaining rights. Not until the Taylor Act did they have the right to strike. Also at this time employment within the municipal government structure was still seen with some suspicion. But now the city promoted fair hiring practices, as in a pamphlet issued by the City of New York, claimed: "The Merit System is simply a new and entirely apt designation for honestly administered civil service."⁶⁵ Newman showed himself to be a strong supporter of the new attitude.

The contents of *The Answer* have been examined here to highlight Newman's point of view that repeatedly led him to proclaim freedom for the individual. Although the very

⁶⁴ Newman, "It Must Be Destroyed!," p. 16.

⁶⁵New York City Civil Service Commission, "Merit System Advancing 1933-1940," (New York: New York City Civil Service Commission, 1941), p. 17.

title may invite criticism based on the idea that anarchism would have to promote no one answer, the title spoke of contents which offered the hope of a kind of liberation. Newman presented himself as the spokesman for Civil Service -- a kind of union leader, a kind of reminder to civil servants of the ideals that they should stand for. Newman's ideal readers were those who were moved to action after reading the magazine because they identified more with ". . . the principle of Civil Service rather than in any specific enterprise of the Civil Service."⁶⁶

Postscript to *The Answer*

Despite *The Answer's* demise after only one issue, Newman continued his campaign. In 1936 he applied for a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship to write a book on civil service's "history, philosophy, and promise for the future." In the essay he sent to Houghton Mifflin Publishers, Newman explained the need that he believed his book would fill, and he expressed the passion he felt on the subject of civil service. He wrote:

⁶⁶Barnett Newman, "Are We Servants," p. 5. Every decision carried the weight of a crusade, even regarding advertising. His argument that "any dependence on advertising must endanger the policy, the freedom, the honesty of a journal dedicated to the Civil Service" resounds with the same intensity he maintains throughout this first and only issue. He builds momentum in this solicitation for subscriptions with the claim that, "We are

The book I intend to write not only will give the layman a true understanding of the meaning of civil service but will offer a world sick of crackpot utopias a real, practical, American solution for our present social chaos. It will be a new social philosophy written for the layman and based on the truth of the merit principle, which rewards on the basis of merit, not because of friendship, prejudice, or dogma.⁶⁷

Newman believed that his book could give civil service its deserved recognition and widen its support. He also believed that U.S. government job programs, such as the Works Progress Administration, threatened civil service. Although public monies supported both, civil service was clearly a demonstration of voluntary mutual aid whereas the Depression-generated WPA, for example, was not. Newman worried that politicians could conceivably curtail civil service along with work relief programs once business interests were powerful again. His book would have helped him reach a wide audience, whom he hoped would be capable of understanding that a greater good comes from service and not from greed. He did not receive the grant, and the following year he submitted the proposal for a Guggenheim Fellowship.⁶⁸

a free press, as free as the seas, owing allegiance to no one except the principles of the merit system."

⁶⁷ Newman, "Civil Service - The American Way Out," p. 14.

⁶⁸ Barnett Newman, "Civil Service - The American Way Out," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc, 1990), p. 13.

In 1938 Newman interviewed Thomas Hart Benton on the same subject. Newman wanted Benton's input regarding a revised New York City high school art teachers exam. He conversed with Benton while both were staying on Martha's Vineyard that summer, and Newman subsequently wrote an article in which he characterized Benton as:

The famous American mural artist who is considered the father of the revival of mural art in this country . . . [Benton] transmits to all who meet him his boundless courage, the courage of a man who has spent his life fighting for ideas and ideals . . . watching Benton work, you see the real man, the Benton in love with provincial America, the America of the farm. He paints the American scene like a modern Brueghel.⁶⁹

Newman described Benton using heroic terms that he also used to describe every artist about whom he wrote. He portrayed Benton as a passionate, committed person, fearless in the face of those who would repress any man or woman, an essentially free individual who believes that personal expression is the real communicator.

In the conversation, Benton supported Newman's position to do away with an objective teachers' exam, saying that otherwise: "The progressive, the individual,

⁶⁹ Barnett Newman, "Interview with Thomas Hart Benton," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1990), pp. 15-16. This is interesting in light of Thomas Craven's support of Regionalism.

the inspired" might face elimination. Newman thanked him and characterized him and his colleagues as "the vanguard in the most progressive art program in this country has ever seen."⁷⁰ Based on this article which Newman sent to the *New York Times*, the newspaper published a short notice that quoted Benton's opinion of the futility of the teachers' exam.

From Newman's rhetoric, it would seem that he accepted Benton's Regionalist aesthetic, and he still did not privilege one mode of art making over another. This would change in the early 1940s when, during World War II Newman attacked Regionalism and the American isolationist art support system for Regionalism's popularity.

In late 1938, Newman directed the issue of the merit principle to a more limited audience. He focused on the situation of substitute art teachers who worked as hard as regular teachers but did not receive equal pay and benefits by organizing "the Fine Arts Substitutes Association to protest the device by which the Board evaded paying regular salaries and benefits to full-time teachers."⁷¹ He took aim at the school board in "Can We Draw? The Board of

⁷⁰ Newman, "Interview with Thomas Hart Benton," pp. 17-18.

⁷¹ Editors, *Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc.), p. 15.

Examiners Says -- No," an exhibition at Herman Baron's ACA Gallery, a gallery known since it opened in 1932 for its commitment to social art and to unknown artists.⁷² Eleven substitute art teachers — all, according to Newman, ". . . experienced teachers who have been failed in the practical drawing test, unafraid of the monopoly of power the board enjoys to give us or to destroy our careers . . ."⁷³ Newman also mentioned Max Weber, who also failed the examination many years before, showed drawings. Newman hoped to bring attention to the absurdity of the Board of Education's tests for art teachers by letting the art speak to viewers:

For to judge, when no scale exists that can adequately rate artistic expression, is a violation of civil service law and common sense. Even to hope that such a test can produce work that is testable is a fantasy. An examination desk and artistic expression are mutually exclusive.⁷⁴ Newman described some of the abstracted imagery in the exhibition intended by the artists "to give the impression of freedom." Two months later Newman wrote to Max Weber about the

positive results the exhibition had had thus far. He was

⁷² See Hugh J. Riddell, "ACA Has Aided Artists in Fight For Recognition," *The Daily Worker*, October 18, 1939, p. 7.

⁷³ Barnett Newman, "Can We Draw? The Board of Examiners Says-No!," *Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1990), p. 19.

⁷⁴ Newman, "Can We Draw? The Board of Examiners Says-No!," p. 20.

optimistic about a recent mayoral committee report, and told Weber:

The Fine Arts test is the only examination singled out for criticism, so the exhibition, the symposium and all the work has had some effect. I fully realize, however, how meager that victory is and I haven't stopped fighting.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Barnett Newman, Letter to Max Weber, February 1939, Max Weber Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. roll N69-84, frame 180.

CHAPTER 4

1940s: Developing a Position on Modern Art; An Art of No Limits vs. Dogmatic Geometry

It is clear that during the 1920s and 1930s Barnett Newman wrote on a broad range of topics, and demonstrated a proclivity for rational argument, bombast, and polemical stances. His viewpoints appear to have been nurtured in part by a developing interest in philosophical anarchism, various aspects of which he incorporated into his rhetoric. Starting in the early 1940s, he applied many anarchist principles to a new subject in his writing, contemporary art and artists. Philosophical anarchism provided one framework for defining certain dimension of his concerns. One finds a mixture of personal interest and historic mission in his writings on art. As is well-known, he drew on a wide range of disciplines in his writings about contemporary art: philosophy, anthropology, art history, and contemporary history, to name a few. As in his earlier writings, he synthesized his ideas idiosyncratically; issues emerged, evolved, intensified, and metamorphosed in relation to the aesthetic concerns within him and the artistic climate around him.

Additionally, he used anarchism's vocabulary. He interwove his argument against dogma throughout his essays, and described the potential for contemporary artists to fashion their own sub-cultures - ideal communities of mutual aid.

He wrote about avant-garde art, individual artists, and art advocates whom he admired during this period. He was also acknowledged by Dore Ashton as having "provided the painters with their first serious outlet for written discourse."¹

Barnett Newman remained his own advocate and agent for his concerns during the 1940's. The first opportunity to publish his writing came in 1943. It was a manifesto-like statement for the "First Annual Exhibition" of the American Modern Artists,² held at the Riverside Museum which was housed on three floors of a residential building at 103rd Street and Riverside Drive. Newman's four-paragraph statement decried Isolationist art and Regionalism which he said "still holds the reins of America's artistic future." Therefore artists cannot remain silent, but must "make

¹ Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Social Reckoning* (N.Y.: Viking Press, Inc., 1973), p.184.

² These fifty artists did not exhibit together as a group again, although the exhibition's title implies that they hope expected to in the future. Whether Newman was the only force behind the exhibition is not known. Evidence that he played at least a major role is made clear by the

manifest by our work, in our studios and in our galleries the requirements for a culture in a new America." In concluding, he proclaimed:

America has the opportunity of becoming the art center of the world. It cannot do so if the perversion of our cultural forces makes possible the strengthening of false artists and their movements. We mean to crystalize these forces.³

No aesthetic program emerged from these statements. Instead, Newman has written a call to arms to fight for freedom to create. He wished to clear the ground of all prejudice, and as in Kropotkin's "Appeal to the Young" this was a cry for artists to heed: to fight with the artist's weapons, the weapons of the studio.

A highly eclectic group of artworks was included in the American Modern Artists exhibition. Some of them tended toward abstraction and many did not. Every kind of painting, except regionalism, made an appearance. Newman's friends and member of The Ten such as Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, Ben Benn, and Louis Shanker were included. Members of the American Abstract Artists were present such as Alice Mason, Balcomb Greene, Gertrude Greene, and Albert Swinden.

fact that Sarah Newman, the Barnett's sister and also a school teacher included four paintings in the show.

³Barnett Newman, introductory essay, *American Modern Artists, First Annual Exhibition* (New York: Riverside Museum, 1943), n.p.n.; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, pp.29-30.

Artists were as varied as Milton Avery, Lenore Krassner, social realist sculptor John Hovannes, Sarah Newman, and Oronzo Gasparo who exhibited a painting called *W.P.A. Tool Box*. Two who would show with Betty Parsons that year and the next included William Johnson, Morris Davidson, John Graham, and Gottlieb.

Toward the end of the run of the exhibition he wrote a letter to poet Wallace Stevens, trying to enlist his participation. Newman's plea was

We believe that isolationism is more than a political clique. It is a cultural movement that is crushing American art and literature with its "American Scene" aesthetique [sic]. No victory against isolationism is possible unless this false art movement with its regionalisms, journalisms, and cheap nationalism is exposed.

We feel that the time is now. We are anxious to enlist your leadership to rally the creative writers so that we may clear the cultural atmosphere of America in order that young artists will have a free atmosphere in which to create.⁴

The prelude to Newman's exhibition introduction was an earlier essay that was begun in 1942 and that remained unpublished during his lifetime, "What About Isolationist Art?"⁵ Extreme anger pervades Newman's essay, in which he accused some artists of being "guilty of corruption" and

⁴Barnett Newman, letter to Wallace Stevens, February 22, 1943, in Barnett Newman files, New York.

⁵Excerpts from the essay were first published in Thomas Hess's 1971 monograph on Newman, and the entire essay appears in *Selected Writings*, pp. 20-29.

who, commercially motivated, ". . . misled a generation of artists, students and public . . ." by their Regionalist and American Scene subject matter. He equated Regionalism in the visual arts with nationalistic Isolationism in politics. Most damning was his condemnation of Isolationism as the dogma that dominated American art, that held a monopoly on "publishers and critics, art dealers, and museum directors." Correctly singling out xenophobic critic Thomas Craven as the leader of Isolationism in art, he condemned all others collectively as blind followers. Newman's political position is clear and as art historians have suggested, he was reacting against the recent "rash of chauvinistic, retrograde exhibitions,"⁶ Perhaps the 1943 Riverside Museum show was intended specifically to counter the Artists For Victory exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum.⁷ But it would be a mistake to use Newman's ideas to help understand the breadth of artistic activity -- even in museums -- in New York at this time.

For while it is true that Thomas Craven was Regionalism's chief ideologue, his arguments defined an attitude in American art that was prevalent in the early

⁶ Editors, *Selected Writings*, p. 20.

⁷ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 68-70.

1930s. Craven published two important books that promoted his point of view and artists he championed including Thomas Hart Benton, Stuart Curry, and Grant Wood. *Men of Art* was published in 1931 and *Modern Art: The Men, The Movements, The Meaning* in 1934. American contemporary art displayed in New York at this time, however, represented numerous directions. For example, a conservative venue such as the Whitney Annual of 1942 included younger modernists such as Alexander Calder, David Smith, Theodore Roszak, Balcombe Greene, Karl Knaths, George L.K. Morris, and Bradley Walker Tomlin.

Newman however, continued to conflate Craven's rightist extremism, leftist Social Realism which flourished as a result of the WPA in the late 1930s, and what he saw as post-Pearl Harbor nationalism. Barnett Newman accused all of gross opportunism. Against the art world's offenses he posed the alternative: the need to fight corruption. Newman suggested that artists lead the way in the art world and use as their models heroic individuals who would fight for peace, today Mahatma Gandhi, and yesterday Emma Goldman, Roger Baldwin, among others. He called their willingness to go to jail instead of compromise, "the

finest expression of a people's ethics and represents the summation of its cultural striving."⁸

Suggesting that artists fight against the dogmatic position, Newman issued a wake-up call for artists to act responsibly. He pleaded,

It is time [artists] understood the political foundation of their art, cleaned house, and went back to the study of art where they belong. It is time artists refused isolationist money, reputiated the art dealers, the favor of museum directors. It is time artists forgot about success . . .⁹

As has been seen in these early essays on art, Newman remained less involved with aesthetics than with moral political positions. His attacks remained against a dogmatic ideology and they lacked a clear artistic alternative. His concern was with the individual responsibility of the artist, and the individual's potential for expressiveness.

The next opportunity to publish came from gallery director and artist Betty Parsons. In retrospect, Betty Parsons was the most supportive force Newman had during this period. Newman met Parsons through Adolph Gottlieb in 1943, when she directed the Wakefield Gallery, and gave

⁸ Barnett Newman, "What About Isolationist Art?," in *Selected Writings*, pp. 21-22.

⁹ Newman, "What About Isolationist Art?," in *Selected Writings*, pp. 28-29.

Gottlieb an exhibition in 1944.¹⁰ Newman's first published essay on art appeared later that very year. It was the brochure introduction for the final exhibition to be held at Wakefield Gallery, "Pre-Columbian Stone Sculpture." Parsons was obviously curious about Newman's evolving thought and stood by as he crystallized his ideas.¹¹ He investigated the meaningfulness of North American primitive art in sections of the unpublished 1945 "Plasmic Image" essay, and went on to write the introduction to the Betty Parsons' Northwest Coast Indian Art exhibition in 1946, which was her own gallery's inaugural show. He later wrote the introduction to another exhibition of primitive art, Amlash Sculpture, the first show at the gallery's new location in 1963. He curated the Ideographic Picture in 1948, a thematic exhibition of the painters whom the Betty Parsons Gallery represented, and wrote another foreword on the relation between the primitive and contemporary artist.

Parsons spoke admiringly of Newman on many occasions.

In 1969 she told an interviewer:

He has been a great friend of mine ever since [we met]. He was always a great help to me; he's such an intelligent man. And he highly approved

¹⁰ Wakefield Gallery was set up in the basement of the Wakefield Bookshop.

¹¹ See Lee Hall, *Betty Parsons* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), p. 81.

of everything I was doing and encouraged me to the hilt.

She then revealed that:

Barney Newman was my greatest help. Because I could discuss anything and everything with him. And he liked my point of view. He never imposed on me. Sometimes he would add to it. But he always gave me my head. He was marvelous that way. Which gave me confidence.¹²

In 1981 she spoke about some of Newman's intellectual interests:

Newman was such a well-rounded man . . . Newman was really a definition of "the urban man" — God, everything about him. I called him the Great Statesman." . . . [He was] a great authority on the primitive. And he suggested, he gave me the idea that the primitive world was a free world and this world that I was now in was a free world. It was no longer under the pressure of the academic world or the rules and regulations that I was brought up by.¹³

Towards the end of the 1940s Newman spent part of most days at the Parsons Gallery, participating in activities from hanging shows, adjusting lights, and editing press releases¹⁴ to leading back-room discussions on speculative topics, for instance "the primitive world was a

¹² Betty Parsons, transcript of interview by Paul Cummings, Betty Parsons Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., June 4 & 9, 1969, p. 25.

¹³ Betty Parsons, transcript of interview by Gerald Silk, Betty Parsons Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., June 11, 1981, 1981, p. 5.

free world and this world that I was now in was a free world." Betty Parsons was more a partner or at least a sympathetic colleague. She represented the antithesis of the opportunistic, exploitative dealer whom Newman criticized in his writings of the early 1940s. Sculptor David Hare described her as a good intermediary, but not a good salesperson. Newman found in Parsons a individual who was intellectually curious and astute, who was an artist as well as a dealer, and who supported the avant-garde artists that he championed.

Kropotkin described cooperation, the natural tendency for like-minded individuals to come together to support each other. He explained that this instinct although not always practiced, nonetheless still present and possible. He stated that mutual aid: "Is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral."¹⁵

¹⁴ Annalee Newman, in interview with author, June 1987.

¹⁵ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (Middlesex, England: Pelican Books, 1939), p. 75. Historian Martin Miller made an important comment on this book: *Mutual Aid* remains a first rate resource to the key ideas in Kropotkin's thinking. "His social theory, its faults notwithstanding, is a moral protest against the inhumanity of the modern world. . . . The metaphors and image of his argument hold together primarily because they are infused with a passionate moral concern. This is Kropotkin's enduring appeal — his ethical

Newman's relationship with Parsons over twenty-seven years was one of mutual admiration and indeed, one can characterize it further as an example of the kind of cooperative friendship that Kropotkin believed led to a better society.

The cooperative spirit seems to have infused Betty Parsons's work with all of the artists in her gallery. She said in a radio broadcast in 1952:

Each one of my painters is an individual. . . . Once I have decided that he is a free personality and that he is not listening to this or to that, I would never dream of imposing my will to create a group for the sake of recognition or applause. What interests me solely is the fact that he is a free individual. I know that his freedom is the result of complete self-discipline. That is why my gallery does not represent a unified school of paintings.¹⁶

Yet Parsons was by no means the only supportive force at this time, evidenced by Newman's praise of Howard Putzel. An art dealer who had worked as Peggy Guggenheim's assistant before he opened his own gallery, Putzel provided visibility for the nascent Abstract Expressionists in the 1945 exhibition "A Problem For Critics." Newman credited Putzel with recognizing a new movement that he

humanism, his devotion to the cause of uplifting." His assumptions about man, which remain a crucial part of each section of his theory, are consistent with this morality."

characterized as: "Spontaneous, unorganized, emerging from several points" ¹⁷ Further, Putzel attached no dogmatic position to the new art movement. The terms "spontaneous" and "unorganized," can be seen as anarchist vocabulary, and when used together in this context suggest conditions or an atmosphere that fostered mutual aid.

Newman wrote a letter to *New York Times* art critic Edward Alden Jewell eulogizing Putzel soon after his death in 1945. He repeated his characterization of the new movement ¹⁸ as one would describe anarchist society: unorganized and spontaneous. This letter obviously meant a lot to Newman because he included versions of it in two sections of drafts of, "The Plasmic Image," an essay he worked on in the mid-1940s. ¹⁹ He wrote about Howard Putzel's "devotion to his mission" supporting an avant-garde. Newman described Putzel's commitment and risk-taking as he often described the courage of the modern

¹⁶ Betty Parsons, "Broadcast WNYC," 1952, in Whitechapel Gallery, *Betty Parsons: Paintings, Gouaches and Sculptures 1955-68*, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1968), p. 13.

¹⁷ Barnett Newman, "The Plasmic Image," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc.), pp. 150-153.

¹⁸ Robert Coates coined the term "Abstract Expressionism" in a review of Hans Hofmann's 1946 exhibition at a gallery run by Betty Parsons, Mortimer Brandt Gallery.

¹⁹ See Newman, *Selected Writings*, pp. 138-155.

artist and as he would describe Kropotkin's in 1968. He said of Putzel in the 1946 eulogy:

It was no easy task to [predict] the revolution that was taking place in American art; yet in one short season, so passionately did he devote himself to this task that this unorganized, spontaneous, unnamed movement became a historic fact. When, soon after he began, his health failed him, so strong was his love of art, so intense was his devotion to his mission [emphasis mine], that he had no love or devotion left for himself. He would still be alive had he postponed his task, had he listened to his doctor instead of to his call. For the gallery was no ordinary showcase for art objects; it was a call to duty [emphasis mine]. In assembling there Gottlieb, Hofmann, Pollock, Rothko, and Tamayo, he let the world know . . . that an authentic art was coming out of America.²⁰

The quote above is most likely the only place one will ever come across an art gallery characterized as "a call to duty!" In the eulogy Newman constructed a Putzel who is a driven altruist, a prime motivator, and risk-taker.

Newman became an unofficial spokesman for the mentioned artists with whom he shared much, even before he exhibited his own paintings. For Newman it was also a call to duty, Due in part to Betty Parsons' support He was regarded by the artists as the most articulate among them: he understood the aims, struggles, and aesthetics of the new mid-century art. By the time Betty Parsons opened her

²⁰ Barnett Newman, "Memorial Letter For Howard Putzel," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), pp. 96-98.

own gallery in 1947 he spent time there daily. Perhaps it was Parson's encouragement that helped Newman formulate an aesthetic position, which he started articulating in the early 1940's.

Real Abstraction

Beginning in 1943 one theme recurs in many of his writings on art during this period; it is his original conception of a 'real abstraction' which he also strives to achieve in his art. He constructs his argument by way of a dialectical exchange which opposes "formal abstraction" to "real abstraction." Whether a piece is a short statement written in behalf of an artist-friend or a major essay, the issue surfaces. To Newman, real and formal abstraction are two modes of expression the modern artist may undertake. In both, the painted surface is nonrepresentational, but in examples of real abstraction pure content is stressed, while in formal abstraction the artist concerns himself with the 'look' of the surface: the balance and harmony of the picture plane. According to Newman, only through real abstraction is the contemporary artist able to create art that is anything other than an art-for-art's sake.

Newman enunciated his position in numerous texts. In all of them he argues the superiority of real abstraction.

He said of the work of former Polish Formalist Teresa Zarnower who exhibited at Betty Parsons: "It is this transition from abstract language to abstract thought, it is this concern with abstract subject matter rather than abstract disciplines that gives her work its strength and dignity."²¹ Real abstraction surfaced as the "abstract thought-complex"²² in another essay, the catalogue introduction for The Ideographic Picture exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery. On this occasion he linked the abstract "thought-complex" ("a living thing," "the abstract shape") of the Kwakiutl artist with the "idea-complex" of the American artists represented in the Parsons show. The Kwakiutl's abstract shape is "directed by a ritualistic will towards metaphysical understanding" and is ". . . real rather than a formal 'abstraction' of a visual fact, with its overtone of an already-known nature."²³ Similarly, it is the Americans' "pure idea that has meaning" and which "makes contact with mystery - of life, of men, of nature . . . " Newman contrasted to this nothing less than all of

²¹ Barnett Newman, *Teresa Zarnower* (N.Y.: Art of this Century, 1946), n.p.n.]; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, pp.103-105.

²² Barnett Newman, *The Ideographic Picture*, (N.Y.: Betty Parsons Gallery, 1947), n.p.n.; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p.107-108.

²³ Newman, *The Ideographic Picture*, n.p.n.

European modernism, which he now derides for its formalistic priorities.²⁴

Newman believed that European modernism still depicts the seen world, and thus did not present new ideas. In another text, a reply he wrote to Clement Greenberg's review of Adolph Gottlieb in *The Nation*, Newman stated:

The world the European artists have created has always been tied to sensation in spite of the fact that in recent years their constant struggle has been to free themselves from the natural world. Brilliant as their successes have been they have always had their base in the material world of sensuality. They may have transcended it but they have never been able to do without it. . . . The links of the Cubists, Fauvists and Surrealists with nature are obvious. The Purists tried to deny nature and became involved with its diagrammatic equivalents - with the realism of geometric shapes. A ninety-degree angle, a triangle and a circle are as much a part of nature as a tree and have all its elements of recognizability.²⁵

The European painters, then, still depicted the phenomenal world of sensation which was evident in the care they took to use geometric shapes, and to establish familiar formal

²⁴ Newman, *The Ideographic Picture*, n.p.n. Modern art styles are described: space cutting; space building; construction; Fauvist destruction; pure line, straight and narrow; tortured line distorted and humiliating; accurate eye, all fingers, the wild eye of dream, winking.

