

**The art of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg
during the 1950s and 1960s: the transition
from modernism to postmodernism.**

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the unaided work of the candidate. It has not been, nor is, submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.



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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, John and Irene Morley, and to Melanie Dommann.

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PREFATORY NOTE

Throughout this dissertation, the titles of artworks and books are underlined. The date of an artwork or book appears directly after its title. The titles of essays, journal articles and other such publications appear in single inverted commas. The Harvard system of referencing and bibliography is used throughout the dissertation. The name of the author appears in parenthesis only if it is not mentioned in the same sentence to which it refers. Footnotes appear at the end of each page. The Reference List appears after the Conclusion.

The dissertation is illustrated with photo-reproductions of artworks. These reproductions appear on the page following the first time a work is referred to in the text. Illustration numbers appear in the text directly after the title and the date of the work of art. Illustration numbers only appear the first time reference is made to such a work. The dimensions of artworks have been metricised.

The terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' appear in lower case letters unless stipulated differently in quotes.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is intended as an investigation into the art of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. The aim of this investigation is to assess the possibility that the art produced by Johns and Rauschenberg during the 1950s and 1960s constitutes a transition from modernism to postmodernism in the visual arts in America.

This dissertation is introduced by means of a broad outline of relevant developments within the visual arts during the 1950s and 1960s in America. This outline also contains explanations of modernism and postmodernism and looks at how these terms are presented throughout this text. In the outline I describe how Johns and Rauschenberg can be identified with a shift that occurred in the visual arts in America during the mid 1950s away from two prominent modes of painting within modernism, namely 'action' painting, as described by Harold Rosenberg (1982:28), and Clement Greenberg's 'American-type' painting (1973:208).

Both Johns and Rauschenberg actively produced art during the 1970s and 1980s - the period in which postmodernism is generally regarded to have been most prominent. However, in an attempt to assess the possibility that their art is transitional from modernism to postmodernism, this investigation focuses upon a selection of artworks produced during the 1950s and 1960s.

I intend to discover whether or not these works signalled a departure from modernism and if they did, at what point this occurred and what the specific nature of this departure was. These works are examined from conceptual, formal, iconographical, stylistic and technical viewpoints.

Throughout this dissertation I attempt to describe how Johns and Rauschenberg anticipated and embraced various postmodern tendencies that have subsequently emerged in the arts and other related disciplines. Parallels are drawn between the artworks of Johns and Rauschenberg and the disciplines of architecture and literary theory. These parallels are drawn with the intention of aligning Johns and Rauschenberg's attitude towards making art in the 1950s and 1960s with a

relatively widespread mood in literary theory, philosophy and the social sciences concerning the inability of these disciplines to deliver totalising theories and doctrines, or enduring 'answers' to fundamental dilemmas and puzzles posed by objects of inquiry, and a growing feeling, on the contrary, that chronic provisionality, plurality of perspectives and incommensurable appearances of the objects of inquiry in competing discourses make the search for ultimate answers or even answers that can command widespread consensus a futile exercise. (Boyne and Rattansi 1990: 12).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: The 1950s and 1960s in America

The term 'postmodernism' has been and remains the subject of multiple interpretations by art historians, critics, and theorists. The diversity of these interpretations is an indication of the complex nature of the term which continues to defy simple analysis and definition.

Donald Kuspit, for example, sees postmodernism as a theoretical construct. He suggests that postmodernism "reflects contemporary bourgeois society more by way of demonstrating problems involved in critical and activist engagement - activism through criticality - than by direct articulation and examination" (Silverman 1990:55).

Kuspit believes that the fundamental issue of postmodernism is the identification of the meaning and character of criticality in the postmodern age: "The term 'postmodernism' reflects the uncertain destiny of criticality in contemporary society and culture" (Silverman 1990:54). Thus, distinctions between modernity and postmodernity are made in terms of this criticality. He comments that "The truth behind the term 'postmodernism' is that modernist criticality no longer works or makes sense in contemporary bourgeois society" (Silverman 1990:57). Hence, Kuspit likens postmodernism to an aesthetic programme developed by theorists rather than just a reflection of the common reality of contemporary society and culture.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, on the other hand, sees postmodernism not as a theoretical construct or a style that succeeds the dissolution of modernism, but rather as

a cultural condition resulting from the erosion of Modern period ideals; it marks a historical moment, one of fairly slow germination, characterized by a shift in assumptions inherited from the Enlightenment. At the core of these assumptions is the humanist code as it converges on the "masterly" figure of man; inasmuch as post-Modernism emphasizes the regulating power of social forces,

it can be said to describe the decentering of the self ... one of the crucial factors in this process has been the postwar development of technoscientific culture. (Linker 1985:104).

The views expressed by Kuspit and Lyotard are but two examples among a myriad of definitions of postmodernism. Given this it is questionable whether the term will ever acquire a coherent definition. Brian O'Doherty suggests that

there is an unconscious agreement to withhold a definition, partly because everyone's definition will expose the confusion the word is designed to cover. (Newman 1986:32).

The validity of such a suggestion is debatable. However, two distinct tendencies which account for most definitions of postmodernism appear to have emerged from the confusion created by the diversity of interpretations. One of these tendencies is to view postmodernism as a distinct break or rupture with modernism. This is then assessed either positively or negatively.

In the field of architecture, for example, Charles Jencks proposes that postmodernism marks a clean break from modernism and that this break should be viewed as a positive development. (1984:9). Jencks comments that "[h]appily, we can date the death of modern architecture to a precise moment in time" (1984:9). He goes on to say that "Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 pm...." (Jencks 1984:9).¹

A similar 'death' can also be attributed to Modernist art. Leo Steinberg describes Robert Rauschenberg's works of the 1950s and early 1960s as 'post-modernist' (1968:91).² In response, Brandon Taylor suggests that

Following Steinberg's analysis, most exponents of the post-modern now locate the decline and final termination of modernist art at the end of the 1950s in the United States; in particular the art of Rauschenberg, Johns, Warhol and their followers. (1987:44).

¹ Jencks asserts that the demise of modern architecture was marked by the demolition of The Pruitt-Igoe housing scheme which had been built "according to the most progressive ideals of CIAM (The Congress of International Modern Architects) and it won an award from the American Institute of Architects when it was designed in 1951" (1984:9).

² Steinberg refers specifically to Rauschenberg's 'flatbed' works which he considers to have departed radically from the upright homogenous surfaces of the abstract expressionists.

According to this view modernist art had expired by the end of the 1950s much in the same way that Jencks perceives modernist architecture to have 'died' in the 1970s. Furthermore, the artwork of Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol can be regarded as the final nails in its coffin.

The claim, however, that the work of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s marks the death of modernist art, dismisses out of hand the many influential articles and books that have been written which suggest that their work belongs within discussions of modernism. Irving Sandler, for example, in his book The New York School (1978) situates the work of Rauschenberg among the second generation New York School painters (1978:ix). Sandler's subsequent claim, however, that Rauschenberg's works from the early 1950s "scandalized the New York School" (1978:174) implies that Rauschenberg's work does not rest comfortably within this category.

The inclusion of Rauschenberg's work within Pop art attests to the notion that his art cannot be confined solely to a single category. In High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture (1990), Kirk Varnadoe and Adam Gopnik assert that both Johns and Rauschenberg's first one-man shows in 1957

are frequently cited as the crucial next step toward fulfilling, in the American Pop art of the 1960s, the promise of an engagement with popular culture that had been heralded by the British. (1990:325).

