



# Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* and the Symbolism of the Body

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Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* (fig. 1), one of the artist's most arresting works, was acquired by The Museum of Modern Art in 1989. An art work as unconventional as this one undergoes a change, in ways both subtle and obvious, when it enters a museum. We look at it quite differently — as a certified museum-quality object within the context of other museum objects, and no longer as some elusive, undefinable entity with its own, peculiar setting within one artist's imagination. Paradoxically, with an object of this kind interpreters must imaginatively undo that change of status. One critic has said that “works such as Rauschenberg's . . . have a lost mode of perception buried in them, as the aesthetic of ‘museum perception’ instructs academic modes of looking quite alien to the original. . . . The task for anyone writing about Rauschenberg now is to construct from the museum-broken residues of his work and intentions a rationale that does not ignore this perceptual history.”<sup>1</sup> And so it seems important to go back and explore the history of ways of seeing implied by *Bed*'s creation. This essay, therefore, seeks to discover something of the “lost mode of perception,” the “perceptual history,” buried in what might be called the material symbolism of this cloth object. Yet what we hope to gain by reimagining the invention of this work is not so much its past as its future; the perceptual history evident in the character of the work itself can tell us how to *see* it, keep its meanings alive, and resist the onset of “museum perception.”

*Bed* derives the rich, almost disconcerting ambiguity of its aesthetic effect from the way Rauschenberg mixed and played with the many associations its material components had for him. As he has said, “All material has history. All material has its own history built into it. . . . An artist manufactures his materials out of his own existence.”<sup>2</sup> I intend to construct a history of perceptual significance for some of those materials within the artist's own practice — to explain not so much what he did in physically manipulating the quilt, the sheet, and the pillow, but why he did it and what it meant.

There is little doubt about the simple facts of the matter; the tale of how Rauschenberg came to paint *Bed* has been recounted many times.<sup>3</sup> He awoke one morning and found himself without materials on which to paint. As he looked about, his eye was drawn to a quilt that had been given to him a while before by a fellow student at Black Mountain College, Dorothea Rockburne. At first he stapled it to a

**Opposite:**

1. Robert Rauschenberg. *Bed*. 1955. Combine painting: oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet, on wooden supports, 6' 3/4" x 31 1/2" x 8" (192.4 x 80 x 20.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fractional gift of Leo Castelli in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.



stretcher and applied paint to the patchwork, trying to “turn the quilt pattern into an abstraction,”<sup>4</sup> but that did not seem to work. Then he added at the top a pillow and part of a sheet, which seemed better; instead of just a quilt, it now became a bed, and the white of the sheet and pillow gave him a fresh surface to paint on. Finally, up it went on the wall (fig. 2).<sup>5</sup>

But there is a little more to it than that: the question immediately arises of the distinction between the artist’s intention — conscious or unconscious — and the spectator’s perception. For what the first viewers of this object *thought* they saw was not just a pillow and bedclothes with some paint on them. It seemed instead the evidence of some horrible crime — an axe murder, perhaps. At its first showing, one reviewer claimed that *Bed* “recalls a police photo of the murder bed after the corpse has been removed.”<sup>6</sup> So strong was this impression that when it was included in an exhibition of works by twelve young American artists at the first Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, in 1958, officials removed it from public view and hung it in an office instead. In 1961, John Cage asked, “Will we in that bed be murdered?”<sup>7</sup> In 1968, when *Bed* was included in the exhibition “Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage” at The Museum of Modern Art, it was described in the catalogue just three sentences after a reference to the section of Kurt Schwitters’s Hannover *Merzbau* known as the “Sex-Murder Cave, which contained a red-stained broken plaster cast of a female nude.”<sup>8</sup> The parallels between Schwitters and Rauschenberg drawn in that text and in its juxtaposition of illustrations were both ideational and stylistic: they established a histori-

2. Rauschenberg in his 128 Front Street studio, New York, 1958, with six of the combines. Against the walls, left to right: *Satellite*, *Interview* (just visible over Rauschenberg’s shoulder), *Untitled, Bed*, and *Odalisk*. In front of *Bed* is *Monogram* in an interim state.

cal affinity between the composition or materials seen in Rauschenberg's combines and constructions and such a work as Schwitters's *Merz Picture with Rainbow*, or between the environmental character of the *Merzbau* and such a work as Rauschenberg's closet-like *Interview*. The close proximity of *Bed* in the text to the Sex-Murder Cave, however, may have had the additional, unintended effect of lending the force of precedent to the familiar axe-murder reading. Now, decades later, some writers still take this interpretation for granted, to such an extent that a few of them ignore the actual physical appearance of *Bed*. For example, the catalogue of a 1988 gallery exhibition in Europe proclaims: "Rauschenberg took a bed with a magnificent bedspread woven in the Indian way. He half-opened it, and painted it blood red." But actually, the bedspread is not a woven Indian blanket but what is known as a Log Cabin patchwork quilt, and little of the paint is in fact red. By a process that seems to happen quite often, the appearance of *Bed* becomes confused, in memory, with the much more lurid aspect of Rauschenberg's preceding Red series paintings.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps recalling the red fabric squares on the quilt, some writers tend to see before their mind's eye not *Bed*'s wide variety of colors and textures, but rather something that is all blood red.

Rauschenberg says that the "murder bed" reading is wrong, and he has consistently rejected it. He speaks of the work in a very positive way: "I think of *Bed* as one of the friendliest pictures I've ever painted. My fear has always been that someone would want to crawl into it."<sup>11</sup> But should we take the artist's claim at face value and simply reject the murder interpretation as a mistake? Or instead is it Rauschenberg himself who is in some way mistaken, if not about his intentions then at least in imagining that others, too, would perceive *Bed* as being "friendly"? The contradiction between the revulsion expressed by some early viewers and Rauschenberg's own positive feelings tells us that in some fundamental way, indicative of this artist's oddly sophisticated naïveté, he was "wrong" about what his painting's body language might say to people.

This "mistake" can be a key to how the piece works, for the conflict with some other people's reactions tends to expose other contradictions, within Rauschenberg's aesthetic practice itself. In other words, "mistakes" can be illuminating, and the various misperceptions, whether on Rauschenberg's part or on others', are especially suggestive. For what they tell us is that from a very early point in the work's perceptual history, *Bed* was taken as evidence of, as a sign for, an absent human body. This idea of signaling the existence of a body that is not presented directly does, I believe, play a central role in the mode of perceiving *Bed*, for works that deal with the human body at one remove, in the form of signs, make up a very important and characteristic segment of Rauschenberg's production as a whole. In the following pages, I shall try to sort out the wealth of material available on this subject by dividing these many various signs for the body into the three categories of signs identified by Charles S. Peirce: the icon, the index, and the symbol.<sup>12</sup>

To begin, then, we can set the stage for Rauschenberg's creation of *Bed* by examining this theme, the absent body and its residual imprint, in other works of his, going back to the beginning of his career as an artist. We will then be ready to address the vexed "murder" question from a more comprehensive point of view.

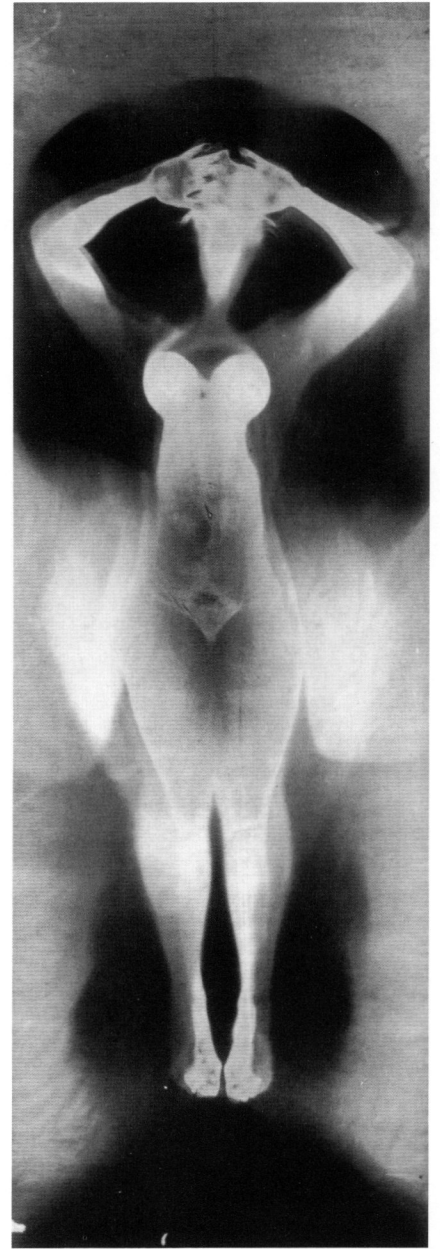
### Body-Prints

The first paintings that Robert Rauschenberg recalls ever having seen in the flesh were all full-length portraits: Thomas Lawrence's *Pinkie*, Joshua Reynolds's *Portrait of Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, and Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*.<sup>13</sup> On leave from the Navy toward the end of World War II, he had wandered into the Huntington Art Gallery, near Pasadena, and recognized *Blue Boy* and *Pinkie* from reproductions he had seen on playing cards. Although he had been making portrait drawings while in the service, at this initial firsthand experience of oil paintings it hit him with the force of a revelation that these were unique, handmade objects. Perhaps just as important, the paintings he saw were images on a scale commensurate with their subjects — life-size or close to it, and especially impressive in this regard since full length.

Over the next decade, and indeed throughout his career, Rauschenberg retained an interest in life-size images of the full-length figure. *Blue Boy* appears as an element in a number of his works in token of this continuing interest. But looking past painting per se, he found a more immediate way to make figurative images of this kind — as a direct imprint of the body itself. His first great success as an artist was with the blueprint images that he and Susan Weil began making around 1950, the year they were married.<sup>14</sup> In a technique related to that of Man Ray's Rayographs (as yet unknown to Rauschenberg), objects were placed directly on photo-sensitive blueprint paper and then exposed to a sunlamp. The most impressive of these works is a full-length body-print of the recumbent Pat Pearman, a friend of Rauschenberg's (fig. 3). This life-size image earned him his first museum presentation when it was included in The Museum of Modern Art's "Abstraction in Photography" exhibition in 1951. The same year, several of the blueprint images were published in *Life* magazine.

Beyond the professional recognition it won for the artist, the image is important in identifying issues that would continue to concern him. For example, though the figure is prone, the work is nonetheless vertical, not horizontal, and was shown that way in its first exhibition. There is a certain playfulness about the insistent verticality here: rather than lying down, the figure seems instead to be flying up, perhaps on the upward arc of a high dive (the model had been a designer of bathing suits). The unexpected orientation imparts a sense of weightlessness.

That Rauschenberg thought of the Pat Pearman print in some sense as a transmutation of the conventional female nude — anticipating his use of Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* in the silkscreen paintings of 1962–64<sup>15</sup> — is suggested by his later inclusion of a small reproduction of *Female Figure (Blueprint)* in his combine *Odalisk* (visible on the extreme right in fig. 2). The woman shown in blueprint is also an "odalisque," an exotic nude, in a way that plays against the expectations aroused by that word from its association with, for example, Ingres and Matisse: with Rauschenberg, although the nude figure is relieved of Oriental or exotic accoutrements,<sup>16</sup> and is treated with an ethereal, almost disembodied lightness, she remains highly sensual. As arabesques of her flesh press against the picture plane of the floor, the shadowy figure betrays unmistakable evidence of a real, physical body; as one critic has noted, the ghostliness of the trace image "can be read as proof that angels actually exist."<sup>17</sup>

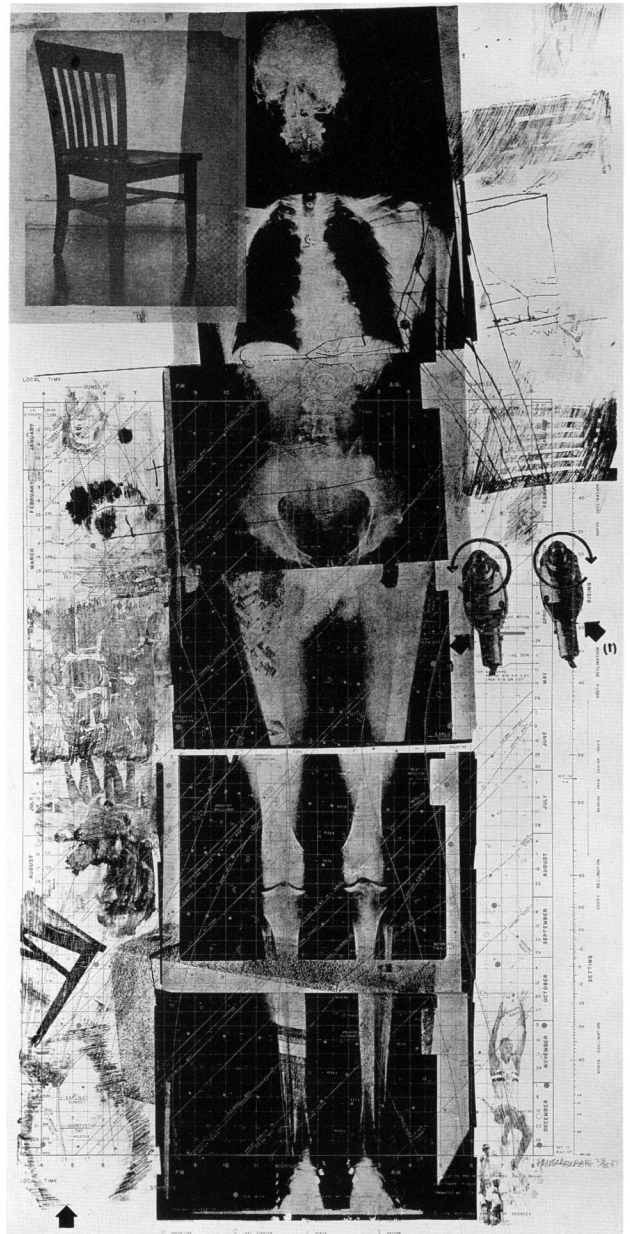


3. Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil. *Female Figure (Blueprint)*. c. 1950. Monoprint, 8' 9" x 36" (267 x 91.4 cm). Collection Robert Rauschenberg

Moreover, the image looks ahead by being printed in negative, initiating an interest in photographic negatives that continues into Rauschenberg's most recent work. More important, however, this is first of all an *imprint* of the body, a direct impression of an entire, living human being (comparable to Yves Klein's *Anthropométries*, created a few years later, which were made by smearing nude women with blue paint and pressing them against canvas laid on the floor). An image like *Female Figure* is even more intimate than a photograph, since it has been made not only by light bathing the subject but by the subject's unmediated physical contact with the paper. The blueprint's network of interrelated concerns has exerted an influence periodically throughout the artist's career, as again and again he has sought to make images that bear the impress of a particular body.

Very often that body has been his own, as in the most remarkable example, *Booster* (fig. 4), the life-size composite print of five X-rays of himself made in 1967. This spectral image may seem more a memento mori than a self-portrait, but it testifies as well to the fascinating mysteries of the living, working body. *Booster* goes beyond *Female Figure* by passing through it, to show not only the envelope of skin but the complex, vital structures within. Something a human being — an embodied consciousness — can never know about itself is how its internal organs do their work.<sup>18</sup> Unlike our skin, they are removed from our sight and largely from our sense of touch; unlike our muscles, they function without our explicit direction, following an independent agenda. Our own anatomy and physiology constitute therefore an interior abyss, a foreign region that we cannot directly perceive. We can drop food and water into this inner void, after which we lose explicit physical awareness of them, until solid and liquid products of various sorts emerge from that void, unbidden and sometimes unwanted. The skeleton, too, is almost entirely absent from consciousness, coming to our attention only at times of injury. And to some extent, the same is true of the very center of consciousness: the brain, the organ in which our awareness of ourselves resides, is forever hidden inside the carapace of the skull and cannot be directly sensed by the consciousness that lives within it.

It is to such secrets of the inner self that *Booster* is addressed; a more "probing" self-portrait can hardly be imagined. Its X-rays point to a larger theme in the artist's work: the anatomical diagram. Examples appear at both earlier and later dates. In the untitled collages Rauschenberg made in Rome and North Africa in 1952–53, he had employed engravings showing a cross-section of an embryo, the skeletal structures of a frog and a turtle, and the dissection of a human foot.<sup>19</sup> And recently, *Urban Order* of 1985, one of the works made for the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI), included a photograph taken by the artist of a store window in Venezuela; it

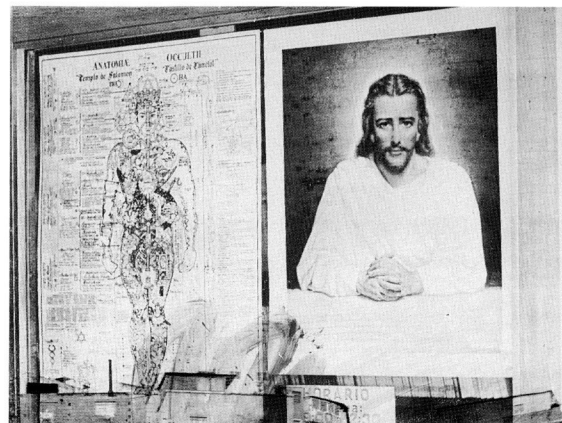


4. Robert Rauschenberg. *Booster*. Los Angeles, Gemini G.E.L., 1967. Lithograph and serigraph, printed in color, 6'  $\frac{3}{16}$ " x 35'  $\frac{9}{16}$ " (183.4 x 90.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. John B. Turner Fund

displays a frontal diagram, labeled OCCULT ANATOMY, paired with a holy-card-style portrait of Jesus Christ (fig. 5). Through such a juxtaposition, the diagram projects the form of the terrestrial self onto an otherworldly configuration.