²⁵ Barnett Newman, "Reply to Clement Greenberg's review in *The Nation*," December 6, 1947, in Ellen Johnson, *American Artists on Art 1940 - 1980* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 17.

relationships and balance in their work; i.e. the Europeans were referential. In contrast to this, as Newman continued,

The Americans under discussion [Greenberg had mentioned Rothko, Still, and Newman as associates of Gottlieb] create a truly abstract world which can be discussed only in metaphysical terms. These artists are at home in the world of pure idea, in the meanings of abstract concepts, just as the European painter is at home in the world of cognitive objects and materials. . . . the American transcends his abstract world to make that world real, rendering the epistemological implications of abstract concepts with sufficient conviction and understanding to give them body and expression.²⁶

Newman wanted to have two things: he wanted real abstraction to demonstrate that the image could not be reduced to a symbol of something known in the world outside the picture plane nor could it be reduced to the formal language of Art.

The most thorough going explication of formal vs. real abstraction was stated earlier by Newman in posthumously published fragments of an 11-part "monologue" that the artist called "The Plasmic Image." This text was written over a two-year period, from 1943 to 1945. Sections of the essay were published for the first time in Thomas Hess's

²⁶ Newman, "Reply to Clement Greenberg's Review," p. 17.

1971 exhibition catalogue on the artist.²⁷ "The Plasmic Image" provides rich insights to Newman's ideological position as well as to the iconographic program of his early drawings and paintings and will be discussed later.

The word plasmic derives from plasma and should be understood in all of its dictionary definitions to appreciate the fullness and cleverness of Newman's usage. It is a faintly translucent quartz, therefore an inorganic substance; a bodily fluid, the organic and inorganic substances that constitute the living nucleus and other living parts of the cell. As protoplasm, it is the only form of matter in which the vital phenomena are manifested. In addition to being solid and liquid, plasma is also a gas. It is an ionized gas containing about equal numbers of positive ions and electrons. Therefore it denotes so much about the natural world and phenomena: it can be a solid, a liquid, or a gas and it is also an indivisible living unit. This very pregnant word should be seen as bolstering Newman's intentions in his art itself - he had the same desire to achieve a unified image, in which all

²⁷ Based on the 1969 monograph, Hess's catalogue accompanied the 1971-72 Newman retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York). The details about the production of the "The Plasmic Image" remain uncertain. The editors of *Selected Writings* say that, "This multipartite composition seems to have been written over a

the elements appear in various stages of organismic metamorphosis and also inevitably evoke all of nature as an indivisible, living entity. For Newman this is what constitutes pure content -- or real abstraction. Finally, one can only appreciate Newman's cleverness in choosing such a resonant word, *plasmic*, in relation to - or in direct opposition to - Piet Mondrian's "plastic art" and Neoplasticism.

Dogmatic Geometry

As passionately as he wrote in favor of Kropotkin, where we consistently find a mixing of aesthetics, ethics and politics, Newman denounced the dogmatic opposition he saw personified in Mondrian. Mondrian was a stimulus to so many artists such as the American Abstract Artists, whose formal purity expressed an ordered fundamental essence. But to Newman, Mondrian was the 'enemy' of the open surface. Mondrian was not merely aesthetic anathema; he bore the moral weight of all dictatorial authority which accompanies a system of 'objective' laws or givens.

Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism (translated from the Dutch "Nieuwe Beelding") derives from "plastic" in the sense of

relatively short period of time in the spring of 1945. Hess may have spoken with Newman about the essay.

"formative" or "shaping." Mondrian's term become more comprehensible if we think of it as referring to The New Form or The New Shape in art. He established the specific characteristics of New-Plasticism in painting which typically involved the asymmetrical division of the canvas by straight lines in vertical and horizontal position. The intersections of these elements generated rectangular planes of primary color (red, blue, and yellow) and non-color (black, white, and gray). Although differing in color and size, the rectangular planes and bands are so arranged that they create a tentative balance, a dynamic equilibrium."²⁸

Mondrian's art was of great interest to young American artists even those who found biomorphic imagery to suit their expressive needs. As Mona Hadler pointed out, Mondrian was an "enduring inspiration"²⁹ to William Baziotes. In contradistinction to Newman's views, Baziotes associated Mondrian with a kind of freedom:

. . . freedom is a state of ind. Freedom of mind leads to freedom of paint. Much as I admire Soutine, I admire Mondrian even more. I pointed

²⁸Nancy Troy, *Mondrian and Neo-Plasticism in America*, (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1979), p. 5.

²⁹Mona Hadler, "William Baziotes: Four Sources of Inspiration," in *William Baziotes: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Newport Beach: Newport Harbor Museum, 1978), p. 93.

out to my friend that looseness of execution was no virtue in itself . . . and that he's dug a grave for Mondrian by his mistaken idea of freedom.³⁰

Mondrian's writings became essential reading for the nascent Abstract Expressionists, especially after the 1945 publication of his essays edited by Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt. Yet Newman continually attacked the Dutchman's theories on art and his relational, "abstracted" paintings from at least 1943 onwards in many essays. Newman described the Neo-plastic canvas as schematic, programmatic, didactic, dogmatic, illustrational, mere ornament, well-designed. He maintained that the image in the Neo-plastic painting was merely abstracted from nature. It was still a tree, whose organically imperfect bark and curved branches had been distorted and stretched tautly in straight lines in accordance with Mondrian's evolutionary imperative. Mondrian used line to divide the space of the canvas into areas of primary-color-and-non-color whose part-to-part relationship established the painting's restrictive meaning. In opposition to Mondrian's plastic, Newman even coined his own plasmic image.

³⁰ William Baziotes quoted in Mona Hadler, "William Baziotes: Four Sources of Inspiration," in *William Baziotes: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Newport Beach: Newport Harbor Museum, 1978), p 93.

In fact Mondrian emerges as Newman's conscious antagonist. The Dutch modernist's purist aesthetics were widely known and influential in New York in the early 1940s. By the late 1930s the Abstract American Artists group was bound to him philosophically and stylistically. By the time Mondrian arrived in America he had a strong and devoted following. The artist immigrated to New York to escape war-torn Europe in 1940.³¹

Mondrian moved to 353 E. 56 Street in 1940, sponsored by artist Harry Holtzman who also became executor of Mondrian's estate after the artist's death in 1944. In 1943, Mondrian moved to 15 E. 59th Street where he undertook 'design' projects. He made his own furniture and "The Wall

³¹ See Sidney Janis, "School of Paris Comes to U.S.," *Decision* 2 (Nov.-Dec. 1941), pp. 85-95; Clement Greenberg, "Art Note," *The Nation* 157 (October 9, 1943), p. 416 and (October 16, 1943), p. 455; "Piet Mondrian, 71. . .," *New York Times*, February 2, 1944, p. 21; James Johnson Sweeney, "Piet Mondrian," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 12 (Spring 1945), pp. 11-12; Robert Welsh, "Landscape into Music: Mondrian's New York Period," *Arts Magazine* 40 (February 1966), pp. 33-39; S. R. Guggenheim Museum, *Piet Mondrian: Centennial Exhibition* (N.Y.: S. R. Guggenheim Museum, 1971); Barbara Rose, *Mondrian in New York*, *Artforum* 10 (December 1971), pp. 54-63; "Joseph Masheck, "Mondrian the New Yorker," *Artforum* 13 (October 1974), pp. 58-65; Cynthia Jaffee McCabe, *The Golden Door: Artist-Immigrants of American, 1876-1976* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976). Although a range of topics are covered, none of the readings shed light on Mondrian's interaction with the American avant-garde outside the friendships and philosophical associations with the American Abstract Artists.

Works." Holtzman opened the studio to the public for six weeks after Mondrian's death so that these projects could be seen.³² Exhibition of some of his belongings also took place after his death. Holtzman felt it appropriate to include his tabouret and shelf case in a 1944 posthumous exhibition of his paintings at Valentine Gallery. These, along with Mondrian's home-designed and home made fireplace cover and other objects in his sparsely furnished studio, were part of a total spatial composition.³³

Serious interest in Mondrian in America coincided with the formation of collections of modern art that were made available to the public. Katherine Dreier included Mondrian in the 1926 Société Anonyme show at the Brooklyn Museum and subsequently bought one of his paintings the following year. A.E. Gallatin owned three paintings by Mondrian for his collection which he placed on public view at New York University in 1927 called The Museum of Living Art.

He wrote several texts in the United States. His essay "Pure Plastic Art" was published in a catalogue for a

³²Harry Holtzman in *Piet Mondrian: The Wall Works, 1943-1944* (New York: Carpenter + Hochman Gallery, 1984), p. 31.

³³"Unhappily, when the show was over, the gallery's cleaning assistant assumed that the constructions were merely disposable boxes," Harry Holtzman in *Piet Mondrian: The*

group show in 1942³⁴ and the same year an autobiographical essay, "Toward the True Vision of Reality," was published by Valentine Dudensing Gallery on the occasion of his first exhibition at that gallery.³⁵

When the Museum of Modern Art exhibited its new purchase, *Broadway Boogie Woogie* in 1943, the artist's prominence was acknowledged by Clement Greenberg's observation that "its acquisition was more than justified; it was mandatory;"³⁶ yet at the same time Mondrian's move away from black lines signaled Greenberg's ambivalence about this painting as "a failure worthy only of a great artist."³⁷ Seconding the endorsement of greatness was the

Wall Works, 1943-1944 (New York: Carpenter + Hochman Gallery, 1984), p. 5.

³⁴ "Masters of Abstract Art" at the Helena Rubinstein Salon, 1942. While Mondrian had published in English as early as 1937 (his essay, "Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art," was written when he lived in London and it appeared in the British Constructivist publication *Circle*), it is most likely that Newman first read Mondrian's writings in 1942.

³⁵ Half of the 28 works exhibited were begun in Europe between 1935 & 1940.

³⁶ Clement Greenberg, "Art," *The Nation* 157, October 9, 1943, p. 416.

³⁷ Greenberg, "Art," p. 416. His prominence in the applied arts was acknowledged soon after his arrival in the U.S. In 1941 an article appeared in *Fortune* which summarizes well the extent of Mondrian's impact on contemporary American design. "His concept of carefully balanced spaces and rectangles has widely influenced both typography and layout and has had an important influence upon

publication by Wittenborn, Schultz Inc. of all of Mondrian's texts written in English as part of that publisher's Documents of Modern Art Series. As Robert Motherwell was the editor of the Series, it may be suggested that American vanguard artists outside of the Abstract American Artists group considered Mondrian's ideas important enough to disseminate among the art-reading public.

Newman's plasmic, then, established a conscious relationship with Mondrian's omnipresent purist 'plastic'. He said in 1943: "I wish to call the new painting plasmic because the mental elements of the art have been converted into mental plasma."³⁸ In other words the givens of painting, the rigid formal order he perceived in the European's abstraction, could be shaken out and replaced by an original American, plasmic expression. Mondrian claimed to approach metaphysical content—"pure reality" and "what nature really is"³⁹—through a balance of internal

architectural and industrial design. . . . you can see the impact of Mondrian and the men of his school in books, magazines, posters, trademarks, linoleum, offices - even the table-tops at Childs. "The Great Flight of Culture," *Fortune Magazine* 24, December 1941, p. 103.

³⁸ Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 38.

³⁹ Piet Mondrian, "Towards a True Vision of Reality," *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art* (N.Y.: Wittenborn, Schultz Inc., 1945), pp. 10 and 13.

relationships. When Mondrian said ". . . relationship becomes the chief preoccupation of the artist who is seeking to create equilibrium . . ." and that ". . . the right angle is the only constant relationship . . .,"⁴⁰ his goal was to attain unity through the equilibrium of dynamic movement.

Newman challenged the European's formula of simplifying the visible, which reduced naturalistic shapes to the merely objective.⁴¹ Newman countered: "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 horizon table-line of the earth, the vertical

⁴⁰ Mondrian, "Towards a True Vision of Reality," p. 10.

⁴¹ Newman even goes further in describing Mondrian's aesthetic. He says, "This objective approach to 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. It is a decorative art ...

. . . The painter of the new movement clearly understands the separation between abstraction [decoration] and the art of the abstract [pure content]," in Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 37.

The "design-image" of Mondrian becomes the "abstract esthetic" in Newman's comments on the 1945 MOMA retrospective exhibition, a year after Mondrian's death. Newman commented in "The Plasmic Image," "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," in Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 38

lines of things that stand and grow on it."⁴² Newman would have agreed with Barbara Rose's comment that Mondrian's work was ". . . still Platonic, that it continued to picture a world, no matter how abstracted, that existed outside the painting . . .,"⁴³ and was therefore, on some level, mimetic.

In contrast, for Newman the American painter of the 'new movement' worked from the individual and subjective conscious state; he clearly understood the separation between mere abstraction and the art of the abstract. He was therefore not concerned with the shapes of forms, and geometric forms per se, but with the "creation of forms which by their abstract nature, carry some abstract intellectual content."⁴⁴ In addition, the painter of real abstraction goes beyond the intellect to achieve an originality of a higher order.

He was

. . . trying to go beyond the visible and the known world and is working with forms that are unknown even to him. He is therefore engaged in a true act of discovery in the forms and symbols that will have the living quality of creation.⁴⁵

⁴² Newman in Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 38.

⁴³ Barbara Rose, "Mondrian in New York," *Artforum*, 10, December 1971, p.39.

⁴⁴ Newman in Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), pp. 37-38.

⁴⁵ Newman in Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 38.

For Newman, these were images that were truly non-representational: they could not be seen because they were unknown in the perceptual world. They were subjective and intuitive, yet attainable because they were common to natural processes in which all life forms partake and were therefore universal (in Newman's own work they will pertain to germination as often as to cosmic occurrences) as well. As Newman would have it, they are present in every macro and microcosmic part of the natural world.

Newman's "universal" pertained to temporal considerations as well. His image occurred in the past, present, and future. Real abstraction does not evolve whereas the Dutch artist's aesthetic depends on the belief that geometric abstract art signals a progressive march toward the future's higher consciousness. Mondrian was adamant about the evolution of culture and correct course for art within it.

In the 1942 essay "Pure Plastic Art" Mondrian stated: ". . . man, evolving toward the equilibrium of his duality, will create in ever greater degree, in life as in art, equivalent relationships, and therefore equilibrium."⁴⁶ To Mondrian, non-figurative art proved an evolutionary given,

⁴⁶ Mondrian, "Pure Plastic Art," p. 31.

that art "continues always on its true road."⁴⁷ He said in 1942

. . . art has to attain an exact equilibrium through the creation of pure plastic means composed in absolute opposition. In this way, the two oppositions (vertical and horizontal) are in equivalence, that is to say of the same value: a prime necessity for equilibrium. *By means of abstraction, art has interiorized form and color and brought the curved line to its maximum tension: the straight line [emphasis mine].*⁴⁸

As if to spite the dogmatism of Mondrian's evolutionary imperative, Newman not only wrote against the implications of straight lines and the relational canvases, but grounded his own drawings and paintings in curved, organismic (they're not really Surrealist biomorphs) shapes, wavy lines, and subjective spontaneous strokes.

He committed much creative effort to at least one goal, that of breaking abstract art's association with objective naturalism and geometry in favor of "real abstraction." In his desire to forge a position for

⁴⁷ Mondrian, "Pure Plastic Art," p. 31.

⁴⁸ Mondrian, "Pure Plastic Art," p. 32. He had previously stated the same case in an essay, "Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art" (1937) in the British Constructivist publication, *Circle* when he suggested that the quest for a neo-plastic expression evolves naturally, ". . . we need only take our place in the development of human culture, a development which has made non-figurative art supreme. . . . This points the way for both present and future, we need only continue and develop what already exists. The

himself as an advanced American artist who was not beholden to any artistic tradition, he argued in his writings, drawings, and paintings against classical balance, harmony, and order which he believed to derive from visible reality — all of which he still discerned in Mondrian's flat abstractions..

Newman's misreading of Mondrian is not without further significance. Newman attacked relentlessly and obsessively. His protest against Mondrian recalls what Harold Bloom identified as the inevitable revisionary relationship a strong artist engages in with his precursor — in order to individuate himself. According to Bloom, it is also this misreading that makes the latter's work possible.

Donald Judd realized his own mistake:

I took Barney's paintings—I remember some of them, particularly black and white paintings, which I think now aren't at all like that-sort of blown-up sections of some of Mondrian's paintings, where the stripe would be over on one edge, which Mondrian does all the time. Except Barney would have nothing but white canvas with a strip at one edge and it looked like a section. So I kept thinking of the stripe, as in Mondrian, moving to one side rather than simply being there as it really is in his paintings.⁴⁹

essential thing is that the fixed laws of the plastic arts must be realized."

⁴⁹ Donald Judd interviewed in Jean Siegel, "Around Barnett Newman," *Art News*, vol. 70, No. 6 (October 1971), pp. 46, 59.

For example, two early abstract paintings, *Euclidean Abyss* (1946-47) (fig. 1) and *Death of Euclid* (1947) (fig.2) alert the viewer to both the roots of geometry's rules and the insufficiency of theorems and rules to generate thought outside of the system. *Euclidean Abyss* contains forms that subtly avoid pure geometry. There are two yellowish-orange vertical lines against a murky black ground. The line on the left swerves off of its axis and upward to the left, like a natural bend in a river. The other line, placed flush against the canvas's right edge unsatisfying, backwards 'L'. Its proportions are awkward and the border of the block letter unrulled. Thus, to Newman's way of thinking, the composition avoids closure of thought. This gouache on canvas vehemently opposes geometric or formal abstraction that Newman associated with Piet Mondrian's aesthetic.

In contrast to *Death of Euclid* and *Euclidean Abyss*, Newman painted *Genetic Moment* in 1947. All three paintings are part of one program. Utilizing the same forms and colors as the other two paintings, *Genetic Moment* directly asserts the essence of life force. Here, the potential, spontaneous generation of new life is imaged as a "geometry-resistant" balance of opposite forces. Hardly abstract, male and female genitals present themselves

forthrightly from the top through the bottom of the canvase, and frame concentric circular forms that occupy an upper register. Both male and female are verticals and similar to the pairs of lines in *Death of Euclid* and *Euclidean Abyss*. Then, three quarters of the way down the canvas, both display their genitalia: the female "trunk" splits into two branches with delicate tendril-like roots hanging down between the branches or legs, and the male "trunk" sprouts a penis that extends upward in a large curve toward the female. The penis's reach for the female is defined emphatically by black spokes pulling towards the left, while the female leans toward the male, thrusting a number of horizontal black blots towards the right. The painting embodies Newman's humanistic alternative to geometric abstraction or "dogma" — direct, simple, nature in process.

Newman reiterated his opposition to dogmatic geometric abstraction throughout the rest of his life. In 1958 he wrote a statement for the Museum of Modern Art's *New American Painting*. It is one of his most straightforward writings. His goal was to make certain that his paintings would be understood outside of the tradition of geometric abstraction. And to do this he provoked morality, the open

situation, "a new image based on new principles [could assure] hope for freedom."⁵⁰

Using strident language and a manifesto-like tone, he grabbed the reader's attention with his first sentence: "It is precisely this death image, the grip of geometry that has to be confronted." This death image was the end of the line — from the Egyptian pyramid through European modernism of Picasso and Mondrian, and the Museum of Modern Art's favorites — whether the ". . . collage scheme of free associated forms, whether it is Miro's or Malevich's is to be caught in the same geometric trap." Newman then articulated this powerful declaration of purpose: "Only an art free from any kind of the geometry principles of World War I, only an art of no-geometry can be a new beginning." He asserted that his own art as life — the opposite of death.⁵¹

When, in 1962, John Gordon of the Whitney Museum implored him to allow the Museum to include him in its upcoming exhibition, "Geometric Abstraction in America," Newman refused. He wrote:

To the extent that mine is, I believe, a new kind of painting, devoid of plastic dogma and

⁵⁰ Barnett Newman, "Statement, *The New American Painting* (NY: MoMA, 1959), p. 60, reprinted in *Selected Writings*, pp. 179.

⁵¹ Newman, "Statement," *Selected Writings*, p. 179.

totally unrelated, if not antagonistic to theirs, the inclusion of my work with those others would, it seems to me, only confuse the issues. I did not come out of the world they advocate. To make me a part of it or to present me as its culmination would only distort my work and my history. What is involved here are two separate realms.⁵²

The message was restated by Newman's widow when she sent the letter to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. The Albright-Knox requested that she allow Newman's work to be displayed in its 1989 exhibition, "Abstraction, Geometry, Painting: Selected Geometric Abstract Painting in America Since 1945." So strong was Newman's aversion to and subversion of the geometric format that nineteen years after his death, Annalee Newman refused to lend her husband's work to the show.

⁵² Newman, "Statement," *Selected Writings*, p. 179.

CHAPTER 5

KINDRED SPIRITS: MODELS OF AESTHETICS AND ANARCHISM

Philosophical anarchism had vocal adherents in the 1940s. According to Paul Avrich:

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, anarchism in America was in the doldrums. . . . the chief evidence of its continued presence lay in a succession of cultural and literary magazines — *Retort* and *Resistance* in the East, *The Ark* and *The Needle* in the West — that published writers of the caliber of Saul Bellow, Paul Goodman, and George Woodcock as well as such poets as Kenneth Rexroth, Kenneth Patchen, and Allen Ginsburg
 . . . *Politics* 1944–1949 . . . [MacDonald said] “forsook the true Marxist faith to whore after the strange gods of anarchism and pacificism.”¹

It is helpful to know the range of anarchist positions that were accessible in print because some intellectual viewpoints relate in spirit to Newman’s developing artistic principles. The writings of Herbert Read, one of the “intellectual heroes”² to Abstract Expressionists, can be examined for their contribution to this new contextual reading as can the small journal, based in upstate New

¹ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 417.

² Steven Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 33.

York, *Retort*³. The long-running Yiddish- language anarchist newspaper, the *Freie Arbiter Stimme* (*Free Voice of Labor*) was mentioned by Newman, who said that he read the paper during this period. All of the resources mentioned above shared a high regard for Peter Kropotkin's philosophical anarchism.

Herbert Read (1893-1969), the British art and critic, poet who successfully integrated anarchism with art criticism, was the author of more than sixty books and innumerable articles on modern art between 1933 and 1968.⁴ Revealing his unfailing belief that modernism is important to all, he noted a "prejudice against modern art" in society at large as late as 1960. Attributing the prejudice to "confined vision or a narrow range of sensibility," he reminded: "People forget that the artist has the acutest sense of us all; and he can only be true to himself and to his function if he expresses that acuteness to the final edge. We are without courage, without freedom, without passion and joy, if we refuse to follow where he [the

³ Annalee Newman, interview with author, June 19, 1992. Mrs. Newman said the title sounds familiar to her. She also said that her husband did not have subscriptions to any magazine. She remembered him saying: "Only buy what you want to read."

⁴ James King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), p. xviii.

artist] leads."⁵ In recent years Read's ideas concerning the meaning of art and the role of the artist in society has fallen out of favor with post-modern commentators.⁶

Read's knowledge of art, literature, philosophy, theories of politics, and psychology was encyclopedic. He considered psychological dispositions to be crucial catalysts driving the individual's creative activity. Not surprisingly, his political viewpoints always figured into his writing concerning art criticism. His politics constitute a fascinating aspect of Read's complex role as an art critic. Specifically, his allegiance to philosophical anarchism remained fundamental throughout his long life. Read's writings also provide a model for understanding the arguments and direction philosophical anarchism took in the 1940s. Historian of anarchism David Goodway has suggested that Read's anarchist politics were a "central, integrating component"⁷ in all of Read's activities.

Drawn to all creative activity, by the early 1930s Herbert Read had become the leading British spokesman for

⁵ Herbert Read, *Art Now* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 5th edition, 1960), p. 11.

⁶ See David Goodway, editor, *Herbert Read Reassessed* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 9.

⁷ Goodway, *Herbert Read Reassessed*, p. 10.

European modern art. He wrote regularly for *The Listener* and edited *Burlington Magazine* from 1933 to 1939. He was a prolific writer every form: fiction, poetry, art criticism, essays, and books, starting with *Art Now* in 1933. In *Art Now* he spoke of modern art's relation to the general character of a revolution. Here, he recognized the diversity of the human spirit and suggested that "this diversity can be diversely expressed, that we must look for an explanation of the vitality and of the validity of the modern movement."⁸

Read's views on art had tremendous influence and appeal in both Europe and the United States at least through the 1960s.⁹ His art criticism arose out of his strongly held attitude that artworks are "not the products of an age or a civilisation (sic) but the individual revolt against an age or civilisation."¹⁰ As will be shown, this component is related to his anarchist outlook.

⁸ Read, *Art Now*, p.44

⁹ King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read*, p. xv "In a *Punch* drawing from 1964, one gallery-goer asks another: 'do you think Sir Herbert Read takes something to keep him so avant-garde?'"

¹⁰ Herbert Read, "War Diary," 1916 in George Woodcock, "A Trueborn English Romantic," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 38, No. 2 (November 1963), p. 61. "War Diary" was published for the first time in 1963 in Read's *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies*. Woodcock's article is a review of the book.