George Boudaille comments that the inclusion of Johns' work within American Pop art is a "crucial issue that has been debated at length" (1989:7). Boudaille claims that "[a]ction painting was not enough" for Johns (1989:7). He also suggests that Johns went "beyond Abstract Expressionism" and that "he can be considered one of the initiators of Pop Art as well" (Boudaille 1989:7). Boudaille backs up his views by referring to Marcelin Pleynet's claim that "Johns' art is distinguished from that of his contemporaries in that it both integrates and goes beyond Abstract Expressionism" (1989:7). Additionally, Lucy Lippard claims that Johns' work "provided the true point of departure for Pop Art" (Boudaille 1989:7).

The point illustrated by these examples is that the art of both Johns and Rauschenberg appears to fit into many categories simultaneously yet seems to rest uneasily in all. These numerous and often conflicting interpretations of Johns and Rauschenberg's work, which have subsequently led to the various categorisations of their work, have provided the catalyst for this investigation.

It is reasonable to assume that these conflicting categorisations of Johns and Rauschenberg's art occur because their works contain elements that appeal variously to each category. Hence, for their work to be interpreted as transitional between modernism and postmodernism - as opposed to a straightforward reading of their work as either modernist or postmodernist - their work cannot be seen to break entirely with modernism. A categorisation of their art as transitional implies that while their work has sources within modernism it also embraces aspects of postmodernism. Hence, modernism and postmodernism should be regarded as continuous in some way.

The view that postmodernism is continuous with, rather than representing a complete break from modernism, appears to be another tendency in postmodern discourse. An explanation of a continuous relationship between modernism and postmodernism is provided by Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi, the editors of Postmodernism and Society (1990) who propose that

the distinctiveness of postmodernism in relation to modernism is inevitably blurred, for it is, like modernism, in part a critique of what it takes as the defining features of modernity. And as with modernity/modernism, we shall insist on a relative distinction between 'postmodernism', as a term that characterises a series of broadly aesthetic projects, and 'postmodernity', as a social, political and cultural configuration of which 'postmodernism' is supposedly a constitutive element. (1990:9).

Boyne and Rattansi's interpretation of postmodernism as characterising "a series of broadly aesthetic projects" (1990:9) suggests that postmodernism is interdisciplinary and culturally pervasive. Boyne and Rattansi also point out that there are certain commonalities inherent to postmodernism that extend across the boundaries between the visual arts and the fields of architecture, literature, and

philosophy, and that these commonalities derive principally from reactions against aspects of modernism within the visual arts, the field of architecture, literature, and philosophy (1990:11).

Comparisons between postmodernism in the visual arts and postmodernism in the disciplines of literature, architecture, and philosophy are acceptable because

they share a common condition which we would characterise as a crisis of 'representation' or, more accurately, a series of crises of representation, in which older modes of defining, appropriating, and recomposing the objects of artistic, philosophical, literary and social scientific languages are no longer credible and in which one common aspect is the dissolution of the very boundary between the language and its object, this in turn being related to the acceptance of the inevitability of a plurality of perspectives and the dissolution of various older polarities (popular/elite forms, subject/object) and boundaries (for instance between disciplines ...). (Boyne and Rattansi 1990:12).

I believe that Boyne and Rattansi's definition of postmodernism provides a suitable cultural context in which to situate this investigation into the art of Johns and Rauschenberg. This is because it is flexible enough to include those aspects of their art from the 1950s and 1960s that have been classified variously as Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, modernism and postmodernism.

I have also identified the ideas of Andreas Huyssen as being particularly relevant to the work produced by Johns and Rauschenberg during the 1950s and 1960s. Huyssen situates the work of Johns and Rauschenberg within the postmodernism of the 1960s in America. In After the Great Divide (1986) Huyssen describes a rebellion in the arts and literature in America that began roughly in the mid-1950s and which was initiated by

a new generation of artists such as Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, Kerouac, Ginsberg and the Beats, Burroughs and Barthelme against the dominance of abstract expressionism, serial music, and classical literary modernism. (1986:188).

Huyssen points out that the rebellion of artists that took place in America in the mid-

1950s was joined by critics such as Susan Sontag, Leslie Fiedler, and Ihab Hassan (1986:188). Steven Best and Douglas Kellner assert that Sontag, Fiedler, and Hassan viewed postmodernism as "a positive development which opposes the oppressive aspects of modernism and modernity" (1991:10). Best and Kellner describe how Sontag's essays that were written during the 1960s

celebrated the emergence of a 'new sensibility' (a term first used by Howe) in culture and the arts which challenges the rationalist need for content, meaning, and order. The new sensibility, by contrast, immerses itself in the pleasures of form and style, privileging an 'erotics' of art over a hermeneutics of meaning. (1991:10).

Of greater significance, however, to the theories of Huyssen are Sontag and Fiedler's approval of the "breakdown of the high-low art distinction and the appearance of pop art and mass cultural forms" (Best and Kellner 1991:10). Huyssen explains that

[e]ver since the mid-19th century, the culture of modernity has been characterized by a volatile relationship between high art and mass culture Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture. (1986:vii).

Huyssen confirms that this dichotomy between high art and mass culture - which he calls the 'Great Divide' (1986:viii) - extends into post-World War II art and culture in America. He claims that

this anxiety of contamination has appeared in the guise of an irreconcilable opposition, especially in the *l'art pour l'art* movements of the turn of the century (symbolism, aestheticism, *art nouveau*) and again in the post-World War II era in abstract expressionism in painting, in the privileging of experimental writing, and in the official canonization of "high modernism" in literature and literary criticism, in critical theory and the museum. (Huyssen 1986:vii).

Best and Kellner confirm the emergence of new artistic forms during the 1960s which contain elements of consumer society. In addition to the art of Johns and Rauschenberg, Best and Kellner mention the art of Warhol, film culture, 'happenings', multi-media light shows, and rock concerts, among other new

cultural forms (1991:10). They also describe how artists in many fields began mixing media and incorporating `kitsch' and elements of `mass' culture into their aesthetic as an alternative to the elitisms of modernism (Best and Kellner 1991:10).

The incorporation of elements from consumer society into art is seminal to Huyssen's definition of postmodernism which states that

[t]he boundaries between high art and mass culture have become increasingly blurred, and we should begin to see that process as one of opportunity rather than lamenting loss of quality and failure of nerve. There are many successful attempts by artists to incorporate mass cultural forms into their work, and certain segments of mass culture have increasingly adopted strategies from on high. If anything, that is the postmodern condition in literature and the arts. (1986:ix).

Huyssen does, however, insist on a distinction between postmodernism of the 1960s and postmodernism of the 1970s, and early 1980s. He comments that postmodernism of the 1960s and 1970s rejected or criticized a certain version of modernism:

Against the codified high modernism of the preceding decades, the postmodernism of the 1960s tried to revitalize the heritage of the European avantgarde and to give it an American form along what one could call in short-hand the Duchamp-Cage-Warhol axis. (Huyssen 1986:188).

It is here that similarities can be seen in Huyssen's and Boyne and Rattansi's respective definitions of postmodernism. It is clear from Huyssen's description of postmodernism of the 1960s as attempting "to revitalize the heritage of the European avantgarde" (1986:188) that he believes that there are elements of continuity connecting modernism to postmodernism.

Huyssen's description of postmodernism is compatible with Boyne and Rattansi's view that "the distinctiveness of postmodernism in relation to modernism is inevitably blurred..." (1990:9). Furthermore, Huyssen's claim that postmodern of the 1960s in America was a reaction against "the codified high modernism of the preceding decades" (1986:188) reinforces Boyne and Rattansi's view that the

commonalities, which link postmodernism across disciplines and which facilitate continuity between modernism and postmodern, are derived in part from reactions against modernism (1990:9).