*Booster* and *Female Figure* have several key features in common. They are narrow, vertical, full-length, human-size images; they evince interest in directly recording traces of the body's anatomy; and they are photographic negatives, suggestive of the spectral — insubstantial shadows, ghosts of the materiality that produced them. Both images, finally, while they could be called “iconic,” since they are pictorial representations, could also be called “indexical,” because they are traces or evidence of actual physical contact.<sup>20</sup> In combining these different characteristics, they are highly unusual pictures, but not wholly without precedent. If one were to seek out an image that anticipates them, widely reproduced in the popular press in the mid-twentieth century, there is a conspicuous candidate (fig. 6). Just as the deployment of a small reproduction of *Female Figure* as a collage element in the subsequent *Odalisk* acted as a commentary on the earlier work, so Rauschenberg's decision to include a reproduction of the Shroud of Turin as a collage element in *Toady Enterprise*,<sup>21</sup> from the *Scale* series of 1980 (a series replete with echoes of his earlier work, amounting at times to a self-retrospective), casts an illuminating light on *Bed*. What we know as the Shroud of Turin, believed by some to be Christ's burial cloth, has been depicted in art works since at least the fourteenth century, the beginning of the existing cloth's provenance. By the time Erwin Panofsky in the late 1940s remarked on “the notorious ‘Holy Shroud’ of Turin,”<sup>22</sup> as well as on the shrouds of Besançon and Enxobregas, the object whose iconography he briefly discussed was already long familiar in the context of art history. But just before the beginning of our century, perception of the Shroud had altered radically, when it was photographed. The first pictures of the Shroud were taken in 1898 by a man named Secondo Pia; it was photographed again, by Giuseppe Enrie, in 1931. When Pia developed his negatives, the Shroud of Turin was found to generate a ghostly but unsettlingly realistic reversed-tonality image of a face and body. Forms that had seemed merely indistinct sepia stains on the actual object (as they do in positives) were revealed as legible only in negative prints.

It is the spectral negatives, especially those from 1931 and after, that have been the most widely reproduced in books and magazines, sometimes with a blue tint. Endless speculation has focused on the puzzle of how the cloth came to be marked in such a way that a clear image of the figure would appear only in a negative. And it was in this tonally reversed medium that the Surrealists encountered and responded to the Shroud, among the first twentieth-century artists to do so. The negatives received new attention after World War II, when it was claimed that the image bore similarities to the ghostly radiation-flash “shadow” images, left on stone and metal surfaces, of some victims of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A few devout writers even asserted that a similar burst of “radiation,” released at the instant of Christ's



5. Photograph taken by Rauschenberg in Venezuela and used as an element in his *Urban Order* of 1985 (Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Caracas)

resurrection, was what had originally produced the image on the Shroud, by a means that could be called proto-photographic (this was the flash-photolysis theory). So it would not be surprising if, after the war, Rauschenberg's attention was caught by a famous burial cloth — especially since his first assignment in the Navy, as an orderly at a military hospital, had been to wash and wrap corpses.<sup>23</sup>

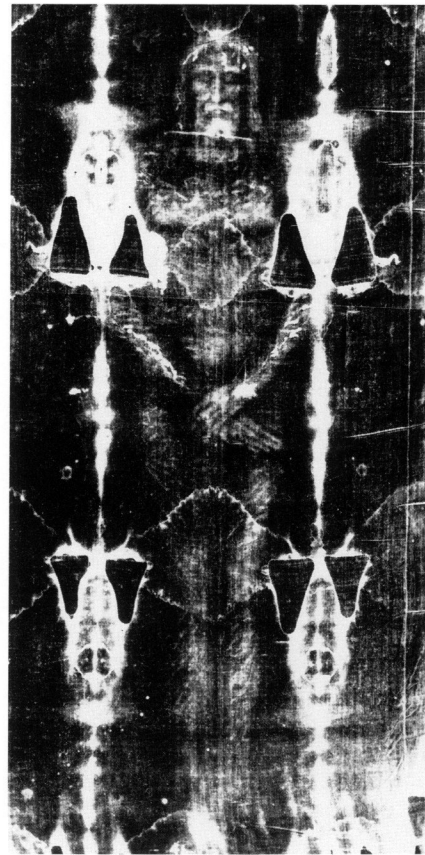
There is no need to insist that Rauschenberg saw these much-published photographs as early as *Female Figure*, though the latter is a close analogue (being a frontal trace-image of a nude, lying down but presented vertically), or even by the time of *Booster*. What is important is their correlation with his pictorial practice: his taking a direct impression from the full-length form, anatomically detailed and in negative. Moreover, he has indeed sometimes printed nearly life-size figurative images on cloth, as with some works in his Hoarfrost series.<sup>24</sup>

There is a further correlation. Works like *Booster* and *Female Figure* are, as noted, both iconic and indexical. And in fact the Shroud, too, bears two different kinds of visual information. First, it shows a modeled, detailed image of a human form, which is the aspect clarified in photographic negatives, and which has led to its being taken as an analogue of the portrait image that tradition says Christ imprinted on Veronica's veil (or sweatcloth) at the Sixth Station of the Cross. That cloth's "picture," we are to understand, was printed by the physical touch of the depicted features (a contact image comparable, in a way, to a brass rubbing). But in addition, the Shroud also has, or at least appears to have, actual soaked-in stain marks, whose patterns show evidence of the flow, streaking, blotting, and pooling of blood. It was perhaps inevitable that this double appearance of the pictorial image and the evidentiary trace of direct transfer of fluids would attract the notice of recent critical theory.<sup>25</sup> Nor should it be surprising that Rauschenberg made use of a reproduction of the Shroud in *Toady Enterprise*. The Shroud is, after all, much like the signs for the body as presented in his own works, and in two ways: not only by being a narrow, vertical, life-size nude, shown in negative and in clinical detail, like *Female Figure* and *Booster*; but also by being the stained cloth covering of a body that is no longer there, like *Bed*. It is this second, non-pictorial kind of marking, evident in *Bed*, that I shall now pursue.

### Stained Cloth

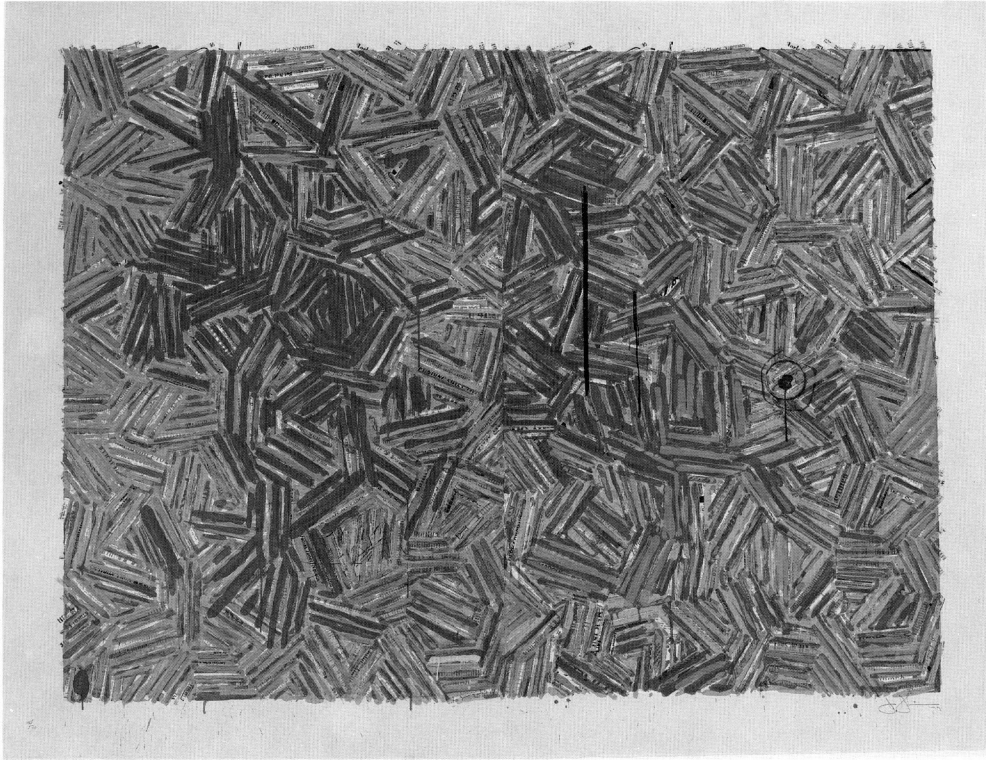
This is the feature, the application of paint to the fabric of this obliquely figurative assemblage, which accounts for *Bed's* jolt. For what are we to think of these painted areas? In their vigorous application and mixing of colors, there seems a certain gestural violence; the real question becomes not what is the bed doing on the wall, but what is the paint doing on the bed? What do the "offending" marks declare themselves to be?

After looking at the Shroud, we might think of the paint marks on *Bed* as soiling stains. In the years just before *Bed*, including those at Black Mountain College and then during his extended stay in Italy and North Africa, Rauschenberg was close to Cy Twombly; the two had a joint exhibition at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1953. The scribbles on the pillow, especially, seem rather like some of Twombly's characteristic marks. In fact, he sometimes painted in Rauschenberg's studio, and one of



6. Photographic negative of the frontal impression on the Shroud of Turin. The frontal negative appears as an element in Rauschenberg's *Toady Enterprise* of 1980 (collection the artist).





7. Jasper Johns. *The Dutch Wives*. 1977. Silkscreen, printed in color, 42 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 56" (109.1 x 142.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Mrs. Alfred R. Stern, and Jeanne C. Thayer Funds

Rauschenberg's works of this time, an untitled combine of 1955 (visible in the center of fig. 2), actually has some scribbles on it that, according to Rauschenberg, were made by Twombly.<sup>26</sup> And as Roland Barthes once noted of the various smudges, clots, scratchings, and smearings of a Twombly painting, "These gestures, which aim to establish matter as fact, are all related to *dirtying*."<sup>27</sup> To Rauschenberg, they seem to be this, but they are also something else; when asked about Twombly's early paintings, what he speaks of is their "massive accumulation of *erotic paint*."<sup>28</sup> His remark stops you short, for it seems as though paint application which to other people looks like "dirtying" looks to Rauschenberg more like accumulated erotic evidence. What are we to make of this association of soiling with sexuality?

It is a significant question, for it involves other of Rauschenberg's works. Many of his works share with Twombly's graffiti-related paintings an impulse to smear and deface — intensified in Rauschenberg's case by the photographic images that often appear underneath the marks, or, in *Monogram* (fig. 27), by the way the visage of the stuffed goat is partly "defaced" by paint daubs here and there (applied in order to disguise damage to the skin). This urge to dirty is the converse of Rauschenberg's most notorious defacement, his erasure of a drawing given to him for that purpose by Willem de Kooning. In that case, "dirtying" paradoxically consisted of "cleaning" the de Kooning, which was then reduced to the merest vestiges, a ghost of a drawing. The very cleanness of the paper is the trace evidence of the two artists' "collaboration."

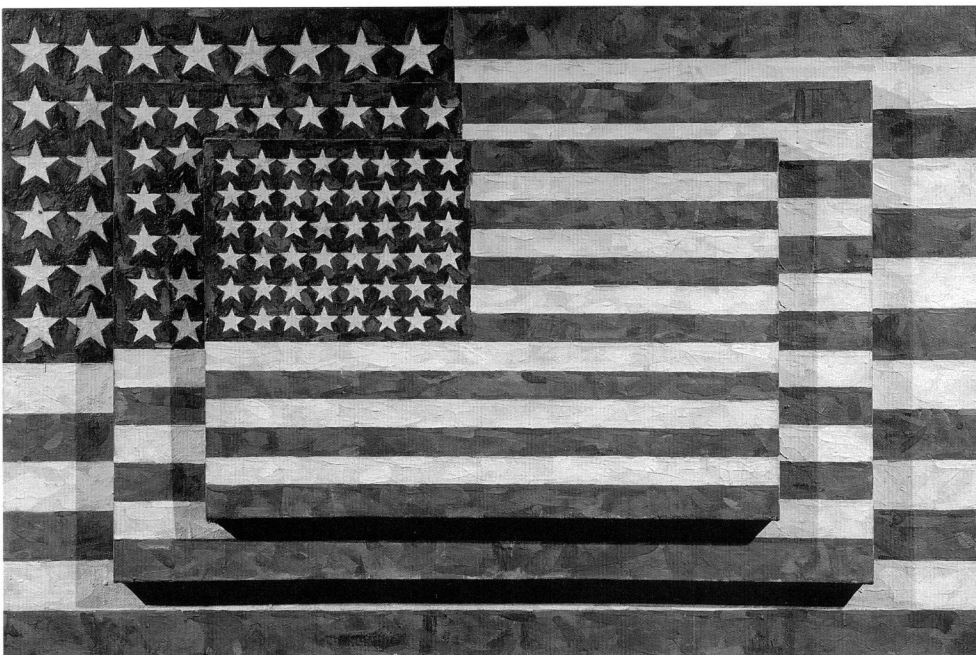
We might try to answer the question by proposing affinities with other such acts of erotic dirtying. It would take no great leap of the imagination to see that the marks on *Bed* could relate to the kind of splatter spot Jasper Johns later marked on his *Dutch*

*Wives* painting and prints (see fig. 7). As has been noted of two of these prints, “The dripped spot is placed directly within the circular can print, surrounded by a freely drawn red line, and would seem to justify Michael Crichton’s reference to the sailor’s Dutch wife, a board with a hole in it used as a means of masturbation.”<sup>29</sup>

But some other features of *Bed* seem insufficiently explained by this particular association of soiling with sexuality. For example, the painted areas are disturbing not only because of the application of the paint but also because of their position, which seems reversed. For no matter how the putative bodily fluids on the surface might be read, they are in the “wrong” place (unless we do admit the axe-murder reading or some other violent event). In the course of ordinary life, a bed might be stained by semen or menstrual blood. Either of these, however, would presumably mark its lower half, yet *Bed* is stained almost entirely on its upper half, even on the pillow and the outside of the quilt, and so a “normal” interpretation is frustrated by the top/bottom (and inside/outside) displacement of the stains’ location, versus where they “should” be.

There are further complicating factors. For one, the effect of the vigorously marked areas is heightened by the fact that the bed is otherwise so tidy; the slashing paint is in disturbing contrast to the neatly tucked-in sheet and quilt and the tightly rectilinear composition of the whole. For another, the marks on *Bed* are not all made with paint or pencil; Rauschenberg says that in addition he employed nail polish and the recently introduced consumer product “striped” toothpaste,<sup>30</sup> both of which substances are associated with the cosmetic sense of the body.

It is easy to get the feeling that something is being kept from us. The covers’ neatness is in complicity with such concealment. Viewers of Johns’s *Three Flags* (fig. 8), in which three different, progressively smaller canvases are mounted one on top of the other, often wonder whether Johns actually painted the hidden areas of the flags



8. Jasper Johns. *Three Flags*. 1958. Encaustic on canvas, 30  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 45  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 5" (78.4 x 115.6 x 12.7 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. 50th Anniversary Gift of the Gilman Foundation, Inc., The Lauder Foundation, Mr. A. Alfred Taubman, an anonymous donor (and purchase)

underneath or left them blank. Similarly, in looking at *Bed* we wonder whether the areas under the covers are also painted, but concealed by the arrangement of bed-clothes. One's natural curiosity makes the resistance of the tightly tucked-in coverings seem to betray not so much modesty as suppressed memories.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps there is a way around these problems of interpretation: for the marks on the bed need not necessarily be exclusively "male," need not be only like the stain marks in *The Dutch Wives* or in the more aggressive graffiti of some Twomblys. Presumably we are free, if we like, to read the paint as whatever other liquid would fit the context, and perhaps this freedom is what prompted the strong visceral reaction of the work's first viewers; an understandable inclination to read the paint as a possible reference to blood triggered an unsavory string of "wrong" associations for some, leading them ultimately to interpret *Bed* as a deathbed — the site of an axe murder, perhaps sexually motivated.

There *was*, to be sure, a sense in which the more vigorously gestural Abstract Expressionist works could be construed at this time as violent and aggressive. The New York School inherited from Surrealist automatism the valuing of gestural marks as the direct expression of untamed forces erupting from the unconscious. And so the free, arm-length swings of Pollock's skeins of paint were often taken to be acts of violence, not only against the canvas as an art material that embodied the established conventions of fine-art painting, but also against the canvas as embodying a more personal, psychological adversary. There is therefore a somewhat disturbing hint of displaced sexual aggression in the derisive epithet given to Pollock: "Jack the Dripper." Likewise, some felt the often excoriating brushwork in de Kooning's *Woman* series paintings was an expression of violence against the depicted subject. Moreover, the tabloid type and pulp ads (transferred from the newspapers used to help dry the paint) that appeared in de Kooning's *Police Gazette* or *Gotham News* of about 1954–56 not only provide possible precedents for Rauschenberg's printed-image transfers,<sup>32</sup> in these de Koonings we see also an association between lurid color or lacerated impasto and police-blotter reporting that foreshadows the similar association made in 1958 by the reviewer who remarked that *Bed* recalled "a police photo of the murder bed." Such dramatic uses of Action Painting techniques were, after all, the kind that Ad Reinhardt had mocked in 1957 as "palette-knifing" and "canvas-stabbing."<sup>33</sup> In the context of this fifties time frame, one can see why the painterly "Action" in *Bed* may have seemed so charged with sexual violence — Rauschenberg's surprise and his disclaimer notwithstanding.