Read propounded an ethical component for modern art. Put another way, he believed that humanistic content is implicit even in abstract art. Additionally, Read believed that aesthetic creativity has strong psychological roots. He understood and accepted modernism in every manifestation important at the time including Cubism, Expressionism, Constructivism, and Surrealism. Avant-garde in his sensibilities and broad in his breadth of knowledge, Read synthesized myriad romantic, formal, and expressionist impulses in modern art.¹¹

The range of projects Read undertook throughout his career was varied and immense. Read served as the founding director of the London Institute for Contemporary Art, starting in 1947. Beginning in the late 1930s Americans sought out Read's opinions and advice. For example, he was consultant to Peggy Guggenheim when she lived in London, and then later when she moved to New York and opened the influential Art of This Century gallery. Art historian Stephen Polcari, who examined the intellectual roots of Abstract Expressionism, found that Read reinforced many other intellectual giants whom American artists lionized in

¹¹ See Larry Lutchmansingh, "Sir Herbert Read's Philosophy of Modern Art," Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1968 (revised for UMI 1974).

the 1940s such as Freud, Jung, Nietzsche and Joseph Campbell, T.S. Eliot, and James Joyce.¹² One of the conceptual premises shared by these authors was an understanding that a primitive aspect of humanity, expressed either consciously or remaining unconscious, plays an essential part in determining and expressing individuality. Polcari realized that Read addressed this important issue and that he was influenced by all of these men, especially Jung. Polcari also noted that Read was the "the principal contemporary English-language critic read by almost all Abstract Expressionists" at this time."¹³

Yet Read was committed to many more intellectual and ideological positions as well. Read became director of Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung's collected works in 1943.¹⁴ A year earlier, in 1942, Read published *Kropotkin: Selections From His Writings*.

My purpose is to illuminate, through the example of Herbert Read, how strongly philosophical anarchism could

¹² Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, p. 33.

¹³ Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, p. 20.

¹⁴ Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, p. 43. Also still useful, see Barbara Reise, "Primitivism in the Writings of Barnett Newman: A Study in the Ideological Background of Abstract Expressionism," unpublished Master's Thesis, Columbia University 1965.

inform aesthetic theories, especially during the '40s. During the early '40s Read published *The Philosophy of Anarchism*, a selection of Kropotkin's writings, *The Politics of the Unpolitical* and *The Education of Free Men*.¹⁵ Read expressed anarchism as an ideal rather than as a clear-cut political agenda, George Woodcock believed that this anarchist tendency allowed Read to write about art with "a quality of empathy rather than analysis" and with a need to point out that "art has its ethical implications."¹⁶

It was at this time that Barnett Newman actively formulated his own aesthetics and wrote art criticism. Newman and Read shared many of the same opinions on the potential of society and the potential of modern art. The strengths in both men's arguments derive from their adherence to the beliefs that a sense of ethical responsibility informs the best art and social action. Whether or not Newman knew the extent of Read's commitment to anarchism, he did know that Read had read Kropotkin.¹⁷

¹⁵ King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read*, p. 221.

¹⁶ George Woodcock, "A Trueborn English Romantic, " *Arts Magazine*, vol. 38, no. 2 (November 1963), p. 62.

¹⁷ See Barnett Newman, "To Be or Not" *Tiger's Eye* (October 1949); reprinted in Ann Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), pp.207-210.

Background of Read's Political Viewpoints

David Thistlewood explained that during the rise of German nationalism, Read was not surprised to see an "attempt to eradicate abstract art." Yet Read did not join the Communist Party because it also had an "antipathy towards all realities of art except the one it had contrived in social realism. He was appalled to discover that it too had stamped out abstract art. . . ." ¹⁸ As Read himself observed in 1937:

In Soviet Russia any work of art that is not simple, conventional, and conformist is denounced as "leftist distortion". Any originality is described as "petty bourgeois individualism. . ." The phrases vary in Germany and Italy, but they are to the same effect. ¹⁹

He also noted:

Fascism has . . . insisted on a purely rational and functional interpretation of art. . . . At this point, marxism (sic) and fascism, the prodigal and dutiful sons of Hegel, meet. . . . There is not the slightest difference, in intention, in control and in final product, between the art of marxist Russia and the art of fascist Germany. ²⁰

¹⁸ David Thistlewood, "Creativity and Political Identification in the Work of Herbert Read," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Autumn 1986), p. 349.

¹⁹ Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. 27.

²⁰ Read, *Poetry and Anarchism*, p. 25.

His promotion of modern art, and in particular abstraction, in the 1930s took place against this background of the rise of Fascism and in antipathy to any form of dictated art.

In the 1930s, Read supported abstraction, in part as a counter attack against the forces discussed above. "He was an unabashed advocate . . . urging all creative people to cultivate the irrational and imprecise."²¹ He supported surrealism, yet he championed all forms of abstraction with a determined insistence that the modern artist could "transform the world by his or her visions of a new reality."²²

Historian of 20th century anarchism David Goodway has recently written in depth about Read's politics and noted: "There is considerable irony in the ultra-modern trend-setter in the visual arts electing so permanently unfashionable a political creed as anarchism."²³ Yet for Goodway, Read's anarchism is the factor that provides the

²¹ David Thistlewood, "Creativity and Political Identification in the Work of Herbert Read," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Autumn 1986), p. 349.

²² Thistlewood, "Creativity and Political Identification in the Work of Herbert Read," p. 349.

²³ Goodway, "The Politics of Herbert Read," in *Herbert Read Reassessed*, p. 179.

unifying context by which to understand Read's myriad activities and subjects of his writings.²⁴ Parallels can be drawn between Read and Newman's grasp of certain issues, including the meanings of and significant forms of modern art as filtered through the lens of anarchism.

Overall Read's writing aimed to blend aesthetics, psychological sources, and art's political benefit for society. And Read was concerned with, as Newman himself noted in *The Tiger's Eye*, the social nature of man.²⁵

Throughout his life Read insisted that aesthetics is potentially more than mere aesthetics, that it is also a reflection of the spirit and an ethical position.

Read made his first trip to the United States during the Spring of 1946 when he delivered a series of lectures at Yale University. He presented seminar lectures at Princeton in 1951, and in 1953-54 he gave the Norton

²⁴ Goodway admits that Read's actions could be contradictory and that his anarchism was imperfect. Read's imperfections included that he spread himself over too many fields and he accepted a knighthood, which was odds with his revolutionary politics. See *Herbert Read Reassessed*, p. 10.

²⁵ Editors, "To Be or Not," *The Tiger's Eye* 9, special section, (October 1949).

lectures at Harvard and the Mellon lectures at the National Gallery of Art in Washington.²⁶

The Grass Roots of Art

The four lectures that Read presented at Yale were immediately published by art book publisher Wittenborn Schultz as *The Grass Roots of Art*. Subtitled "Lectures on the Social Aspects of Art in an Industrial Age" Read delved into the issues of freedom that were relevant to artists working in a post-war world:

The formal liberation that we now enjoy is all-important, and many artists are satisfied with it. But the main release in modern art affects not its form, but its content. It is the imagination that has found freedom.²⁷

Relating this freedom to the political arena, Read denounced historic and recent attempts by outside ideological institutions whether religious (Puritan) or political (Fascist) to limit artists by constricting the imagination, "to control it from a centre and to impose uniformity on it." He continued: "I personally take the view, which is heterodox to most people, that the more

²⁶ See Robert Richman, editor, *The Arts at Mid-Century* (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), p. 305; Goodway, *Herbert Read Reassessed*, p. 4. The Princeton talks became Part One of *The True Voice of Feeling* (1953), The Harvard talks were published as *Icon and Idea* (1955) and the National Gallery of Art talks were published in *The Art of Sculpture* (1956).

²⁷ Herbert Read, *The Grass Roots of Art* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1946), p. 15.

consciously moral or political values are imposed on art, the more art suffers. Art is spontaneous, the unpremeditated act of an individual, but always innocent."²⁸

Looking back on modern art of the last fifty years, Read summed up the artist's relevance to society. His statements had a distinctly anarchist ring. He suggested that, like other members of society, the individual artist who is free within him- or herself will flourish in the community of like-minded individuals. These beliefs are close to Kropotkin's.

There is a sense in which freedom implies isolation and inertia. But the real freedom is a freedom to act, to create, to move in reciprocal orbits with other free units. It is that dynamic freedom which we must seek for art, and I think we shall find it only in communities of a comfortable size, where intimacy is possible and a personality can have free scope and a friendly audience. I am not saying that a personality cannot find freedom to express itself within a vast centralized State. . . . What I am saying is that a free personality, a noble soul, is independent of powers and potentates, as of all the evil and destruction they let loose in the world.²⁹

In *The Grass Roots of Art*, Read set out to show: "Art, in the tangible form of living and creative artists, is not the by-product of a culture; rather a culture is the end-

²⁸ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p. 19.

²⁹ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p. 33.

product of the outstanding personalities of a number of artists."³⁰ As far as how to proceed from here on out:

A new social order will be possible only in so far as it provides for personal freedom. To provide for personal freedom is largely a question of providing the opportunity for creative activities.³¹

It is clear that Read saw "interconnections being made among politics, sociology, education, design, and culture. Read no longer viewed the artist as the outsider."³² The anarchist understood that art produces civilization, that art is intimately related to the production of the natural social structure of the country and art was not a product of it. Newman's oft spoken pronouncement that if his art were properly understood it would mean the end of the state capitalism now makes a little more sense. It is the anarchist's conviction that art functions in this manner.

Read took the opportunity in these lectures to propose a way to rebuild vigilantly. At the time that Read composed *The Grass Roots of Art*, post-war England, Read's homeland, was being rebuilt. His imperative was to rebuild society with the safeguard that such a situation as Fascism or German Nationalism could not recur. The anarchist needed

³⁰ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p.14.

³¹ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p.15.

³² King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read*, p. 229.

to possess "freedom to act, to create, to move in reciprocal orbits with other free units. It is that dynamic freedom which we must seek for art."³³ However, only in small groups and with a sympathetic audience could reconstruction be possible. The friendly audience widened the orbits of reciprocity; it continued the dialogue. This creative spirit provided, in Read's view, a safeguard. This was written after the experience of World War II. The formative experience of this attitude must be the rise of Fascism which culminated in modern "total war." He stressed more strongly than ever that aesthetic sensibility was innate and its nurturing was essential to the health of society.

Read continually referenced recent events in his argument. In his hope for the future - the reconstruction of society would wholeheartedly endorse the role that art should play. Despite potential powers against him, his synthesis grew out of the antithetical terms of the recent past: the engulfing global situation he witnessed first hand, the growth of nationalist power which attempted to annihilate all individual growth. As art was the expression of the free personality which recognized the ability within

³³ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p.33.

himself to act, it exercised a "creative spirit"³⁴, and in this way set an example for others.

Read alluded to Fascism which, although recently defeated, could still legitimately menace or threaten humanity. He saw in Fascism an attempt "to dragoon art - to control it from a centre and to impose uniformity on it." Art suffered when political values such as this are imposed on it. "Art is spontaneous, the unpremeditated act of an individual, but always innocent."³⁵ This was a distinctly anarchist position: a work of art would always be the product of the individual personality, and of that personality operating naturally, and not in a social vacuum, but in maximum conditions of personal freedom.

It is clear here that Read established the individual artist, the unique personality, even private mark-making artist as the opposite of recent history's example of the imposition of a doctrinaire conception of style and purpose. The artist's freedom is framed within this landscape of the world situation. However, only in small groups, and with a friendly audience, could reconstruction be possible.

³⁴ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art* , p. 35.

³⁵ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p.19.

Kropotkin's teaching of mutual aid is fundamental to Read's position. Read's statement: "Art movements in general, we may conclude, are legitimate in so far as they take the form of co-operative societies to aid in the free intercommunication of the personal styles of their members"³⁶ is evidence of this. Woodcock also points out the "classic anarchist position: the denunciation of the State, the proclamation that societies must be built, like houses, from the ground up. For a culture 'grows out of the soil, out of the people, out of their daily life, their joy in work, and if this joy does not exist, the culture will not exist.'" ³⁷

The Tiger's Eye

For its October 1949 issue, the editors of *The Tiger's Eye*, Ruth and John Stephan, solicited reactions to British psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow's book, *The Neurosis of Man*. The Stepahns explained their reason: "many of the points emphasized in this study of human behavior are parallel to the aesthetic tenets held by this magazine."³⁸ The editors were interested in Burrow's conclusion that peer "group

³⁶ Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p.33.

³⁷ Woodcock, *Herbert Read: The Stream and the Source*, p. 252.

³⁸ "Editorial," *The Tiger's Eye* 9 (October 1949), p. 69.

analysis" could eliminate the sense of alienation that the individual experienced in modern life.

Burrow's ideas were different from prevailing existentialist notions that alienation was a necessary condition or *malaise*. *The Tiger's Eye* eagerly provided a forum for Burrow's viewpoints. The Stephans stated, "Whether or not Dr. Burrow believes in art as the artist believes in it is not important, for he is not an aesthete but a scientist and expresses, as such, only a personal viewpoint."³⁹

Both Herbert Read and Barnett Newman were among the six commentators invited to respond to the book.⁴⁰ Both Read and Newman raised points that addressed the individual's relation to society and the individual's ways of asserting individuality. Read's review was enthusiastic while Newman's opinion of Burrow's book was highly critical.

Herbert Read had followed Burrow's writings for twenty years when he wrote the essay for *The Tiger's Eye*. He understood many of Burrow's basic ideas. Read wrote: "He [Burrow] shows that from its birth the child is inducted

³⁹ "Editorial," *The Tiger's Eye* 9 p. 69.

⁴⁰ The others included poet Jean Garrigue, novelist Seymour Krim, poet Richard Eberhart, and semantic scholar and editor of *Etc.* S.I. Hayakawa.

into an artificial pretence -- a sort of make-believe world of social behaviour and habit which has no relation whatsoever to the inherent reality of the living organism."⁴¹ For Read:

Dr. Burrow's psychology is of commanding interest to one who not only sees education as an initiation into the organic life (or creative activity) of the group, but also sees the group itself as a self-governing anarchistic organism. But the matter does not end with the achievement of social harmony. Such a harmony would be inert were it not ceaselessly renewed in the adventures and discoveries of art and science. . . . I believe that Dr. Burrow has . . . explained the secret of cultural vitality.⁴²

On the other hand, Newman attacked Burrow's premises. He began with a distinction between his and Burrow's views on man's role in society. He stated that Burrow considered man to be "conditioned by the cultural instruments of society to consider himself a part of society rather than a social fact."⁴³ For Newman this distinction allowed for individuality, while Burrow's conceptualization did not. Newman believed that Burrow reduced the human personality down to a scientific model, "a diagram of science [that becomes] Science, some supernatural verity" and therefore

⁴¹ Herbert Read, "To Be or Not," *The Tiger's Eye* 9 (October 1949), p. 115.

⁴² Read, "To Be or Not," p. 117.

⁴³ Barnett Newman, in "To Be or Not," *The Tiger's Eye* 9 (October 1949), p. 122.

"an emblem of a species rather than as a single individual within a phylum." His argument regarding formal vs real abstraction is a variant of this approach.

But there is something more important than Newman's reaction to *The Neurosis of Man*.⁴⁴ This essay by Newman is important because he mentions Kropotkin in relation to Herbert Read. Newman wrote:

Trigant Burrow's name came to my attention through the writings of Herbert Read, who, in his concern with the social nature of man, has quoted from Burrow as the harbinger of a new vision. It was, therefore with some eagerness that I came to this book, hoping to find some true insight into a problem that has great interest for me . . . Read who in the fields of art and literature (no matter how much I may disagree with him about specific ideas) knows better than to confuse the false with the real, in the field of social philosophy shows the same ingenuousness he had before he read Kropotkin. He knows that an all-embracing formula, the single secret does not exist in the arts. Does he still persist in finding panaceas, does he still believe that there is a secret formula that will solve man's social problem?⁴⁵

Newman took seriously many of Read's ideas, especially Read's folding of philosophical anarchism into aesthetic concerns. Newman may have very well read *The Grass Roots of*

⁴⁴ Newman's *The Tiger's Eye* essay is reprinted in O'Neill's *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*. The title of Dr. Trigant Burrow's book is titled *The Neuroses of Man* in both the table of contents and body of O'Neill's book while in *Tiger's Eye* it is titled *The Neurosis of Man*.

⁴⁵ Newman, "To Be or Not" *Selected Writings*, p. 115.

Art. In that book Read stated that a contemporary psychological text by Trigant Burrow recontextualized the basic concept of mutual aid. Kropotkin and Read endorsed mutual aid to the extent that it qualified as the only model "possible if we are to retain any belief in the worth of life."⁴⁶ The realization and practice of mutual aid was absolutely vital; anything else resulted in further war and devastation. In *The Grass Roots of Art* Read also wrote:

. . . biological, historical and sociological [evidence] can be brought together (it was done with great effect by Kropotkin in *Mutual Aid*) to show that societies only cohere by virtue of a natural principle of cooperation. Much evidence of a psychological nature has been accumulated in recent years which proves that war and conflict, as well as individual neuroses, are regressions from a natural condition of interdependence. War is a disease of society just as schizophrenia is a disease of the human personality, and society can only be cured of its ills by returning to its "biological heritage of cooperation and true social integration."⁴⁷

Read's reference, in quotation marks, is taken from a biologist's study of cooperative behavior and Read also cited Trigant Burrow's 1937 *Biology of Human Conflict* in this note. Read synthesized these overlapping subjects, bringing them to the attention of the American avant-garde.

⁴⁶ Read, *The Grassroots of Art*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ Herbert Read, *The Grass Roots of Art*, p. 29

The Magazine of Art's "A Symposium: The State of American Art," March, 1949

While Herbert Read's anarchism was indisputable, it was not important to most art critics. On the other hand his points of view on contemporary art were important, as evidenced by the fact that they were singled out for debate among art professionals in 1949. The *Magazine of Art* composed a questionnaire that polled critics and others on the "state of American art today, given the perspective of the last few years upon our development and the comparable evolution abroad."⁴⁸ Herbert Read was the only individual whose comments were quoted and then used as the basis of the discussion. Thus Read's inclusion indicated his prestige among American art professionals. All of the questions put on the table at the symposium itself demonstrated the concerns and problems that modernism still posed in the United States. Indeed, in 1949 modern art -- its manifestations and meanings -- were open to argument.

Magazine of Art editor Robert Goldwater asked three general, open-ended questions to sixteen men: literary and art critics, art historians, and museum curators and

⁴⁸ Robert Goldwater, "A Symposium: The State of American Art," *Magazine of Art*, vol. 42, no. 3, March 1949, p. 83.

directors.⁴⁹ Goldwater considered a broad spectrum of relevant problems in contemporary art. He queried the participants about three general areas, and elicited a range of opinion. All of the participants responded thoughtfully, and Goldwater published their lengthy answers. The three question areas that Goldwater posed included: reflections on the "Americanness" (or not) of American art, the possibility of cross-fertilization between the literary and visual arts, and the following issue that Herbert Read raised in lectures he gave in the United States in 1948. Below are the questions that relate to Read's statements:

In his lectures here last spring Herbert Read suggested that our habitual modes of dividing recent art into the extremes of "abstraction" and "naturalism" no longer apply to current creativity. He proposed the idea that, far from being antagonistic, these two tendencies are equally strong within the individual and correspond to divergent emotional directions-so that they can be practiced simultaneously by the artist, his (unconscious) choice of style depending upon his mood of the moment. Do you think this true at present?

In a way, this problem for the individual artists is but an intensification of the broader problem of an "eclecticism of styles" in artists' practice and public taste. Though many artists engage in a "battle of styles," profoundly

⁴⁹ The participants included Walter Abell, Alfred Barr, Jacques Barzun, John Baur, Holger Cahill, Alfred Frankenstein, Lloyd Goodrich, Clement Greenberg, George Heard Hamilton, Douglas MacAgy, H.W. Janson, Daniel Catton Rich, James Thrall Soby, Lionel Trilling, John Devoluy, and Patrick Heron.

convinced of the virtues and validity of one alone, exhibitions and prize awards reflect the assumption of all "styles" are equally valid (in themselves and as general expressions). Would you say that all "styles" of art can be equally well carried out by different artists, success depending only on the quality of the individual work? Is such eclecticism in public taste a normal phenomenon of twentieth-century visual culture?⁵⁰

Excerpts from selected individuals' answers give a sense of the seriousness with which the writers addressed the issues. Most of them shared the belief that what distinguished American art for the better was its diversity. They remarked on the lack of a dominant contemporary trend (Soby) and no "well-marked trend or direction, although a strong, broad and diversified movement toward abstraction"⁵¹ (Barr).

Only one respondent's answer had an antagonistic tone. Clement Greenberg, as might be expected, disagreed with Read's viewpoint. His response was the strongest of all of the participants. He called Read's suggestion that naturalism and abstraction might be two internally co-existent tendencies "illusory." Explaining his objection he stated firmly:

⁵⁰ Goldwater, "A Symposium: The State of American Art," p. 83.

⁵¹ Alfred Barr, in "A Symposium: The State of American Art," p. 85.

I believe that the evidence upon which Herbert Read rests his suggestion that abstract and naturalistic art are compatible in the same age and even in the same person is illusory. The naturalistic art of our time is unredeemable, as it requires only taste to discover; and the sheer multitude of those who still practice it does not make it any more valid. Moreover, the whole bother about eclecticism serves only to conceal the true situation in art today. On one side we have cubism, cubist-derived abstract art and expressionism; on the other we have surrealism, even futurism, neo-romanticism. *Neue Sachlichkeit*, magic realism, etc. The first is advanced, creative, evolving, since it corresponds to the truth of contemporary life; the second has simply found new pretexts, all of them literary or journalistic, to reintroduce what is essentially academic naturalism.⁵²

Greenberg advanced the cause of abstract expressionists whom he characterized as artists who must still "waste valuable energy in the effort to survive as working artists in the face of a public whose indifference consigns them to neglect and poverty." In contrast he declared that the Museum of Modern Art and Whitney supported a "spurious kind of modern art." For Greenberg, there was no middle ground.

On the other hand, John I.H. Baur of the Whitney Museum had this to say:

I do not believe there is any unity in American painting today. . . . in a civilization as diversified as ours, it is not surprising that our art reflects many and sometimes opposed facets. . . . whether he sees the world in terms of intuition and feeling or in terms of rational relationships and the beauty of an intellectual

⁵² Clement Greenberg, in "A Symposium: The State of American Art," p. 92.

order-these seem the things that determine the basic qualities of "styles." Such contrasts are equally important in measuring the accomplishments of a Sheeler and a Levine, or a Rice Pereira and a Gorky.⁵³

Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art, presented an even-handed argument. His opinions represent the general tenor of the *Magazine of Art's* other respondents as well. He described American post-World War II abstraction as the "third wave of American in American art":

Abstraction and realism were crude and ambiguous terms but they have a present usefulness as indications of polarity. . . . An actual "battle of styles," as for instance between realism and abstraction, is desirable only to those who thrive on a feeling of partisanship. Both directions are valid and useful-and freedom to produce them and enjoy them should be protected as an essential liberty. There are, however, serious reasons for taking sides when one kind of art or another is dogmatically asserted to be the only funicular up Parnassus or, worse, when it is maliciously attacked by the ignorant, the frightened, the priggish, the opportunistic, the bigoted, the backward, the vulgar or the venal. Then those who love art or spiritual freedom cannot remain neutral.⁵⁴

⁵³ John Baur, in "A Symposium: The State of American Art," p. 87.

⁵⁴ Barr in Goldwater, "A Symposium: The State of American Art," p. 85.

Respondents mentioned Picasso as the one artist who successfully negotiated both naturalism and abstraction without compromising potency of expression.

Since it opened in 1929, The Museum of Modern Art, under Barr's stewardship, supported European formalist modernism. MoMA had traditionally favored an eclectic approach to American art. Barr's reflected the pressure that modernism was experiencing in light of the early attacks of the Cold War. Conservative political factions saw American modernism as subversive.

Douglas Macagy was more nuanced as he tried to accommodate many in his assessment:

The proposition that "abstraction" and "naturalism" can be practiced simultaneously by the same artists is plausible in limited circumstances, but it may not apply to all types of expression today.

. . . the realm that includes "naturalism" may extend to a kind of "abstraction" without violating its basic idiom. . . . The diversity and contrast of belief, curiosity and behavior in society at large occur as well within the individual, and differences on this level do not invalidate the position that a demonstration of diversity in a collective sense is, by extension, an affirmation of the individual's privilege to form his own patterns of actions.⁵⁵

The *Magazine of Art's* symposium elucidates mid-century issues and Herbert Read's prominence among them.

⁵⁵ Douglas Macagy, in Goldwater, "A Symposium: The State of American Art," pp. 94-95.

Herbert Read was never a spokesman for Abstract Expressionism. Yet in 1949 Read contributed to the debate. His ideas, that the emotional state of the artist contributed to stylistic choices, made an impact on American art critics, including advocates of Abstract Expressionism like Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg.