Huysen identifies the form of modernism against which the postmodern of the 1960s in America was a reaction. He explains that

modernism had of course been safely established as the canon in the academy, the museums and the gallery network. In that canon the New York School of abstract expressionism represented the epitome of that long trajectory of the modern which had begun in Paris in the 1850s and 1860s and which had inexorably led to New York.... (Huysen 1986:189).

Huysen's assertion that Abstract Expressionism was a vital component in the generation of modernism in America is confirmed by Stephen Polcari who claims that

Abstract Expressionism represents the American turn to modernism as presenting the best answers to the questions of the artists' historical circumstances. (1991:33).

Polcari's claim, however, that Abstract Expressionism provides "the best answers to the questions of the artists' historical circumstances" (1991:33) is debatable. Max Kozloff, for example, acknowledges that there are certain limitations in the idiom of Abstract Expressionism that contribute to its elitist nature (1973:45). He comments:

It is remarkable that art searching to give form to emotional experience immediately after the most cataclysmic war in history should have been completely lacking in overt reference to the hopes or the absurdities of modern industrial power. (Kozloff 1973:45).

Kozloff's allegation undermines the notion that Abstract Expressionist paintings are metaphors for a subjective position which denounces aspects of modern society. According to this notion Abstract Expressionist paintings can be considered to be concrete manifestations of "the absurdities of modern industrial power" (1973:45). Nevertheless his assertion suggests that the non-

representational idiom of Abstract Expressionism was possibly too exclusive and restrictive. This suggestion is plausible if one considers that there were a number of artists who were active at the same time as the Abstract Expressionists whose works have, up until recently, been excluded from consideration as significant examples of mainstream art. According to Kozloff, the contributions of artists like Georgia O'Keeffe and Edward Hopper have in the past been considered by art historians and critics to be "too parochial" and "too `unmodern' to provide models for mainstream work" (1973:43).

This exclusion of art - which can be characterised as representational - from mainstream art in America in the 1950s and 1960s, illustrates the elitist tendency of modernism. A consequence of this elitism has been the marginalisation of artistic elements that do not adhere to "totalising theories and doctrines" (Boyne and Rattansi 1990:12). These theories and doctrines have been formulated for modernism by influential art critics and historians such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg.

Further examples of artistic styles that were marginalised, for approximately the two decades in which Abstract Expressionism dominated American painting, are the art of Precisionism, Magic Realism, and the narrative detail and democratic genre of American scene painting (Rose 1980:89). This elitist tendency of modernism which led to the marginalisation of representational imagery, extends into the art of Abstract Expressionism through the definitions of provided by Greenberg and Rosenberg.³

Polcari observes that interpretations of Abstract Expressionism have varied according to the views of those critics who were examining it. Barbara Rose supports this when she observes that by the late 1950's the American art scene was clearly polemicised into two main groups (1980:96). One of these groups revolved

³ The term Abstract Expressionism is used here as a blanket term. It is noteworthy that Greenberg refers to Abstract Expressionism as 'American-Type' painting (1973:208). Rosenberg describes Abstract Expressionism as 'action' painting (1982:23).

around Rosenberg and his conception of 'action' painting, and the other centred on Greenberg and his ideas concerning the 'American-type' painters.

Irving Sandler confirms the significance of the contributions of Rosenberg and Greenberg when he declares that they were two of the most influential critics involved with Abstract Expressionism (1970:270). Taking into consideration these acknowledgements it is fair to assert that the views of Rosenberg and Greenberg were significant in determining the nature of modernism in the visual arts in America during the 1950s and 1960s.

Rosenberg's view of modernism is encapsulated within 'action' painting, so called because of its emphasis on gesture and its alleged ability to act as a record of emotional content in painting. The 'action' painter approaches the canvas without a preconceived idea, only with the intent to apply paint to canvas. Imagery is derived through the process of spontaneous paint application in an unpremeditated manner, thus the produced painting is a record of the artist's action while he is creating it. Rosenberg declares that

The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter. (1982:25).

The imagery resulting from this 'encounter', or 'act', is seen to embody the 'essence', or psyche of the artist. Rosenberg explains that

[a] painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. The painting itself is a "moment" in the adulterated mixture of his [the artist's] life The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence. (1982:28).

The importance of the 'act' of painting to Rosenberg is noted by Sandler who observes that

Rosenberg declared that the action painters in their "gesturing with materials" had discarded traditional aesthetic references as irrelevant. "Form, color, composition, drawing, are auxiliaries ... [which] can be dispensed with. What matters always is the revelation contained in the act." (1970:270).

Sandler alleges, however, that Rosenberg places too much emphasis on the 'act' of painting and that

he went to such an extreme that none of the artists who could be subsumed under his label would follow. They questioned his assertion that the action painters could discard every traditional reference, for none could help but begin with ideas culled from past art and from their own earlier works Many gesture painters also objected to Rosenberg's conception of action painting on the grounds that it might be thought of as a program for making a type of picture - and it was often interpreted in this way. (1970:271).

Sandler's observation indicates that there was significant resistance on the part of artists towards Rosenberg's notion of 'action' painting. He also implies that artists reacted against 'action' painting because they perceived it as being prescriptive and exclusive of tradition. The exclusive nature of 'action' painting can be regarded as an example of modernism's elitist tendencies.

Greenberg recognised the exclusive nature of 'action' painting. His criticisms, based largely on aesthetic considerations, are echoed by Sandler:

Believing that action painting had done away with aesthetic criteria, Rosenberg consistently refused to "indicate why any action painting is valid as a *painting* nor how to tell a good one from a bad one" (1970:271).

Rosenberg's criteria for judgement (between good and bad painting) in 'action' painting are the qualities of "authenticity" and "seriousness" (Sandler 1970:272). Yet, as Sandler observes, there is no way of objectively determining these qualities (1970:272). Greenberg had recognised this in 1952 when he declared that "We cannot be too often reminded how decisive honesty is in art" (Sandler 1970:272).

Sandler claims that in his efforts to describe the intentions of modernist painters, Greenberg declared that

modernist artists were increasingly occupied with what is unique in the nature of their mediums and that they were transforming their styles by eliminating impurities or expendable conventions that denied the medium (in painting this meant figuration and illusionism). (Sandler 1970:272).

According to Greenberg, no one carried out the attack on art's 'expendable

conventions' more directly or more sustainedly than the 'American-type' painters (1973:209). Greenberg explains that

It seems to be a law of modernism - thus one that applies to almost all art that remains truly alive in our time - that the conventions not essential to the viability of a medium be discarded as soon as they are recognized. (1973:208).

According to Greenberg the shedding of painting's 'expendable conventions' "meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance" (Risatti 1990:13). The purification of painting through the shedding of expendable conventions has extended through the art of Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, to the works of the 'colourfield' painters Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis, and in the 1960s to the works of Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski (Fineberg 1995:154).

Greenberg's proposals for painting, however, based on his insistence that painting must be cleansed of its 'expendable conventions' are arguably even more exclusive and restrictive than Rosenberg's. The shedding of expendable conventions in painting ensures that its very nature is exclusive rather than inclusive.

Reactions on the part of artists against Greenberg's restrictive, exclusive proposals are hinted at by Rose who observes that "there is no doubt that, around 1960, there was a widespread revolution in taste, not to say aesthetic standards, in New York" (1980:91).⁴ Apart from the work of Johns and Rauschenberg, Rose comments that the works of artists such as Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, Larry Zox, Darby Bannard, and Larry Poons among others were considered as rejections of Abstract Expressionism (1980:91). The reactions described by Rose on the part of these artists seems to support Huyssen's description of postmodernism of the 1960s as a 'rebellion' against elitist aspects of modernism in which Johns and

⁴ Rose indicates the degree of diversification that occurred within the visual arts during the 1960s: Unlike the forties and fifties, when a style with more or less uniform aesthetic premises - despite the degree of individual interpretation it might receive - was the single repository of all avant-garde impulses, the sixties saw warring factions compete. (1980:91).