That is the paradox we encounter here. It is as if this work, when seen by others, had turned out to be a rather large Freudian slip. Associations with the bloodstained Shroud of Turin, too, might seem to lend support to the murder interpretation of *Bed*; yet here also Rauschenberg is interested in "friendly" traces of the body — the life of the body — and not necessarily interested in death. That is to say: although the Shroud's bloodstains testify to the torture of the redeemer, nonetheless, to be "redeemed" is to be "washed in the blood of the Lamb" — to receive the benefit of an unmerited act of self-sacrifice; to benefit, that is, from the redeemer's "friendliness."

But unfortunately the sheer shock value of body traces, if one decides to cry bloody murder, overwhelms the delicate complexity of what could be called a dual (and in a sense “typological”) interpretation and annihilates the work’s ambiguity.

Still, even if we *were* to reduce the variously colored and configured marks to just one thing, to no more than “blood,” this need not necessarily suggest violence, let alone murder. There are obvious alternatives, even within a quite narrow range of possible associations. To put it simply: as evidence of the body’s functions, blood is not always “bad”; on the contrary, it could seem quite commonplace and natural for a bedsheet to be stained with blood. Blood might be not a sign of male aggression but rather of female procreativity. This may not necessarily be the “right” reading either: yet the work is rich enough to accommodate a wider range of interpretive possibilities than we sometimes encounter. It *is* possible, after all, for blood to signify something other than destructive violence, and for *Bed* to issue from friendlier, more congenial imaginings — and for the marks staining it to be residue of the activity of life’s generative forces.

Here too, we see the relevance of Shroud symbolism. For example, in a familiar rendering of the Holy Grail legend, Richard Wagner’s opera *Parsifal*, the hemorrhage of the never-healing side of the Grail king Amfortas makes him both like the wounded Christ and like a menstruating woman. Amfortas can become a type of Christ precisely because his issue of blood is associated not with suffering alone but also with the ability to bear new life. This much is implicit in a particular significance accorded to bleeding in Christian typology; for instance, in the way that the woman with a permanent flow of blood, the “hemorrhissa” of the synoptic gospels, who was cured by touching the cloth of Christ’s garment, later developed into the figure we know as Veronica, the co-creator who bears his sweat-and-blood image.<sup>34</sup> In these cases, the symbolic gender-mixing of the procreative meanings of blood is associated with what Caroline Walker Bynum has called the role of “Jesus as mother.”<sup>35</sup> Seen in such a context, *Bed*’s pervasive associations with various kinds of bodily traces tie it closely to the physiological processes that generate life. We would impoverish this object by reducing it exclusively to evidence of the body’s extinction.

Recall again that Rauschenberg himself speaks of the work as “one of the friendliest pictures I’ve ever painted.” To him, its soiled appearance is not distasteful. Even as he professes to see nothing off-putting in the “friendly” soiled bed, he remains the same artist, with the same unusual sensibility, who thought nothing of using his own blood as shading in a drawing he made while in the Navy.<sup>36</sup> His attitude toward blood is clearly a good deal more casual than that of most people, and in general, reminders of sheer physicality that would disturb some are accepted by him, almost without comment, as given.<sup>37</sup> This can produce a healthy, down-to-earth quality in his work, but in a different light it can seem like adolescent coarseness — the kind of “slip” that led to the initial revulsion at *Bed*.

Indeed, to most people, bodily stains in general and bloodstains in particular are threatening, virulent images of evil, long associated with deep-seated fears of contamination and defilement by bodily fluids. This has to do not only with the sense of violation, the loss of personal physical integrity, that the draining of fluid entails (whether

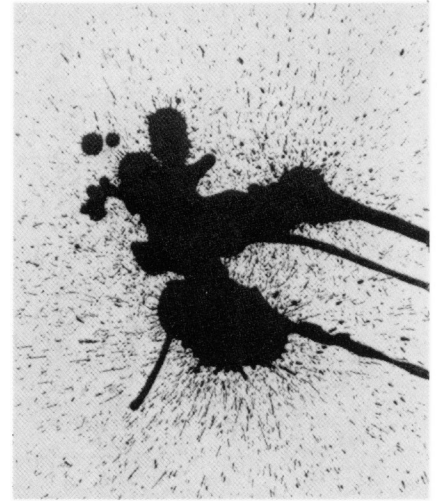
in hemorrhage or incontinence). Nor is it only a matter of natural repugnance at bodily wastes, even in the more positive sense of catharsis in tragedy as a literal purgation.<sup>38</sup> For most of all, it is sexuality, in its many delicate, potentially unsettling aspects, that is made manifest in the loss of fluids (from ejaculation, menstruation, secretion, defloration, and so on). And from early times, such stains have aroused the deepest, most extreme reactions. Male anxieties in this regard seem to have often focused on menstrual blood. One senses an ancient fear of contamination in Pliny's description in his *Natural History* of the corrosive power of menstruation, contact with which, he says, "turns new wine sour; crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seeds in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees falls off . . . the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust." Or he writes of "this pernicious mischief," and of "the mysterious and awful power of the monstrous discharge itself. . . . At such seasons, sexual intercourse brings disease and death upon the man."<sup>39</sup> Or Aristotle tells us that "if a woman looks into a highly polished mirror during the menstrual period, the surface of the mirror becomes clouded with a blood-red color (and if the mirror is a new one the stain is not easy to remove, but if it is an old one there is less difficulty)"; the latter phenomenon Aristotle explained by the analogy that "the cleaner one's clothes are, the more readily they become stained."<sup>40</sup> Or we read in Leviticus (chapter 15): "Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation: and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation. And whosoever toucheth those things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even." The stain, Paul Ricoeur tells us, is the primal, underlying symbol of evil, making visible the sense of personal defilement that comes from violating the major prohibitions in one's culture. Most such prohibitions are sexual; indeed, "the inflation of the sexual is characteristic of the whole system of defilement,"<sup>41</sup> crucial to the whole of what he calls "the symbolism of stain," because sexual stains are *ethical* stains: they have to do with two people and the physical relations between them — the source of all the trouble since Adam and Eve.<sup>42</sup>

A stain, in other words, and especially a stain polymorphous enough to implicate several different fluids, from both sexes, is after all quite likely to disturb people. A stain, especially a bloodstain, has powerful, even upsetting connotations that make it seem both "good" and "bad": the "symbolism of stain" is unnervingly double-edged. Blood can be "good," as when "the blood of the covenant" in Exodus is a sign of divine favor. A bloodstain from menstrual flow can also be "good," by showing the passage of a young girl into womanhood and the onset of the ability to procreate; its periodic recurrence is a sign of continuing fertility. This significance of course counters the stain as defilement and contamination. Within a conventional understanding of marriage vows, a bloodstain would have a further "good" significance, indicating (as in the title of Duchamp's painting) the passage from virgin to bride, and certifying her previous chastity; indeed, the very absence of a stain would in this case be "bad," as evidence that she was not *virgo intacta*. Such highly charged associations with defloration and menstruation are exploited in Francis Picabia's *The Blessed Virgin* (fig. 9).

Underlying these potentially upsetting transpositions of the “good” and “bad” meanings of blood is another transposition. The stain confounds the categories not only of good and bad, but also of male and female: “A man produces blood when he dies; a woman produces blood when she creates.”<sup>43</sup> Disorienting inversions like these may have affected early viewers of *Bed*. But perhaps precisely *because* it is so heterogeneous — because it mingles different symbolic values through the various deposits left by different kinds of bodies — Rauschenberg himself sees *Bed* as “friendly”; its messy, deeply infused sense of bodily residue is what makes it look so *personal*. As a boy, he had once put a personal mark on things by painting red fleurs-de-lys all over the furniture and walls of his bedroom, upsetting his parents — a child’s transgression.<sup>44</sup> But as an artist, he again took bedroom things and broke the rules by smearing paint on them. And again, people were upset.

Perhaps we can get a different slant on the New York School in the early and middle fifties by looking at certain paintings with the specifically female body in mind. Sometimes it may seem as though certain sorts of essentially non-depictive paintings are to a degree removed from the things of this world — as with the kind of floating, disembodied abstraction epitomized by Helen Frankenthaler’s breakthrough soak-stain painting of 1952, *Mountains and Sea*.<sup>45</sup> Yet the implications of Frankenthaler’s work for artists of diverse sensibilities have been pointed out, not only for the generally acknowledged ones in the late fifties, including Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, but also for “Larry Rivers and Robert Rauschenberg, who in the mid-1950s adopted the diaristic, episodic approach to picture making, and the thinly washed technique, that Frankenthaler had pioneered.”<sup>46</sup>

In trying to imagine some aspects of the reception of Frankenthaler’s pivotal early work, we might recall a story Rauschenberg tells about Black Mountain College, an anecdote that may seem as trivial as it does irrelevant. In 1948–49, while he was studying at Black Mountain under Josef Albers, Rauschenberg frequently accompanied a beautiful young woman named Dolores to church. “Albers noticed Dolores, too,” Rauschenberg told Calvin Tomkins. “He may have painted squares, but he had quite an eye for what he called ‘the hills and the valleys.’” He was referring to Albers’s life-drawing classes, in which Albers demanded close concentration on “the mountains and the valleys” of the figure.<sup>47</sup> (Compare de Kooning’s observation that the woman’s form in his *Woman I* reminded him strongly of “a landscape — with arms like lanes and a body of hills and fields, all brought up close to the surface, like a panorama squeezed together.”)<sup>48</sup> Nowadays, language like that can make us squirm in our seats; as Mary Ellmann wrote about such naïve “sexual analogy”: “At the present time . . . a person who points out breasts, thighs, *et al.* in the contours of a landscape is asked to leave the average car.”<sup>49</sup> Rauschenberg’s remark brings to the fore just that kind of sexual analogy. His association of Albers’s pedagogical “mountains and valleys” with a specific woman’s actual sexuality is a flash of the imagination as easy for him as it was revealing. It betrays an impulse to perceive the abstract (in Albers’s case, the geometric) as a kind of “cover” for the sexual. In a more subtle analogy, it has been asserted



9. Francis Picabia. *The Blessed Virgin*. 1920.  
From the review 391, no. 12 (March 1920)



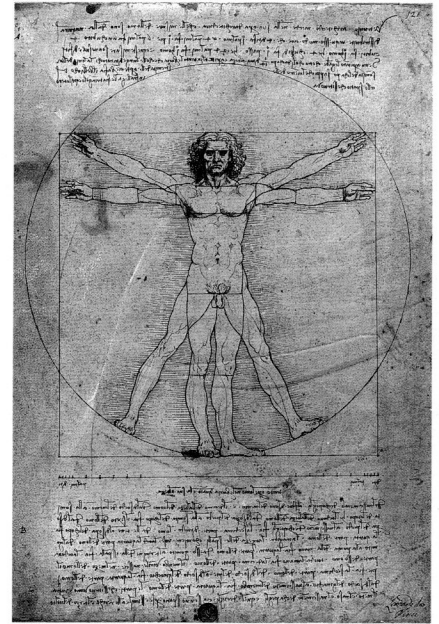
becomes a kind of anatomy lecture on the rocket's frame, its components (including "umbilical" cord) identified for us like the tagged features of a Larry Rivers "parts of the body" painting. With only one intermediate stage, a man has become an object.

If this anthropomorphic effect can obtain with a represented object, it can obtain too with an actual, constructed object. We see it in the emblematic quality of, for example, David Smith's *Tanktotem I* of 1952.<sup>53</sup> We see it also in the more humanoid of the assemblages Richard Stankiewicz made from junk metal and machine parts, in which suggestions of an animate, purposeful intelligence still inhere in the frozen connections between formerly working parts.

Such personification can take place even if the object in question happens to be a painting rather than a construction: there is a sense in which *Bed*, or any painting, can be not only evidence of a body but can *be* a body itself. It was a not uncommon idea among the artists of the preceding generation or so. Even an artist as antithetical in temperament to Rauschenberg as Ad Reinhardt could nonetheless describe a square, all-black painting as being "five feet wide, five feet high, as high as a man, as wide as a man's outstretched arms"<sup>54</sup> — a kind of calculus for constructing a man from mathematical equations alone. It almost seems as if the five-foot-square format of a late Reinhardt canvas retraces the box inscribed around the schematic, full-length figure, his proportions squared by his height and outstretched arms, in Leonardo's famous drawing (fig. 11).

Of course, many other artists have seen the painted canvas as a human body.<sup>55</sup> After Harold Rosenberg's essay "The American Action Painters" of 1952 — purportedly "equating the painting itself with the physical body of the artist who made it"<sup>56</sup> — the ardent rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism could profess "an art descriptive of the body because a record of the body's gestures."<sup>57</sup> For Rosenberg, paintings came not solely from vision but from a general bodily awareness: one painted, he said, from "somatic memories of paintings" as well as from visual ones.<sup>58</sup> We see evidence of this general line of thinking, ironically, in Rauschenberg's wanting to take a sabbatical from painting in favor of performance and dance. As he once said about working with the dancers in Merce Cunningham's company (for which he made his first set in 1954): "Painting tends to remain fixed, to be made of its own external materials. The idea of having your own body and its activity be the material — that was really tempting."<sup>59</sup>

But the conflict between abstraction and figuration tended to keep such conceptions veiled. The body was to be referred to by index, not by icon — by a brushstroke trace of its muscular action, or by a mathematical extrapolation from its form. After de Kooning's *Woman* paintings were exhibited in 1953,<sup>60</sup> however, and as more artists felt compelled to deal with the figure again in some way, the body did reemerge a little more openly. Still, when in 1955 Jasper Johns inserted direct casts of body parts into his *Target with Plaster Casts* (fig. 12), he put them in little boxes with hinged doors, seeming to offer the viewer the option of hiding them from sight, and thus allowing the pure geometry of the bull's-eye to be seen unsullied.<sup>61</sup> (With the doors open, the startling encounter between the purely abstract and the blatantly physical foreshadows a roughly comparable effect in *The Dutch Wives* two decades later.) Jim Dine respond-



11. Leonardo da Vinci. Diagram of human proportions. 1485–90. Ink on paper, 13 1/2 x 9 3/8" (34.3 x 24.4 cm). Accademia, Venice

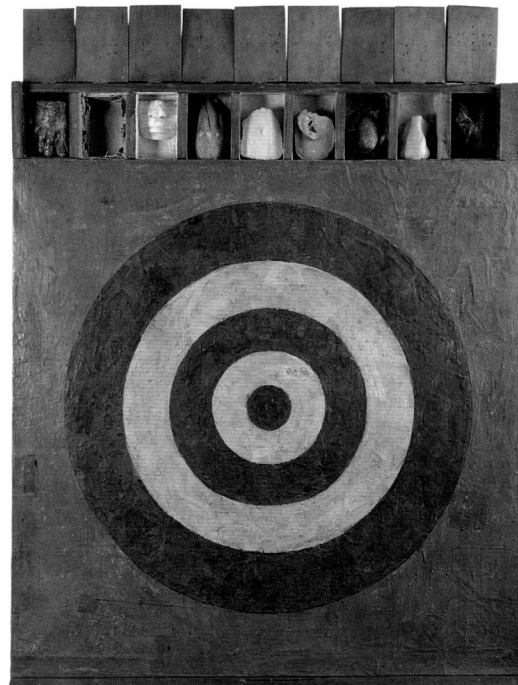


ed to a similar conflict when he painted clothing as a kind of surrogate for the figure, as with the actual outfit called *Green Suit* of 1959.<sup>62</sup> After that, by further manipulating our perception of clothing, even the rectangle could be more openly acknowledged as a vehicle of the figure: the neat row of real buttons that secures the fabric seam in Dine's otherwise non-representational painting *Coat*, of 1961,<sup>63</sup> makes the stretched canvas into an abstracted (if rather tight-fitting) overcoat. More provocative is the zipper that runs down the center of the textured painting *Black Zipper* of 1962 (fig. 13).<sup>64</sup> Although inescapably a rigid, geometrically composed rectangle, the picture wears its rectitude lightly: it is rather like an unusually large, extremely well-pressed, folded pair of pants (the zipper making a wicked figurative joke at the expense of Barnett Newman's sublime "zips").

The physical character of cloth painting surfaces has always fostered such associations: if clothing can be analogized as a textured, skin-like membrane, so can canvas. Through much of the history of Western art, the cloth of Veronica's veil, the *vera icon*, has seemed to be an analogue of Christ's skin. The reproductive image that Christ and Veronica make between them, when his sweat and blood impregnate her cloth, has for this reason on occasion been called their "child,"<sup>65</sup> because it is flesh of their flesh (though it takes after its "father"). Cloth becomes a symbol of the Incarnation, of the flesh that the spirit "puts on." And this, of course, is much the quality imputed to the Shroud of Turin: as Christ's burial cloth, and bearing the stain of his image, it is, like the "seamless garment" stripped from him at the Crucifixion, an analogue of his own perfect skin, the savaging of which does the work of redemption.