"My Anarchism"

Read was among the writers who contextualized modern art within traditions of modern intellectual thought. He also contextualized the relevance of anarchist thought for modern society and addressed how anarchism could be updated.⁵⁶ One essay, "Pragmatic Anarchism," appeared in *Encounter* in January 1968. "Pragmatic Anarchism" is a review article of an anthology of over fifty writings, *Patterns of Anarchy*⁵⁷ Read took the occasion of the book's

⁵⁶ George Woodcock remembered: "On his return from his first visit to the United States after World War II . . . he came to see me and talked mostly about supermarkets, which he had seen for the first time, and which interested him because people took what they wanted from the shelves; it seemed to him that, if only the cash desks at the entrances could be removed, the supermarket would be the perfect model for free anarchist communist distribution as envisaged by Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread*." In Goodway, *Herbert Read Reassessed*, p. 186.

⁵⁷ The publication of *Patterns of Anarchy* is itself a reminder that anarchism was of great interest to the New Left and other '60s activists. *Patterns of Anarchy* contained selections from forty-one writers, some of whom

publication as the opportunity to assert anarchism's contemporary and continuing relevance. The essay reappeared the following year as "My Anarchism" in Read's own anthology *The Cult of Sincerity*.

In his review article, Read chronicled his steadfast, fifty-year allegiance to philosophical anarchism. He explained that he "completed his conversion to anarchism"⁵⁸ by 1917, having read its major theorists. He found anarchism to be compatible with the modern age's intellectual gains in all fields.

The pivotal point around which the essay revolved is the connection Read drew between anarchism and 20th century developments in individual psychology. Read positioned anarchism as a humanistic tendency, one that was or should be especially compatible with Jungian psychology. In fact, Read proposed a synthesis between Jungian psychology and anarchism. In particular, he referenced Jung's description of the process of individuation, calling it ". . . that part of individual psychology that has most relevance to anarchism." Read also believed that Kropotkin's theories

Read said "expressed an anarchist philosophy though they may never have used the word anarchism." See Herbert Read, "Pragmatic Anarchism," *Encounter*, vol. 30 (January 1968), p.54.

⁵⁸ Woodcock, *Herbert Read: The Stream and the Source*, p. 20.

remained relevant throughout the twentieth century. He stated: "Kropotkin remains the greatest exponent of scientific anarchism, but since Kropotkin's time his ideas have been immensely reinforced by the development of individual psychology." Kropotkin clearly enunciated the importance of individuation at the beginning of the 20th century, in his *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on the subject of anarchism.

Individuation of the self is a key concept in both Jung's theories and in Kropotkin's writings. It is one of the premises of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*. Both the psychologist and the anarchist understood that individuation was *necessary* in order for the individual to integrate into society. Read defined integration as "the reconciliation of individual uniqueness with social unity."⁵⁹

To appreciate the relevance of the relationship between individual psychology and anarchism Read explained that people must return to the philosophical foundations of anarchism and to certain stated or assumed premises of anarchism:

⁵⁹ Herbert Read, "My Anarchism," in *The Cult of Sincerity* (NY: Horizon Press, 1969), p. 91. Read stated that he explicated this twenty-five years earlier in *Education Through Art*.

. . . they are nothing less than the perennial problems of ethical and political philosophy. This is parallel in some ways to Jung's description of the personal psyche in relation to the collective psyche, and to the distinction which Jung makes between the undifferentiated ego instincts and the achieved personality of 'Self'.⁶⁰

Here Read turned to Jung himself, explaining: "Since the individual is not only a single entity, but also by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, the process of individuation does not lead to isolation, but to an intenser (sic) and more universal collective solidarity."⁶¹ Read saw a logical and natural affinity with Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid, and wrote, "The ego, we might say, achieves his own in order to offer it, in mutual trust to 'the other.'"⁶²

Read refused to call himself idealistic, but instead insisted that his attachment to anarchism was "quixotic," a pragmatic fight for the spirit. Later that same year, 1968, Barnett Newman characterized Kropotkin as quixotic: one who could never be neutral: "who takes a stand on moral issues."⁶³ Although he called Kropotkin idealistic, he qualified the description: "Only by having an ideal, a

⁶⁰ Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, p. 86.

⁶¹ Read, "Pragmatic Anarchism," p. 59.

⁶² Read, "Pragmatic Anarchism," pp. 59-60.

⁶³ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," pp. 46-47.

quixotic ideal, can one paradoxically save oneself from the smugness of self-deception."⁶⁴

Retort

Retort was a small journal published in Bearsville, just west of the town of Woodstock, New York, over a period of nine years, from 1942 to 1951. It was first subtitled "a journal of social philosophy and the arts" and by volume three in 1947 proclaimed itself "an anarchist quarterly of social philosophy and the arts." The publisher and editor, Holly R. Cantine Jr, outlined his purpose in the first issue's editorial statement. Retort would "try to work out a new orientation for the revolutionary movement -- one which is as much concerned with individual liberty as it is with economic security and which cannot easily degenerate into bureaucracy." Cantine connected the social with the artistic as he continued: "And since all free societies have always been artistic societies, we believe that there must be some basic connection between the two, and will devote ourselves to championing the arts and the artist. . . ."⁶⁵ Citing anarchist social philosophers Peter Kropotkin and Pierre Proudhon as inspirational voices, he

⁶⁴ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," p. 47.

⁶⁵Holly R. Cantine Jr., "Editorial Statement," Retort, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1942), p. 7.

wrote: ". . . they were aware of the deep connection between liberty and the cooperative." Their communist anarchism simultaneously stressed mutual aid or cooperation, and the importance of the individual ego as the sole repository of dignity and authority.⁶⁶

Retort shared some of the aesthetic standards that avant-garde art magazines had. To take *The Tiger's Eye* as an example, the two magazines published some of the same poets and writers, including Kenneth Patchen, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Henry Miller, Paul Goodman, and Herbert Read. Like *The Tiger's Eye*, *Retort* conveyed a dissatisfaction with contemporary mainstream artistic standards and aimed to establish an alternative position and vision.⁶⁷ *The Tiger's Eye* editors and publishers, Ruth and John Stephan, were open to a diverse range of expression and had a keen interest in art critical issues of the day. On the other hand, *Retort* was virtually a one-man operation, overtly political, and concerned with moral issues such as pacifism. In these ways it differed from *The Tiger's Eye* and other avant-garde art periodicals.

Holly Cantine wrote about art's value to the revolution in *Retort's* very first issue. From his premise

⁶⁶ Cantine, "Editorial Statement," p. 7.

that the average individual's normal experience is one of having competition foisted on him, Cantine advised that art and creative thinking led to internal satisfaction. He wrote:

It is the duty of revolutionists who sincerely want to make a better world, to work for a more widespread appreciation and practice of the arts, crafts, and sciences; as a means of giving the people ego security without having to depend on leaders to provide it vicariously. The arts must be raised from their present despised position, and the public made to understand the joys of creation. Moreover, tolerance of divergent schools of art must be fostered, and narrow formulas and dogmas avoided. Only a truly free artistic expression can insure a free people.⁶⁸

Retort stresses the courage to live.

Another article, "Art For What Sake?," in Retort's first issue touched on the essential role the artist plays in society. Author Dorothy Paul criticized a recommendation endorsed by the *New York World-Telegram* art critic, Emily Genauer, that artists apply their skills to the war effort by working in camouflage, mechanical drafting, poster work, and stone-cutting in shipyards.⁶⁹ If the artist would not work for the war effort, he would risk certain alienation.

⁶⁷ See Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals*.

⁶⁸Holly R. Cantine Jr., "Egoism and Revolution," *Retort*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1942), p. 29.

⁶⁹One remembers that Arshile Gorky actually taught camouflage art.

Paul saw patriotic duty as being at odds with the artist's sensibility and mission. She lamented: "To retain any inclination or resolve to be an artist in this society which holds the living artist in such profound contempt, the individual must be a man of extraordinary ego . . . the artist is forced into an extreme of individualism and isolation. . . ." ⁷⁰ But she also realized:

The dilemma exists only for those artists whose lives have been devoted to the forces of their craft, and for the "modern" artist -- the expressionist, the abstractionist and the non-objectivist -- especially. His position, always a painful and precarious one, he now faces extinction, for how easily now can his extermination be made tantamount to a patriotic duty. His courageous attempts to inject into the never mature yet already decadent American art the rediscoveries that Europe was making of earlier, more virile arts and consequently bring purification and revitalization to our shallow realism has caused him to be regarded in the criminal light of a "foreign agent." He can now be reviled frankly and openly and with sanctity as America bathes in wartime orgies of nationalism. ⁷¹

Paul's view that American art was becoming confined to nationalistic jingoism would be echoed by Newman in his early 1940s writings that decry the dogmatic "oaken bucket" school.

⁷⁰ Dorothy Paul, "Art for What Sake?", *Retort*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1942), p. 56.

⁷¹ Paul, "Art for What Sake?", pp. 56-57.

In the next issue Dorothy Paul reviewed the catalogue, *Art of This Century*, which was published by Peggy Guggenheim a few months before she opened her gallery. The book contained artists' statements, manifestos, and illustrations of the paintings and sculptures in Guggenheim's collection. Paul admired the range of the collection but believed that the emphasis on Surrealism is regrettable because many of the examples are formally objective. She stated that this was not modernism:

I think that in the following quotation Max Ernst quite effectively disposes of surrealism as a force in plastic art: "Surrealism has so systematized and modified them (drawing and painting) that it is now possible to photograph either on paper or on canvas the amazing graphic appearances of thoughts and desires."⁷²

Paul took Ernst's value to mean that formally realistic representation was Surrealism's strong point, an idea which she could not support. Instead, to her, this aspect of Surrealism was regressive. After World War II Newman would raise a similar problem.

In 1947 anarchist writer and historian George Woodcock, reported on the current state of the arts in England. While he did not discuss the visual arts specifically (he only mentions that the production of new paintings is very scanty) he makes an interesting point

⁷² Paul, "Art for What Sake?", p. 57.

regarding the relationship between anarchism and the artist when he noted that "the younger writers are all reading Kropotkin and Godwin" and while this "does not make their work any better as writing, . . . the acceptance of anarchism does at least show a tendency to return to the individual as the motive unit in artistic activity, and out of this rediscovery that their own ideas are more important than party directives the young may eventually produce something better than the 'Marxist' writing of a previous generation."⁷³

Politics

Politics was edited by Dwight MacDonald who founded the new journal as soon as he resigned from the editorial board of *Partisan Review* in 1943. It expressed his own values and published writers such as George Orwell, C. Wright Mills, Jean Paul Sartre, Simone Weil, Victor Serge, Albert Camus, Andrea Caffi, Paul Goodman, and George

⁷³ George Woodcock, "Art in the Desert," *Retort*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Spring 1947), p. 28.

Woodcock.⁷⁴ This list illustrates the range of leftist positions covered by the magazine, including an anarchist one.

⁷⁴ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, p. 417.

Chapter Six

Constructing a Dialogue: *Onement* and *Be*

Onement

At the time Newman painted *Onement*, (fig. 3) he sensed that it was a breakthrough painting. *Onement* is discussed in detail here because it best exemplifies Newman's ambitions to work at this date. He said in 1970: "I recall my first painting - that is, where I felt that I had moved into an area for myself that was completely me - I painted it on my birthday in 1948. It's a small red painting, and I put a piece of tape in the middle, and I put in my so-called 'zip'."¹

Masking tape in the middle holds one gestural zip that glows like lava. The zip runs down a monochromatic plane of earthy orange paint. The format is only 27" x 16", a modest size, and is in fact exceptionally small compared, say, to Jackson Pollock's large drip paintings first

¹Barnett Newman, interviewed by Emile de Antonio, *Painters Painting: The New York Art Scene 1940-1970* (Mystic Fire Video, 1972); interview published in Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940-1970* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p.66. De Antonio says in the book's introduction that "Newman died a few weeks after we filmed him," which would date the interview from June 1970.

exhibited in 1947 and again in 1948. Still, nothing by Newman before *Onement* was its equal.

Newman also said later, in 1970, that he realized a change of "attitude" had emerged in the experience of painting this canvas. Whereas he had previously been caught up in "emptying" — concentrating on the avoidance of relational form and associative visual references, he now understood his process differently: he wasn't subtracting from an already-given; he wasn't simplifying a naturalistic image nor was he arranging form. Newman explained in Emile de Antonio's film, *Painters Painting*:

. . . when I painted this painting, which I call *Onement*, my first *Onement*, so to speak, I stayed with that painting about eight, nine months, wondering to myself what had I done. What was it? . . . I felt that for the first time for myself there was no picture making. That stroke made the thing come to life for me. . . . It does not cut the format in half or in whatever parts, but it does the exact opposite: it unites the thing. It creates a totality, and in this regard I feel it is very, very separate, let's say, from other mental views, the so-called stripes.²

Newman had previously said his work was not pre-planned,³ but it was nevertheless meditated upon before

² Newman quoted in de Antonio and Tuchman, *Painters Painting*, pp. 66-68.

³ See Dorothy Gees Seckler, "Frontiers of Space," *Art in America*, vol. 50, no. 2 (Summer 1962), pp. 83-87; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, pp. 247-251.

he realized he had completed it. Newman saw in this painting a sense of immediacy and the nonhierarchical format that he would stress for the next twenty-two years. In other words, he believed that he had achieved "wholeness" in which all elements were given equal importance, and which Lawrence Alloway⁴ described as the expansion of color to make a continuous surface. Alloway said:

Onement I (1948) exemplifies the aesthetic of wholeness with unmistakable. On a flat field of dark red a vertical band of the same color has been applied in plump impasto. The thick paint is irregular enough to diffuse the symmetry of the line and make it impossible to speak of division. . . . The unity of the piece is stressed, too, by the fact that the band goes from edge to edge of the canvas, with no internal veering or stops. The image is the result of all the painting, not its parts.⁵

Newman had found his "plasmic" that challenged, overcame, and indeed, decidedly individuated his painting

⁴ Lawrence Alloway was an early Newman advocate. He curated Newman's first one-man museum exhibition. It was the S.R. Guggenheim Museum's April 20-June 19, 1966 showing of Newman's painting series, *The Stations of the Cross*.

⁵ Lawrence Alloway, "The Spectrum of Monochrome," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 45, no. 3 (December 1970/January 1971), pp. 30-31. When Newman painted *Onement I* a wholistic configuration was more readily understood to be a continuum of gestural marks, characterized, for example, by Pollock's all-over painting.

from Mondrian's Neoplastic art. Whereas a composition by Mondrian achieved a neat dialectical rigor through balanced and opposed straight lines, Newman's painting was continuous and ambiguous, complete although it may have appeared still in-process or unfinished to some.

Onement gave Newman impetus to paint at a quicker pace and by January 1950 he hung his first one-man show, which took place at Betty Parsons Gallery. Newman's ideals were not shared by art reviewers, who understood his paintings quite differently. At the first exhibition, Newman's paintings were cast in the shadow of Mondrian's geometry. Especially insulting to him was the association of Newman's paintings with commercial art, specifically the commercial art's facile appropriation of Mondrian's compositional formats. *Art Digest* reviewer, Judith Kaye Reed complained: "This is the kind of *reductio ad absurdum* art that may have refreshed some people and shocked many others back in the days when no advertising layout man had heard of Mondrian."⁶ Writing in the *New York Herald*

⁶ Judith Kaye Reed, "Newman's Flat Areas," *Art Digest*, vol. 24, no 9, Feb. 9, 1950, p. 16. Peyton Boswell, "Too Many Words," *Art Digest*, February 15, 1950, p. 5. In the March 15 issue of *Art Digest*, p. 5, editor Peyton Boswell defended himself against Barnett Newman's complaints that Boswell used his ". . . feelings about a painter's work as a weapon of spite against a critic expressing her free feelings - a right you claim for yourself."

Tribune, Emily Genauer (signing E.G.) denied the paintings' linguistic legitimacy by putting quotation marks on either side of the word "paintings."⁷ Genauer questioned whether the artworks made sense, and if, in fact, they were art at all. Reviewers and artists alike responded at best quizzically, at worst with a certain amount of outrage and hostility.⁸

Newman remained undaunted by contemporary taste or ongoing attacks on his artistic ability. It would seem that Onement satisfied Newman on many levels because by 1952 (a year after a second, ill-received, one-man show at Betty Parsons Gallery) the 1948 painting had become *Onement I*, retitled because Newman subsequently titled more paintings *Onement*. By 1953 Newman had painted a total of six paintings that bear the same title. *Onement II* (1948), 60" x 36", was in his second show at Parsons (fig. 4) and *Onement III*, (1949) (fig. 5) 71 7/8" x 33 1/2", an Indian red zip on/in/with a modulated bright red field of the same color organization as the *Onement I*, was in his first show. He also painted *Onement IV* (1949), 33" x 38"; *Onement V*

⁷ E.G., "Barnett Newman Exhibit," *New York Herald Tribune* January 26, 1950, p.

⁸ For the reactions of other artists, see April Kingsley, *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 69-74.

(1952) (fig. 6), 60" x 38", a midnight blue field with a just darker than dusk blue zip ; and *Onement VI* (1953) (fig. 7) 102" x 120" a watery, very light blue zip on/in/with a bright blue field. Additionally there is the brush and ink work on paper *Untitled (Onement I)* (1947)⁹ (fig. 8).

Onement has been scrutinized by most art historians and critics who have studied Newman, including his biographers Thomas Hess and Harold Rosenberg. Both biographers' ideas inform the present study. Hess wrote two books on Newman,¹⁰ and influenced many subsequent

⁹ Brenda Richardson, *Barnett Newman: The Complete Drawings, 1944-1969* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1979), p. 138 says of this drawing, "It is this work which has been generally accepted as the 1947 drawing, the prototype from which Newman derived the clarity and impetus for the decisive 1948 painting, *Onement I* (Abrams #7)."

¹⁰ Published in conjunction with Newman's 1969 one-man show at Knoedler Gallery, the book is based on extensive interviews with the artist. This monograph is conversational and witty in tone; Hess's other monograph accompanied Newman's 1971 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art and was completed after the artist's death. The text of the latter, based on the 1969 biography, delves much further into intellectual issues surrounding Newman's work. Also see Ann Gibson, "Retracing Original Intentions: Barnett Newman and *Tiger's Eye*," *Art International*, n.s., no. 5 (Winter 1988), p.21, note 10. Gibson interviewed Annalee Newman about the 1969 biography and related: "Newman went over each page of this small biography and corroborated each incident."

interpretations.¹¹ Hess saw *Onement* as a key to understanding Newman's mature work. He said: "Newman's ambitions . . . were to achieve masterpieces; he wanted to break into the highest levels of discourse. The open availability and freedom of the symmetrical format suggested a way."¹²

Hess also suggested that Newman's aims were to inspire discourse and philosophical thought in the manner of Mondrian. Hess alluded to Piet Mondrian's painting methods and goals: "there is an evident relationship to Mondrian, who also used tapes, and whose stripes divide and articulate abstract space on a plane that is both material (in paint) and metaphysical (in the symbolizing constructs of equivalences, that is of balancing of unequal colors and masses)."¹³

But *Onement* is an exemplary example of Newman's rational and nuanced subversion of Mondrian's

¹¹ See Benjamin Paskus, "The Theory, Art, and Critical Reception of Barnett Newman" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1974); Michael Quick, "Meaning in the Art of Barnett Newman and Three of His Contemporaries" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1978); Steven Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹² Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 55.

¹³ Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 55.

Neoplasticism. Whereas Mondrian used "pure" primary colors as well as black and white, Newman avoids primaries.

Mondrian would assuredly judge Newman's secondary colors, brownish orange and a high key vibrant orange, as "impure." Mondrian did not draw continuous lines from the top through to the bottom of a canvas, much less one that is a shrill tint of the adjacent color.

Nor did Mondrian break boundaries as Newman has done with his zip in *Onement*. The thick, hot orange sweep is not a ruled measure. Streaming from top to bottom and fairly centered on the canvas, it bulges slightly in places, narrows in others, pays no heed to the tape's straight edges. Instead, it curves slightly inward from the edge of the tape, overflows onto the canvas in other section. The color is saturated, the texture thick, remains a pulsing presence in, and on, a relatively evenly painted surface.

I would add that he found something new with *Onement* that had been formerly missing. He had previously used tape to define edges of color planes in brushed on ink fields, watercolors, and paintings such as *Moment*. As stated earlier, tape attached to the canvas signals that a painting is not yet complete. Mondrian used colored tape to

plan his compositions.¹⁴ The presence of tape also signals that an artwork is subject to possible revision at any time. For the artist, a painting with tape on the canvas is still "in process."

But Newman accepted the tape as part of his process and now, as a part of the product as well. He left it on and incorporated it into what he finally decided would be the final composition. It literally separated, and in the separation it created two distinct areas out of the one field; and it literally binds. The tension produced by the tape can also be, overpowering and mysterious. Mysterious because the tape was a small part of the canvas to focus on, yet it has the potential to affect the composition dramatically. The tape endows the painting with a sense of contingency, provisionality and vulnerability because it can be pulled off at any time, inextricably altering the overall image. The tape also holds the color on the canvas even though the color spills over the tape's edges. This artwork has not been called a collage. The artwork has never been framed. The viewer is left in a state of "what if" *Onement* embodies nothing less than a dynamic situation; presents a dramatic moment of possibility. This

¹⁴ Newman may have known that *Victory Boogie Woogie*, probably was left unfinished at Mondrian's death with the tape still on.

is what Newman refers to throughout the years as an open situation.

Harold Rosenberg, whose biography of Newman remains compelling and authoritative,¹⁵ grappled with the complex nature of Newman's painting.

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.¹⁶

A presence that is, nonetheless, contingent.

In 1994 curator Jeremy Strick explained that Newman's writings on art and painterly explorations matured together: Newman "produced the bulk of his theoretical and critical writings between 1944 and 1949 — a period corresponding almost exactly to the interval between his first preserved works of art and the painting of *Onement I*."¹⁷

¹⁵ Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman* (N.Y.: Harry Abrams, 1978). Rosenberg's 1978 monograph was reissued with an updated bibliography in 1994. Newman and Rosenberg had a mutual respect and enjoyed a strong friendship. This respect, closeness, and trust of the families is well exemplified by Annalee Newman's appointment as a trustee of Harold Rosenberg's estate.

¹⁶ Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Jeremy Strick, *The Sublime Is Now: Newman Early Work of Barnett Newman* (N.Y.: PaceWildenstein Gallery, 1994), p.10.

Newman may have anticipated his breakthrough as early as 1944 in an essay he wrote about The Museum of Modern Art's Fifteenth anniversary exhibition. He wrote admiringly that the art of 20th century American artists' included in the exhibition provided models for younger artists. He wrote that the younger generation represented an amalgam of the best of two older American artists: Max Weber (expressionist) and Milton Avery (individual style of beauty). Explaining that the younger artists went further, he described the paintings of Karl Knaths, Adolf Gottlieb and Mark Rothko: "These artists are doing what seems impossible, expressing feelings and thoughts with abstract forms and flat space."¹⁸

Yves-Alain Bois described *Onement I*'s theme as the myth of origin, for the first time told in the present tense. It confronts ". . . directly, immediately, as an 'I' person which is characteristic of fiction. It is thus that *Onement I* fulfills the goal Newman set for his works, that of giving a 'sense of place' to its beholder. not with the distance of an outside viewer looking into a different

¹⁸ Barnett Newman, "On Modern Art: Inquiry and Confirmation," *Revista Belga*, November 1944; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p. 70.

space. Armin Zweite contributed to the phenomenological reading when he summed up:

Newman's paintings have something of a mirror about them, inasmuch as the viewer's glance is reflected back upon himself and he, the viewer, is prompted to reflect not only on the painting but also on the process of looking at the painting and on the person who is looking at it, and also on the process by which the subject and the object interrelate. For a painting to exist for the viewer, it is not enough for the viewer to see and register it with his eyes; he must also be conscious of his seeing and registering, and be aware of himself as a seeing and registering subject.¹⁹

Many interpretations foreground a phenomenological component of Newman's mature art. This argument assigns significance to the zip as a sign of self, the self as a reflected and reflecting perceiver.²⁰

Objects such as *Onement I* seem inexhaustible and it is easy to become immersed in an expansive discourse on a variety of aspects. I would add that the "what if . . ." mentioned earlier heightens an encounter with a painting like *Onement I*, The encounter is raised to a level of active dialogue and engagement, making reflection reach beyond self-awareness.

¹⁹ Armin Zweite, *Barnett Newman* (Ostfildern-Riun, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 1999), p.83.

²⁰ Yve-Alain Bois, "Perceiving Newman," *Barnett Newman Paintings* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1988), p. iii.

The radical nature of Newman's work will be more clear when a hitherto overlooked element is brought forward. The term "onement" is a neologism. "Onement" did not exist previously as a "real" word. Instead, Newman made up this word to match his idea. And he made up this word to elicit, indeed induce, a dialogue between painting and viewer.