Rauschenberg are seen as key figures (1986:188).

This investigation describes the art of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s as a consequence of this 'rebellion'. The situation of the work of Johns and Rauschenberg within this 'rebellion' is meant to provide a context within which this investigation into the transitional nature of their work from the 1950s and 1960s can take place.

CHAPTER 2 of this investigation attempts to describe how, through their work from the 1950s and 1960s, Johns and Rauschenberg propose a relative definition for artistic identity as a consequence of their reaction against the fixed, totalising definition proposed by Rosenberg in his account of modernism as 'action' painting.

In **CHAPTER 3** the investigation attempts to describe how Johns and Rauschenberg propose a reopening, or broadening of the narrow area of focus set for modernism by Greenberg. Central to this part of the investigation is the way Johns and Rauschenberg undermine the "process of self-purification" (Greenberg 1973:208) by denying certain fixed criteria (such as flatness, and figuration) which are the defining features of Greenberg's account of modernism.

The investigation describes how Johns and Rauschenberg propose an alternative function for art in their work from the 1950 and 1960s. This alternative function for art is discussed in relation to John Cage's inclusive suggestions for a life affirming art, based on 'perspectivist' or 'relativist' interpretations.

CHAPTER 4 investigates how Johns and Rauschenberg make their artworks more accessible to the viewer. They reintroduce the work of art to the viewer by reversing the exclusive viewing function of 'action' painting and suggesting a new 'participatory' role for the viewer.

CHAPTER 5 of this investigation examines how the art of Johns and Rauschenberg

can be interpreted as either modernist or postmodernist. Issues that are discussed are the use of collage in Johns and Rauschenberg's art; the notion of pastiche and allegory; the reintroduction of narrative and representation; and Johns and Rauschenberg's engagement of mass culture. These issues are discussed in relation to both modernism and postmodernism.

The **CONCLUSION** acknowledges the influence of Johns and Rauschenberg's art upon American Pop art and subsequent overlapping developments such as minimalist sculpture, conceptual art, and performance art. The **CONCLUSION** then considers whether or not the art produced by Johns and Rauschenberg during the 1950s and 1960s can be considered as a transition from modernism to postmodernism in the visual arts in America.

CHAPTER 2

Towards a relative definition of artistic identity

In an attempt to explain the intentions of abstract painters in America during the 1950s as 'action' painting Rosenberg proposed an exclusive fixed function for painting - as the means by which an artist is able to discover his identity.⁵

Central to this function for art is the premise that the artist's identity is determined through the act of painting, and that the painter's brushmark or 'gesture' is the vehicle through which the metaphysical constituents of identity (such as emotions) manifest themselves. Rosenberg comments on the significance of the gesture in relation to the identity of the artist:

The big moment came when it was decided to paint ... just To PAINT.
The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value -
political, aesthetic, moral ... (1982:30).

Rosenberg comments further:

On the one hand, a desperate recognition of moral and intellectual exhaustion; on the other, the exhilaration of an adventure over depths in which he might find reflected the true image of his identity. (1982:31).

The 'action' painter is described by Rosenberg as one who "gesticulated upon the canvas and watched for what each novelty would declare him and his art to be" (1982:31). Hence, the artist participates in a process of self-discovery and self-creation through the process of painting (Leja 1993:34).

Rosenberg declares that painting "became a means of confronting in daily practice the problematic nature of modern individuality" (1982:40). Furthermore, through 'action' painting, Rosenberg considers American painters to have "discovered a new function for art as the action that belonged to himself" (1982a:39). In 'action' painting, the artist is able to express his anxiety on the canvas:

Only the blank canvas, however, offered the opportunity for a doing

⁵ Rosenberg's theories on 'action' painting first appeared in Art News in 1952.

that would not be seized upon in mid-motion by the depersonalizing machine of capitalist society, or by the depersonalizing machine of the world-wide opposition to that society. (Rosenberg 1982a:39).

Hence, Rosenberg considers the function of painting to be linked to the expression of the anxiety of the artist. The `act' of painting encapsulates the artist's `essence' or identity which makes itself apparent to the artist during the process of painting. This essentially confers upon the artist a privileged status, that of `creator', `master' or `oracle' around whom the making of art is centred.

Various works produced by Johns and Rauschenberg during the 1950s, however, undermine this notion that painting encapsulates the artist's essence or that the artist's identity manifests itself through the act of painting. Rauschenberg's White Painting (1951) (fig. 1) is such an example. It consists of seven panels which have been painted white. The panels function as screens which receive the lights and reflections in the room and the shadows of the viewers.

Sandler observes that although the panels are `empty' they are not devoid of content or `colour' - "...for they possess a `self-color', which constantly changes as the light changes, or as shadows are cast on it ..." (1978:174). The white panels `record' each moment that occurs within the art gallery environment whether it is in the form of shadows or reflections. The result is that the images that fall upon the screens are constantly changing. In this way White Painting evokes questions regarding the input or activity of the artist.

Rauschenberg said of his White Painting, "It is completely irrelevant that I am making them. *Today* is their creator" (Alloway 1980:49). Rauschenberg's comments indicate that he was not concerned with expressing his identity or personality in White Painting. Rather, he attempted to conceal any trace of himself within the work. The idea that Rauschenberg attempts to avoid imposing his artistic persona upon his art is supported by Jonathan Fineberg who comments that Rauschenberg

tried to push his artistic persona into continual flux, so that he could

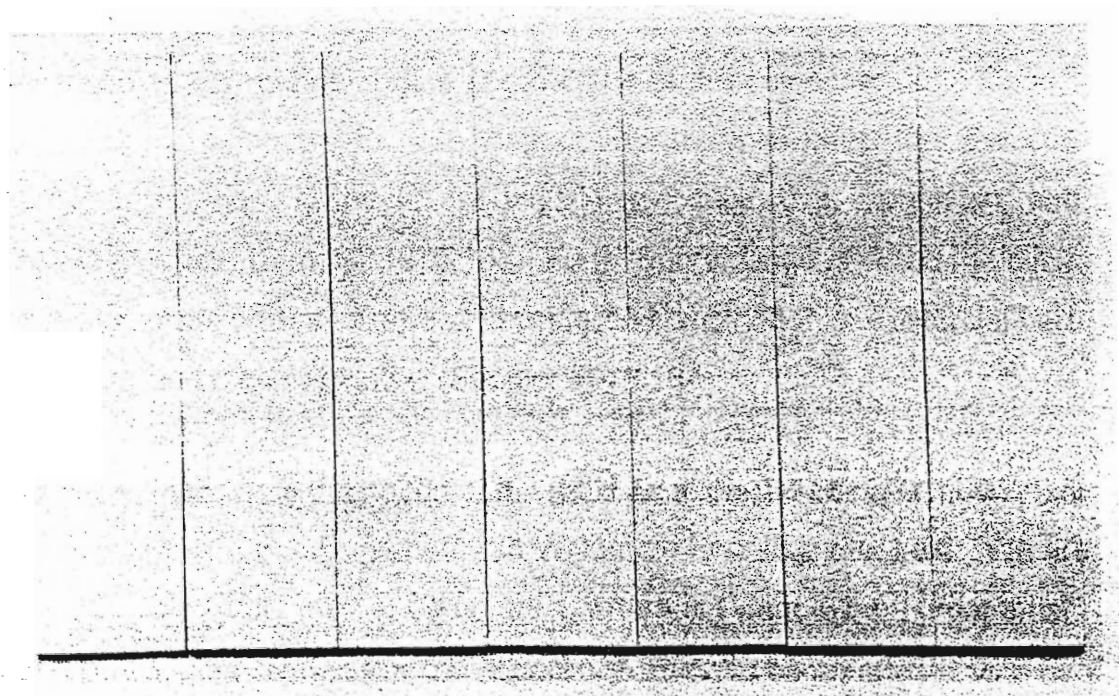


fig 1 Robert Rauschenberg, White Painting, 1951, oil on canvas,
182.9 x 325.1 cm, collection: the artist

perpetually reinvent himself through an acutely sensitive response to the prevailing climate. "I don't want my personality to come out through the piece ... I want my paintings to be reflections of life ... your self-visualization is a reflection of your surroundings". (1995:176).