From there it is a short distance to the metaphorical idea of one's being stripped, like a studio *écorché*, of the garment of a flayed skin, as in the myth of Marsyas, or the flayed self-portrait in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. A little further along this road lies the kind of densely paradoxical image (or "conceit") that transposes bodies as easily as it changes clothes. I mean the kind of expansive iconographical thinking that makes the crucified Christ into a pregnant Virgin Mary, and which thus makes his seamless garment, his shroud, into his swaddling cloth — changes, in other words, graveclothes into bedclothes: "For when the hour of your delivery came, you were placed on the hard bed of the cross."<sup>66</sup> This kind of transposition of cloth and skin is within the vocabulary of Christian iconography, to which Rauschenberg often returned, particularly in his early work.<sup>67</sup> Imagery of this sort is pervasive and deeply rooted in Western tradition, even now; so pervasive that, for example, Roland Barthes can be immediately understood as asserting something we already half intuit when he says "the human body . . . [is] in a relation of signification with clothing . . . proposing an ideal incarnate body."<sup>68</sup>

Although these are admittedly somewhat emphatic examples, seeing the canvas as in some way the garment of one's skin is almost inescapable; so too with seeing it as the whole body. A stuffed animal is attached to several of



12. Jasper Johns. *Target with Plaster Casts*. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas with plaster casts, 51 x 44 x 3 1/2" (129.5 x 111.8 x 8.9 cm). Collection Leo Castelli

13. Jim Dine. *Black Zipper*. 1962. Oil and mixed mediums on canvas, 8 x 6' (243 x 182.9 cm). The Sonnabend Collection



Rauschenberg's combines: the eagle in *Canyon* (see p. 137), the goat in *Monogram*, the pheasant in *Satellite*, the rooster in *Odalisk* (see fig. 2). Such accoutrements, among the combines' most characteristic features, are important because they present the reconstituted body as a basic principle of the works. Taxidermy makes something tangible of the idea of the canvas as a skin wrapped around the bones of its stretcher, literalizing the painting-as-body metaphor. It has been literalized before. When Picasso, in his "African" style of 1907, drew striations and hatchings that represented the scarification marks and body painting of tribal peoples, he transferred those scars to the skin of the canvas through what has been called his "slashing painterly attack."<sup>69</sup> Decades later, Lucio Fontana would quite literally slash that woven membrane with savage gashes, Ad Reinhardt would talk of "canvas-stabbing," and Alberto Burri's lacerated fabric works of the early and middle fifties would be called "a metaphor for human, bleeding flesh."<sup>70</sup>

In literalizing the painting-as-suspended-body metaphor, the pillow of *Bed* turns out to be perhaps the preeminent feature, since its rounded fullness and its memory of softness are ostentatiously corporeal, leading one to think of the whole as an anticipated "soft sculpture" supported on a wooden armature. Pillows in fact appear in a large number of Rauschenberg's combines and other works, often subjected to rough handling: in *Canyon*, a small, tied pillow hangs below the Rough Rider eagle, which seems to be eyeing it as if it were prey; a larger pillow is pierced by the pedestal that supports *Odalisk*. Many years later, in *Honorarium* of 1981, from the Spread series, Rauschenberg clamps a folded pillow in a vise.<sup>71</sup> One of the more telling appearances of the pillow occurs in *Gush* (fig. 14), a printed-fabric Hoarfrost work of 1974. A long, narrow cloth hangs so that it is draped over a pillow lying on the floor, and just touches the floor on either side; *Gush* becomes an upside-down bed. With *Bed* itself, the work's obvious conformity to the proportions of the imagined body that rested on it makes for the clearest statement of associational figuration,<sup>72</sup> to the point that *Bed*'s pillow seems a surrogate head, surmounting a kind of schematic torso. (In a manner perhaps analogous to de Kooning's *Women*, the head is clearly defined, the rest of the body more generalized.) But an upright human body presented in this posture would still seem to be attached to the supporting wall, hung from it. And thus the pillow atop *Bed* becomes more compelling than any of its uses elsewhere: uncomfortably suspended, streaked with dramatic rivulets of paint running down, it sags like the head of a crucified Christ.

### Gender and Geometry

*Bed* was not Rauschenberg's first painting over a pattern on cloth. When he and Susan Weil were students at the Académie Julian in Paris in 1948, they lived in the same *pension*, and the concierge allowed them to use the front room as a studio. One day, after accidentally spilling paint on the patterned rug, Rauschenberg cleverly disguised the stains by applying additional spots of paint, making the drips look like part of the pattern.<sup>73</sup> (Like the erased de Kooning drawing, this is an instance of mark-making as simultaneously both dirtying and cleaning.) Sometimes, it seems, marking over a patterned fabric can reveal the pattern anew — change it by highlighting some features



14. Robert Rauschenberg. *Gush* from the Hoarfrost series. 1974. Solvent transfer on fabric with pillow, 8' 2" x 48" x 18" (249 x 122 x 46 cm). Private collection

over others, rather than merely covering it up.

A similar impulse can be seen in the way part of the patchwork quilt of *Bed* has been marked, to isolate and highlight the pattern of square shapes. But unlike the pillow or the paint, the block-pattern quilt as a separate kind of sign in its own right declares the body in a sharply different way. The quilt signifies by association rather than by trace mark, at a remove from the shape or the impress of the body. Even the most abstract geometric configurations can, like badges or emblems, come to stand for aspects of the body, and therefore can function in a manner that is neither iconic nor indexical, but “symbolic.”<sup>74</sup>

Here too, like the symbolic values seen earlier, the square as a symbol will in its own, more abstract way confound the categories of male versus female. Since *Bed*'s quilt is a sign of the “product standing for producer” kind, it is in that way indexical (and also metonymic). Nonetheless, I shall argue, the way the quilt develops a further meaning out of comparable geometric forms by other, male producers makes it symbolic (that is, symbolic of duality). Because the grid is so seemingly neutral — so remote from the figure, so purely non-objective — it can be made to embody a covert androgyny, and symbolize the cohabitation of masculine and feminine elements in one personality.

The quilt brings with it a ready-made frame of bodily reference, one which Rauschenberg could hardly ignore. Its design raises questions of gender. Quilt-making has for centuries been considered almost exclusively a women's art, and thus carries inevitable associations of the feminine; at the same time, the role of the quilt as bedding asserts a link between gender and geometry.

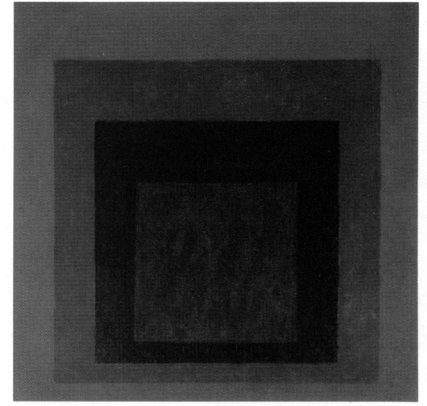
A quilt is a kind of folk collage, assembled from leftover scraps, often of dress material, stitched together to make geometric patterns. And we should remember that the cutting up and attaching of collage elements, which are generally thin membranes of paper or cloth, is a kind of bodily assemblage: it has been pointed out that “cutting and pasting are procedures that deal with epidermal operations.”<sup>75</sup> The same is true, of course, of cutting patches and sewing them together, especially so since in surgery sewing is, in fact, an epidermal procedure. In order therefore to assess the bodily associations of the quilt we need to examine not only the way it was painted over, but the geometric collage of pieced fabric with which *Bed* began.

In a number of interviews over the years, Rauschenberg has mentioned the formative influence of his mother. That influence is often said to be implicit in the way men's shirts are frequently collaged onto his works, beginning with the T-shirt in *Charlene* of 1954,<sup>76</sup> recalling those his mother made for him by hand when he was young, which later reappear, neatly ironed against the picture surface.<sup>77</sup> Rauschenberg has also mentioned her participating in quilting bees when he was a child (“I loved crawling under the quilts; they were like big, beautiful tents”);<sup>78</sup> he has said more than once that he learned about collage from her skill in assembling the intricate paper sewing-patterns on fabric. And recall that the particular quilt which became *Bed* was given to him by Dorothea Rockburne, who had used it herself for several years.<sup>79</sup> In these ves-

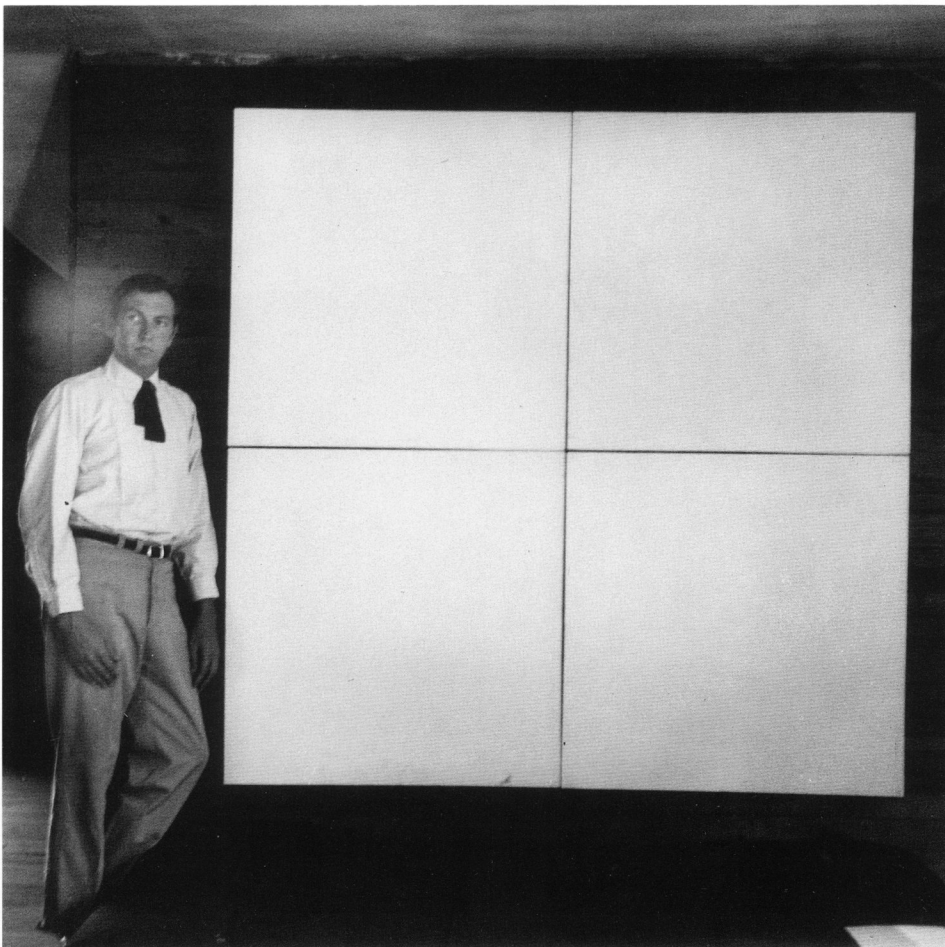
tigial senses, *Bed* remained a woman's bed as much as it was Rauschenberg's own.

As he became an artist, this association of women with pieced (often geometrically pieced) fabric would continue. In 1948, after Paris, Rauschenberg had gone with Susan Weil to Black Mountain College to study with Albers, who, he hoped, would instill in him professional discipline. Although Rauschenberg was far from a favorite pupil, Albers's teaching would exert a lifelong influence. His emphasis on materials prepared Rauschenberg for his own exploration of unusual materials and textures. More important, something of Albers's geometric rigor (he began the *Homage to the Square* series [fig. 15] while Rauschenberg was his student) appears in Rauschenberg's *White paintings* of 1950–51 (fig. 16), often taken as precursors of Minimalism.<sup>80</sup> But as with Ad Reinhardt, here too the geometric is a kind of schematic diagram of the figurative; at six feet by six feet, the four-panel *White painting* is, even more closely than Reinhardt's black squares, "as high as a man, as wide as a man's outstretched arms." Perhaps for this reason, among others, a version of the four-square *White painting* is the only wholly unimpeded element included in the 1960 transfer drawing called *Autobiography*.<sup>81</sup>

In this regard, however, what we have yet to see is the pertinence to Rauschenberg of not only Josef Albers but Anni Albers as well. A force in her own right, with



15. Josef Albers. *Homage to the Square: Coniferous*. 1958. Oil on composition board, 18 x 17 7/8" (45.6 x 45.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jay R. Braus



16. Rauschenberg with *White Painting*. 1951. House paint on canvas; four panels, 6 x 6' (182.9 x 182.9 cm) overall. Collection the artist

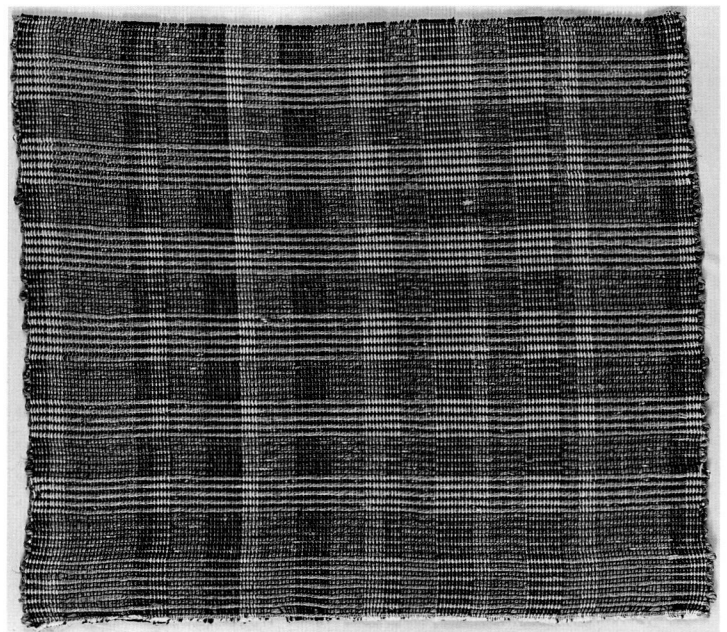
her own students at Black Mountain and her own career as an artist, she had been trained at the Bauhaus in the weaving workshop, the only one that was open to her. At Black Mountain she taught classes on woven art and continued to be an active weaver herself. The rectilinear-pattern textiles, pictorial weavings, and wall hangings she made during the Black Mountain years and after (fig. 17) would have reinforced the association of grid-patterned fabrics with the women who made them (and, moreover, with the vertical presentation of lengths of hanging cloth).

Shortly after Anni Albers left Black Mountain, she had an exhibition of her weavings at The Museum of Modern Art in September–November 1949 (fig. 18), months during which Rauschenberg was studying at The Art Students League of New York, four blocks away. At this time, at the invitation of Walter Gropius she was making a plaid fabric for bedspreads to be used in the dormitory at the Harvard Graduate Center (figs. 19, 20). “Their plaid design masked stains . . . and had a boldness that satisfied Gropius’s request for something in an English ‘manly’ style.”<sup>82</sup> Given Rauschenberg’s impeccable design sense, it is intriguing that photographs of his studio as late as 1964 would show a plaid bedspread on his own bed as well (fig. 21).

There are clear affinities between Anni Albers’s works and those of Rauschenberg and Johns. In her woven works, says Richard Field, “One thinks of Rauschenberg’s fusion of paint and found commercial materials. Or one might even recall Jasper Johns’s use of known structures (Flag, Target, Number) as a means of distancing an otherwise sensuous and potentially emotive manner of painting.”<sup>83</sup> Much later in her career, Anni Albers stopped making pictorial weavings and wall hangings and turned to prints. These later works abandon the sensuous manner of the weavings in favor of hard-edge geometric abstraction, yet would further clarify this affinity: in this later period, in her Triadic series and its reversed fields of repeated patterns, Field says, she “anticipated the subtle calculations and spatial innuendos of Jasper Johns’s hatched paintings by two or three years.” It seems possible that the positive/negative reversals in her repeated and overlaid geometric fields may have been suggested to her by what happens when folded layers of cloth are cut out to a pattern. (The simplest comparison is with the way schoolchildren make kaleidoscopic snowflakes by cutting negative shapes out of folded paper.)