Nonetheless religious and metaphysical interpretations regarding the title have held currency for generations. For example, Thomas Hess wrote at length about the symbolic nature of the title. Bringing attention to "onement's" close relationship to "atonement" as his basis for a religious explanation, Hess saw Newman's relation to Kaballistic²¹ metaphysics in the painting. This established the similarity Hess saw between the artist-as-creator and god-as-creator. Hess began in his 1969 monograph and filled out his theory in the 1971 publication. His was the first interpretation that delved so deeply into the iconographic imagery:

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

²¹ Hess notes that Gershom G. Sholem's books were in Newman's library. *Barnett Newman* (1971), p. 57.

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 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.²²

Hess's interest in the Kabbalistic references in Newman's work spawned other research during the 1970s. He and others saw great value in integrating Jewish mysticism as the key to understanding Newman.

In the 1990s Matthew Baigell set Newman's paintings in a more culturally relevant perspective. He wrote about Newman's paintings in "Barnett Newman's Stripe Paintings and Kabbalah: A Jewish Take:"

Newman, a secular person, happened upon a concept of creation in a book by Gershon Scholem, that allowed him to visualized the moment of creation. The artist's connection to Kabbalah was nothing more and nothing less.²³

Baigell went on to contend that Newman's reading was a misreading. Baigell's ideas are compelling, especially since Newman also misread others, notably Mondrian.

²² Hess, *Barnett Newman* (1971), p.56.

²³ Matthew Baigell, "Barnett Newman's Stripe Paintings and Kabbalah: A Jewish Take," *American Art*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 40-41.

Admittedly, "at one ment" can suggest atonement. And perhaps Newman intended the reference to stick. Nonetheless he did not name this painting "atonement" nor did he name it "at one ment." He specifically avoided "atonement," although came close to it. He used our linguistic system only to subvert it, thereby encouraging 'not limiting' and frustrating an attempt to finalize meaning, to close off possibility. It is Newman's own metaphor; and this is Newman using language as a poet writes poetry.

Why create a neologism? We must first consider that the principal reason for new words and new terms to be coined is necessity: the need to communicate, to express an emotion or a thought or an observation — to tell of one's discoveries or intentions or fears. To inform, to describe, to urge, also creates the need for self-communion; the need to think lucidly, even subtly; the desire to elaborate whether for intellectual or for artistic reasons.²⁴

When considering the formation of an adequate vocabulary and a workable syntax, one realizes that no word arises from nowhere out of nothing; that no word is an

²⁴ *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd. edition, newly revised and updated.

entirely fresh creation. New words are formed in a variety of ways: they take a suffix, a prefix, etc. A word may fairly be described as 'new' if it acquires a new sense. More precisely, the new sense can be described as a new word.

Alternatives close to "onement" exist, for example "oneness." Oneness is a word meaning 1. the quality of being one; singleness; unity; sameness, and 2. Agreement; concord; unity of thought, feeling, belief, aim, etc.²⁵ But Newman swerved away from the word "oneness" since an already existing word was inadequate to produce the desired encounter and the desired effect. Using *Onement* supports, in fact, ratifies the new.

The neologism functions in a number of ways. One is that the title itself remains contingent; it is a version of dynamic being, of "being-in-process." And the viewer must choose: is the painting finished, why is the tape still on, it is a geometric canvas, well, no it is the exact opposite, the title means this, no it means that. The viewer must ask: what is going on here? The artwork does not conform to a closed (established) system; viewer is alerted to the new, and the process of making meaning. This viewing situation is one of interior dialogue, which may

²⁵ *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. "oneness."

include vacillation, decision-making, responsibility-taking.

Harold Rosenberg pointed out that there was a lack of critical language that could account for Newman's work, specifically a lack of sufficient language to account for *Onement*.²⁶ In this sense, Newman's expression asserted its difference from all other painting, its potential as a new beginning, its revolutionary potential for changing consciousness.

The fact that viewer can not use an established system to comprehend fully or come to grips entirely with this artwork was actually substantiated in the reviews of Newman's first one-man show in 1950. This small audience, the only audience, was unable to read Newman's paintings because the paintings did not even speak the language of abstraction as it was then accepted. In 1962 Newman said:

²⁶ Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*, p. 49. Rosenberg describes *Onement I* as "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 — Newman was justified in regarding himself as closer to the action painters than to the 'purists'; *Onement* was something he had done, not conceived." Rosenberg's observations inform the present study, yet it is my interest to consider that the artwork is complete only when the viewer acts. This is somewhat outside of Rosenberg's ongoing interests, which privileges action on the part of the artist.

I have never worked from sketches, never planned a painting, never "thought out a painting. . . . I present no dogma, no system, no demonstrations. I have no formal solutions. I have no interest in the "finished" painting. . . . For me painting involves an immediate exercise of total commitment. It is what I am trying to say that is important. . . . I don't manipulate or play with space. I declare it. It is by my declaration that my paintings become full. . . . Anyone standing in front of my paintings must feel the vertical dome lie vaults encompass him to awaken an awareness of his being alive in the sensation . . . the meaning must come from the seeing, not from the 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 fifteen 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 answer still goes.²⁷

"Almost fifteen years ago" would have been late 1947 or early 1948, just when Newman painted *Onement I*. Harold Rosenberg understood Newman's point of view when he reviewed Newman's 1971 posthumous retrospective for the *New Yorker*. Rosenberg commented that there is nothing in the paintings to prevent the spectator from perceiving ". . . the reality indicated by the title." He further explained:

On the other hand, there is nothing to prevent him from considering the painting an organization of colored planes and lines and nothing else. . . . the difference between a Giotto and a Newman would

²⁷Newman quoted in Seckler, "Frontiers of Space," p. 83; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p. 248.

lie in the degree of control exercised by the image. If, instead of responding to the emotional potential of the paintings, the critics sought a visual opera, the paintings left them free to find it.²⁸

Finally, this freedom to decide, more precisely one's self-conscious awareness of the freedom to decide, empowers an individual to recognize the authority of the self, as well as recognize the autonomy of the self. These are the terms by which the individual crushes oppression and dogma.

BE

The discussion above may be brought to bear on *Be*. The painting has not been discussed extensively in the art historical literature apart from general discussions of this productive period of Newman's painting, the late 1940s. *Be* stands out as the largest painting that Barnett Newman included in his first one-man exhibition in 1950, and it was executed in 1949 (fig.9). It hung against the wall, a large painting 94" x 76", ready to receive if not surround the viewer with its intense red pulse. The artwork's simplicity shocked viewers. An attenuated, thin white vertical band, its edges retaining a handmade look,

²⁸ Harold Rosenberg, *Art on the Edge* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc. 1975), p. 54.

runs from top through the bottom, focusing the viewer's attention on its haphazard-seeming appearance, and inflecting the otherwise all red field. It shakes up the viewer's assumptions about painting and does not allow for easy viewing.

For some, the frustrating disparity between Newman's title, with all its connotations of existence and being, and the canvas's physical sparseness is jarring. This situation exists throughout Newman's career, making the examination of titles productive. Artist Robert Murray, who worked for Barnett Newman in the 1960s characterized him as a "stickler for language." When Newman argued, joked, or wrote "every choice counted." "

The very title was deliberately structured in the form of a verb, a proposal addressed to a receiver - Be. To exist, to live, simply "be" - encouraged the viewer to assume an active, participatory role. "Be" is a nonrestrictive and open ended suggestion and affirmation through which the artist advanced new meanings for the exchange between artwork and viewer. There is no suggestion or evocation of a static state of being, but rather a dynamic process of being, an exchange. "Be" is so

²⁹ Robert Murray, interview with author, July 1994

all-inclusive that it accepts he who would respond with rejection.

The title was carefully chosen to come close to the noun "being" and the proposition "to be." Just as Newman subverted geometry by closely approaching it, he brought attention to terms that echoed with a resonance of existentialist associations. Yet "be" brings attention to affirmation rather than alienation, to clarity and decisiveness rather than the threat of disengagement.

Other titles by Newman imply a similar sense of immediacy, directness, and identification, as well as speak to the relative nature of meaning. Meaning remains contingent, since as conditions always change, so do dialogues. That conditions constantly change is brought to a viewer's attention in paintings with titles such as, *Right Here* (1954), *Not There — Here* (1962), *Be II* (1961-1964) *Now I* (1965), *Now II* (1967), *Be I (second version)* (1970). The same is true for Newman's series of sculptures titled *Here I*, *Here I (To Marcia)*³⁰, *Here II*, , and *Here III* executed from 1950-1966. The text of the title accompanies the abstract image. Steven Zucker, examining the sense of freedom that Newman artworks "reclaim" said that the artist attempted to "recreate man's originary condition - a figure

that does not cower before the firmament but stands, occupies, and establishes space and in so doing the basis for being in the world."³¹

When *Be* was exhibited in 1950, the artist posted an explanatory statement on the gallery's wall requesting that the viewer stand close to the picture to be fully, even unavoidably present to the color-saturated open plane. When standing close one sees and senses the pulse of the red and sees only part of the white zip. The zip is unmistakably the work of the hand, on which arbitrary vestiges of the painting process continually reveal themselves. Leftovers of the brush spill over the line's edges. Because of the painting's title, a verbal proposition, the visual proposition puts demands on a viewer, perhaps to the point of discomfort. How can a painting be a verb. Is the painting "be," does the viewer "be," what does the viewer "be," or how does the viewer "be?" The painting continues to disclose itself. A visual paradox arises: the picture plane seems to be full of nothing and the picture plane seems to be full. Would such

³⁰ *Here I (To Marcia)* of 1962 is a bronze cast version of the 1950 plaster version.

³¹ Steven Zucker, "Art in Dark Times: Abstract Expressionism, Hannah Arendt, and the 'Nativity' of Freedom" (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, 1997), p. 210.

a dialogue occur if the painted were titled "Red With White Line"?

"What to do" is ultimately a responsibility. The issue of the mutual obligations that exist between artist and spectator is equal. To look at art is not to consume it passively, but to become part of a world to which both that art and the spectator belong. The active spectator cannot leave things unchanged.

Be II, painted from 1961-64 and titled in 1966 (fig. 10), immediately articulates the continuity of Newman's theme throughout his mature career. Here the inverse formal solution of *Be* was used. A large white area spreads across the 80" x 72" canvas. It spreads so far that when one looks straight at the center, the other colors, orange and black, appear as peripheral color sensations. Various devices allow color areas to interpenetrate. Color changes do not signify a hierarchy of harmonious compositional divisions, but rather a spontaneous interdependence, which encourage exploration. Exploration reveals the process of painting, the process of decision-making. There is the ragged, hand-torn meeting point between the orange and white, the wavering border of black and white, a few stray splatters of orange and smudges of black near the bottom--which signify a kind of imperfection, human activity, as

well as a sense that any meaning derives from this encounter, the dialogical open situation. Remembering that Newman was opposed to "limiting" modes, especially the mode of geometric abstraction, the interdependent internal elements of *Be II* worked against all the givens that pure geometry depends on. All limiting devices -- for Newman, dogma -- diminished free engagement.

In 1966 the title *Be II* was new. The same painting had been named *Resurrection* when it was exhibited at Allan Stone Gallery in 1962. Obvious and immediate religious associations abound. While "be" reverberates with connotations close to a general definition of "resurrection," such as rebirth or resurgence or even renewal, we have seen that for Newman, "to be" was a direct appeal to the viewer, and that the viewing experience entails making choices, being present to an open situation, that the dialogue happens in the world.

Newman did not accept *Resurrection* for long, in fact he blamed the titling on others and protested its usage.³² He used the title *Be II* when the painting was next exhibited, in 1966 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. It became an extra, 15th painting, with which Newman concluded

³²Tony Smith, telegram to Barnett Newman, September 6, 1962, Annalee Newman files.

his series, the *Stations of the Cross* (1958-66) (fig. 11; fig. 12). Within the new context of the series, the new designation responds directly and deliberately to the earlier title. Perhaps Newman, as a secular Jew and as an anti-dogmatist, could not accept the other worldly Resurrection which followed the 14th Station, The Entombment of Christ. Instead the renaming places the work *in this world* of experience. This resolution inserted itself into the traditional religious narrative while simultaneously subverting the concept of the Passion.³³ What was a noun is now a verb, a call to involve oneself, to explore, or perhaps most direct is the 1960s phrase "to be here now."

While the story of the *Stations* is immediately accessible to all members of this culture, its visual transcription in Newman's series is not. Any possibility of signification resides only in the process of attentive viewing. Humanistic content becomes apparent only if one becomes conscious of a kind of mutual obligation. The willing viewer attends to the disparity between traditional story and its incongruous, ambiguous representation. The

³³Newman was also challenging contemporary serial art, which he diagnosed as reductive, formal, geometric abstraction without extra-pictorial meaning. He described it as overly concerned with "the grammar and aesthetic of surface and forms." See Lawrence Alloway, *Systemic Painting*, (New York: S.R..Guggenheim Museum, 1966.

audience is present to a particular and new event of its own making.

Ever since Newman's *Stations of the Cross* were exhibited in 1966, critics and art historians have attempted to reconcile the iconography indicated by the titles with the lack of visual correspondence. Lawrence Alloway astutely wrote that one must acknowledge Newman's: "tact and reticence when he escorts cultural references and cues into paintings that by their economy seem to exclude such meanings."³⁴ Alloway curated the 1966 Solomon R. Guggenheim exhibition and knew that the paintings combated two formalist strains of 1960s modernist art. Large-scale geometric abstraction and serial art were increasingly visible in New York museums by the mid-1960s, Alloway understood that Newman, in whose strokes one "can always see the tremor of the hand, the ruffle of the brush," protested "limiting" geometric abstraction in the *Stations of the Cross*. There is no cross or cruciform shape. He wrote in the catalogue:

. . . Mondrian regarded his lines as bits of a universal grid that ran on beyond the work of art, an image, which, though not literally true, expresses his belief in painting as symbolic of universal order. Though Newman's art raises major issues, of the Passion and Death as in the *Stations*, for example, he does not do so as the

³⁴ Lawrence Alloway, "Notes on Barnett Newman," *Art International* (Summer 1969), p. 38.

basis of absolutes. Man is the center of Newman's world-picture and it is from man that art originates. Art is therefore, centrifugal to man and not, as in Mondrian, our glimpse of absolute truth existing separately from us.³⁵

Alloway called attention to one of many possible protests Newman incorporated.

Thomas Hess's essay on the *Stations* in his 1971 monograph on Newman speculated that the artist utilized Jewish mysticism to achieve "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 Kabbalists." Hess wrote further that Newman "raises [The Stations] to a philosophic enquiry on the nature of agony, on the nature of his art and on the life of man-as-an-artist."³⁶ Hess's work is important here because it has guided much research since it was written. For example, Hess's essay, as reprinted (the only not-original essay) to represent Newman in the National Gallery of Art's (Washington,

³⁵ Lawrence Alloway, *Barnett Newman, The Stations of the Cross: Lema Sabahtani*, (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1966); reprinted in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 342-343.

D.C.) exhibition of Abstract Expressionist art, *Subject of the Artists*, held in 1976.³⁷

Hess and Alloway were close with Newman, and Newman genially rejected Alloway's interest that the *Stations* were in fact serial art. Newman also rejected Hess's claims for the Kabbalah. In 1987 the catalogue for another major exhibition of Abstract Expressionist painting, *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (Albright-Knox Museum) included an essay on Newman by another close friend, British art critic David Sylvester. Sylvester recalled that "according to Annalee Newman, that phrase [Lema sabachtani] was Newman's first choice for the main title, but rejected for fear that it was too arcane." It bears reminding that Barnett Newman said in an interview:

For me, the voice is what you hear and have a dialogue with, "Lema Sabachtani" . . . not a complaint, but a declaration. . . . I'm trying to capture the voice.³⁸

The *Stations* is a series of paintings surrounded by complexity. I am simply considering here that the "declaration" can provide the beginning of a dialogue

³⁶ Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), p. 104

³⁷ The National Gallery acquired the series that year.

through which a viewer attempts to reconcile universal, humanistic, and narrative content with the resolutely abstract expression of it. While a spectator perceives the intensity, cohesiveness, and variety of the stark black and white abstractions over an extended time and space, one reflects on one's relation to the specific story and its cry as much as one oneself confronts a self or Other.

For example, Steven Polcari evoked the series' immediate visceral quality and its humanity. Characterizing the series as "a bit existential" he described:

Stark, undecorated paintings, the color of bone and ash and radiant white, complete the ritualized themes of suffering, death, and resurrection that lie at the heart of his art Be II, 1961-64 concludes the ritual process with a recommendation to hold forth without human fancy. While a bit existential, such a recommendation form the wisdom of its age ³⁹

Polcari considered the work as belonging in the world and to the world, in a realm of lived experience. Indeed, a viewer should not get lost in imagining another world. I would see and hear in *Lema Sabachthani* its protest and in *Be II* the resolution .

³⁸ Barnett Newman, Transcript of interview March 20, 1966, Alan Solomon Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., roll 3923..

³⁹ Steven Polcari, "Barnett Newman's Broken Obelisk, *Art Journal* vol. 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994), p.53.

Protest and Affirmation

Newman eschewed formalist interpretations of his emphatically abstract art, saying in 1966 that to insist "on this alone can only lead to a doctrinaire position . . . the opposite of what I feel is the free situation, and if I've created anything, I hope that I've made it possible on the basis of a free situation for anybody to paint, you might say, anything."⁴⁰

One way Newman actually provided an alternative to the viewer who might approach his paintings as if they were merely solutions to painterly issues was in his titles. He titled (and in instances, re-titled) virtually all of his paintings and sculpture. Newman used titles at exactly a time when his colleagues omitted titles (contributing to what Ann Gibson has called the Abstract Expressionist's evasion of language⁴¹).

⁴⁰Newman, "Interview With Thomas Hess," in *Selected Writings*, p. 280.

⁴¹See Ann Gibson, "The Rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism," in Michael Auping, *Abstract Expressionism: the Critical Developments* (New York; Buffalo: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1987), 64-93 for a discussion of the Abstract Expressionists' visual means and imagery that parallel literary devices, and which "aimed at escaping the confines of rhetoric altogether." She says that this is an attitude generally accepted as central to existentialist philosophy.

Art historians David and Cecile Shapiro explained the ramifications of evasive titles:

responses are not necessarily related to the emotions suggested by the titles of the works or the written comments of the artists. Communication via visual metaphor comparing two unknowns is unlikely to be effective, yet it may be that this very quixotic attempt tells us why serious critics have called the art and the artists "heroic." ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" works because we have experienced summer days, although we do not know "thee." But suppose the speaker had compared "thee" to a "frumious Bandersnatch" when commenting to a person unfamiliar with Lewis Carroll?) In the typical Abstract Expressionist canvas the objective correlative . . . to the emotion has been omitted. Feeling is free-floating, as ambiguous as a Rorschach blot, because it is not anchored in the experience of the spectator as well as the artist.⁴²

Titles imply a layer of specificity that colleagues whose mature paintings were resolutely abstract often wanted to avoid. For example, beginning in 1947 Jackson Pollock assigned numbers as "titles" for many of his drip paintings (*Number 8*, 1949, *Number 3*, 1949; *Number 2*, 1951; *Black and White Number 20*, 1951) or alluded to the world of nature (*Autumn Rhythm*, *Lavendar Mist*). Mark Rothko stopped using titles in 1947.⁴³ Instead, like many of the other

⁴² David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 3.

⁴³ For Rothko this was an important decision. He wanted the fact known, therefore the following comment was printed at the end of the three-line artist's biography in *The Tiger's Eye*: "For the last two years he has not used titles." *The Tiger's Eye*, 9, October 1949, p.114.

Abstract Expressionists he assigned numbers or named a painting by its dominant colors. Clyfford Still devised an inventory-like system for titles, for example *1948-E*, 1948; *1949-H*, 1949; *November 1950*, 1950; *1957-D No. 1*, 1957.

A reader may ask, is not the non-specificity of subject indicative of a desire to open possibilities to viewer, to invite plural or multiple responses, even to identify with? The answer is, of course, yes. *The Tiger's Eye*, October 1949 reproduced five paintings by Mark Rothko. Rothko wrote a short statement in which he shared his thoughts regarding the communicability of his art. Like Newman, he sought a direct dialogue with the viewer, a clarity unhampered by "obstacles" such as "memory, history or geometry . . ."⁴⁴

Nonetheless, Newman's mature paintings fascinate the viewer with their deliberate disjunction between title and painted surface, the verbal and visual, referent and means of signifying. As narrative or symbolic representation, they serve up only illogicality. How evident this is in the series *Stations of the Cross*. The paintings combat two formalist strains of 1960s modernist art that were increasingly visible in New York museums by the mid-1960s: large-scale geometric abstraction and serial art. Newman's

⁴⁴ Rothko, *Tiger's Eye*, p. 114.

paintings insist, entirely by their titles, that they are laden with meaning. Could they represent Newman's "open situation?" The word 'situation' was analyzed in relation to the word 'experience' by Harold Rosenberg in a 1948 article in *Commentary*. Rosenberg made the

. . . distinction between experience and situation as subject matter for the individual artist. The experience of an audience is the thing which is given to it, a predetermined appearance: it is , for example, what the media presents to the masses, a version of what has actually happened. The experience of the artist, however, embodies the situation. It is the process of experiencing, and not the result, it is action versus object.⁴⁵

Over the years Newman talked about the experience, the emotional experience that accompanied his process of creating art. But Newman actively provoked an audience who might experience frustration when the paintings were exhibited in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He continually discussed the primacy of subject matter, thus provoking discomfort with paintings that did not describe the named referent.

One of the most straightforward writings is the statement that Newman composed expressly for MoMA's *The New American Painting* exhibition catalogue in 1958. His goal

⁴⁵ Nancy Jachec, "'The Space Between Art and Political Action': Abstract Expressionism and Ethical Choice in Postwar America 1945-1950," *The Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1991), p. 20-21.

was to make certain that his paintings would be understood outside of the tradition of formal and geometric abstraction. If viewed without prejudice, his art engaged one in the dialogic, affirmed the open situation. He identified it as "a new image based on new principles [that assures] hope for freedom."⁴⁶

Using strident language and a manifesto-like tone, he grabbed the reader's attention in the first sentence: "It is precisely this death image, the grip of geometry that has to be confronted." This death image was the end of the line — from the Egyptian pyramid through European modernism — whether the ". . . collage scheme of free associated forms, whether it is Miro's or Malevich's is to be caught in the same geometric trap." Any artist engaged in formal explorations was merely following, following the historically given but not creating. Newman continued with this powerful declaration of purpose: "Only an art free from any kind of the geometry principles of World War I, only an art of no-geometry (sic) can be a new beginning." He called for understanding his own art as life — the opposite of death.

⁴⁶Newman, statement from the *New American Painting as shown in Eight European Countries*, 1958-59 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p. 60; reprinted in *Selected Writings*, p

Newman's four paintings in this exhibition were painted from 1949 through 1952. They were *Concord* (1949), *Abraham* (1949), *Horizon Light* (1949), *Adam* (1951-52). Except for the deceased artists Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, and Bradley Walker Tomlin, the other thirteen artists were represented in this important, international exhibition, by work painted in the mid-'50s. highly charged moment during the Cold War.

Newman also wrote a preface to this essay which he edited out of the final version. The preface was published for the first time in *Selected Writings*, so Newman's thinking process became more fully understood. Instead of a declarative tone, here his language and tone were defensive.

He defended his art against the negative charges and misunderstandings advanced by the art press for a dozen years. For example, Newman protested "My work, they say, is more advanced than Malevich's, when what they really mean is that I have reduced Malevich to yet another color scheme, so that his white-on-white is just another syntactical device no more significant than black-on-white."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Newman, *Selected Writings*, pp. 179-180

After a series of nine one-sentence paragraphs, all beginning the phrase "My work" and all answering what critics "say," "charge," or "claim," Newman summed up the accusations. He said: "They say that I have advanced abstract painting to its extreme, when it is obvious to me that I have made only a new beginning."⁴⁸

Newman was fighting for his art. Here his writing provided the verbal language a sympathetic audience would need that it is ". . . anti-dogma, that it is anti-the kind of stereotyped picture they expect."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Newman, *Selected Writings*, pp. 179-180.

⁴⁹ Newman *Selected Writings*, p. 179.

CHAPTER 7

1968

Barnett Newman protested for decades against everything that he considered to be dogmatic. He denounced institutions, limiting "givens," constricting ideologies, and unfair assessments. He also consistently affirmed his beliefs in the high purpose of the individual's free expression and that no human being could speak for another.

In 1968 Newman composed the enlightening essay, "The True Revolution Is Anarchist!" as a Foreword to a re-issue of Kropotkin's autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. The essay makes Newman's political convictions unequivocally clear, and it also reconfirms some of his artistic and moral goals. Newman's lifelong commitment to philosophical anarchism would unquestionably remain obscure if he had not written "The True Revolution Is Anarchist!" In this essay Newman brings new observations to bear on familiar themes that had preoccupied him throughout his life. And he added the realistic, resonant, and apt caveat "if they will listen."