It is likely that Rauschenberg's denial of a fixed artistic identity in his work of the 1950s and 1960s had its origins in the ideas of the composer John Cage.⁶ Cage "had no sympathy for the Abstract Expressionist belief that the true sources of art were in the artist's psychology, subjective expression, and creative process" (Sandler 1978:164). Furthermore, Cage rejected the elitist conception of the artist as a privileged being, "a combination of existential hero or shaman and master painter" (Sandler 1978:164).

This aversion towards the notion of the artist as a special being is made clear in a conversation that Cage had with Willem de Kooning, who said: "We are different You don't want to be an artist, whereas I want to be a great artist". Cage commented: "Now it was this aspect of wanting to be an artist ... who had something to say, who wanted through his work to appear great ... which I could not accept" (Sandler 1978:164).

The suggestion that Rauschenberg shares Cage's rejection of the identity of the artist as a special being is reinforced by Rauschenberg when he declares:

There was something about the self-confession and self-confusion of abstract expressionism - as though the man and the work were the same - that personally always put me off because at that time my focus was in the opposite direction. I was busy trying to find ways where the imagery, the material and the meaning of the painting would be, not an illustration of my will, but more like an unbiased documentation of what I observed, letting the area of feeling and meaning take care of itself. (Fineberg 1995:179).

White Painting is a result of Rauschenberg's attempts at 'unbiased documentation'. A piano composition by Cage entitled 4'33" (1952) explains the intention of White Painting. 4'33" consists of four minutes and thirty-three seconds

⁶ The extent of Cage's influence upon Rauschenberg is noted by Sandler:

The two had become friends by 1951 when Cage purchased one of the young artist's pictures. In the following year, Rauschenberg was the only student invited to participate in Cage's theatrical event at Black Mountain. (1978:174).

of silence. Instead of music, one hears the external natural noises of the outside world combined with the sounds emitted from the puzzled audience.

The point that both works make is that the production of the art work relies upon an interaction between the artist, the environment and the audience. This ensures that the meaning of a work of art is not determined solely by the unique activity of the artist or musician. Rather, as implied in White Painting and 4'33", the artist or musician functions as a single factor among other factors. The completion of the work of art is dependent upon the sum of these constitutive factors.

The input of the artist is just one of these disparate factors as opposed to being the principle controlling factor in the shaping of the artwork. Therefore, instead of limiting the function of the artwork to the expression of his identity, in White Painting Rauschenberg suggests that the artist's identity is more like that of unprejudiced compiler, or recorder of events. As Rauschenberg expressed to Calvin Tomkins: "I'd really like to think that the artist could be just another kind of material in the picture, working in collaboration with all the other materials" (Alloway 1976:5).

Similar attitudes regarding the identity of the author surfaced in the literature of the 1950s and 1960s. In Naked Lunch (1986) William Burroughs comments that a writer is only able to write about that which is in front of his senses at the time of writing (1986:221).⁷ He declares "I am a recording instrument... I do not presume to impose `story', `plot', `continuity'" (Burroughs 1986:221). This attitude towards the author/artist function which is shared by Burroughs, Johns, and Rauschenberg is an example of a `commonality', which Boyne and Rattansi say exists between disciplines (1990:11).

Similarly, Roland Barthes' Image-Music-Text (1977) is significant in its formulation of the unimportance of artistic `aura'; or personality in

⁷ Naked Lunch was first published in 1959.

literature.⁸ In the 'Death of the Author', Barthes asserts that throughout modern literature there is the assumption that the author's function is to express his/her personality to the reader, and that subsequently the value of the text resides with the author (1977:148). Barthes suggests, however, that a literary text should not necessarily be conceived of as a coherent and unified entity. He comments that "a text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation ... there is one place where this multiplicity is focused ... that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (Barthes 1977:148). Barthes goes on to say that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination ... The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1977:148).

These theories that suggest a change in the artist/author function, and which are implicit in artworks such as White Painting and the literature of the 1950s and 1960s, anticipate postmodern theory. Taylor, for example, points out that

it became difficult to perceive the works of the modernists themselves as anything other than as *texts* which offer their truths in a strictly relative manner - relative to other texts, but also to the detriment of old humanist assumptions about the 'personality' of the author and the camp-follower nature of the reader. In likewise fashion the writer could no longer assume the mantle of a prophet or oracle, under post-modernism; but at best could function only intertextually, that is, as a purveyor and redistributor of someone else's texts, as a *Bricoleur* (to use Levi-Strauss's phrase) of images and experiences from elsewhere. (1987:44).

This attitude regarding the function of author/artist also appears in the writing of Michel Foucault. Foucault stresses three points which align him with Barthes on the issue of the dissolution of the 'Author' (Newman 1986:39). Foucault observes that

freed from the necessity of expression, writing is transformed into an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier; writing is now involved with the death or 'sacrifice' of the author into the text; and the boundaries according to which a 'work' is constituted are thrown into question. (Newman

⁸ Image-Music-Text was first published in 1968.

1986:39).

Foucault declares that "[w]e can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author" (Newman 1986:39).

A similar attitude towards building design appeared in postmodern architecture.

Postmodern architects tried to remedy the elitism of modern architecture by

extending the language of architecture in many different ways - into the vernacular, towards tradition and the commercial slang of the street. Hence the double-coding, the architecture which speaks to the elite and the man on the street. (Jencks 1984:8).

Hence, the postmodern architect is concerned with trying to make architecture accessible to the users and the professional elite. He performs more of a representative role than a saviour, or a doctor role.

Postmodern film likewise marks a departure from modernist film. Taylor explains that postmodern film does not present "a coherent and unified world-view - traceable ultimately to the craftsmanship or the creativity of a single individual" (1987:43). Rather, postmodern film amalgamates fragments from other films and genres. Taylor describes postmodern films as

[s]elf-referential and often knowingly parodic, these productions often appear to consist of open-ended, empty collages, referring at best to the materiality of film and hardly at all *through* the medium of film to the real world itself. (Taylor 1987:43).

The above examples demonstrate that the postmodern concept of the 'dissolution' of the artist/author extends across disciplines. Of greater significance, however, is that Rauschenberg appears to anticipate this in his work from the 1950s.

The rejection of the identity of the artist as existential 'hero' or 'shaman' and 'master painter' by Cage and Rauschenberg is shared by Johns. However, it is likely that Marcel Duchamp was the figure that most influenced Johns in this respect. Duchamp "loved to poke fun at the high aspirations of artists, their seriousness and obsession with self", or as Johns put it, "the stink of artists' egos" (Sandler 1978:164).

In 1955 Johns painted Flag (fig 2) which consists of an American flag in encaustic, oil paint and newsprint on fabric. Johns describes why he chose to use the flag as subject matter:

Using the design of the American flag took care of a great deal for me because I didn't have to design it.... So I went on to similar things like the targets - things the mind already knows. That gave me room to work on other levels. (Steinberg 1972:31).