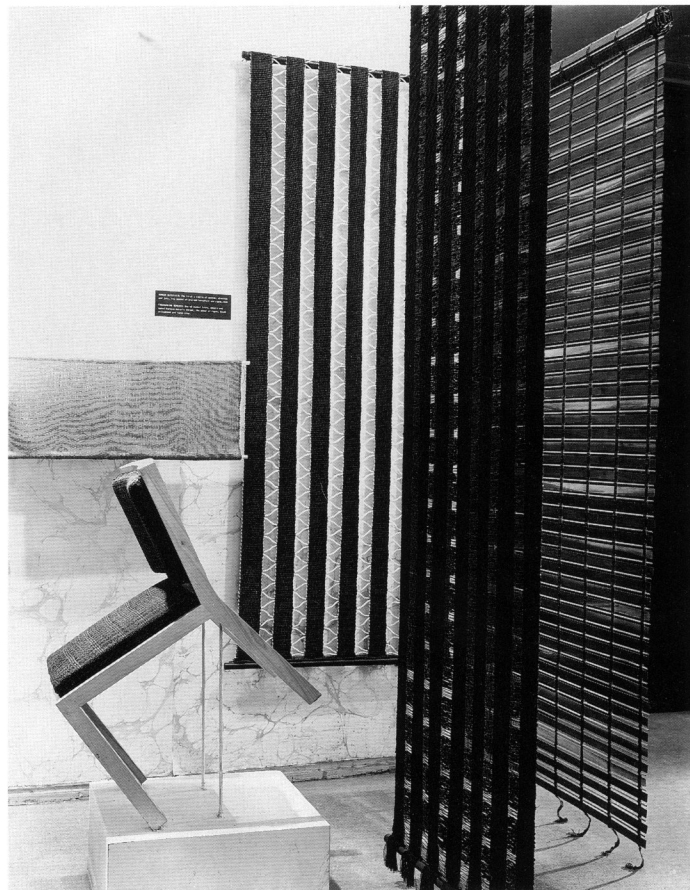
But the salient point is that to an imaginative young artist, Anni Albers’s pictorial weavings could have reinforced an important but at the time infrequently recognized connection: the association between the material of a woven or stitched fabric lattice, on the one hand, and the notion of a gridded *pictorial* surface, on the other. Rauschenberg intuitively recognized that the abstract concept known as “the picture plane” was, in the material realm, simply a thing of cloth. Indeed, the picture plane was actually a kind of metaphor for cloth. As Rosalind Krauss points out, in mod-

17. Anni Albers. Display fabric. 1949. Mixed warp, heavy linen weft with jute, cotton, and aluminum, 16¾ x 19¼" (42.5 x 48.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist

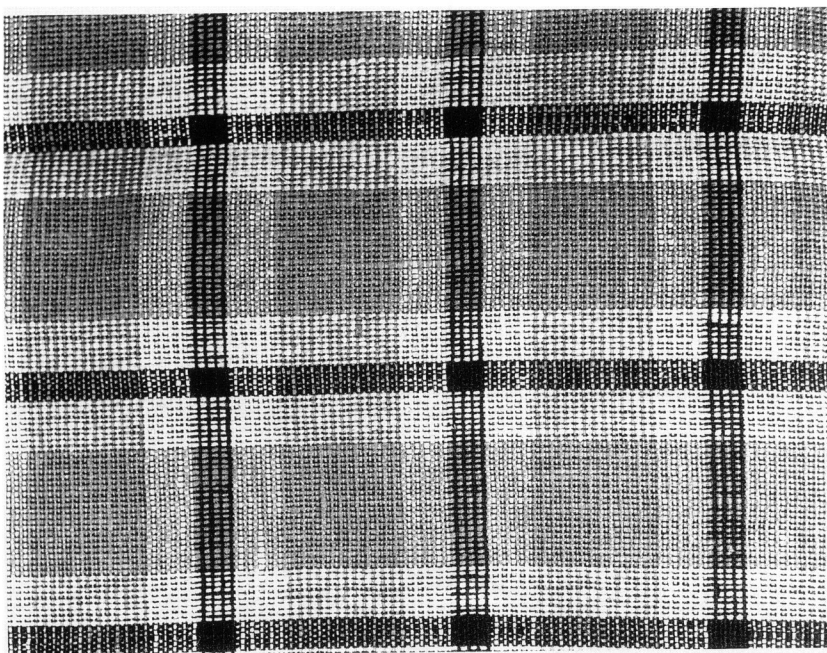


ernist art the grid was a pictorial embodiment of the support, attesting to “the originary status of the pictorial surface. . . . Through its mesh it creates an image of *the woven infrastructure of the canvas.*”<sup>84</sup> Or elsewhere, “By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece cropped from an infinitely larger *fabric.*”<sup>85</sup> There had always been at least a potential connection of this kind between pictures and things like bedspreads — through the intrinsic geometry of the woven material they have in common. In 1955, when Rauschenberg looked around for something to paint on and saw the quilt spread out, the connection clicked: the patchwork squares of the bedclothes evoked for him the woven configuration of the pictorial surface itself, and instigated the painting called *Bed*. Given the metaphorical association as well as material continuity between flat bedclothes and the picture plane, it may have been foreordained that Leo Steinberg’s essay “Other Criteria” would cite *Bed* as the clinching example of the horizontally conceived “flatbed” picture plane.<sup>86</sup>

This association between paintings and the fabric of bedclothing by means of the grid has been made by others, both before and after *Bed*. Certainly it has often been seen that the grids of Minimalist art and Op art in the sixties were in part borrowed from the long tradition of quilts as the great “women’s art.” In fact, the exhibitions “Abstract Design in American Quilts” at the Whitney Museum in 1971 and “American Pieced Quilts” at the Smithsonian Institution in 1972 were criticized for helping to certify the appropriation of women’s quilt design ideas



18. Installation view showing fabric room dividers in the exhibition “Anni Albers Textiles,” The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1949



19. Anni Albers. Bedspread for Harvard University Graduate Center (detail). 1950. Linen and cotton, 8' 6" x 55" (259 x 140 cm) overall. Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan



by (principally male) avant-garde painters.<sup>87</sup> It has also been suggested that Josef Albers's *Homage to the Square* paintings, begun in 1949, may have been inspired by Amish central-square quilt patterns.<sup>88</sup> All such artists were, as Rauschenberg said he was with *Bed*, taking a quilt and trying to turn it "into an abstraction."

When we look at how Rauschenberg painted over the quilt, it quickly becomes apparent that he blotted out only those of the pieced squares of this Log Cabin pattern that would leave virtually unmarked just one large square area, made up of four-by-four smaller squares (fig. 22). Moreover, the block pattern itself — in which each patch is made up of several concentric layers of bars, or "logs," that surround the central red square, or "fireplace" — would inevitably recall to Rauschenberg the works of Josef Albers, so that *Bed* with its patchwork squares-within-squares becomes a kind of homage to the *Homage to the Square*.<sup>89</sup> But the grid of the fabric makes that homage richly ambiguous; encompassing both painter and weaver, the grid becomes in a way androgynous, symbolic of both husband and wife, both Josef and Anni.

Later, Rauschenberg again paid this kind of dual homage to the Alberses. In a ROCI work for Malaysia, he included some batik folk scarves of geometric design, which were spread out and pressed against the steel. The most prominent of these scarves is built on a familiar format — concentric squares (fig. 23, right side).<sup>90</sup>

Rauschenberg met Jasper Johns in 1954, the year before *Bed* was made, and beginning in 1955 they lived in the same building on Pearl Street, a block or so from Rauschenberg's studio. They were by now seeing each other's work almost daily and were embarking on that astonishingly productive period of shared interests and mutual influence which would last until about 1962. The works the two made during this period thus have for Rauschenberg what he has called "a kind of family history."<sup>91</sup> Keeping in mind

*Left:*

20. Dormitory room, Harvard University Graduate Center, with bedspread designed by Anni Albers, 1949

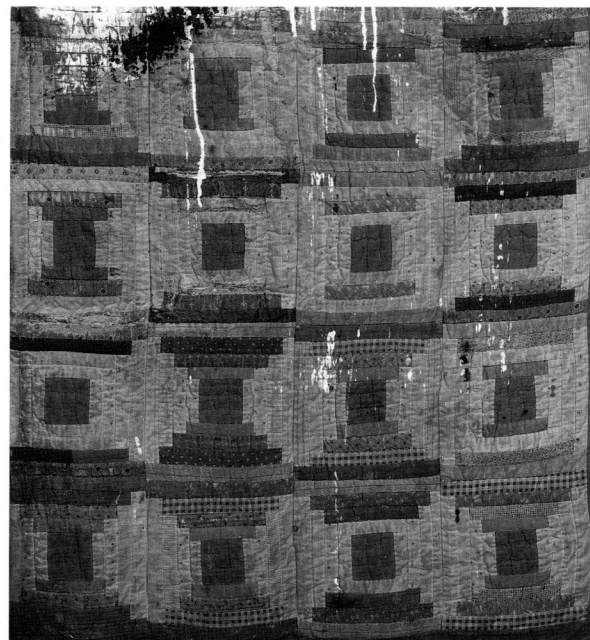
*Right:*

21. Rauschenberg's studio, 809 Broadway, New York, 1964

the grids from folk craft and the two artists' creative association, some interesting affinities suggest themselves. As with *Bed*, Johns's Alphabet and Number works reflect a preoccupation with symbolic values attaching to ranks and files of squares. And recalling some other patchwork things that quilters sew, like flags (consider Betsy Ross), further links become apparent, notably to Johns's various Flag works, with their star-square-and-stripe elaborations of the grid (stripes are also visible on the pillow in *Bed*). In particular, *Flag* of 1954–55 (fig. 24), a contemporary of *Bed*, has often been compared to the rigid, flattened flags sometimes depicted in American folk art, while the image's adherence to the picture plane is another instance of conformity to the "woven infrastructure of the canvas"<sup>92</sup> — especially so, in this case, since large flags are often made of canvas in the first place. Noteworthy also is the frequent appearance of the American flag as a large, single-image subject in traditional quilt designs, such as a well-known "friendship" flag quilt from the turn of the century (fig. 25). Through the two artists' shared references to the woven and stitched, the patchwork becomes the emblem of a "family history."

Johns's subsequent *Three Flags* of 1958 (fig. 8), with its concentric arrangement, is a kind of homage to the rectangle, and further complicates the relation to Albers. Of course in part its use of concentric shapes comes out of Johns's own Targets, but the association between folk fabric and squares-within-squares, from Rauschenberg, could have suggested to Johns some additional possibilities in his own ideas.

Rauschenberg himself has recounted that Johns once permitted him to paint one of the stripes on a Flag painting, and that he then smeared the wrong color into an adjoining stripe. Charles Stuckey has suggested that this incident may have led Johns to the idea of stenciling the name of a "wrong" color over freely brushed areas of some 1959 paintings, offering thereby a new sense of the nature of the exchange between Rauschenberg and Johns during 1954–62.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps along the same lines, we can see an affinity of material preoccupations and pictorial concerns between the Flags and *Bed*, another area of possible interchange between the two artists. It seems fitting, then, that *Bed* and Johns's *Flag* of 1954–55, two objects that share a family history, were brought together in the same room when, after its acquisition, *Bed* was installed in the Museum's painting and sculpture galleries.



22. Robert Rauschenberg. *Bed* (detail of fig. 1)

23. Robert Rauschenberg. *Malaysian Flower Cave* from ROCI Malaysia. 1990. Acrylic and fabric on galvanized steel, 10'  $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 12'  $\frac{3}{4}$ " (306.7 x 367.7 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

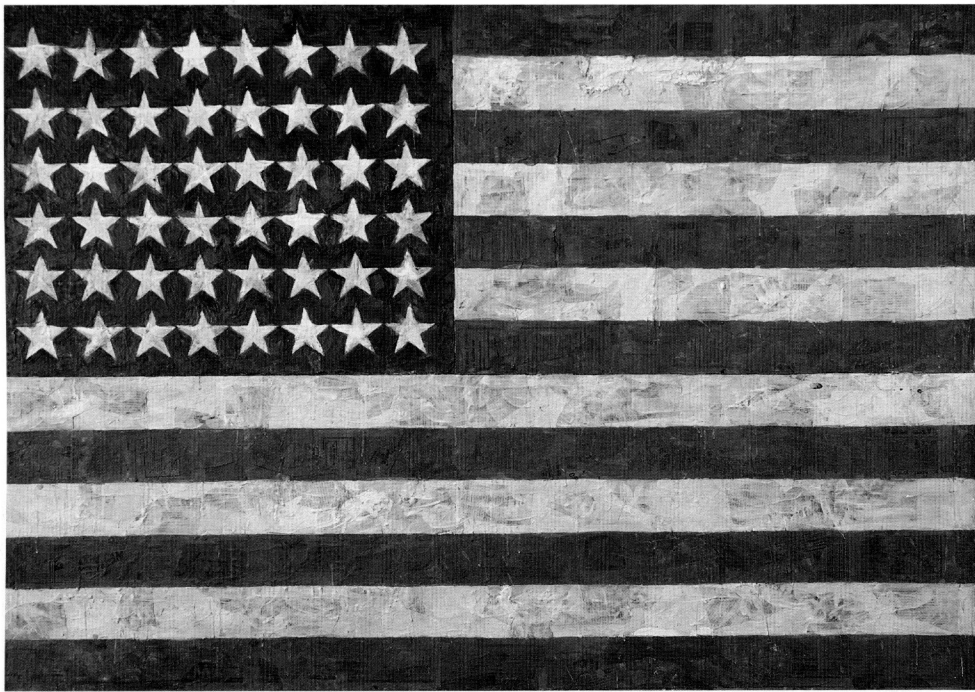




### Getting Inside the Canvas

We have looked at several ways in which Rauschenberg's art seeks to symbolize the body: surfaces showing its impress; empty clothes or bedclothes impregnated with its stained residue; canvas aspiring to the texture of skin; a pillow as an abstraction of the head it supported; and geometric pieces of cloth indicative of the gender of the person who sewed them or of the person they covered. In all these, the painting becomes a surrogate, a sign for a corporeal presence that is elsewhere.

The canvas can invite that presence to return. That is to say, a painting can also become a place the body can enter, and where it can live, a kind of shelter. When Harold Rosenberg included in his essay "The American Action Painters" a section titled "Apocalypse and Wallpaper,"<sup>94</sup> the choice of words allowed one to imagine the possibility that mural-like, all-over Abstract Expressionist canvases could *become* the

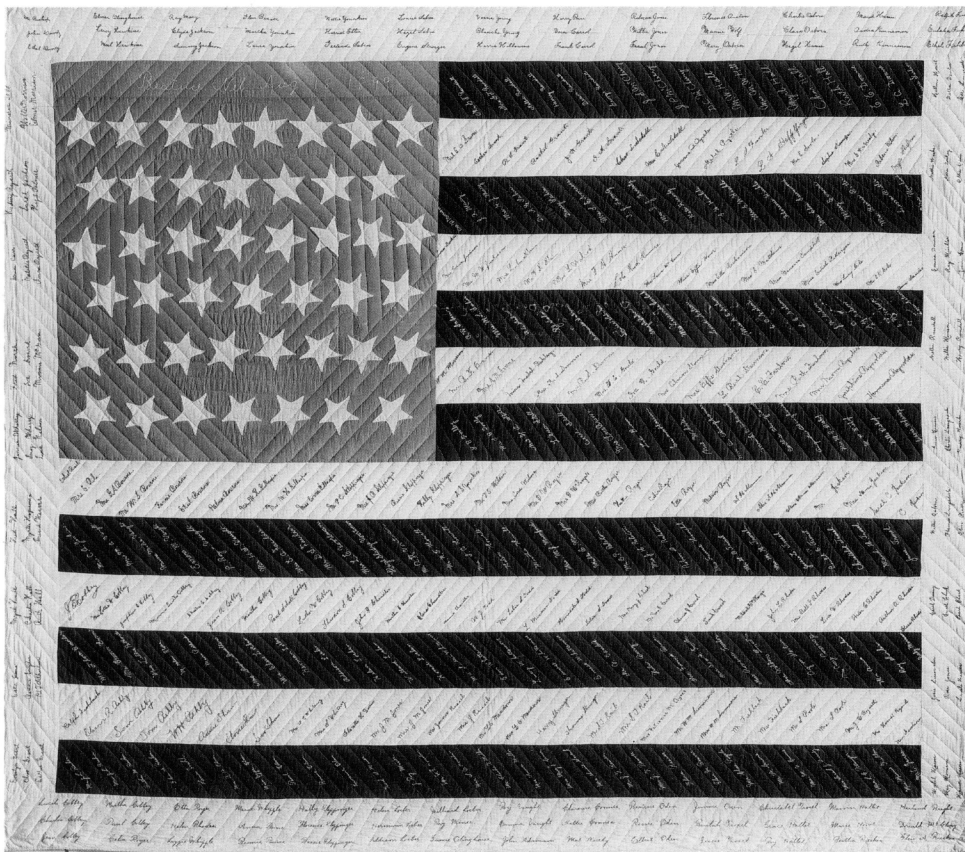


24. Jasper Johns. *Flag*. 1954–55. Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, 42 ½ x 60 ⅝" (107.3 x 153.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

wall, rather than merely hang on it like easel paintings. Being walls themselves, they were part of a sheltering structure in which we could live.<sup>95</sup> Taking such an idea with a provocative literalness, Rauschenberg went the next step and attached a chair to a painting-as-wall in *Pilgrim* of 1960 (fig. 26), making the canvas into a piece of a furnished room. It looked so much like living space that visitors to his studio might find they had inadvertently sat on the art.<sup>96</sup> Or if not a room, then a canvas might create some other place in which to be, like a meadow: in 1959, after two previous states of *Monogram* (see fig. 2), Rauschenberg, with his third go at that work, finally achieved what he wanted by setting the celebrated goat free, standing in a square "field" of canvas (fig. 27).