Anarchist Peter Kropotkin spoke for himself in his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, which was first published in 1899. In 1968 Horizon Press republished the book with its original Introduction by George Brandes, and

added a Foreword by Barnett Newman and a Preface by anarchist writer and educator Paul Goodman. The new Introductions related the themes of Kropotkin's thought to the upheavals of 1968. Both Newman and Goodman remarked upon the then-current revival of anarchism. At the time anarchism was discussed by leftist activists across the country and around the world. Many classic anarchist texts were reissued and new books published during the late 1960s.¹

How did Newman become involved in this project? According to Horizon publisher Ben Raeburn, he first spoke with Newman about a separate project. He wanted to publish Newman's own writings. Newman demurred, and said that he wasn't ready yet, that he "had a few more things to say."² Newman then raised the subject of Kropotkin. Raeburn enthusiastically told Newman that Horizon Press was already working on the reissue of Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, and had commissioned Paul Goodman to write a

¹ "Across Europe and America, during the 1960s and early 1970s anarchism returned. The combative ideas of all the classic 19th century anarchist thinkers and practitioners were published anew." Terry Perlin in *Contemporary Anarchism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1979). Also see Michael Lerner, "Anarchism and the American Counter Culture," in *Anarchism Today*, edited by David E. Apter and James Joll (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971).

² Annalee Newman, interview with author, June 19, 1992.

new Preface.³ Raeburn and Newman then agreed that Newman could contribute a Foreword to the book.⁴

According to Raeburn, Newman worked long and hard on the essay. Raeburn remarked that Newman "was as adamant and precise and nervous a writer I've ever encountered." Raeburn continued, "Barney struggled word by word, and he continued to bring in corrections after he had delivered the final draft. Newman insisted on exactitude of thought, and he was not a facile writer."⁵ Newman titled his essay "The True Revolution Is Anarchist!" Indeed, it remains a clear statement of the artist's synthetic mind.

Newman's willingness to express his political views so directly had grown during the 1960s. Perhaps his artistic success, starting at the end of the 1950s, affected his

³ Ben Raeburn, telephone interview with author, February, 1989. Horizon Press was also Herbert Read's American publisher. Horizon Press published Harold Rosenberg as well. Evidence of its success, the book was issued as a paperback in 1970.

⁴ Raeburn's version of this story is significant because he denied that Newman brought the idea of Kropotkin to his attention. On the other hand, Annalee Newman consistently maintained that Newman suggested that Horizon Press reissue Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, and only then did Raeburn undertake the project. David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). This will not be resolved until further research is undertaken.

⁵ Raeburn, February, 1989.

willingness to assert his views so strongly.⁶ He spoke up on numerous occasions and in diverse contexts. He participated on presented his thoughts on "The Artist and Society," at the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1965; taped a public television interview with Frank O'Hara for New York City public television, Channel 13, in 1966; he spoke at the First International Congress on Religion, Architecture and the Visual Arts, 1967; participated at the symposium, "For Impassioned Criticism," International Seminar in Commemoration of Baudelaire, Paris, 1968. He had a truly public voice for the first time. He actively participated rather than privately reflected.

Still, Newman's public voice was heard primarily now through his art. During the 1960s Newman was included in

⁶ Newman's willingness to openly incorporate political viewpoints into his activities and writings. He started in 1962 in the Art in America interview with Seckler. Newman presented "For Impassioned Criticism" in January 1968 at a symposium on poet Charles Baudelaire held in Paris. The talk was subsequently published in *Art News* in the Summer of 1968. There Newman called for a return to Baudelaire's own recommendation for art criticism, that it be "partial, passionate, political." "We know it is possible to be partial without being passionate; or political, in the best sense of the term, without being either partial or passionate. But if one is truly passionate, one is all three. .. true passion, by its very nature, by its sheer existence, is a political threat against the philistine and the bourgeois. Let's face it; "scientific," didactic criticism, in itself, and practiced for itself, is fundamentally a bourgeois activity," *Selected Writings*, pp. 132-133.

art exhibitions as never before. His recognition was two-pronged. On the one hand he received overdue acknowledgement as a leader of the first generation of

Abstract Expressionist artists.⁷ Secondly, his art was increasingly associated with new art movements and the work of younger generations of artists -- color field painting, hard edge geometric abstraction, and minimalism. It was this late success, and ironically the positive attention of associating with younger artists that provided Newman with a renewed *raison d'être*, a good reason to individuate himself. For example, Newman received his first, one-man museum exhibition in 1966, when the Guggenheim Museum showed his recent work, the series *Stations of the Cross*.

Newman now enjoyed an elevated status in the art world that had not previously been available to him.⁸ He was sought out as an elder statesman of the first generation of Abstract Expressionism. He happily made himself available to younger artists and art students.

⁷See Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *The New York School -- the First Generation* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1965). The exhibition catalogue includes an extensive historical bibliography. It is one of the earliest for Abstract Expressionism. Examination of the bibliography reveals that Newman was not included in most surveys written during the 1950s.

⁸See Barbara Rose, "The Passing and Resurgence of Barney Newman, *New York Magazine*, vol. 4, No. 5 (November 8, 1971), p. 84.

Newman wrote for younger generations of political activists in "The True Revolution Is Anarchist." He enjoyed an admiration and respect among generations of artists, yet he wrote this essay at a time of national and international political trauma and turmoil. Indeed, Newman responded to the monumental events of this period which, in retrospect, count among the defining events of the era. By 1968 he confidently saw himself in a position to be an effective messenger.

In all, 1968 was an irreducibly complex year of protest, dissent, and revolutionary explosion. United States troop strength was at its height in Vietnam and the anti-Vietnam War movement was at its height. Demonstrations for peace were visible in urban settings worldwide. In New York City alone 100,000 people demonstrated in Central Park against the war. The Tet offensive, launched in January 1968, sparked protest around the world. the 1960s. The May, 1968 student uprisings in Paris threatened established power because spontaneous support from workers disciplined in the leftism of the European labor movement was so strong. In the United States the Students for a Democratic Society was an especially strong radical organization. From Berkeley to London to Tokyo students protested against the Vietnam War.

American racial struggles had featured violence throughout the nation's history, but in 1968 violence erupted more widely often featuring participation by the white middle class. Tensions in Barnett Newman's New York City reached a crisis point in April 1968 when students took over five buildings on the Columbia University campus, protesting the University's sponsorship of war-related research and construction of a gym in city-owned Morningside Heights Park in Harlem. After five days of student occupation the university administration asked the police to clear the buildings.

In 1968 tragic violence struck national leaders who were symbols of peace, leaders who had proposed alternatives to the Cold War model of armed deterrence. Martin Luther King's and Robert Kennedy's assassinations fueled already raging fires. Finally, violence against anti-war protesters erupted at the Democratic Convention in Chicago.⁹

⁹ See Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987). Gitlin describes important developments of that crucial year. The continual eruptions of 1968 were acknowledged by *Fortune* in a special issue in October published, "American Youth: Its Outlook is Changing the World." Included here were the results of a poll which found 42% of college students were unconcerned with college's practical benefits and 20% identified with Che Guevara more than any of the presidential candidates: Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, George Wallace. Other crucial events include: Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* was published and the racial struggle gained immediacy and international (peaceful) visibility when American Olympic

New Left political groups had been working throughout the 1960s. In its early days Students for a Democratic Society advocated participatory democracy as an alternative to oppressive government structures which the individual had to struggle against to attain personal freedom.¹⁰ As Alice Echols cogently explained:

During the 1960s [SDS] radicals were taken with the idea of developing forms that would prefigure the utopian community and they struggled to develop alternatives to hierarchy and centralized decision making. They spoke often of creating 'participatory democracy' in an effort to maximize participation and equalize power. Their attempts to build a democracy of individual participation often confounded outsiders . . . but to those radicals who craved political engagement, 'freedom' was . . . 'an endless meeting'. According to Gregory Calvert, participatory democracy appealed to the deep anti-authoritarianism of the new generation in addition to offering them the immediate concretization of the values of openness, honesty, and community in human relationships.¹¹

To the 1960s New Left activists and intellectuals, the "openness, honesty, and community in human relationships" that they envisioned participatory democracy to be, also sounded ideally anarchistic. Yet to the older generation of

medallists raised their fists with the Black Power salute in Mexico City, Black Panthers. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviets took place. 200 feminists protest for the first time at the Miss America Pageant.

¹⁰ Gitlin, *The Sixties Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, p. 383.

¹¹ Alice Echols, "Women's Liberation and Sixties Radicalism," in David Farber, ed, *The Sixties*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 1994), p. 159.

intellectuals such as Newman's friends Irving Howe, Lionel Abel, and Harold Rosenberg participatory democracy needed to be critically scrutinized in order to proceed responsibly and without risking any loss of freedom. Indeed according to cultural historian Andrew Ross, since the early Cold War period, "increasingly the acid test of serious intellectual life was the capacity to choose an independent path . . . responsibility became redefined as the protection of an intellectual's freedom at all costs."¹² Cultural historian Neil Jumonville further explained: "New York intellectuals sensitive to Communist history told [the New Left] that it is essential to make distinctions."¹³ But the "new generation brought personal commitment to direct action and politics of confrontation,"¹⁴ which would further antagonize the New York intellectuals.

By the late 1960s anarchism received serious attention from *Commentary* magazine. "Anarchism Revisited," an article written by British historian of anarchism (and anarchist journal editor), George Woodcock, appeared in its August,

¹² Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 219.

¹³ Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 233.

¹⁴ Ross, *No Respect*, p. 221.

1968 issue. Woodcock recounted the revival of anarchist activity in England during the 1960s, and explained how it differed from past manifestations of anarchism. He described them as new "militant pacifists" who "came into being through radical protest drives against nuclear warfare" and whose leaders included, among many others, older anarchists such as Herbert Read.¹⁵ He also noted the explosion of anarchist magazines in the universities, "giving expression . . . to the local form of the general ferment." He characterized the ferment as "becoming rather than joining, . . . a change of heart rather than a party ticket . . . "¹⁶

Further on, remarking on young anarchists across the Atlantic, in North America, Woodcock remarked that these radicals had not read the classic anarchist theories — he mentions Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* and *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* — but that many had read "that surviving but untypical Old Anarchist Paul Goodman." Still, he greatly admired that the Americans adapt anarchism "to their own situation."¹⁷

¹⁵ George Woodcock, "Anarchism Revisited," *Commentary*, vol. 46, no. 2 (August 1968), p. 56.

¹⁶ Woodcock, "Anarchism Revisited," p. 56.

¹⁷ Woodcock, "Anarchism Revisited," pp. 56-57.

Woodcock observed:

What the anarchist tradition has to give the radical young is perhaps, first of all, the vision of a society in which every relation would have moral rather than political characteristics. The anarchist believes in a moral urge in man powerful enough to survive the destruction of authority and still to hold society together in the free and natural bonds of fraternity. Recent events — the civil-rights campaigns, the revolts in the Negro ghettos, the behavior of have-not countries toward their prosperous benefactors — have shown that even in a materialist culture, non-materialist values will make an irrational but convincing clamor. The relations among men are moral in nature, and politics can never entirely embrace them. This the anarchists have always insisted.¹⁸

Woodcock also saw the importance of acknowledging that "anarchism has never been genuinely non-political; it has always represented politics carried out by other means; a recognition of this would free those who hold libertarian convictions to seek the social changes they think necessary within an existing political framework." Woodcock believed that to work for future anarchist society one must address the North American situation as it exists in the present [*italics mine*]. One must acknowledge its technological sophistication and affluence. Change could be attained by "searching out those areas in which authoritarian and bureaucratic methods have manifestly failed or over-extended themselves." Therefore, he added: "our aim should be to

¹⁸ Woodcock, "Anarchism Revisited," p. 58.

preserve as much freedom as possible for men as they are, rather than dream of a hypothetical total freedom for men as they at present are not."¹⁹

Woodcock made important contributions to the literature on anarchism and Kropotkin throughout his long career. His own study of Kropotkin, *The Anarchist Prince*, was the first published in 1950.²⁰ If Newman read this book, which is based on Kropotkin's autobiography, he undoubtedly welcomed Woodcock's admiration of Kropotkin. Woodcock's appreciation of the Russian becomes evident in his chapter titles such as "The Explorer," "The Convert," "The White Jesus," "The Exile," "The Neglected Sage," and "The Prophet."

Newman urgently wanted the young to understand anarchism from the inside out. He characterizes *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* as a "story of an exemplar of anarchism." Newman characterized the way Kropotkin lived his life — ethically, spontaneously, and, blending Existentialism with anarchism, as an "engagé" — which could be a model for the student activists of 1968.

Why would Newman want this book to be published rather than another one by Kropotkin? Why this one instead of one of Kropotkin's theoretical studies? Newman wrote that what

¹⁹ Woodcock, "Anarchism Revisited," pp. 59-60.

he especially admired about Kropotkin was the anarchist's moral and ethical backbone. Examples include Kropotkin's selfless nobility, his abhorrence of anti-Semitism, and Kropotkin's stand against the domination of one over another individual. Much of the value of *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* resides in the very fact that it does not generalize, preach a doctrine, or put forth definitions. Instead Kropotkin emerges as an embodiment of anarchism in his first-person narrative, provoking thought and dialogue about philosophical anarchist possibilities.

Newman's twelve-page essay can be divided into two parts: The first six pages present an overview of Newman's view of anarchism's recent past in the United States, his reasons supporting this book's republication, and a summary of the value of Prince Piotr Kropotkin's life story for the present-day reader. Newman stakes the particular claim that a strong moral character generated every one of Kropotkin's anarchist actions and intellectual pursuits.

Newman sketched a Kropotkin who was uncompromisingly empathic, altruistic, and of noble character. One of his descriptions characterized Kropotkin as ". . . so intoxicated with the love of personal freedom . . . that he

²⁰ Issued in paperback in the United States by Schocken in 1971.

stood against all forms of domination over one's person."²¹

Newman reiterated this in many ways throughout. For instance he said:

. . . Kropotkin was scrupulous to the point of fanaticism in his defense of the untrammelled person. He was conscious to respect the identity of others as he was conscious of his own. . . . His sense of self existed in his selflessness. . . . The nobility of his person comes through on every page. . . . The book contains no vindictive revelations . . . his scrupulous sensitivity regarding any tyranny over the individual . . . Kropotkin would develop an extraordinary sensitivity to anything that smacked of tyranny over someone else's body.²²

Other writers, both anarchists and historians of anarchism, characterized Kropotkin similarly.²³

²¹ Barnett Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p.xi.

²² Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," pp.xi-xiv.

²³ See Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931), p. 863. Kropotkin spoke with Emma Goldman not long before his death in 1921. Goldman, then living in Russia after being exiled from the United States in 1919, described their conversation at Kropotkin's home outside of Moscow. Goldman remembered: "I wanted Peter to help me better understand the situation which was threatening to puncture my faith in revolution and the masses. Painstakingly, and with the sort of tenderness lavished upon a sick child, he had tried to set my mind at rest. He claimed that there was no reason to despair. He understood my inner turmoil, he said, but he was confident that, in time, I would learn to distinguish between the Revolution and the regime. They were worlds apart and the gulf between them necessarily had to deepen as time passed. . . . It had made a deep impression upon the life of the masses everywhere and no one could predict the rich harvest which mankind was going to reap from it."

Paul Goodman was another timely model for activists of 1968. His publications, such as *Communitas*, in which he and his brother, architect Percival Goodman, advocated integrated (mixed use) town planning, had been well known since the 1940s.²⁴ By the mid-sixties, however Paul Goodman's fame as an intellectual activist predominated. Sociologist Theodore Roszak wrote about Paul Goodman in 1968, describing him as charismatic, a kind of "intellectual pied piper," who understood the problems of the day and the counter culture's disaffection with the status-quo:

For the New Left he has functioned as the foremost theoretician of participatative [sic] democracy, bringing back into lively discussion a tradition of anarchist thought that reaches back through Prince Kropotkin to Robert Owen. And so in spirit, if not in scholarly reference, it is anarchist politics that is being most hotly debated among the socially involved young - far more so than the Marxist tradition of socialism.²⁵

In his Preface for Horizon Press's reissue of *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Goodman affirmed many of the same ideas as Newman, although the two did not see each other's pre-

²⁴ *Communitas* was written in 1947 and revised in 1960. *Communitas* acknowledges anarchism as an influence in theorizing ideal urban planning. "affirming ancient values of space, sun, and trees and beauty, and human dignity." P. 10.

²⁵ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1969), pp. 200-201.

publication texts.²⁶ Like Newman, Goodman believed that Kropotkin had much to teach today's youth: Goodman noted a similarity between the Nihilist youth of Russia and the 1968 university radicals.²⁷ Newman and Goodman drew important parallels between the Russian students of the 1860s vividly portrayed in Kropotkin's autobiography, and contemporary American young people.

But both also agreed that today's youth's agitational actions were not yet enlightened by what Kropotkin's story could teach. Goodman explained that, "Kropotkin belonged to a more mature Anarchism . . . already 'discussing', as Kropotkin calls it, the possibility of Anarchist technology, ecology, pedagogy, rural life, industrial management."²⁸

Goodman explained that it is not enough to achieve "agitational success." Newman asserted the same thing when he said that today's students were "revolutionists." He added:

To call the student revolts Anarchist is, I believe, an exaggeration. Their take-over of buildings has the look of the Anarchist style, but let us not forget . . . The take-over of the college is just as much in the American tradition as it is Anarchist. It was inside the buildings

²⁶ Ben Raeburn, telephone interview with author, February 7, 1989.

²⁷ Paul Goodman, "Preface," in Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (N.Y.: Horizon Press, 1968), pp.xxii-xxiii.

²⁸ Goodman, "Preface," p. xxiv.

that the Anarchist drama took place. There the students found themselves resisting not only the Administration on the Right but the several cadres on the Left who were trying to politicize them. As one of them said to me, "What happened is that we ended up having the Anarchist experience."

As he continues, Newman offers students a direction:

"Hopefully, the experience should lead to a serious involvement in Anarchist ideas and thought."²⁹

And like Newman, Goodman appreciated the manner in which *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* was written: as a vivid narrative, holding the reader in suspense throughout the book. Finally, Goodman understood Kropotkin's commitment to his ideals. "His experience . . . was that just by trying to pursue his profession with courage and integrity he found there must be revolutionary changes in society."³⁰ Both Goodman and Newman also admired the autobiographical format in which Kropotkin, the individual, affirms his life's work, with no intermediary between him and the reader.

In a passage in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* Kropotkin describes his unwavering commitment, passionate involvement with the creative process, and his exaltation experienced at the moment of discovery. Kropotkin wrote: "Preparatory work took me more than two years; and then followed months of intense thought, in order to find out what all the

²⁹ Newman, "The True Revolution Is Anarchist!," p. xvi.

bewildering chaos of scattered observations meant, until one day, all of a sudden, the whole became clear and comprehensible, as if it were illuminated with a flash of light." He continued:

There are not many joys in human life equal to the joy of the sudden birth of a generalization, illuminating the mind after a long period of patient research. What has seemed for years so chaotic, so contradictory, and so problematic takes at once its proper position within an harmonious whole. Out of a wild confusion of facts and from beforehand the fog of guesses, -- contradicted almost as soon as they are born, -- a stately picture makes its appearance, like an Alpine chain suddenly emerging in all its grandeur from the mists which concealed it the moment before, glittering under the rays of the sun in all its simplicity and variety, in all its mightiness and beauty. And when the generalization is put to a test, by applying it to hundreds of separate facts which had seemed to be hopelessly contradictory the moment before, each of them assumes its due position, increasing the impressiveness of the picture, accentuating some characteristic outline, or adding an unsuspected detail full of meaning. The generalization gains in strength and extent; its foundations grow in width and solidity; while in the distance, through the far-off mist on the horizon, the eye detect the outlines of new and still wider generalizations.

He who has once in his life experienced this joy of scientific creation will never forget it; he will be longing to renew it; and he cannot but feel with pain that this sort of happiness is the lot of so few of us, while so many could also live through it, -- on a small or on a grand scale, -- if scientific methods and leisure were not limited to a handful of men.³¹

³⁰ Goodman, "Preface," p. xxiii.

Newman's foreword to *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*.

Newman identified some positive aspects of Kropotkin's anarchism including spontaneous action and mutual aid. He compared mutual aid to participatory democracy espoused by the New Left's "quixotic idealism".

Newman also wrote about himself in the *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* Foreword. Defining his position as an anarchist in 1968, Newman shed light on his own past and his relation to the present. He welcomed the New Left, but he wrote as a voice of the Old Left. As he did in previous essays and statements throughout the years, he criticized the critics. He described his own political isolation during the 1930s and credits Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* with sustaining him at that period of loneliness. He then compared the dogmatism of the '30s Left ("Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, and Trotskyite alike") to the growing dogmatism he saw creeping into the New Left.

During the 1930s Newman had warned against those who sought to replace institutions of power with their own power, for example Huey Long's Share-the-Wealth fight on the Right and the Communists on the Left. Now, in the 1960s, Newman again sounded an alarm reminiscent of *The Answer*.

³¹ Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (N.Y.: Horizon Press, 1968), pp. 226-227.

Extremists on the Right³² and on the Left both seemed the same to Newman. Arguing that dogmatists were building walls of ideological purity in 1968, Newman warned against self-appointed leaders who were already commanding. Thus Newman suggested that the student movement could become a quarrelsome group of dogmatic sects. If that were to happen, Newman further warned, the anarchist moment would be lost. He declared forthrightly what anarchism meant to him and he stated that nothing else would do: *only* anarchism was different from other critiques of society because it was "not a technique for seizure and transfer of power; it supports the creative way of life."³³

How well did Newman understand the historical moment in which he writes? To be sure, he focused on activism he encountered at the local level. Yet his own protest to many issues of the day reached further than those he represented in this essay. Herbert Marcuse, then on the philosophy faculty of University of California, San Diego (and mentor to Black Power, student activist Angela Y. Davis) spoke out in his *Critique of Pure Tolerance* of "socially useful destruction" initiated by youth and oppressed minorities. By this time the New Left had adopted Marcuse as a

³² George Wallace ran for president in 1968.

³³ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist!," p.ix.

philosophical guide, but Barnett Newman cautioned the New Left concerning "a new prison with its Marcusian, Maoist and Guevara walls."³⁴ Newman went on to compare the New Left to the Right: He saw no difference between the two and warned:

. . . state (sic) rights begins to sound like participatory democracy. They are for the right of the individual, a man's house is his castle. They are against the power structure and for the individual if he is a farmer or if he lives in a ghetto. Social criticism has been reduced to the clichés of doctrine that are now the common property of all factions.³⁵

In the second half of the essay Newman described the story that this book, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, tells. In his own narrative, Newman interjected commentary that relates similarities, as well as differences, between the youth of Kropotkin's time and the youth of 1968. As he continued his overview of *Memoirs*, Newman also digressed to mention ways that he believed Kropotkin's thought applies to the modern artist's situation in general, and to his own in particular. In essence, Newman valued a certain kind of spontaneity or manner of working directly that his own paintings embodied, and mentions its similarity to ". . . the Anarchist idea of social spontaneity or the direct

³⁴Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," p. ix.

³⁵Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," p. x.

formation of social communities."³⁶ It was Newman's sympathetic and synthetic sensibility to regard these elements as seamlessly melded together. This is not uncommon for modern artists who have a strong philosophical bent; for example Mondrian also saw his ideal reflected in society.

Instead of explaining details, Newman told the reader that Kropotkin's life was one of excitement, danger, humor, and good-heartedness that would keep the reader turning pages quickly. What about Kropotkin's life did Newman recount in the Foreword? Something of Kropotkin's family background and his place in Tsarist society, his schooling, his scientific expeditions, and his realization among the Swiss, Jura Mountain watchmakers, that "all dogmatic systems, no matter how radical, are as much a tyranny as the State and he took a stand against all Establishments."³⁷

Memoirs of a Revolutionist ends around 1886 when Kropotkin moved to London where he made a living by translating Russian scientific texts, and before he wrote most of his major works.

³⁶ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," p. xix.

³⁷ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," p. xvii.

Then, without mentioning the name of a single book or article that Kropotkin wrote, Newman enunciated the importance of Kropotkin's thought:

Kropotkin was deeply concerned with the de-humanization which was happening as a result of the industrial revolution [sic] and the division of labor. . . . He believed that problems of equality could not be solved by solving the problems of distribution and was opposed to controlled under-production. . . . He advocated over-production and believed that it would provide for everyone's needs and would make possible the leisure for a creative life. But his most important work was . . . proving that it was mutual aid that was a true law of nature and a normal condition of life.³⁸

The texts that Newman referred to here are *Mutual Aid* (1902) and *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (1899).