Michael Crichton observes that it was the impersonal nature of Flag that enabled Johns to find his self-identity (1994:30). A flag is an impersonal, common object that exists in the environment. This is significant because it is easily accessible and does not have to be created by the artist. Duchamp's influence is notable in this respect. Although Johns' Flag can be viewed as an artwork, it remains essentially an object from the environment.

The accessibility of Johns' objects, like a flag, is something which is common to Duchamp's 'readymades'. Johns' objects are complete objects which have been taken from the environment and reintroduced into art. Much in the same way that a snow shovel or urinal goes some way to being a sculpture, a flag is also already on the way to being a painting as it is a design inscribed on a flat surface. The choice of such a ready made subject relieves the artist of the effort of discovery. This is essentially a negation of the tenets of Rosenberg's 'action' painting in which the "act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence" (1982:28). Additionally, because Flag has a prefigured shape, Johns does not stress a specific focus or privilege one area of the work over another.

Apart from Flag, an absence of hierarchy is evident in Johns' numbers and alphabets of the 1950s, in which no particular number or letter is emphasised or privileged.

Steinberg points out: "His numbers, [Johns]when not single ciphers, run zero to nine... his alphabets, from A to Z" (1972:35). Thus there is no specific point of focus in a work such as Numbers in Color (1958-59) (fig 3). The same can be said for Johns' Flag which has a similar non-hierarchic, 'all-over' focus.



fig 2 Jasper Johns, Flag, 1955, encaustic, oil and collage, on canvas,
107.3 x 153.8 cm, collection: The Museum of Modern Art,
New York

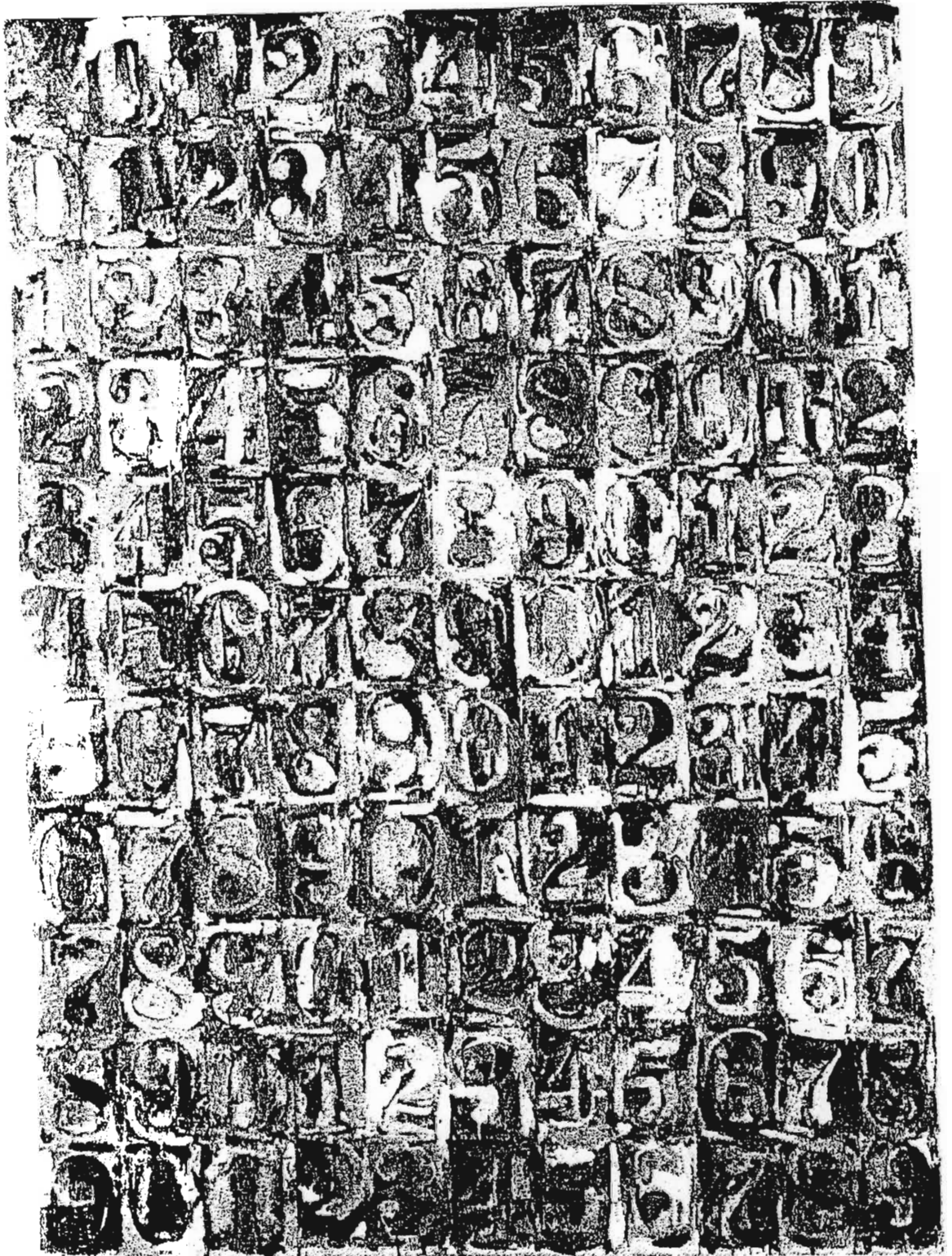


fig 3 Jasper Johns, Numbers in Color, 1958-59, encaustic and collage on canvas, 170.2 x 125.8 cm, collection: The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York

The non-hierarchic nature of Johns' numbers, alphabets, and Flag is augmented by his almost exclusive use of the primary colours. The colours red, white, and blue in Flag, and red, blue and yellow in a work such as Numbers in Color ensure a non-subjective colour usage that does not provide a glimpse of Johns' personality by indicating his personal colour preferences. The application of non-hierarchic subject matter in works such as Flag and Numbers in Color is an indication that Johns has not imposed himself upon his work in the manner of a subject who manipulates objects. The implication here is the unfixed point of view:

As his objects are seen from no particular angle, so there is no intellectual position from which a significant fragment might have been singled out. No partiality. The completeness of his systems or entities implies the artist's refusal to advertise his subjective location (Steinberg 1972:35).

By choosing impersonal, commonplace and often banal imagery such as flags, targets and numbers as subject matter Johns ensures that his work is not dominated by his intentions or personal judgements. He denies the importance of personality in the creation of the artwork and avoids imposing a hierarchy of meanings on events. Referring to his early paintings of flags, targets, and numbers, Johns said

I'm interested in things which suggest the world rather than suggest the personality. I'm interested in things which suggest things which are, rather than in judgements. The most conventional thing, the most ordinary thing - it seems to me that those things that can be dealt with without having to judge them: they seem to me to exist as clear facts, not involving aesthetic hierarchy. (Hermann 1977:26).

Johns' Coat Hanger (1958) (fig.4) which features a wire hanger centrally suspended against a dense ground of black crayon illustrates his interest in those things which suggest the world rather than the personality. The coat hanger, in Coat Hanger, is of the cheap, mass produced variety, of little value within its original context. Its use, however, as subject matter is significant as it implies that Johns preferred to express an anonymous self rather than his own identity.