The painting can be a place where a body can sit down and rest itself. Pieces of furniture, including the chair in *Pilgrim*, are already unmistakably *of* the body through their ergonomic conformity to it: chairs are constructed on the model of seated figures,

floor lamps are like servants holding torches, beds shape themselves to the reclining form, and so on.<sup>97</sup> Flattened against the wall, however, *Bed* could never be taken for a piece of furniture, not even a Murphy bed: we see no headboard, footboard, or frame, no mattress or box springs, only a cloth surface.<sup>98</sup> Yet *Bed* is nonetheless even more open to the body than would be other kinds of furniture: the fact that it is entirely composed of fabric soft to the touch makes it more inviting, more “friendly”; in addition, it is endowed with familiar proportions — a long, narrow rectangle measured, like a door, to the length of the extended body. Further, as a place we live in every night, a bed is more personal than any other kind of furniture or dwelling, a primal container bigger than clothing and smaller than a room: a kind of in-between-size



25. Friendship flag quilt. Nebraska, 1899. Cotton, 6' 4" x 7' (193 x 213 cm). Collection Philip Morris Companies Inc.

enclosure, like the tents that Rauschenberg as a child imagined his mother’s quilts to be. In this sense a double bed, for example, is simply a “garment” big enough for two sleepers to wear.

The single *Bed* — associated with both the aesthetic creativity and the biological procreativity of women — extrapolates from the womb, our first shelter, where we are clothed in another’s body. Moreover, its paint marks seem to have been expelled, appearing mostly around the outside of the opened covers: one might interpret the appearance, on a comfortable, tightly wrapped, womb-like enclosure, of staining fluids released outside the opening, as alluding to childbirth. (A bed is, after all, a place where not only conception but birth can take place.) Seeing *Bed* as a kind of abstracted womb from which a new life has just been delivered into the world accords with Rauschen-

berg's remark about its being one of the "friendliest" of his works — and with his wondering whether someone might one day want to crawl back into it."<sup>99</sup>

Rauschenberg has said that even when he never thought he could make his way as an artist, nonetheless "I knew that I couldn't live without painting or making art, whatever it is that I do. It was essential to my particular sanity."<sup>100</sup> Given the highly therapeutic psychological effect he sees in making art, it is permissible to regard *Bed*, created during a taxing period of transition in his life, as a principal site of the self-transformation, as man and artist, that Rauschenberg had accomplished by the mid-fifties. Its making occurs at a time of reorientation — after the birth of his son, after his divorce from Susan Weil and his recognition of his own sexual identity, but still early in his family history with Johns. It was made after his *White*, *Black*, and *Red* series (works which could still be accurately characterized as "paintings"), but at the start of the radical new phase in his work signaled by the combines. In a multitude of senses, therefore, it announces his "passage."<sup>101</sup>

### The Category Mistake

Having looked at specific aspects of *Bed* in some detail, it may now be useful to try to generalize about its mode of aesthetic perception. I began this essay with what I called the "mistake" made by early viewers — or by Rauschenberg, in disagreeing with them — in seeing possible "murder" associations attaching to this work, an interpretation whose emphasis on death is opposite to my own emphasis on birth. I then used the disagreement between the artist and some viewers as a key to the dynamics of the object. For it is through examining such perceptual mix-ups, envisaging the free, unresolved dissonance of contradictory associations, that this object reveals itself to us. Similarly, such a process tells us something about the aesthetics underlying the idea of collage, assemblage, and the combine.

All assemblages, all collages, depend to some extent on juxtaposing disparate elements in an unexpected way, releasing an unaccountable jolt of new meaning. When each element retains its separate identity, and continues to tug in its own direction, an illuminating sense of "wrongness," of the different components' irreconcilable "otherness," results: a sense that the conflicting elements somehow attract each other even as they are repelled. (This would conform, of course, to a dictionary definition of a paradox as "a statement that is seemingly contradictory . . . and yet is perhaps true." It would also meet a criterion that F. Scott Fitzgerald set in *The Crack-Up* of 1936: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.") The opposed elements' uneasy proximity — the stress of their simultaneous attraction and repulsion — becomes the defining characteristic of such work.

In the case of *Bed*, plenty of things could be construed as "wrong." Most obviously, the orientation is "wrong," being vertical rather than a bed's expected horizon-



26. Robert Rauschenberg. *Pilgrim*. 1960. Combine painting: oil, pencil, paper, and fabric on canvas, with chair, 6' 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 53 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 18 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (201.3 x 135.3 x 47.3 cm). Onnasch Collection, Berlin

tal; and of course, the appearance of the fluid medium on this particular cloth support seemed “wrong” enough seriously to disturb the first viewers. At the same time, we are looking at the “wrong” category of art object: the quilt is a product of folk arts, but it is marked with oils and stretched, thus compounding needlework crafts and easel painting. Moreover, the pillow and the swag-like draping of the covers seem to place *Bed* in a limbo somewhere between painting and found-object sculpture. Finally, the very notion of a bed combines, in one ambiguous place, deep-seated yet contradictory associations attaching to both the beginning and the end of life. As remarked in T.S. Eliot's “Sweeney Agonistes”: “Birth, and copulation, and death. / That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks: / Birth, and copulation, and death.” All three of these essential acts, which define a lifetime, can take place on this same site, permeating it with an unsettling mixture of positive and negative meanings.

This instance of a collage aesthetic, with its unresolved sense of “wrongness” in the way that different associations clash with each other, closely resembles an especially effective strategy used in literary metaphor and known as the “category mistake”: the “presentation of facts belonging to one category in the idioms appropriate to another.”<sup>102</sup> To make a “mistake” in this sense does not quite mean to commit a simple factual error; rather, it means to take (or “mis-take”) one *class* for another, to present a thing as belonging to some other, incompatible group. This introduces a disruptive, seemingly random element into the process of mentally substituting one thing for another, skewing the stable system of equivalents that makes possible all signs and all metaphorical comparisons. Scrambling features from distinct, clearly opposed things makes it difficult for us to tell whether something is in the “right” or the “wrong” category; we have to work harder to make sense of things in their new ambiguity.

To a very great extent, Rauschenberg's imagination switches elements from opposing categories in just that revealing way. Opposed pairs freely transpose with



27. Robert Rauschenberg. *Monogram* (final state). 1955–59. Combine painting: oil and collage on canvas with stuffed Angora goat and objects, 42 x 63 ¼ x 64 ½" (106.7 x 160.7 x 163.8 cm). Moderna Museet, Stockholm

each other, but instead of creating mere random confusion, their collision sets off sparks of sudden recognition. The spatial reversal of inside and outside, the tonal reversal of positive and negative, and the orientation reversal of vertical and horizontal throughout Rauschenberg's work manifest that quality of mind. These reversals help us see how many other pairs of categorical distinctions are confounded in *Bed*: good/bad, self/other, male/female, figurative/abstract, clothing/skin, secretion/emission, neat/messy, and perhaps even birth/death. Rauschenberg's particular gifts appear to include the instinctive ability to grasp a device something like the category mistake and use it to give an unexpected twist to the metaphorical comparisons with the body that constitute *Bed*'s subject. We witness the stable doubles intrinsic to the nature of signs (the pairing of the sign with what it refers to) being destabilized and reconceived. That is, the polysemous *Bed* shakes up opposite categories when its stains, like its squares, betray residual evidence of being both male and female; or when what would have been understood at the time as a "man's" form of geometric abstraction, the oil painting, is played off against a "woman's" form, the quilt. Conflating elements from two opposite referents into one conflicted (but thereby enriched) sign, Rauschenberg's ambiguous pairings remain irritatingly "wrong," yet somehow "right," no matter which way you look at them.

At the same time, that deliberate sense of "mistakenness" is reinforced by inducing a category mistake between different categories of *signs*, whether iconic or indexical or symbolic. Two kinds, or aspects, of signs are made into one, giving us, so to speak, indexical icons or symbolic indices. Iconic signs of the body play a counterpoint to indexical ones, as in the body-prints, or opposing bits of indexical evidence (the residue of different bodies or the work of different hands) generate a new, symbolic meaning. That elusive increment of added meaning is the payoff.

Thomas Sebeok calls the combining of different categories of signs ("an indexical sign . . . intermingled with both iconic and symbolic elements," for example) a conspicuous feature of the fetish object.<sup>103</sup> That term is used in both a psychosexual and an anthropological sense. "Fetish" defines not just the "misplaced response," the species of category mistake, seen in inappropriately eroticized objects; that is only the word's psychosexual sense. It defines also the positive attachment of additional significance seen, for instance, in the rabbit's foot, or saints' relics, or the bodily "sacrificial material" adhering to some tribal fetishes. In these and other talismanic objects, the material evidence that comprises the indexical gives a kind of magical physical presence to other, less tangible meanings; that is the anthropological sense of the word "fetish." It is this latter kind of enriched significance (which at the outset I called "material symbolism") that coincides with Rauschenberg's way with signs. It begins with the *feticci personali* ("personal fetishes") he made in Italy and North Africa in 1952–53 — hanging assemblages, with lengths of scalp-like braided fiber<sup>104</sup> — and continues in *Bed*. He takes conflicting "symbolic" values, from bodily products and from gender, and attaches them not only to indexical traces but to abstract shapes. Transgressing the boundaries of strictly rational, categorical thinking, he makes objects that come to stand for much more than themselves.

### The Poetry of Difference

This free dialectic of difference commands our attention because it is related to our mode of perception, to the liminal, or “threshold,” nature of our physical senses. We experience our selves as being located inside our bodies, yet also as projected outward, through sight, hearing, and touch — as interacting and intertwined with an exterior world of otherness.<sup>105</sup> Our senses constitute a threshold, not a boundary, between the self and the other; they permit traffic in both directions. While the things proper to the category of the self and the things proper to the category of the other can never become one, neither can they be cleanly divorced from each other. Therefore, as a compromise, the elements of the outer world and those of the inner self are instead perceptually doubled. Each thing partakes of its opposite number, becoming no longer just one thing or the other, no longer either/or, but instead both/and. That is why there is something deserving close study in Rauschenberg’s preoccupation with evidence of the body’s presence marked on the world: through its imprint, its stains, and the geometry it engenders, the body proclaims itself to be both “in here” and “out there.” Bodily traces thus declare the paradoxical nature of the self’s doubled identity, articulating the way we live and have our being — partly inside our fleshly envelope and partly outside it. Like Marsyas in the midst of his ordeal, we find ourselves only partially contained within our skin.

From this dialectical sense of identity, a poetry of difference arises: the bed and its other, the body, while intractably different entities, are yet so closely intertwined that they become a curiously intimate pair of strangers. Like poets, all artists of course see resemblances between things; but only artists as contrary as Rauschenberg are quite so enthralled by the residual differences, even conflicts. And only artists like him hold on to the differences and the similarities simultaneously, seeing in their fierce, irreconcilable coupling, in things’ being *both* alike *and* different, their true identities. Rauschenberg has said, “When I was a student . . . I was surrounded by groups of artists, all investigating the comparable similarities and likenesses between things. It was not until I realized . . . the celebration of the *differences* between things that I became an artist who could see.” Or he speaks of the importance of “the old thing about the internal dialectic of contradicting yourself, which is cathartic — the only thing that leads to something new. I have to use contradiction in my work not only to achieve something but to avoid something else. This sets me up for some schizophrenic tension.”

The need for self-contradiction (“When I know what I’m doing, I don’t do it”) is fundamental to how Rauschenberg’s art is made, and how it affects us. He constantly patrols the unsettled frontier between categories, seeking from his ambiguous, conflicted position fresh opportunities to surprise unsuspecting viewers (and himself) — to obscure the boundary lines and leave travelers unsure whether they have mistakenly crossed the border and blundered into a foreign country. Let the spectator beware; it is never a good idea to be too sure what you are looking at: “If you think that you know what you’re looking at while you’re looking at it, well, then, it doesn’t even have to be there.”<sup>106</sup>

Not only *Bed*, of course, but much of Rauschenberg's most striking work over four decades relies on strategies of the category mistake: exploring the no-man's-land between aesthetics and engineering with his Experiments in Art and Technology project; or elsewhere, between the "fine art" of painting and the "applied arts" of design; between visual art and performance; between individual creation and collaborative effort; or between mediums — between painting and sculpture, or painting and printmaking, or printmaking and photography. In so doing, he disregards as much as he combines, since his "vernacular glance doesn't recognize categories of the beautiful and ugly."<sup>107</sup> All the categories are pushed around and redefined: "combined," to be sure, but in a manner that maintains, even highlights, a disquietingly apparent space between them — a zone of estrangement between strange bedfellows. It is perhaps in this sense that Rauschenberg operates in the famous "gap"<sup>108</sup> between the category known as Art and the category known as Life.

## Notes

I owe debts of gratitude to the following individuals, who read and critically commented on this essay during November and December of 1991: John Elderfield, Peter Galassi, Penny Jones, Carolyn Lanchner, Kynaston McShine, William Rubin, Joseph Ruzicka, Debbie Taylor, Lynn Zelevansky, and most especially Gail Culver. The manuscript was edited by Helen M. Franc, whose sensitive, discerning analysis of the text taught me how intelligent editing can be.

1. Brian O'Doherty, "Robert Rauschenberg: The Sixties" (1973), in O'Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth in Modern Art* (New York: Dutton, 1974; rpt., 1982), pp. 262–63.
2. Quoted in Barbara Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," in *Rauschenberg*, Vintage Contemporary Artists series (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 58.
3. Various versions by Rauschenberg appear in interviews by Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Viking, 1965), p. 215; Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 1981), pp. 136–37; Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life* (New York: Abrams, 1990), p. 85; Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," pp. 50, 58, 62; and numerous others.
4. Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," p. 62.
5. *Bed* appears unframed in fig. 2, but in later years the protective frame visible in fig. 1 was added.
6. *Newsweek*, March 31, 1958; quoted in Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 85. On the "axe murder" interpretation, see also Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 137; and Tomkins, "Profile: Leo Castelli" (1980), in *Castelli and His Artists: Twenty-five Years* (Aspen, Colo.: Aspen Center for the Visual Arts, 1982), n.p.
7. John Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," *Metro*, 2 (May 1961), p. 46.
8. William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 56; the works by Schwitters and Rauschenberg mentioned in this paragraph are reproduced, pp. 52, 58, 59. During the time Rauschenberg was emerging as an artist, Schwitters's text titled "Merz" (1920) was republished by Robert Motherwell in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, 1951) in the series Documents of Modern Art. Moreover, in addition to the relevant Schwitters works mentioned by Rubin, one might note with reference to Rauschenberg the appearance of mattress ticking in the collage *Emerka*, which Schwitters made around 1922, and which was acquired by The Museum of Modern Art in 1953 (illustrated on p. 39 of the present publication).
9. Pierre Sterckx, "A Trapper in Manhattan," in *Robert Rauschenberg: Gluts* (Brussels: Galerie Isy Brachot, 1988), p. 47.

10. Some representative Red paintings of 1953 are reproduced in color in Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, the works in the Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles, p. 80, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, p. 81; Andrew Forge, *Rauschenberg* (1st ed., New York: Abrams, [1969]), the work in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, p. 174; and in Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: The Menil Collection and Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), those examples just mentioned and three others, pls. 141–146.
11. Quoted in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 137.
12. Charles S. Peirce gave as examples of iconic signs “any material image, as a painting”; “a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometric line”; a diagram; and a metaphor, among others. As indexical signs, he cited “a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as a sign of a shot”; “a rap on the door”; and a barometer. He called “symbolic” those signs whose reference value is assigned to them arbitrarily, citing as examples badges, ensigns, theater tickets, and words. See Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 98–119.
13. Recounted by Rauschenberg in Robert Hughes, “Most Living Artist,” *Time*, November 29, 1976; quoted in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 19. See also Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, pp. 56, 60, where the account includes only *Pinkie* and *Blue Boy*.
14. After being introduced to the blueprint medium by Weil, Rauschenberg began making these images for commercial applications as well, such as window displays. He made the last of his commercial blueprints in 1955 with Jasper Johns, when the two were designing window displays under the joint pseudonym of Matson Jones. See Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, pp. 24–25.
15. On Rauschenberg’s works incorporating the *Rokeby Venus* and Rubens’s *Toilet of Venus*, see Roni Feinstein, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Silkscreen Paintings, 1962–64* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990), *passim*. The Velázquez is relevant in other ways as well. Anne Hollander points out, for example, how in a number of works, including the *Rokeby Venus* and Courbet’s *Le Sommeil* (both of which make appearances in Rauschenberg), importance attaches to bed hangings and bedclothes as ways of emphasizing the “nakedness” of the nude body: “The disposition of bedclothes made a convenient means of controlling the level of prurience in a nude image” (Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* [New York: Viking, 1978], p. 171; see also pp. 164–72). Bedclothes are deployed in art in order to reveal the body as much as to hide it. (For a different view of how the Velázquez articulates the body, see Mario Perniola, “Between Clothing and Nudity,” in Michel Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, eds., *Fragments for a History of the Human Body: Part Two* [New York: Zone, 1989].)
16. On Ingres’s *Grande Odalisque* with regard to *Odalisk* and, more generally, on how “Rauschenberg’s work often bears traces of the full-scale human figure,” see Charles F. Stuckey, “Reading Rauschenberg,” *Art in America*, 65 (March–April 1977), pp. 74–84.
17. Roberta Smith, “Rauschenberg, at Home and Abroad,” *New York Times*, August 6, 1991.
18. On the “disappearance” of the inner body from explicit consciousness, see Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), especially chap. 2, “The Recessive Body,” which I am attempting to paraphrase here. The sense of the body’s interior as an unknown country is investigated not only by phenomenology, of course, but by popular entertainment as well: in 1963, a few years before Rauschenberg made *Booster*, Roger Corman directed his allegorical science-fiction film *The Man with X-Ray Eyes*, in which the title character, played by Ray Milland, suffers the fearful consequences of seeing all too clearly into the interior nature of things. Note also that Duchamp’s *Large Glass* can be considered a “giant X-ray plate” (Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, p. 21).
19. Reproduced in Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, pls. 64–66.
20. The dual quality in *Booster* and *Female Figure* of being both iconic and indexical is shared by all photography. However, the indexical element is stronger with an image like *Female Figure*, produced by contact not only with light rays coming from the object, but directly with the object itself. On the application of the term “index,” see Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index” (1977), in her *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).
21. Collection the artist; reproduced in Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 216. Perhaps we can detect in *Toady Enterprise* a certain lighthearted skepticism toward otherworldly claims made for the Shroud of Turin: the work also includes pictures of flying saucers.
22. Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1947–48 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 364–65.
23. On Rauschenberg’s hospital experiences, see Rose, “An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg,” p. 17;



and Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 56. It may not be without significance that American interest in the Shroud remained high during this postwar period of Rauschenberg's work, and led a group of Roman Catholic clergymen to found the Holy Shroud Guild, an information agency, in New York in 1951.