Scattered throughout this essay were Newman's ideas about the book's relevance for the contemporary youth. He praised the timing of the reissues with an anarchist's warning: "now . . . when the New Left has already begun to build a new prison with its Marcusian, Maoist and Guevara walls, is an event of importance for the thinking young and their elders . . ." The importance that Newman placed on speaking to "our youth, our flower children and hippies" can be easily gauged by the large amount of space he devoted to them and by the precision of his advice. He said that, ". . . they will enjoy Kropotkin's description of themselves when

³⁸ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," p. xviii.

he describes the Nihilists of his own time." But in 1968 "the university has become the symbol of the Establishment for the new Nihilists" ³⁹

The rebellions among students were similar in their complaints against the older generation and system but differed in purpose. The 19th century Russian Nihilists ". . . rebelled because they wanted education. They wanted the university and the study of science, especially for women . . ." But in 1968 "the university has become the symbol of the Establishment for the new Nihilists

Going to the heart of the matter, Newman asserted that he also believed that Kropotkin lived a life of commitment -- in existentialist terms -- ethically, spontaneously, and as an 'engagé' could be a model for the students of 1968.

Newman was ready to talk about Kropotkin, and encouraged others to read Kropotkin. He talked about himself through Kropotkin. His comment to Ben Raeburn, that he "had a few more things to say" suggests that a selection of his own writings was premature or would have had the effect of a "summing up." Would it have had an ossifying effect? Instead Newman spoke through Kropotkin's words. Summarizing the commitment during the era, Stanley Aronowitz later characterized, "the leading theme of the ideology of the

³⁹ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist!," p. xvi.

1960s was the attempt to infuse life with a secular, spiritual and moral content, to fill the quotidian with personal meaning and purpose."⁴⁰ A study of Kropotkin's anarchism and life contributed.

As he concludes his Foreword, Newman folds the artist's situation into anarchist sensibility. While the situation echoed his own personal story, it presupposed a particular model of the modern artist. He recounted: "In the nineteen-forties, when artists got together of[sic] an evening, there was always someone who insisted on playing surrealist games. I recall one evening when everyone in the room had to say what it was that destroyed him. I remember what I said. I said that I felt destroyed by established institutions. . . . one of the artists present said that what destroyed him were people. . . . Looking back, I think we were both right, because only those people practice destruction and betrayal who hunger to accept completely the values of the Establishment in which they seek a place. It's the Establishment that makes people predatory."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stanley Aronowitz, *The 60s Without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 18.

⁴¹ Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," pp. xviii-xix.

Newman compared the artist's direct, "a prima" manner of painting to anarchism's social spontaneity, then ended on an optimistic note:

. . . the artist can create if he has it in him to do so because the dogmatists among art critics and art historians do not know that they are operating in a mirage and that there is no such thing as art 'history'. Likewise, there is hope for the Anarchist because the social planners, the political scientists, do not know that theirs is also a mirage and that there is no such thing as political 'science'.⁴²

In the Kropotkin essay, Newman finally "came out" and he actually did so with the same confidence one seeks in a retrospective exhibition: It revealed some continuity with his past, reflected his present situation, and pointed to its relevance for the future.

It should come as no surprise that Newman created a straight-forward political artwork in 1968. He used strict grid format and geometric shapes, his symbols of oppression, for his only overtly political work. In 1968, the same year as the Kropotkin essay, he made *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* (fig. 13). It has a frankly polemical purpose that comments on aggressive repression of freedom: specifically the attack

⁴² Newman, "The True Revolution is Anarchist," p.xx. In a 1966 interview with Alan Solomon, Newman said, "I feel that no one knows what history is. Art is something that you cannot plot. It may die here; it may develop in London. Who the hell knows. It may develop in Karachi. It's impossible to figure." "Interview Transcript of Barnett

by police and subsequent arrest and detention of demonstrators that Richard Daly ordered outside the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* is Newman's sole work with a delimiting boundary, a corten steel rectangle, 70 x 48 x 10" frame, that holds and encloses a threatening barbed wire grid of 96 squares. Eleven barbwire horizontals cross seven barbwire verticals. Each square that makes up the grid is 6" and a single barb carefully occupies each side of every square. Unlike Newman's other sculptures except for *Zim Zum* (1969), *Lace Curtain For Mayor Daley* has no base. Unlike Newman's paintings which he did not frame, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley's* iconographic expression relies upon a situation of limitations that a frame defines.

Harold Rosenberg pointed out the double-edged suggestion made visible in this strong piece as evoking both a concentration camp and ironically, by its delicate limpness and transparency, Irish lace hanging within a window.⁴³ A more immediate and literal reference, barbed wire was strung to keep demonstrators out of the convention in Chicago. The piece dramatically represents what Newman

Newman," Alan Solomon Papers, Archives of American Art, roll 3923, frame 294.

⁴³Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1978), p.78.

was against; his careful geometry -and closed structure - emphatically clarify that point. For once, Newman did not aim to subvert or undermine the viewer's expectations. Indeed, the artwork's specific, narrative title, format and visceral imagery work together to reinforce Daley's arrogance and barbarism as well as his blatant command of power he manifested in running Chicago's political machine. This artwork is also unique in Newman's oeuvre in that it references current events, and further, does so with illustrational detail. Red paint drips down the barbed wire, thus lessening the force of expression.

Newman created the sculpture specifically in protest and for a protest art exhibition held at the Richard Feigen Gallery in Chicago in the fall, 1968. Proceeds from sales went to the American Civil Liberties Union to help investigate the convention actions by Chicago police. Because Claes Oldenburg cancelled a long-planned October one man show in protest,⁴⁴ the gallery organized "Richard J. Daley." Feigen worked tirelessly to impress upon artists that they could do more if they "expose bad things rather

⁴⁴Richard Feigen, "'Richard J. Daley' The 20th Anniversary," exhibition pamphlet (Chicago: Richard L. Feigen & Co., 1988), no page number. Feigen writes that Oldenburg grew up in Chicago and ". . . returned to attend the convention where he was beaten up by police and called a communist."

than ignore Chicago because it was a bad place,"⁴⁵ after many New York artists had declared a boycott of Chicago for ten years. Soliciting works from artists around the country, Feigen exhibited fifty pieces, including *Lace Curtain For Mayor Daley*, and published Oldenburg's "open letter cancelling his celebration of his home-town."⁴⁶

It may also come as no surprise, that Newman's earlier corten steel sculpture, *Broken Obelisk*, an almost-geometric form that deliberately and ultimately subverted geometry could be interpreted as a work of social conscience, as a symbol of the American civil rights movement, for social justice and liberation, although Newman did not design the sculpture with a current event in mind. Yet art collectors did. Houston art patrons Dominique and John de Menil worked with the City of Houston to contribute a sculpture to a public space, the plaza in front of City Hall. The de Menils listed two conditions:

⁴⁵ Jan van de Marck, telephone conversation with author, July 12, 1995.

⁴⁶ Feigen, "'Richard J. Daley' The 20th Anniversary," n.p.n. The show received national coverage during its run from October 23-November 23, 1968. *Lace Curtain For Mayor Daley* was singled out for mentioned repeatedly. See *The New York Times*, October 24, 1968, p. 46; "Portrait of a Mayor: Art Show in Chicago," *Wall Street Journal*, October 23, 1968, p.1; "Artists vs. Mayor Daley," *Newsweek*, November 4, 1968, p. 117.

. . . (1) that the sculpture would be Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk*; and (2) that it would be dedicated to Martin Luther King.

My husband considered *The Broken Obelisk* to be the greatest sculpture of our time, and the dedication was fitting in 1969.

When the city refused the second condition it lost our matching contribution and thus the federal grant.

Dominique de Menil continued:

The dedication to Martin Luther King had, from the start, made sense to me. It illustrated what Barnett Newman had told me: "every generous enterprise has to be firmly and realistically anchored on the ground; and from this solid base the creation, the enterprise, the dream rises-up and up until interrupted by death".⁴⁷

The de Menils subsequently purchased *The Broken Obelisk* and sited it outdoors, in front of the Rothko Chapel at St. Thomas University in Houston. Although the sculpture does not stand in a public space, *The Broken Obelisk* is available to all who pass by. And it is dedicated to the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. and his "generous enterprise."

Newman allowed political and social content to enter his work. In a thought-provoking article, Steven Policari examined the sculpture's composition, its pyramid and upside down, broken obelisk forms, as symbols of life and death

⁴⁷Dominique de Menil, letter to the author, dated April 17, 1991. The loss of the sculpture as public art was publicized nationally. "Houston Art Unit Rejects Sculpture as King Tribute," *The Miami Herald*, June 15, 1969; "Woe Follows the Obelisk," *The Washington Post*, August 25, 1969; "Houston Getting a Sculpture After All," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1969.

unified, in other words a cycle of life and death or a fusion of opposites. Polcari said: "Thus it fulfills Newman's overall goal to render the sacred, timeless, "primitive," or pre-industrial vital force of life itself"⁴⁸ Polcari also placed the sculpture within the traditions of public memorials and private meditation on suffering and regeneration.

The de Menil's response to *Broken Obelisk* was arrived at through dialogue - with the sculpture, with the artist, with the historic event of Dr. King's assassination, and with their own meditation on Dr. King's life. Together, Polcari's and Dominique de Menil's interpretations represent a most expansive discourse that promises to continually evolve.

⁴⁸ Steven Polcari, "Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk*," *Art Journal*, vol 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994), p. 54.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has brought attention to Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman's commitment to the ideals of philosophical anarchism, which he demonstrated over many decades. To accomplish this, the dissertation has explained the specific terms of philosophical anarchism which would inform the reader and demonstrate this social philosophy's relevance to Newman. In the case of Newman, it has been shown that he held constant and enduring convictions which he adapted to changing artistic conditions as well as political climates in the United States from the 1930s through the 1960s. It is hoped that understanding philosophical anarchism expands the ways political and social ideologies can be thought to influence modernist artistic practice, and in particular, Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, it points to the means artists may use to raise the awareness of freedom(s) and engage culture. For Newman, this was a moral responsibility,

To promote social revolution, philosophical anarchism developed theories that reject authority, support social spontaneity, and explain that cooperation among all

species, rather than competition, is the natural order. Peter Kropotkin, working from the last quarter of the 19th century through the first two decades of the 20th established the precepts and arguments of philosophical anarchism. His ideas have influenced, indeed guided, most important anarchists, including Emma Goldman and today, Murray Bookchin. This is distinct from the political anarchism of the 1930s. While Kropotkin looked forward to a social revolution, he did not support violent overthrow, but instead advocated a revolution of consciousness as the first step towards making a better world. To accomplish this, the philosophical anarchist upholds the necessity of individuation, and not individualism.

One reason that Newman was attracted to Kropotkin has to do with the strong ethical dimension that Kropotkin's ideas implied. In fact, Kropotkin worked on the subject of anarchist ethics late in his life; the topic was an amalgam of ideas that he had presented in earlier books. Newman studied, internalized, and developed his understanding of anarchism over a long period of time. He brought anarchist ideas to bear on events, causes, and situations that were outside of the visual arts arena. Therefore it has been both necessary and appropriate to identify, examine, and then unify separate elements in this study.

A theme that stands out is the vocal stand Newman took against dogma. He constructed arguments that proclaimed the necessity of no dogma, protested dogma where he found it, and accused others of dogmatism, especially in his extended critique of Mondrian. Protests against dogma figure prominently in his writings from at least 1933 through 1968. In his platform statement for the 1933 New York City mayoral election he labeled politicians and capitalists "maniacs of dogma." In 1968 he defended his artistic intentions in a letter to the editor of *Art News*, on the occasion of a review of The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*. Newman took issue with the curator, William Rubin's, suggestion that Newman's painting, *Genetic Moment*, shared a technical affinity with Max Ernst's frottages. In his letter, Newman individuated himself when he identified the Surrealist's concerns as "dogma." He said:

. . . I found their dogmas, their subject matter based on Freud and Marx and their techniques and their failure to get away from anecdote, to be of no interest to me. My paintings are, in fact, a confrontation with surrealism — just as they are a confrontation with abstraction.¹

¹ Barnett Newman, "Letter to the Editor, *Art News*," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), p. 234.

Between the 1930s and 1970 Newman attacked dogma at least twenty times. Exposing dogma and separating himself from it is clearly an important preoccupation, indeed cause.

Newman's insistent voice and eagerness to argue engendered criticisms from some artists that he was arrogant, cantankerous, immodest, pretentious. The complaints are fair enough in some cases; still, Newman constructed well-reasoned, if idiosyncratic arguments. Additionally, it should be noted that Newman was not widely recognized or successful as an artist until he was approximately fifty-five years old (he told an interviewer in the mid-1960s that he had made money through his art for three years). He rarely had an opportunity to show his art before 1959. Richard Shiff explained:

Newman's anarchist independence and uncompromising attitude contributed to his slow public acceptance, but it was also the force that sustained his art. To say this is to risk uttering what may seem the most clichéd of praises. Are not artists expected to be independent? . . . If any artist of his generation acted consistently on ethical principles, it was Barnett Newman.²

And as a spokesman for colleagues, Newman's synthetic, complex writings as well as the range of his intellectual interests had strong implications for Abstract

² Richard Shiff, "Introduction," *Selected Writings*, p. xxiii.

Expressionist production and critique. The inclusion of philosophical anarchism can expand the area of study on the ways concepts of freedom were understood by the artists and their milieux. As Kropotkin wrote in his 1905 *Encyclopedia Britannica* article: "Anarchism is closely connected with all the intellectual movements of our own times."³

Many Abstract Expressionists sympathized with anarchism at different points in their lives. Mark Rothko always remembered that Emma Goldman, whom he heard speak when he was a teenager in Portland, Oregon, inspired him.⁴ Art historian David Craven has written that Adolph Gottlieb, Clyfford Still, and Robert Motherwell arrived at the anarchist position "somewhat later" than Newman.⁵ In preparing this study, I became aware of the attraction that anarchism held in general when photographer Aaron Siskind included a note in his correspondence to me, "Vive l'anarchisme!"⁶ Effective research can best be accomplished by investigating exactly what each artist thought anarchism

³Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchism" reprinted in Roger Baldwin, editor, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), pp. 284-300. (This book is a reprint of 1927 Vanguard Press, Inc.)

⁴ Dore Ashton, "Rothko's Passion, *Art International*, vo. 22, no. 9 (February 1979), p. 7.

⁵David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 156.

⁶Aaron Siskind, correspondence to author, April 1990.

to be and how each artist practiced anarchism in his or her life and art. In the case of Barnett Newman art historians will benefit from the fact that he wrote so much and referenced anarchism so much, albeit often in subtle and nuanced ways.

Over the years Barnett Newman's influence on younger artists has continued to grow. The popular *Selected Writings* brings Newman's thoughts to reach new audiences. Peter Kropotkin is still widely read among social radicals. As long as artists maintain humanistic programs for their art, they will seek renewal in the most comprehensive sense of the term. Their goals may coincide with the anarchist spirit.

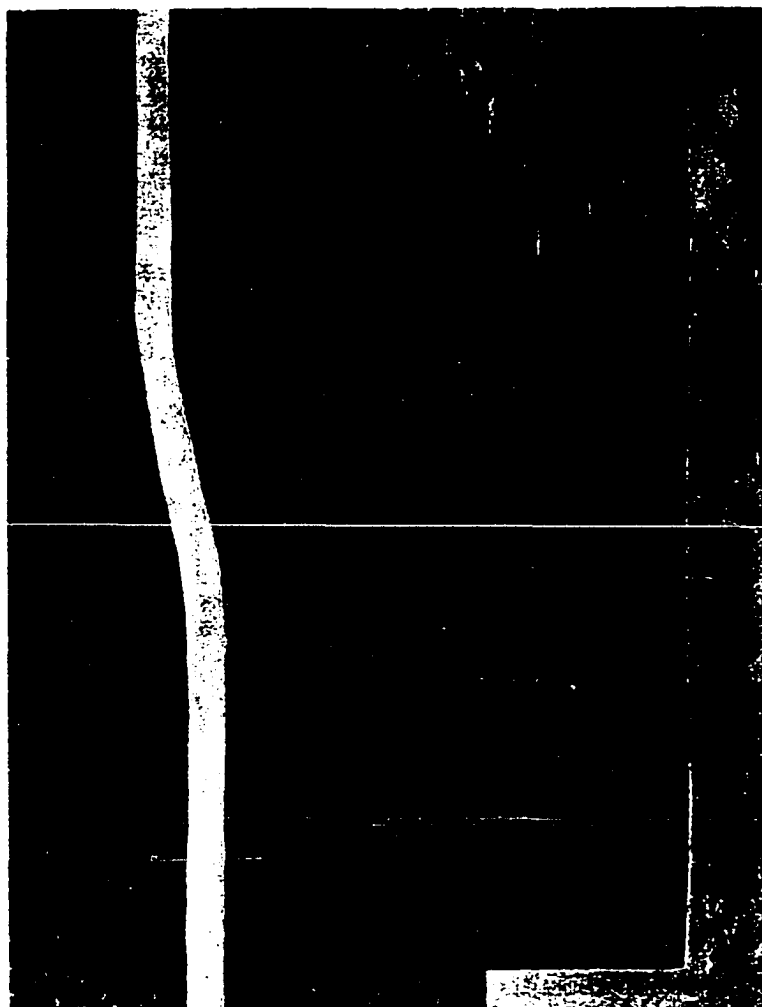


Fig. 1

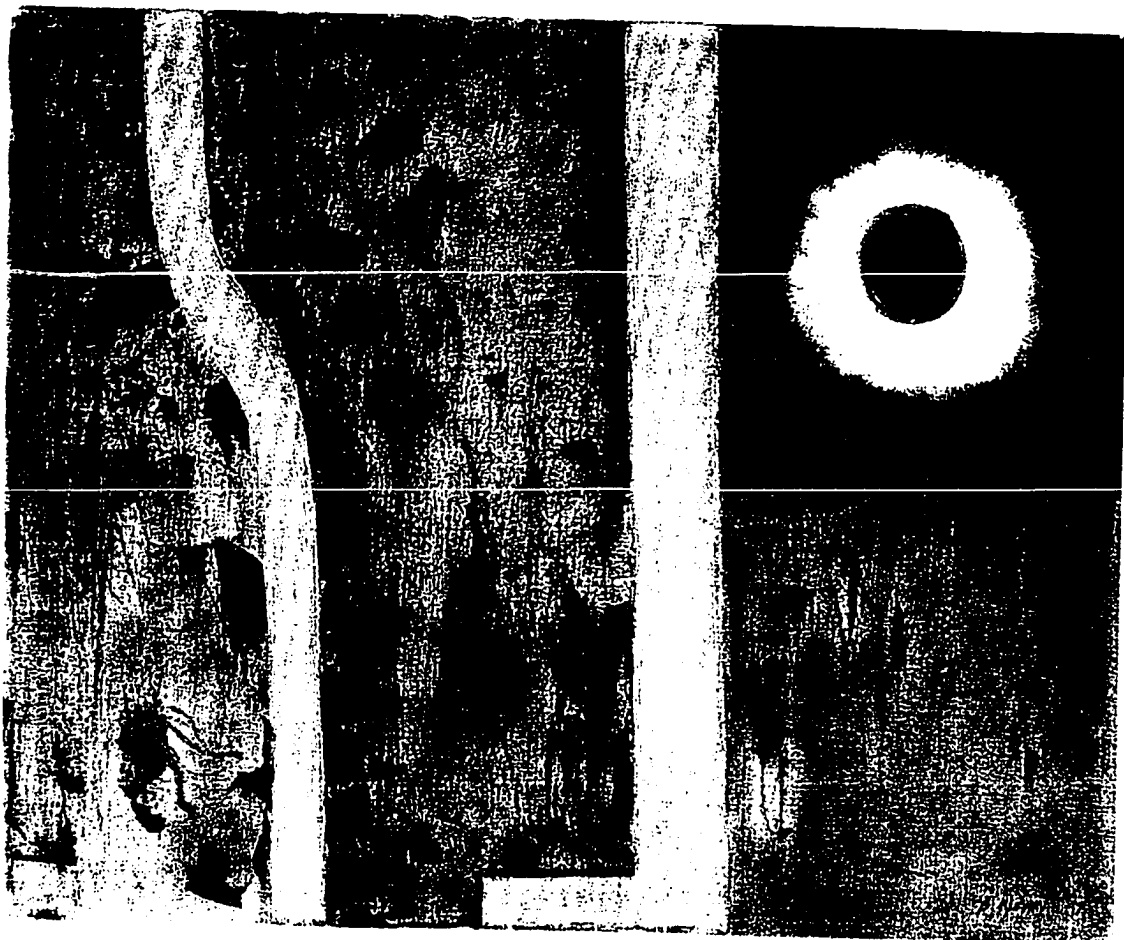


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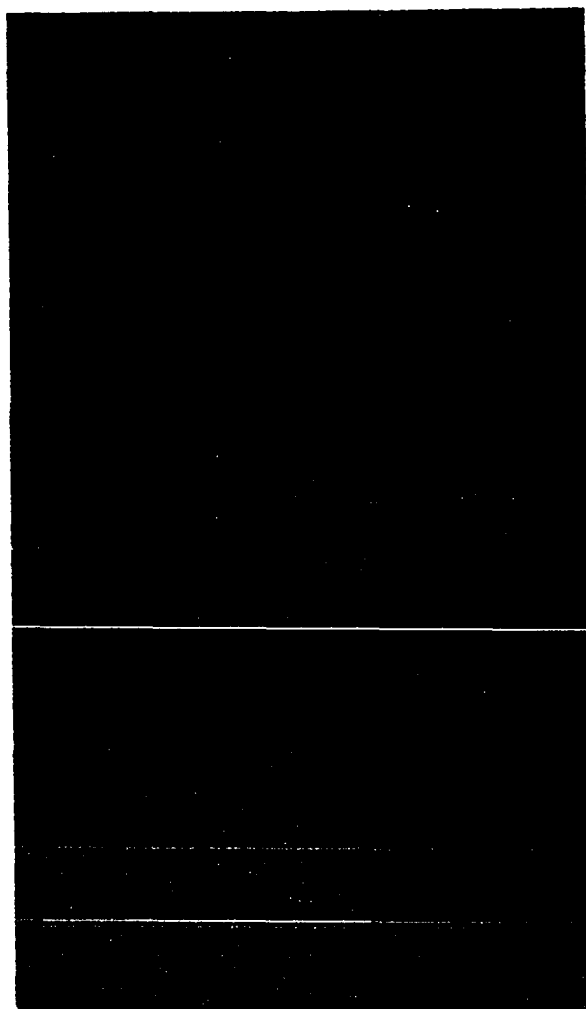


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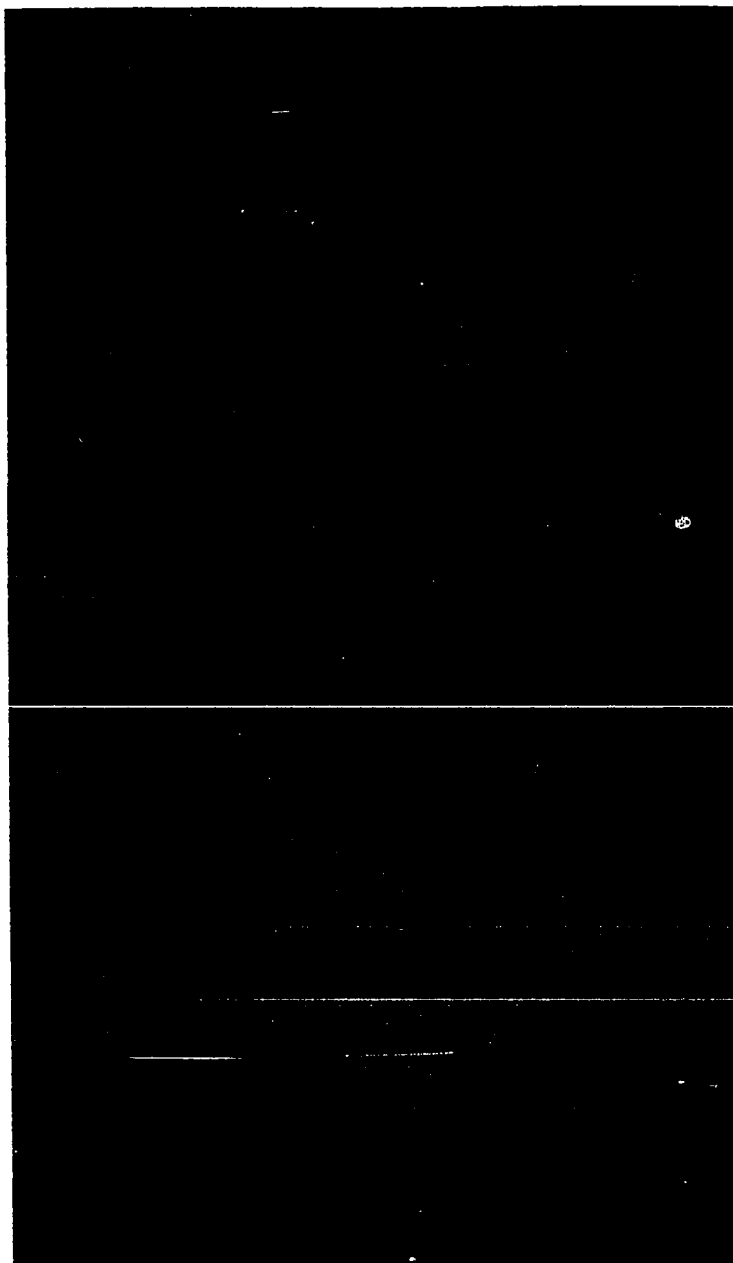