Johns' attempts to present an anonymous `self' in works such as Coat Hanger

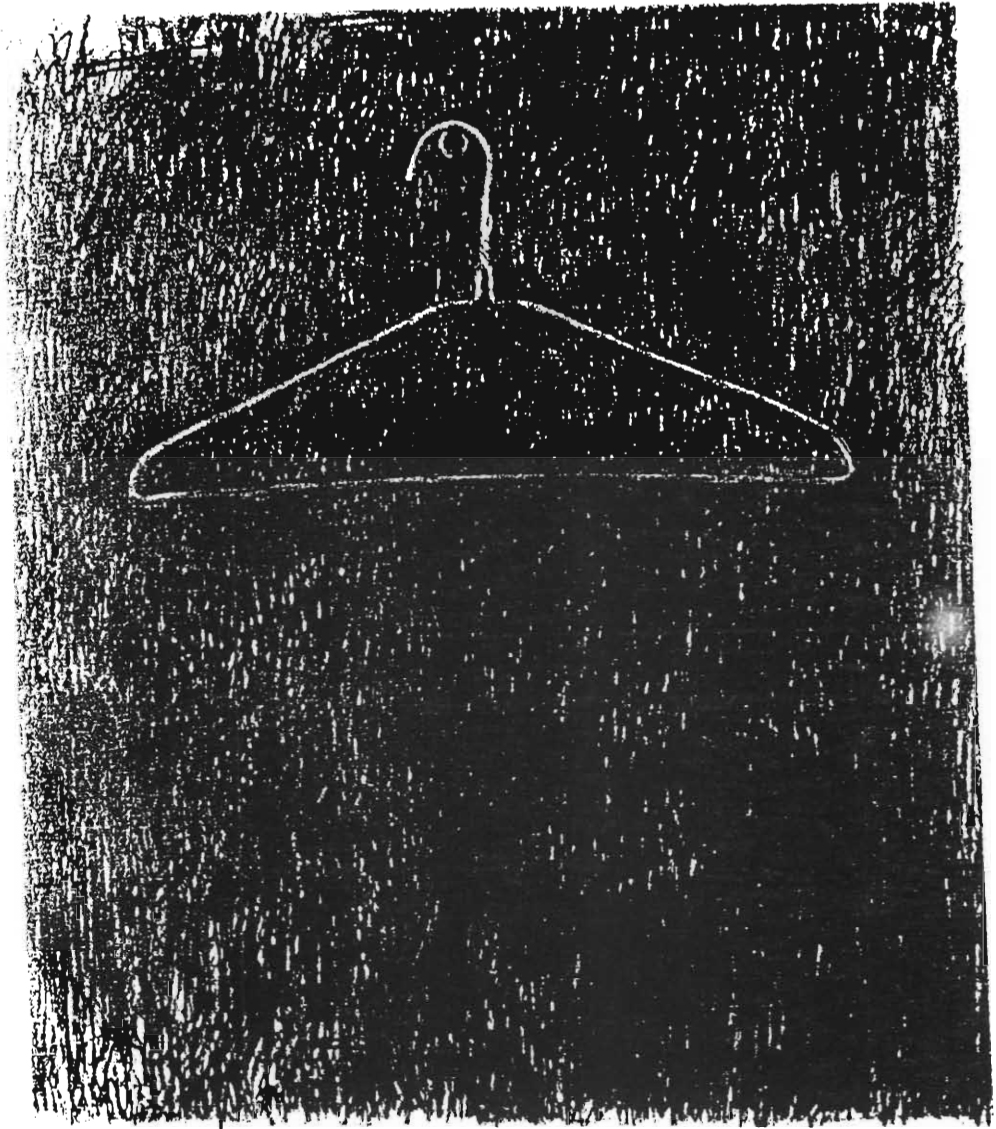


fig 4 Jasper Johns, Coat Hanger, 1958, crayon on paper with coat hanger, 62.3 x 54.9 cm, collection: Mr. and Mrs. William Easton

suggest that he preferred to keep his artistic identity unfixed. His artistic identity has less to do with his personality than with the associations attached to objects from the environment. This perspective is reinforced by Rosenberg who declares that Coat Hanger

is a public declaration that the artist prefers the identity of an anonymous, commercial object to his own. Coat Hanger is an idealised self portrait of Johns as Mr. Anything". (1985:137).

Steinberg testifies that Johns told him that his aim was to totally remove himself from his artworks. "He wants his pictures ... to be objects alone" (Rosenberg 1985:137). It was possibly this emotionally detached approach to making art that prompted Fairfield Porter to ask of Johns "[w]hat does he love, what does he hate?" (Kozloff 1973:51).

According to this view then, Johns' works can be considered as objects among other objects in the world. Johns' works easily achieve this 'object-ness' because they are already actual objects from the world i.e. flags, targets, and numbers. Furthermore Johns' works assume 'object-ness' because he does not impose his creativity upon them in a way that would suggest they are to be treated as artworks rather than as objects.

These observations indicate that Johns did not want to intrude upon his subject-matter by imposing his ego upon his objects. He preferred rather, to transcend his subjectivity and to view "the things around him as objects which exist matter-of-factly among other objects within the continuity of the world" (Hermann 1977:26). Johns' clarifies his intentions when he declares that

I have attempted to develop my thinking in such a way that the work I've done is not me - not to confuse my feelings with what I produced. I didn't want my work to be an exposure of my feelings. Abstract-Expressionism was so lively - personal identity and painting were more or less the same, and I tried to operate the same way. But I found I couldn't do anything that would be identical with my feelings. So I worked in such a way that I could say that it's not me. (Raynor 1973:22).

Johns and Rauschenberg's incorporation of commonplace objects into the context of painting suggests the influence of Duchamp's 'readymades'. The removal of a commonplace object, like a coat hanger or a urinal, from its original functional context and its introduction into an art context detracts from its status as a commodity and raises serious questions concerning the identity of the art object and the identity of the artist.

The use of such objects within an art context reinforces the idea that Johns and Rauschenberg refute 'action' painting's fixed definition of the artist as 'master painter', or 'creator', and brings them closer to postmodernism by suggesting an alternative definition. Amelia Jones explains

that beginning with the generation of John Cage, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, and continuing to this day, artists and critics have perceived the readymade as an authorisation for at least two postmodern preoccupations: redefining the artist as one who chooses or names the work of art rather than one who invents or "creates" it; and unveiling the status of the art object as a commodity, produced and distributed within an institutional framework that is very much like any other marketplace. (Joselit 1994:35).

Johns and Rauschenberg's refusal to express their personality in their work is facilitated by their appropriation of commonplace objects and imagery from the environment. They also 'attack' the expressive means of 'action' painting. In Flag, Johns makes use of all over gestural brushstrokes yet he empties the gesture of its significance by turning the brushstrokes into a kind of mannerism. This, along with his use of the primary colours, disallows any emotive reading of the artwork. The divesting of the gesture of emotive content is taken to its climax in Rauschenberg's Factum I and Factum II (1957) (fig.5).