24. For example, in *Preview* of 1974, which prints (on a vertical piece of cloth) a tall, narrow photographic image of a *kouros*, shown against a dark background; reproduced in *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York: Abrams, in association with The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), p. 377. Helen Franc points out that this particular type of *kouros* is very often identified with Apollo — the name NASA appropriated for its lunar exploration missions launched between 1968 and 1975.

25. On the Shroud of Turin as index, see Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)," *October*, no. 29 (Summer 1984), pp. 63–81; reprinted in *October: The First Decade* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1987).

26. In interviews, Rauschenberg mentions Twombly's working in his studio and drawing on the untitled combine, which is now in the collection of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; see *ROCI: Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), p. 156; and Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 87 (reproduced p. 88). The mesh of biographical allusions in this combine is remarkable. In addition to the marks made by Twombly, it includes a photograph of Jasper Johns, a pencil sketch by Jack Tworkov, and scribbly pencil drawings by Rauschenberg's son, Christopher, who was then about five years old. (A 1953 photograph of Christopher as a toddler later appears in *Canyon* of 1959.)

27. Roland Barthes, "The Wisdom of Art," printed in French and in an English translation by Annette Lavers in *Cy Twombly: Paintings and Drawings, 1954–1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1979); reprinted in Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985), pp. 179–80. Ideas of painting as "dirtying" are of course related to bodily functions in the sense of painter's mediums considered as a kind of creative excretion. Since Freud, this concept has achieved the status of a standing joke. For example, when Gertrude Stein's description of Picasso's creative process — "he empties himself and the moment he has completed emptying himself he must recommence emptying himself" — was read to him, Picasso commented: "She's confusing two functions" (quoted in John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, vol. 1: 1881–1906 [New York: Random House, 1991], p. 406). More recently, in 1954, de Kooning, possibly with Pollock, decorated out-house toilet seats as a party prank (and perhaps in jesting allusion to Duchamp's *Fountain*).

28. Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," p. 37 (emphasis added).

29. Riva Castleman, *Jasper Johns: A Print Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1986), p. 32; the two prints she discusses are reproduced on pp. 108 (the same print shown in the present fig. 7) and 109. The painting is reproduced in Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns* (New York: Abrams; Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977), p. 167.

Affinities with Francis Bacon might also be found, for example, in the streams of white paint that Bacon sometimes threw with his hand at portraits such as *Isabel Rawsthorne Standing in a Street in Soho* of 1967, marking them with what the artist called "the foam of the unconscious." On these white streams of flung paint, see Lawrence Gowing, "Francis Bacon: The Human Presence," in *Francis Bacon* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), pp. 22–23, and cats. 28, 29, 31, 34, 41.

30. See Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," p. 53.

31. On the structure of memory in Rauschenberg's work, see Rosalind Krauss, "Rauschenberg and the Materialized Image," *Artforum*, 13 (December 1974), pp. 41, 43.

32. On possible relations between the transfer images in paintings such as *Gotham News* and Rauschenberg's work, see Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 76; relevant reproductions appear on pp. 65, 77, 107, 108.

33. Ad Reinhardt, "Twelve Rules for a New Academy" (1957), in *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), p. 205.

34. For extended discussion of the "hemorrhissa" figure and her symbolic impregnation by Christ's touch, see Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a "True" Image* (Cambridge, Mass., and Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

35. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1982).

36. See Rauschenberg's comments in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, pp. 17–18; and Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," p. 57.

Joseph Beuys used hare's blood shamanistically in a number of drawings. Anne Seymour writes that "according to Beuys the hare is related to the lower part of the body, having a particular affinity with women and menstruation, the subject of *Hare's Blood*, 1962" (Seymour, "The Drawings of Joseph Beuys," in *Joseph Beuys: Drawings* [London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983], p. 16). *Hare's Blood* is a drawing of a woman with legs splayed, seen from below; bloodstains appear to the side of the sheet (fig. 28; reproduced in color *ibid.*, cat. 82). A number of other drawings with hare's blood are reproduced in *Joseph Beuys: Zeichnungen / Tekeningen / Drawings* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie; Munich: Prestel, 1979), cats. 21, 33, 34, 60, 75, 78 (the catalogue entry for number 78 omits the word "hare's" from the medium listing).

37. Rauschenberg's attitude toward his own body is indeed casual by some standards, and not only because he used his own blood in this drawing or his hair in paintings. He was apparently unembarrassed about appearing naked in public on two occasions: as Adam to Elaine Sturtevant's Eve in her version of *Relâche* (re-creating the roles originated by Marcel Duchamp and Brogna Perlmutter in 1924), and in making his "entrance" at a large party in the sixties for the rock group the Monkees (see the interview with Henry Hopkins cited in Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 127). It is perhaps within such a context of casual self-acceptance that we should see not only Rauschenberg's full-length body images but also the individual body parts displayed in the mechanized *Carnal Clocks* of 1969, which flash on and off, revealing anatomical details based on photographs he took of his friends. The prints *Tides*, *Gulfs*, and *Drifts* of the same year also feature parts of human anatomy.

Considering how much Jasper Johns would seem to be Rauschenberg's opposite in this regard — reticent, self-concealing, hiding behind neutral subjects like Alphabets, Flags, and Targets in his early career — it is notable how many works Johns has made from impressions of parts of his body, including the charcoal *Study for Skin I–IV* of 1962, *Skin I* and *Skin II* of 1973, and *Skin* of 1975 (all reproduced in Nan Rosenthal and Ruth E. Fine, *The Drawings of Jasper Johns* [Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1990], pp. 170–73); the lithographs *Hatteras* and *Hand* of 1963 and *Skin with O'Hara Poem* of 1965 (reproduced in Richard S. Field, *Jasper Johns: Prints, 1960–1970* [New York: Praeger; Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1970], cats. 15, 16, 48); and the unpublished lithograph *A Cartoon for Tanya* of 1972 (reproduced in Castleman, *Jasper Johns: A Print Retrospective*, p. 127). The body may seem more anonymous and its self-revelation less overwhelming when shown only in fragments, as it usually is with Johns.

38. On tragic catharsis as thematizing and "dressing up" the natural visceral reactions to deep emotional distress, such as micturition from fear, see Kenneth Burke, "The Thinking of the Body: Comments on the Imagery of Catharsis in Literature" (1963), in his *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1966).

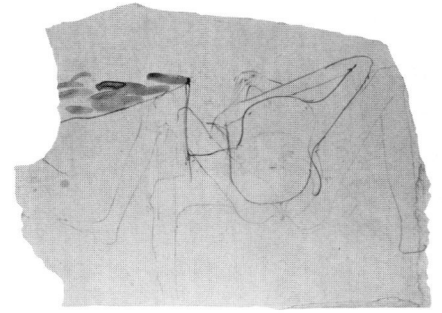
The mythology of lost liquids is very much a part of the vernacular culture. It has been pointed out, for example, that the crazed general, played by Sterling Hayden, bent on nuclear war in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* of 1964 is motivated by insane fears that the Russians are contaminating what he calls "our precious bodily fluids"; see Wendy Doniger [O'Flaherty], "Sexual Fluids," part 2 of her *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 56. On the continuities among beliefs held by different groups concerning bodily fluids, or "why people living in very different epochs and in very different parts of the world have arrived at remarkably similar theories, as well as why those theories, in their explanatory acuteness and sophistication, sometimes tally with the most modern knowledge on the subject," see Françoise Héritier-Augé, "Semen and Blood: Some Ancient Theories Concerning Their Genesis and Relationship," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body: Part Three*.

39. Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), 7.15.64 and 28.23.77; cited in Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, pp. 158, 161. See also Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove, *The Wise Wound: The Myths, Realities, and Meanings of Menstruation* (1978; rev. ed., New York: Bantam, 1986), pp. 51, 243.

40. *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*, trans. W. S. Hett, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 357–59; cited in Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, p. 162.

41. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. 28; and see especially chap. 1, sect. 3, "The Symbolism of Stain," pp. 33–39.

42. To an extent that is easy to overlook, Christian iconography depends on bodily exudings. "All human exudings — menstruation, sweating, lactation, emission of semen, and so on — were seen as bleedings; and all bleedings — menstruation, nosebleeds, hemorrhoidal bleeding and so on — were seen to be analogous. . . . Mystics and theologians increasingly emphasized the human body of Christ" (Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg" [1986], in her *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* [New York: Zone, 1991], pp. 109, 114, responding to Steinberg, "The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in



28. Joseph Beuys. *Hare's Blood*. 1962. Pencil and hare's blood on paper, 9 3/4 x 13 3/8" (24.8 x 34 cm) irregular. Private collection

Modern Oblivion," *October*, no. 25 [Summer 1983], pp. 1–199).

In this regard perhaps, Andres Serrano's notorious *Piss Christ* of 1987, a photograph taken of a crucifix immersed in urine, is no more than simply the most recent episode in the scandal of the Incarnation. Although self-consciously exploiting its shock value, Serrano does use a troublingly visceral iconography that forms a genuine part of traditional Christian art — such as the declaration "This is my blood," followed by the startling instruction to the apostles to sacramentally consume it, and subsequently by the shedding of actual blood and the final flow of blood and water from the wounded side. In such a sense, even to the orthodox the Passion is *about* lost fluids as evidence of the degradation of the body of Christ, as *Piss Christ* may be. (On the relation of Serrano's photographs to his Catholic upbringing, see Lucy R. Lippard, "Andres Serrano: The Spirit and the Letter," *Art in America*, 78 [April 1990], pp. 238–45.)

43. Doniger [O'Flaherty], *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, p. 40.

44. See Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 14.

45. Collection the artist; on extended loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Reproduced in John Elderfield, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Abrams, 1989), pp. 2–3, 64.

46. Elderfield, *Frankenthaler*, p. 83. Rauschenberg had been included along with Frankenthaler in the Ninth Street Show of 1951; see Roni Feinstein, "The Unknown Early Robert Rauschenberg: The Betty Parsons Exhibition of 1951," *Arts Magazine*, 59 (January 1985), pp. 129, 131, n. 19.

47. Recounted by Rauschenberg in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 33. On Josef Albers's use of this phrase in the drawing classes Rauschenberg attended, see the account in Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 67, based on interviews with Rauschenberg and Susan Weil.

48. Quoted in Thomas B. Hess, "De Kooning Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 52 (March 1953), p. 67. At the same time he was making *Police Gazette*, de Kooning also made a painting titled *Woman as Landscape*; reproduced in Hess, *Willem de Kooning*, p. 104.

49. Mary Ellmann, "Sexual Analogy," chap. 1 of her *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p. 7.

50. Eugene C. Goossen, "Helen Frankenthaler," *Art International*, 5 (October 20, 1961), p. 78. Another critic has noted her use of "a number of devices for narrowing the distance between visual and bodily experience. One's awareness of how much her own body has participated in making the work is crucial"; in this respect, a painting like hers of Provincetown Bay, with its "gently lapping waves," is said to induce in the viewer physical sensations such that "one feels literally immersed in her watery fluids" (Barbara Rose, *Frankenthaler* [New York: Abrams, 1972], pp. 74, 76).

51. Perhaps this correlation between different kinds of stain marks can be seen more explicitly in another work Frankenthaler painted in the same month, *Scene with Nude* (fig. 29; reproduced in color in Elderfield, *Frankenthaler*, p. 71), which may have been made either before or after *Mountains and Sea*, and which shows only the lower half of the female nude, with application of orange spots below in a way that gives the appearance of staining, though the work is executed on prepared canvas. (Both *Scene with Nude* and *Mountains and Sea* were included in Frankenthaler's 1953 solo exhibition at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York.) Although the two artists are otherwise remote from each other in sensibility, it is possible to compare *Scene with Nude* with Joseph Beuys's *Hare's Blood* (see note 36, above).

On menstruation as the prototype of aesthetic creation, see Richard Ellmann, "Why Molly Bloom Menstruates," in his *Ulysses on the Liffey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), especially p. 171: "Joyce is establishing a secret parallel and opposition: the body of God and the body of woman share blood in common. In allowing Molly to menstruate at the end Joyce consecrates the blood. . . . It is this [generative] quality which the artist has too, in that he produces living human characters. . . . Menstruation is Promethean."

[As a postscript I am just able to note that on the eve of this publication's going to press, an account of a symposium held at the Whitney Museum of American Art mentions a paper delivered by Lisa Saltzman that apparently calls Helen Frankenthaler's works a "visual analogue" of "bloodied wedding-night sheets"; as reported in the June 1992 issue of *The New Criterion*.]

52. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; reproduced in Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 137, in the version for the cover of the magazine 291, edited by Stieglitz.

53. The Art Institute of Chicago. Rosalind Krauss writes that in seeing this work, "one feels confronted not so much by a surrogate for figural presence as by an abstract sign for it" (Krauss, "Tanktotem: Welded Images," chap. 5 of her *Passages in Modern Sculpture* [1977; rpt., Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1981], p. 148; reproduced p. 149).



29. Helen Frankenthaler. *Scene with Nude*. 1952. Oil on canvas, 42  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 50  $\frac{3}{4}$ " (107.2 x 127.4 cm). Private collection

54. Ad Reinhardt, “[The Black-Square Paintings]” (1963), in *Art-as-Art*, p. 82. In this regard, it is of interest that some members of the Russian avant-garde thought of the square as a kind of personage or literary character, as in El Lissitzky’s *A Suprematist Story — About Two Squares in Six Constructions* of 1920. Kazimir Malevich (whom Rauschenberg calls “an idol of mine,” *ROCI*, p. 173) conceived of the square as a “living royal infant,” an idea derived from his understanding of Russian icons (see the article on Malevich by Magdalena Dabrowski in the present publication). With respect to the argument to follow, one might also note Malevich’s use of a medical metaphor, with new strains of the “virus” of innovation attacking the “body” of painting, and the art critic playing the role of physician; see his pedagogical charts (all the extant examples are reproduced in “Teaching Diagrams,” *Art and Design*, 5, nos. 5–6 [1989], pp. 37–44; the five in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art are reproduced in Dabrowski, *Contrasts of Form: Geometric Abstract Art, 1910–1980* [New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1985], pp. 41–45); and see the discussion of them in Yve-Alain Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992), p. 204, n. 57.
55. On the subject of paintings as bodies, see Richard Wollheim, “Painting, Metaphor, and the Body: Titian, Bellini, de Kooning, etc.,” chap. 6 of his *Painting as an Art*, Bollingen Series XXXV, 33 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), comprising the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1984.
56. Rosalind Krauss, “The Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture,” chap. 7 of her *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, p. 256, discussing Rosenberg.
57. John Elderfield, “The Precursor,” in *Studies in Modern Art I: American Art of the 1960s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p. 83, discussing Rosenberg.
58. Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Art News*, 51 (December 1952), p. 48 (emphasis added).
59. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 104.
60. Rauschenberg’s photographs of an early state of *Woman II* (1951–52) in de Kooning’s studio in 1951 are reproduced in Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, p. 71.
61. For Johns, however, the apparent option was not meant to be freely exercised. When Alfred Barr wanted to purchase the work for The Museum of Modern Art, he inquired whether it would be permissible to exhibit *Target with Plaster Casts* with the door of the box containing the cast of male genitals kept closed (thus avoiding the possibility of offense). But Johns’s answer was no, not all the time. In the end, the Museum acquired *Target with Four Faces* instead. See Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 144.
62. Reproduced in David Shapiro, *Jim Dine: Painting What You Are* (New York: Abrams, 1981), pl. 6; Shapiro says *Bed* “may have been a formal precedent” for *Green Suit*, calling the Dine work “evidence for a legal proceeding or the sign of a murder” and an example of “a vascular art already bleeding” (pp. 19–20). A different connection with *Bed* can be seen in Dine’s mixed-medium construction *Bedspring* of 1960, in which materials and objects, including a painted image of a woman’s face, are woven through the open mesh of the bare springs; reproduced in Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958–1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984), p. 24.
63. Reproduced in Shapiro, *Jim Dine*, pl. 63. Regarding clothing as a surrogate figure, see also Dine’s *Double Isometric Self-Portrait (Serape)* of 1964; reproduced *ibid.*, pl. 97.
64. Dine included an actual pair of flattened pants in his two-panel mixed-medium painting called *Car Crash* of 1960 (private collection).
65. See Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, pp. 125–26. As with Caroline Walker Bynum’s “The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” some of Kuryluk’s comments take issue with Leo Steinberg. Kuryluk’s discussion of St. Bartholomew in Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*, the myth of Marsyas, and the skin of Christ in relation to the art of painting (pp. 208–13) reconsiders some points in Steinberg’s “The Line of Fate in Michelangelo’s Painting,” in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *The Language of Images* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
66. From a meditation by Marguerite of Oingt; quoted in Bynum, “The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” p. 97.
67. Rauschenberg — who was raised in the Church of Christ, wanted to be a preacher when young, and continued to attend services as an adult — made frequent use of Christian symbolism, particularly in the early years of his career, and he has given explicitly religious titles to a great many of his works (such as *Crucifixion and Reflection* and *Mother of God* among the early works and more recently in his series *Stations of the Cross*). See Feinstein, “The Unknown Early Robert Rauschenberg,” p. 127. On the coincidence of mattress ticking and the religious “allegorical cartoon” in *Garden of Eden* of 1950, see Roni Feinstein,

"Random Order: The First Fifteen Years of Robert Rauschenberg's Art, 1949–1964" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1990), pp. 61–62. See also Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, p. 29.