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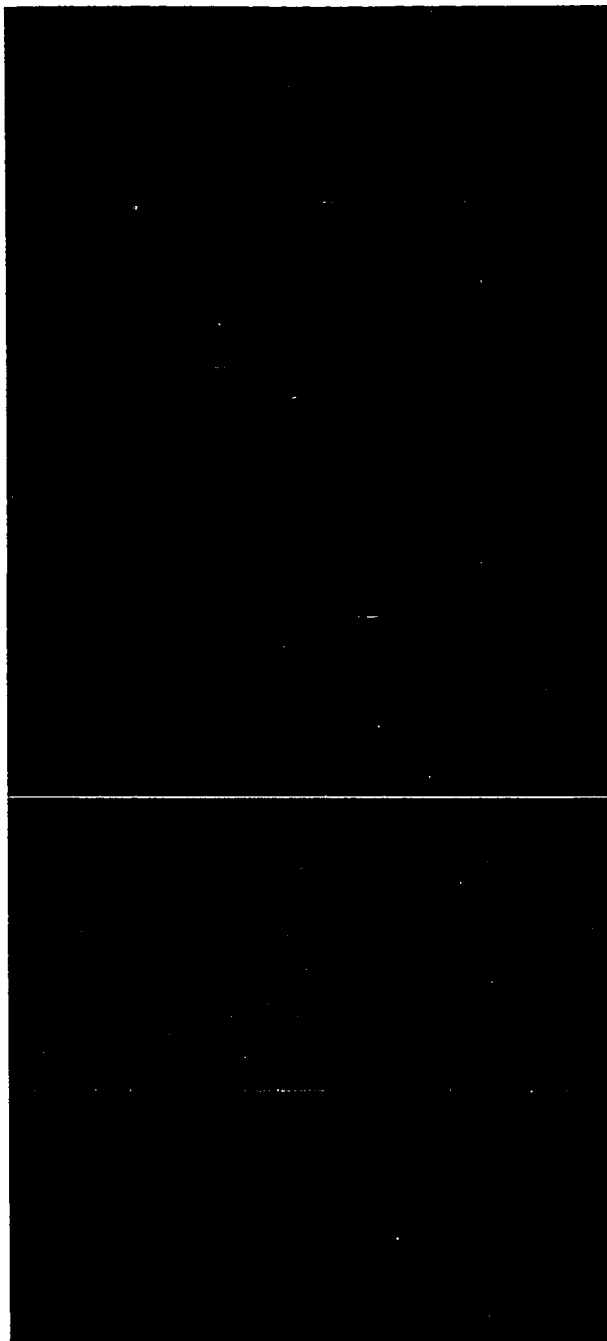


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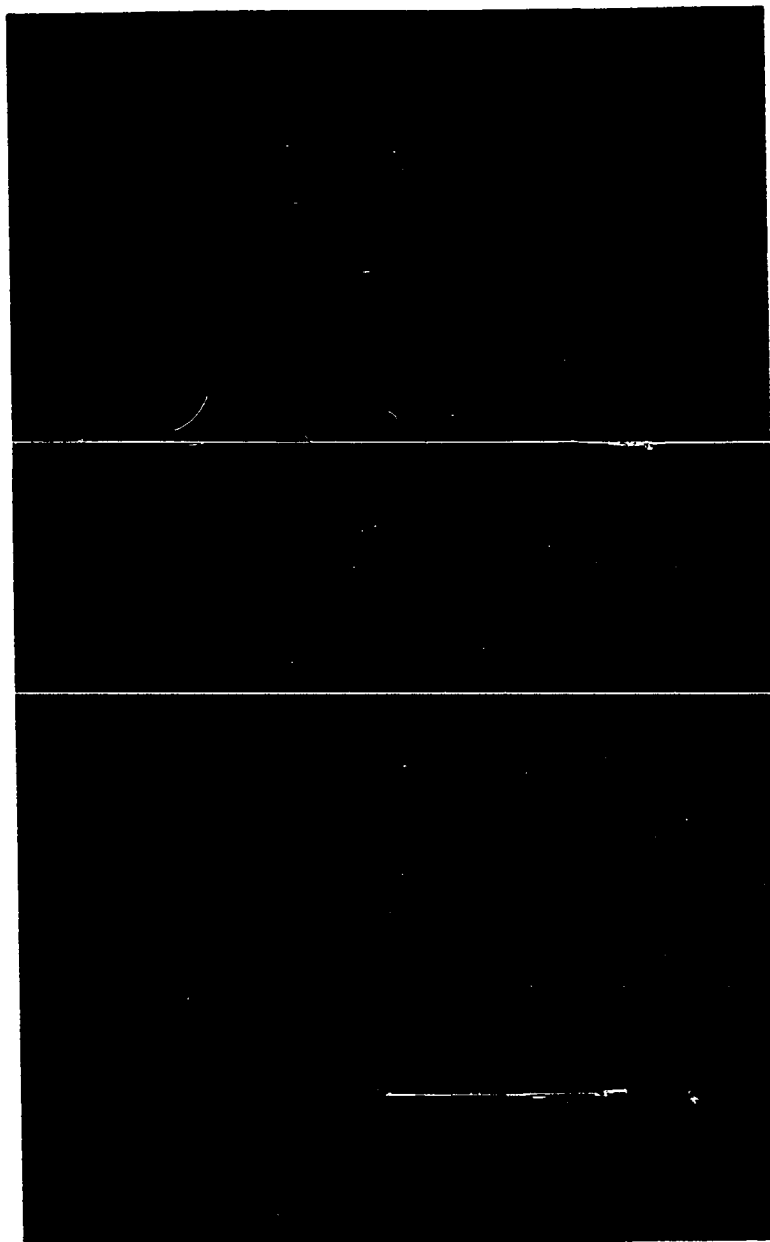


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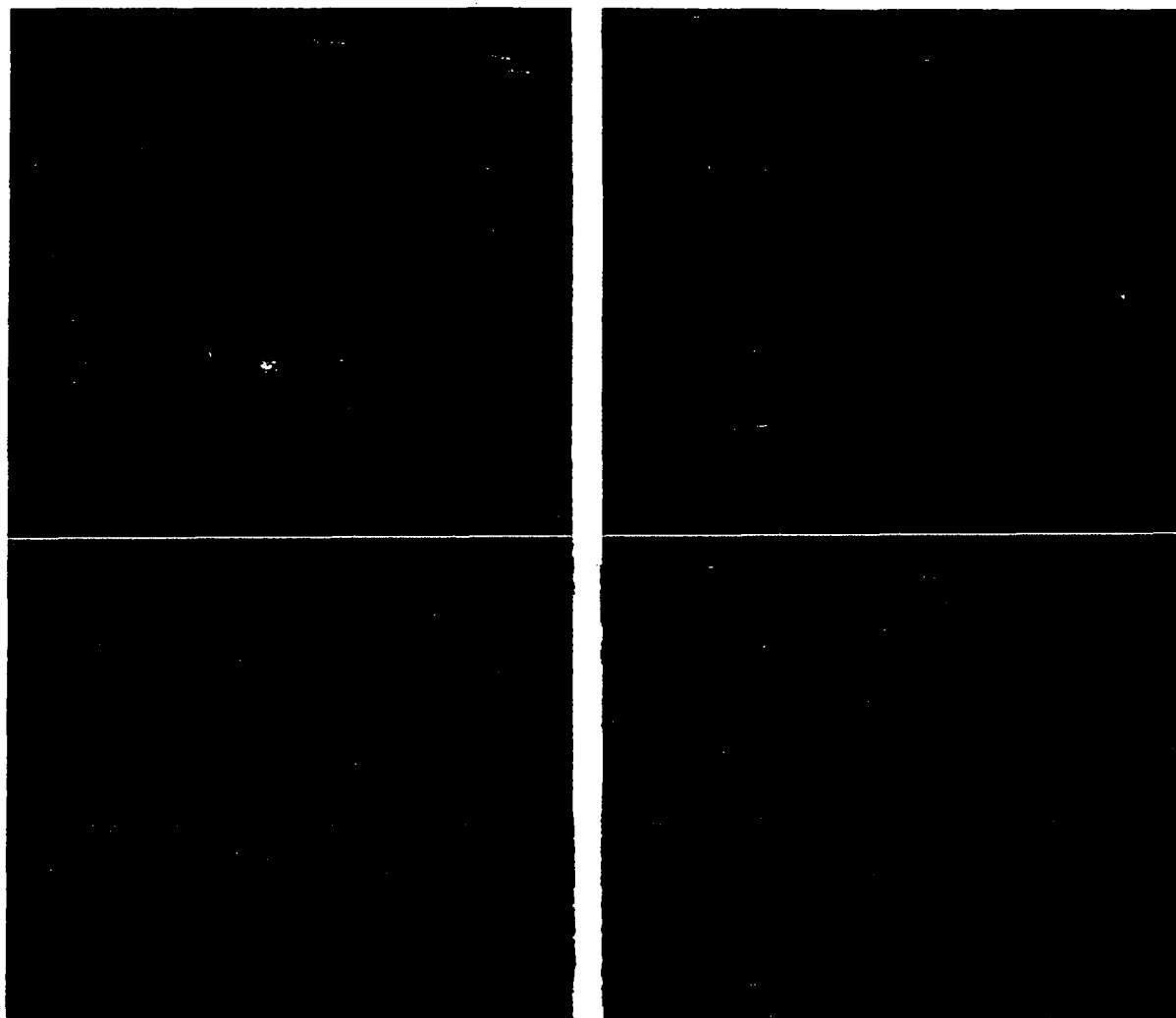


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

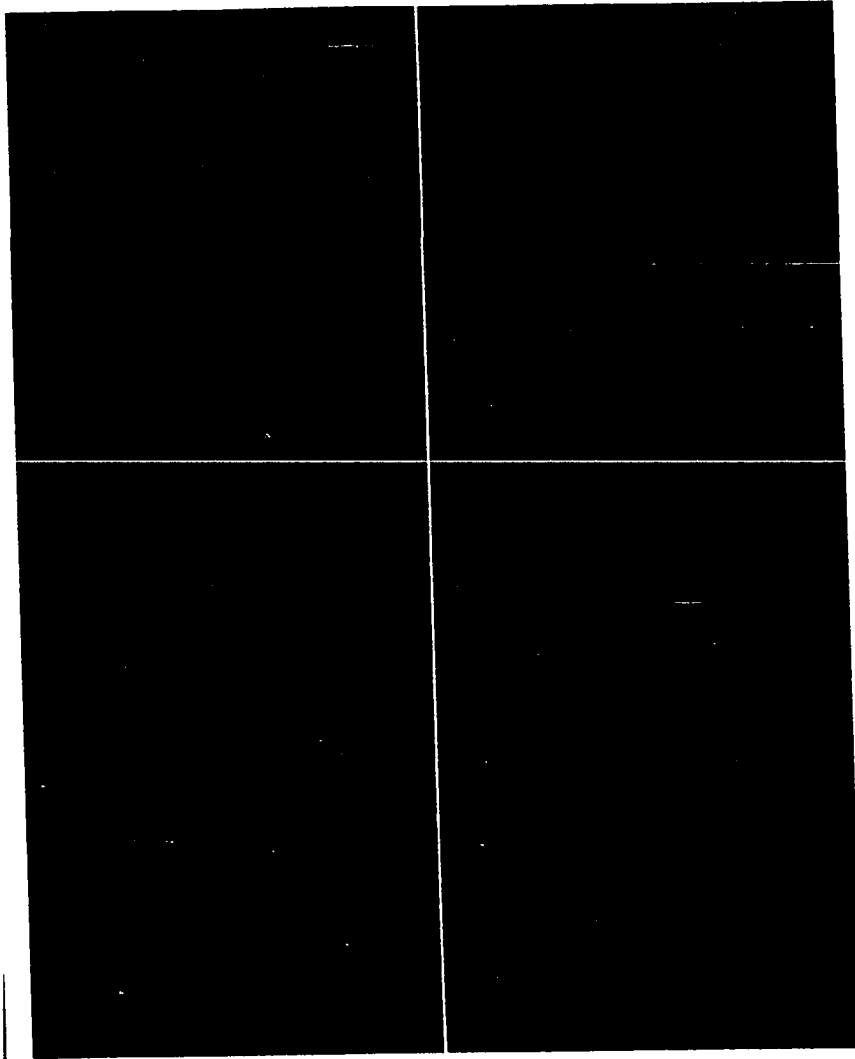


Fig. 9

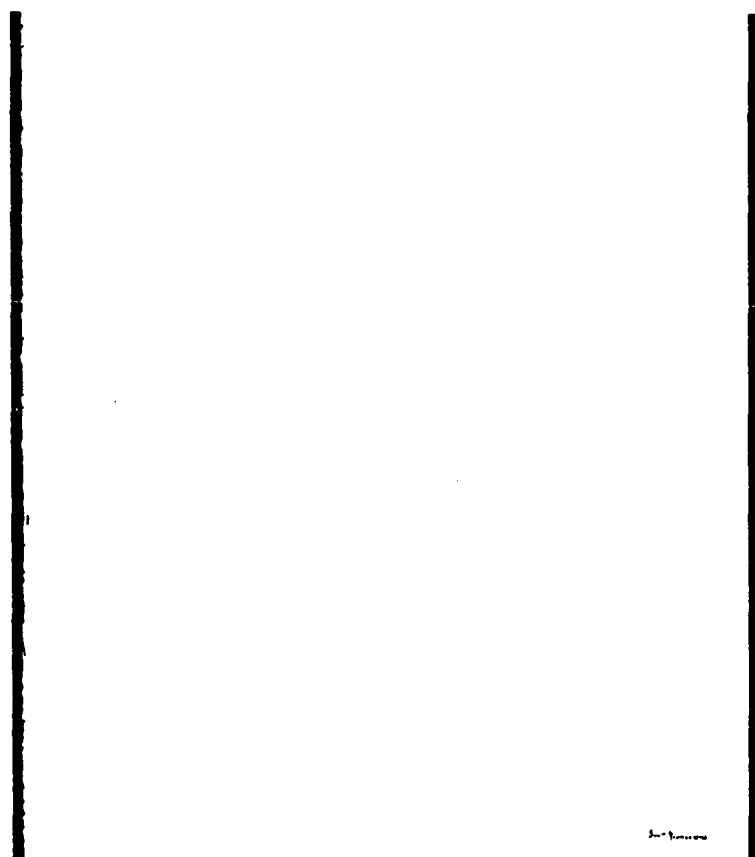


Fig. 10

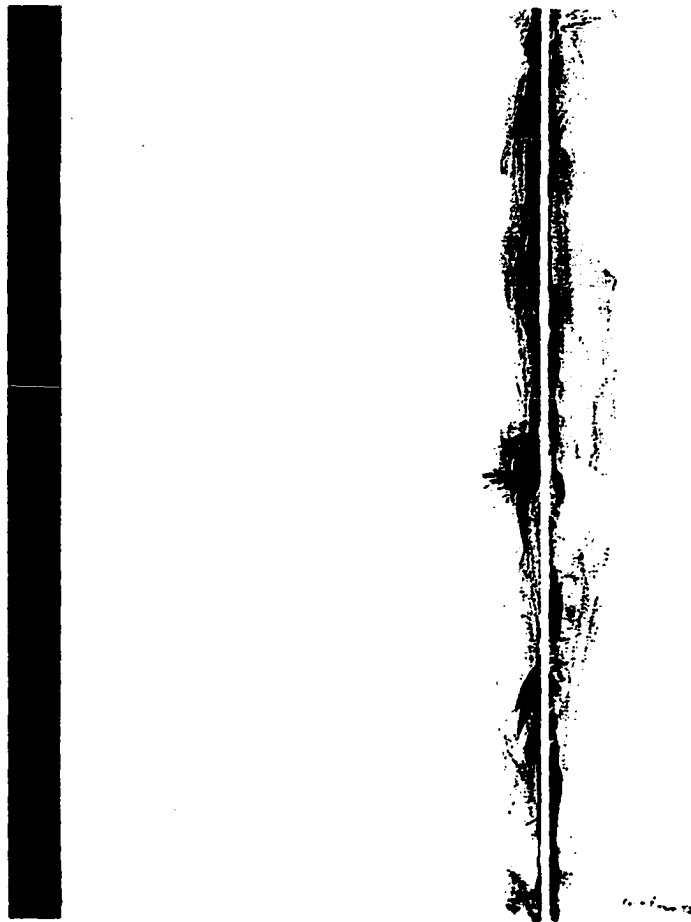


Fig. 11

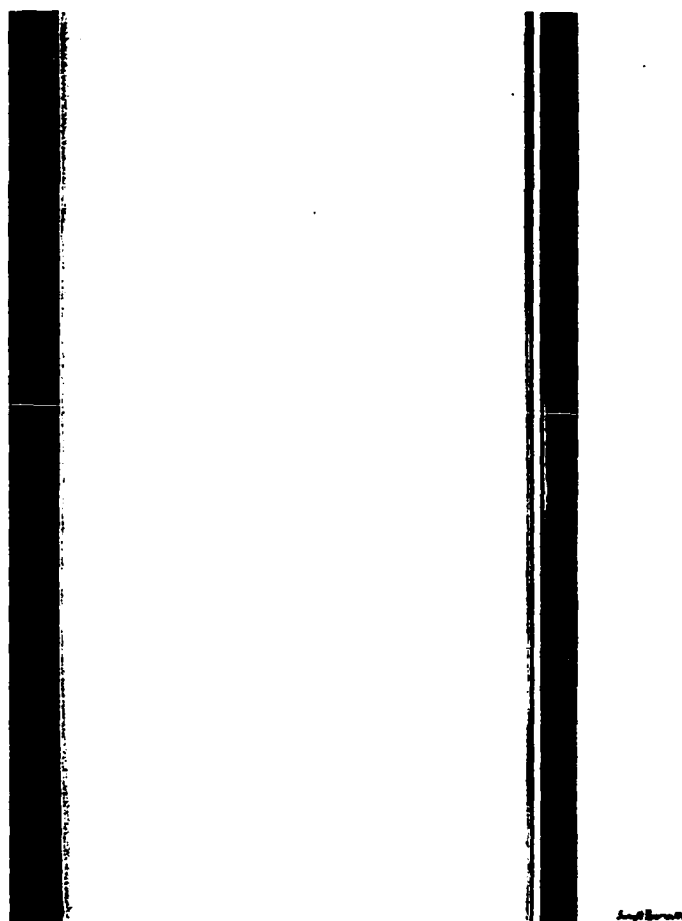


Fig. 12

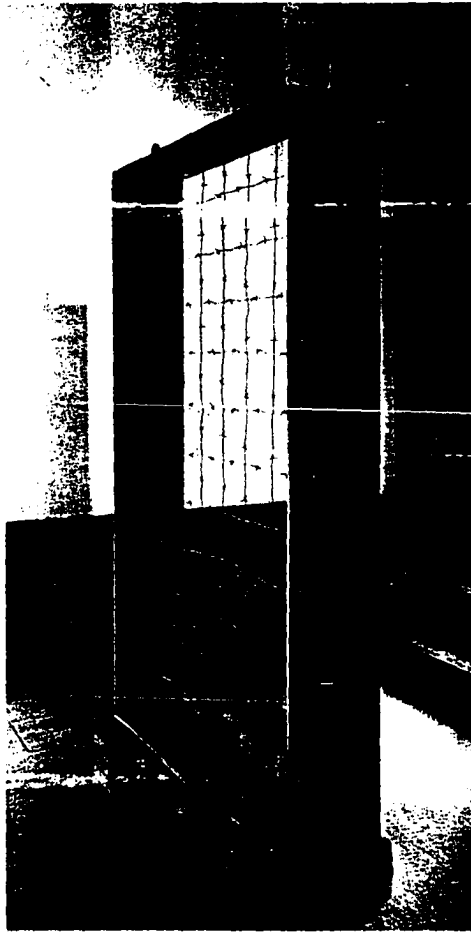


Fig. 13



"LACE CURTAIN FOR MAYOR DALEY" is the name of this work by Barnett Newman at the Richard Feigen Gallery in Chicago. Mr. Feigen is behind it, holding poster. The exhibition, "Richard J. Daley," protests police action during the Democratic convention.

Anti-Daley Art Put in Show in Chicago

By DONALD JANSON

Special to The New York Times
CHICAGO, Oct. 23—Richard J. Daley, went on parade today, without the consent of the Chicago Mayor.

The exhibit, a protest against violence and repression during the Democratic National Convention in August, opened a one-month stand at the Richard Feigen Gallery.

Fifty artists sent works, none complimentary to the man for whom the show was named. The paintings and sculptures were contributed from points as distant as California and Vienna.

A 6-foot-by-4-foot frame of steel, laced with barbed wire and dripping with red paint, dominates the exhibit.

The sculpture, "Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley," is the work of Barnett Newman. It recalls the barbed wire strung around the convention hall to keep dissenters out and the bloodshed in the streets of Chicago as the police maintained order with nightsticks.

Claes Oldenburg is represented by three works, including two drawings of heads without bodies. The exhibit replaced a one-man Oldenburg show scheduled to open at the gallery today.

The artist canceled his show in a post-convention letter to Mr. Feigen describing how he was "tossed in the ground by six swearing troopers who kicked me and choked me and called me a Communist" during the convention.

He said that "a gentle one-man show about pleasure seems a bit obscene" so soon after the convention. Mr. Feigen arranged and substituted "Richard J. Daley." He said today it would be displayed next at his New York gallery, from Jan. 4 to Feb. 9. Then, he said, it will be shown around the country.

Most of the contributors are widely known. About half offer works done specifically for the exhibit. James Rosenquist, for example, is represented by "Tattered Image," a frowning likeness of the Mayor in red on ribbons of plastic that creates the impression of a slashed portrait.

Other artists sent older works, saying they had nothing new on short notice but wanted to protest by participation anyway.

Robert Motherwell, here from New York, said he an

interview at the opening that he and many of the other artists had first planned to boycott Chicago.

They joined in the exhibit instead, he said, after deciding a boycott would hurt the city's artistic community more than it would the Mayor and the political system he represented.

Next week 10 more Chicago galleries will hang shows called "Response," a protest against convention-week violence and violence and racism in society generally.

Proceeds will go to the American Civil Liberties Union to help support an investigation, by an independent commission of leading Chicagoans, of the convention disorders.

The commission is headed by Dr. Edward J. Sparling, president emeritus of Roosevelt University. Its formation was announced yesterday.

Bill Mauldin, the cartoonist, has designed an emblem for the exhibit that shows a flower emerging from behind a strand of barbed wire. The emblem symbolizes the aim of the show to respond to violence with gestures of peace.

Fig. 14

JANUARY, 1930

The Answer

AMERICA'S CIVIL SERVICE MAGAZINE

It's For Your Own "Ultimate" Good

The Story Of The Citizens' Budget Commission

By HAROLD RIEGELMAN
COUNSEL FOR THE COMMISSION

It Must Be Destroyed

The True Story Of The Citizens' Budget Commission, Inc.

By B. BARNETT NEWMAN

An Open Letter to Frederick W. Rubien

Teachers' Examinations—What's Wrong?

Are We Servants?—An Editorial

Football and Shakespeare

\$2.00 a year

25 cents a copy

Fig. 15



VIEW OF THE SEA FROM MARTHA'S VINEYARD
By SISKIND

FREE AS THE SEAS

WE are free! Free of any and all political, financial, commercial party, Republican, Democrat, Socialist, Communist, propaganda, department or organization influence!

We are not the mouth-piece of any politician or office-seeker looking for power!

We are free even of the vicious though subtle influence of ADVERTISING!

We know and you know that any dependence on advertising must endanger the policy, the freedom, the honesty of a journal dedicated to the Civil Service.

We shall not, therefore, carry a single line of paid commercial advertising!

We are a free press, as free as the seas, owing allegiance to no one except the principles of the merit system.

Yet we are not free of bills!

We are not free of the necessity of paying for

paper, for printing, for drawings, for articles, for engravings, for photographs, for rent, for telephone, for expenses.

Some men become free of these bills by selling their spiritual freedom.

We have chosen to keep it. We think you need somebody who can.

Since we have chosen not to live by advertising, you must support us by subscription.

If, therefore, you understand and value freedom, if you think you need a journal that will fearlessly protect the merit principle—the basis for your functioning, if you think you need a journal that will explain it to the world as a concept, teach it as a social philosophy, preach it as a way of life, so that you may be respected as an honest, thinking individual, you must support the only magazine willing and capable of winning it.

Subscription is \$2.00 a year.

PROTECT THE MERIT PRINCIPLE BY SUBSCRIBING TO THE ANSWER TODAY!

Fig. 16

B. BARNETT NEWMAN
Editor and Publisher

THIS world is a place of business. Yet I think that there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, aye, to life itself, than this incessant business.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU.

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Fig. 17

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