In 1965, Rauschenberg lent one of his silkscreen paintings and two large prints to Spencer Memorial Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn; propped up against the altar and on easels on either side, they provided the text for a sermon on "The Image of God in Art." The minister addressed such questions as how to find "the religious experience in everyday and often ugly circumstances" and the significance of the accidental as a vehicle for revelation (reported by Helen M. Franc in a memorandum to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., March 29, 1965; artists' files, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art).

68. Roland Barthes, "The Vestimentary Sign," in *The Fashion System* (1967), trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 258.

69. William Rubin, "Picasso," in *"Primitivism" in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), p. 256; see also pp. 250–51.

70. In this 1955 statement, James Johnson Sweeney goes on to say that "the representation of the human form, in keeping with the trend of our times, may not appear in his pictures; but a suggestion of what gave that form life still remains — a suggestion of flesh and blood" (quoted in William C. Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* [New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961], p. 136, where Burri's *Sack Number 5*, with its bright red "wound" in burlap, is reproduced in color on the facing page; Burri's *Sackcloth* of 1953 was acquired by the Museum in 1954).

Rauschenberg knew and admired Burri's work at this time, and took photographs of Burri's 1954 exhibition at the Stable Gallery; reproduced in Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, p. 158.

71. Reproduced in *Castelli and His Artists*, fig. 119.

72. Regarding *Bed's* fresh traces of human presence, Lawrence Alloway noted that "the pillow is dented (more so originally than now) and the sheets are turned back, suggesting a recent departure" (Alloway, "Rauschenberg's Development," in *Robert Rauschenberg: Werke, 1950–1980* [Berlin: Staatliche Kunsthalle, 1980], p. 51). Alloway also remarked on "Rauschenberg's sensitivity to the human scale and stance . . . [his] highly developed sense of the body in space and of the objects of human use . . . his lyrical ergonomics."

73. Recounted in Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 24.

74. Symbols may develop out of other signs; but whereas "icons and indices assert nothing," symbols are "declarative" (see Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic," p. 111). In *Othello*, for example, I would say that Desdemona's handkerchief is at first merely a kind of "indexical" sign, because it is a personal accessory that points to its owner. Only later, as Iago spins his web, does it develop into something "symbolic" — of her supposed infidelity and of her soul.

75. Claude Gandelman, *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 67.

76. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; reproduced in Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 63.

77. The garments pressed against the surfaces of some of Rauschenberg's paintings invite comparison with Duchamp's prescription for a Readymade: "Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board" (*The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Almer Peterson [New York: Da Capo, 1989], p. 32; translation of *Marchand du sel: Écrits de Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet [Paris: Terrain Vague, 1958], p. 44. Repeated by Duchamp in "The Art of Assemblage: A Symposium" [1961] in the present publication; also quoted in Steinberg, "Other Criteria," n. 33A). With regard to Duchamp, it is interesting to see Rauschenberg wield a household steam iron to transfer printed images onto cloth (in a photograph published in Kay Larson, "Rauschenberg's Renaissance," *New York*, December 27, 1982–January 3, 1983, p. 50).

This is not the place to engage the complex question of Rauschenberg's relation to Duchamp, but it does seem worth asking whether the series of graduated color samples lined up across the middle of *Rebus* (1955) is related to the row of such samples that zooms through Duchamp's *Tu m'* (Yale University Art Gallery). And with regard to the themes of the present article, it is noteworthy that Rauschenberg has spoken of the older artist as if incorporated into the younger man's sensorium: "Marcel Duchamp is all but impossible to write about . . . but when I think of him I get a sweet taste in my body" (Rauschenberg, statement for "A Collective Portrait of Marcel Duchamp," in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* [New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973], p. 217).

78. Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," p. 63; see also p. 62, where Rauschenberg speaks of his mother's sewing, and Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, pp. 49, 269.

79. On Dorothea Rockburne and the quilt, see Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, pp. 136–37.

80. On the Homage to the Square series and Rauschenberg, see Roni Feinstein, "The Early Work of

Robert Rauschenberg: The White Paintings, the Black Paintings, and the Elemental Sculptures," *Arts Magazine*, 61 (September 1986), p. 30. On Rauschenberg's expectations regarding Albers, see also for example Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 25. For Albers's impact on Rauschenberg's art in general, see Feinstein, "Random Order," pp. 81 (n. 9), 91, 339 (n. 35), 394, 454. On the White paintings and Minimalism, see Feinstein, "The Early Work of Robert Rauschenberg," p. 32.

81. Reproduced and discussed in Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," pp. 48, 49.

82. Mary Jane Jacob, "Anni Albers: A Modern Weaver as Artist," in *The Woven and Graphic Art of Anni Albers* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), p. 79, referring to her interview with Anni Albers in July 1983. On Anni Albers's entry into the Bauhaus weaving workshop, see pp. 65, 103, n. 1; see also Nicholas Fox Weber, "Anni Albers to Date," *ibid.*, p. 18.

83. Richard S. Field, "Anni Albers: Prints and Drawings," in *The Woven and Graphic Art of Anni Albers*, p. 108. The other quotation from Field's article in this paragraph is from p. 131, n. 14, where the kind of print he is discussing is exemplified by *GR I* of 1970; reproduced *ibid.*, pl. 36.

84. Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde" (1981), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, pp. 160–61 (emphasis added).

85. Rosalind Krauss, "Grids" (1979), *ibid.*, p. 18 (emphasis added).

86. Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria" (1968/1972), in his *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). There are two distinct senses operative in the term "flatbed," one being a horizontal work surface, such as a tabletop, and the other the more literal kind of bed. Both are of interest in the present connection, but their differences should be recognized.

Concerning a painting as a horizontal work surface like a table, in 1961 John Cage wrote of *Rebus*, "This is not a composition. It is a place where things are, as on a table . . ."; and of the transfer drawings, "The work is done on a table, not on a wall," involving therefore a "change in gravity" (Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," pp. 38, 46). In this regard, Leo Steinberg wrote, "I borrow the term from the flatbed printing press — 'a horizontal bed on which a horizontal printing surface rests' (Webster)" ("Other Criteria," p. 82). Two years after the initial publication of Steinberg's article (as "Reflections on the State of Criticism," *Artforum*, 10 [March 1972], pp. 37–49), Rauschenberg installed a Griffin flatbed press in his Captiva, Florida, studio (see Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 162).

Although Steinberg's metaphorical term "flatbed" does come from the technology of printing, his essay's climax is devoted to the other, more literal bed of Rauschenberg's combine. That well-known paragraph about *Bed* should be quoted in full; at the culmination of the section devoted to the flatbed picture plane, he writes: "Perhaps Rauschenberg's profoundest symbolic gesture came in 1955 when he seized his own bed, smeared paint on its pillow and quilt coverlet, and uprighted it against the wall. There, in the vertical posture of 'art,' it continues to work in the imagination as the eternal companion of our other resource, our horizontality, the flat bedding in which we do our begetting, conceiving, and dreaming. The horizontality of the bed relates to 'making' as the vertical of the Renaissance picture plane related to seeing" ("Other Criteria," pp. 89–90). The idea was so fruitful that Steinberg was able to interpret the reclining demoiselle who is anomalously presented as vertical in Picasso's painting as "register[ing] on the picture plane like a Murphy bed hitting the wall" (Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel" [1972], reprinted in *October*, no. 44 [Spring 1988], p. 33).

"Other Criteria" also linked Rauschenberg to the then new term "postmodernism." For later discussions of Rauschenberg and postmodernism, see Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins" (1980), in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983); and Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" (1980), in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

87. See Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art" (1973), in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982). Mainardi cites the exhibition catalogues published respectively by the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Smithsonian Institution Press. As a token of its seeing nineteenth-century quilts as "precursors" of modernist abstract paintings, the Whitney catalogue is dedicated to Barnett Newman.

From the Smithsonian catalogue Mainardi quotes the following passage: "The finely realized geometry of the pieced quilt, coupled with this sophisticated sense for the possibilities of color and form, produced such works which mirror in startling ways contemporary painting trends. We can see in many such phenomena as 'op' effects, serial images, use of 'color fields,' a deep understanding of negative space, mannerisms of formal abstractions, and the like. Too much can of course be made of these resemblances, to the confusion of the intrinsic merits of both the paintings and the quilts. They were not made as paintings, nor did the people who made them think of themselves as 'artists'" (p. 344). Something of that writ-

er's easy subordination of female quilters to male painters may also be detected in the relationship imputed between Anni and Josef Albers.

88. See Arlene Raven, Introduction to *American Quilts* (New York: Abrams, 1987), which, concerning artists and the quilt, mentions Josef Albers, Georges Braque, Judy Chicago, Jasper Johns, Joyce Kosloff, Picasso, Rauschenberg, Miriam Schapiro, and Ann Wilson, along with systemic and Color Field painting and Op art.

89. The resemblance between *Bed's* quilt pattern and Albers's Homage to the Square paintings was noted by John Russell in his review of the 1977 Rauschenberg retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art (*New York Times*, March 25, 1977). Black Mountain College, where Albers began the series, is in Appalachia, a center for the production of such quilts.

90. Compare the concentric-square design in the fabric Hoarfrost work titled *Red Shuttle* of 1974; reproduced in *Robert Rauschenberg: Werke, 1950–1980*, pp. 16, 369. The patched fabric-collage works for Russia are also of interest, showing a continuing association of fabric with block composition; reproduced in *ROCI*, p. 64. A precedent for Rauschenberg's incorporation into his work of a woven cloth with square design may be found in Anne Ryan's collage *Number 48* of 1950, included in the exhibition "Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America" at The Museum of Modern Art in 1951 and acquired by the Museum in that year (reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, p. 115).

91. *ROCI*, p. 156.

92. This phrase of Rosalind Krauss's, quoted earlier, prompts me to mention that as long ago as 1974, Krauss pointed out how *Bed* was allied with Johns's first Flag, since in both "the single-image identified itself so completely with the support that bore it that it took on the holistic nature of that support. It was assimilated into the mode of perception by which objects in the world are recognized as unitary, unbroken Gestalts"; see Krauss, "Robert Rauschenberg and the Materialized Image," p. 37. (See also Feinstein, "Random Order," pp. 250–51, on *Bed* as a possible response to Johns's *Flag*, calling attention to the stripes visible on the pillow.) Perhaps one should note further that in its conformity to the woven texture of the picture plane, the extended *Flag*, spread out over the picture surface, is indexical in a layered, twofold way, since it exhibits at the same time a point-to-point correspondence with its flat "original" in nature as well as with the picture plane (thus making a kind of sandwich of signs).

93. The anecdote about the Flag painting was recounted by Rauschenberg in *Vogue* (September 1989); cited in Charles F. Stuckey, "Rauschenberg: An Untold Story?" (review of Kotz, *Rauschenberg*), *Art in America*, 79 (July 1991), p. 35.

94. Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p. 48. (The heading for the present section, "Getting Inside the Canvas," is taken from Rosenberg, p. 22.)

95. Compare Mark Rothko's statement, "My paintings are sometimes described as facades, and indeed they are facades" (published 1958; quoted in *New York School: The First Generation* [Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1965], p. 30). In *Winter Pool* of 1959, treating a painting as if it were a stockade, Rauschenberg leaned a ladder against it to scale the facing wall; reproduced in Kotz, *Rauschenberg*, p. 53.

96. See Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 188.

97. On furniture in this regard, consider van Gogh's pair of paintings *Gauguin's Armchair* (Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam) and *Vincent's Chair* (Tate Gallery, London). In their individual design and in their attributes, the paired objects are quite clearly presented as surrogates for their absent "sitters." Gauguin's chair, equipped with arms and a cushion or cloth upholstery and made of elegantly curved wood elements, displays a candle, two novels, and a pair of eyeglasses resting on the seat; van Gogh's rough, simple, armless chair with a straw seat bears his pipe and an opened packet of tobacco. These two works (of nearly identical format), which van Gogh told his brother Theo were "quite amusing," were painted at Arles during the brief but intense period the two artists spent there together late in 1888. The paintings' highly personal and complementary qualities make them object-portraits of the two men, a kind of diptych emblematic of the artists' collaboration.

98. Since it is the bedclothes that refer to the body (see note 15, above), the rest of the bed, the pieces of the frame, could safely be omitted, as in Rauschenberg's combine painting: "It is only the nude female in art who needs no definition of her bed. . . . Artistic birth and death beds are furniture, complete with posts and platforms, even for saints. Beds for nudes never needed to do this; they could be made entirely of cloth" (Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, p. 171).

99. Andrew Forge identified the focal point of *Bed*: "The hot center of the paint is the area knotted

around the turned-back edge of the quilt's pattern . . . where the sleeper crawls in" (Forge, *Rauschenberg*, p. 81).

100. Rauschenberg, interview with Pat Mitchell on the CBS television program *Sunday Morning*, June 16, 1991; transcript in *CBS News*, no. 644, p. 16.

101. On the prototype "passage," which is also very rich in its mixture of aesthetic and personal associations, see Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan (1984; English ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

102. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (1949); quoted in Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 197. See also Walker Percy, "Metaphor as Mistake," in *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, Straus, [1975]); and William Empson's classic *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). The purpose of metaphor is thus to trigger "corrective action. . . . For the hearer or reader of a metaphor to detect, for himself, the nature of the error and to invent his own (conjectural) version of the truth entails understanding and achievement and thus pleasure" (Don R. Swanson, "Towards a Psychology of Metaphor," in Sheldon Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], p. 162).

It should be apparent by now that I have quoted from so many critics and art historians in the present article because in writings about art, the choices of metaphor constitute a compelling subject of their own. Metaphors and how authors handle them reveal aspects of the critical intelligence accessible to use in no other way. They articulate the conceptual models underlying discourse, and thus furnish analyzable evidence of some of the unacknowledged workings of the mind.

103. Thomas A. Sebeok, "Fetish," chap. 12 of his *A Sign Is Just a Sign* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 124; and see the chapters titled "Indexicality" (especially p. 132), "The Semiotic Self" (especially pp. 39–40), and "The Semiotic Self Revisited" (especially p. 42). Some aspects of such combinations and juxtapositions would of course involve Roman Jakobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy, the former being based on similarity, the latter on contiguity; Sebeok discusses metonymy as "the replacement of an entity by one of its indexes" and as playing a role in both the anthropological and psychosexual aspects of the fetish (p. 132). See also Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," pp. 177, 199, n. 35, which comments on Picasso's "combination of two categories of signs — indices and symbols" and refers to Rosalind Krauss's earlier discussion of Picasso's "double semiotic strategy" in her review "The Cubist Epoch," *Artforum*, 9 (February 1971), pp. 32–38.

104. See Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, p. 113, pls. 83–85, 128. See also Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, pp. 80–81.

105. On bodily awareness and the "other" in perception, see Leder, *The Absent Body*, *passim*.

106. Quotations of Rauschenberg in this and the preceding paragraph are from: *ROCI*, p. 154; Rose, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," p. 59; Grace Glueck, "Rauschenberg at 65, with All Due Immodesty," *New York Times*, December 16, 1990, p. 47; and the interview on *Sunday Morning*, p. 16.

Rauschenberg's caution against "know[ing] what you're looking at while you're looking at it" is not unlike Harold Rosenberg's: "It is pointless to argue that Rembrandt or Michelangelo worked in the same way [as the new American painters]. You don't get Lucrece with a dagger out of staining a piece of cloth. . . . If Lucrece should come out she will be among us for the first time — a surprise. To the painter, she *must* be a surprise. In this mood there is no point in an act if you already know what it contains" (Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p. 22). Rauschenberg's remark, like Rosenberg's, stands in marked contrast to Jasper Johns's wanting to paint "things the mind *already* knows."

107. O'Doherty, *American Masters*, p. 265.

108. Rauschenberg's often quoted remark appears in his statement for the exhibition catalogue *Sixteen Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p. 58: "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"



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