In Factum I and Factum II, Rauschenberg comments on the 'baggage' that the gesture accumulated in the hands of 'action' painters during the 1950s, as the vehicle of emotional content. The composition of Factum I and Factum II is based on repetition. Each element in Factum I has been duplicated in Factum II. These elements include photographs of trees, calendars, photos of a burning building,

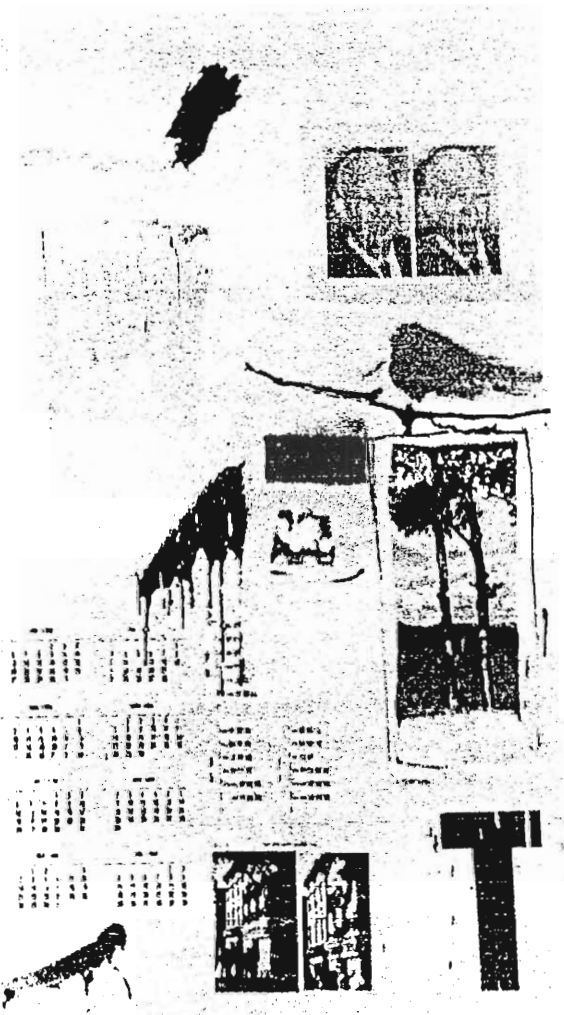


fig 5 Robert Rauschenberg, Factum I, 1957, oil and paper on canvas, 156.2 x 90.8 cm, collection: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

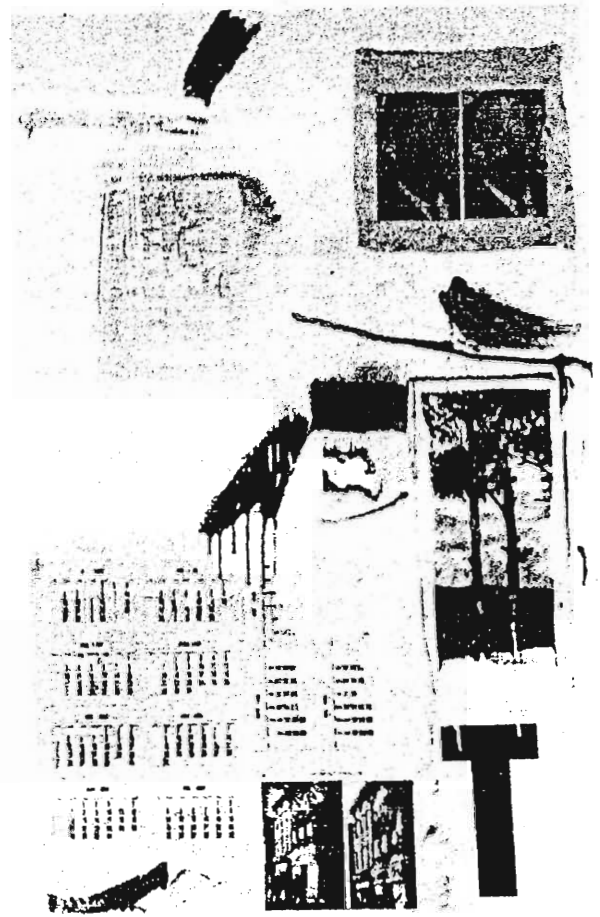


fig 5a Robert Rauschenberg, Factum II, 1957, oil and paper on canvas, 157.5 x 90.2 cm, collection: Morton G. Neumann

and a portrait of President Eisenhower.

The duplication of these images, along with the replication of painted brushmarks, has no effect unless the paintings are viewed together. The replication, especially of the painted brushmarks, evokes questions concerning the issues of spontaneity and 'accident' in art as opposed to intention and planning. Furthermore, in the presence of the duplicated image, the duplicated brushmarks read equally as fact, in the same way that the trees or the portrait of Eisenhower are facts. This further denies the gesture an emotive reading.

The two Factum paintings undermine the notion of unique individuality in Abstract Expressionism by showing that the gesture can be duplicated. Rauschenberg explained: "The point was to see what the difference could be between the emotional content of one and the other ... I couldn't tell the difference after I painted them!" (Fineberg 1995:179).

Factum I and Factum II can also be considered as a reaction on Rauschenberg's part against Rosenberg's theory that communication in a painting resides in the gesture, which is an unmeasurable entity. Johns and Rauschenberg's reaction against the expressive means of 'action' painting anticipates the belief of some postmodernists who claim that

'expression' elevates the artistic style, trace or brushmark to a position of importance which it cannot in reality possess - since there can be no guarantee that the brushmarks of the artist give an *accurate* account of the state of his inner mind or character. (Taylor 1987:46).

Similar concerns regarding the expressive means of 'action' painting are expressed by Greenberg in the article 'How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name' (1962). Greenberg submits that if, as Rosenberg suggests, the gestures of 'action' painters consist purely of "autobiographical meaning" (1962:67), there can presumably be no justification for the acquisition of these works by other people. Additionally, Greenberg claims there can be no method for qualitatively differentiating between

two or more different works. (1962:67).

Greenberg's concerns regarding the author/artist function are echoed in Foucault's postmodern theories.⁹ Taylor explains that

we have no adequate method for identifying 'the work' of the author or artist in the first place; for how do we distinguish between his 'genuine' work of art and what Foucault calls the 'millions of traces left by someone after his death' - his notes, his erasures, his private letters, his doodles or even his laundry lists? (1987:47).

Greenberg voices similar concerns regarding the function of the artist in 'action' painting when he asserts that

Mr. Rosenberg did not explain why the painted left-overs of "action," which were devoid of anything but autobiographical meaning in the eyes of their own makers, should be exhibited by them and looked at and even acquired by others. (1962:67).

Greenberg's criticisms, however, derive more from his concerns with 'quality' than with 'action' painting's reliance on the gesture as the conveyor of expression in painting. Johns and Rauschenberg's denial of this anticipates a postmodern concern that this notion is ideologically unsound. Taylor explains that

Above all, the humanist and modernist concept of 'expression' has come under attack from virtually every side. 'Expression' assumes, according to the argument, the very distinction between the 'inner' and 'outer' mind that characterised the old bourgeois humanist conception of the subject as an autonomous a-social being. (Taylor 1987:46).

A similar view is held by Lyotard. For Lyotard the decline of the modern period is

linked to the decline of objects, which can no longer be opposed, as before, to a shaping subject. The dissolution of the object into complexes of microelements, or interactive energy states, marks the end of the dualisms that gave security to the Modern self. (Linker 1995:104).

Kate Linker explains that

⁹ Foucault's theories are described in this research as postmodern rather than poststructuralist. Poststructuralism forms part of the matrix of postmodern theory, and while the theoretical breaks described as postmodern are directly related to poststructuralist critiques, we shall interpret poststructuralism as a subset of a broader range of theoretical, cultural, and social tendencies which constitute postmodern discourses. (Best and Kellner 1991:25)

Hence, poststructuralist theories are included within the category 'postmodernism'.

it is in this manner, Lyotard suggests, that new technologies force us to reconsider the very notion of creative endeavor. For the loss of matter as a palpable medium subverts the Modern concept of production, which implies both an origin, or author, and a finality, or product. (1995:104).

Hence, Lyotard proposes a "decentering of the self" (Linker 1995:104) because "Without the self as center all is interchangeable, for man is a part of, rather than apart from the reality he once controlled" (Linker 1995:104).

It is precisely this 'interchangeable' relative definition of identity proposed by Lyotard that Johns and Rauschenberg pre-empt in their artworks of the 1950s. Johns and Rauschenberg anticipate these postmodern strategies - like those of Foucault and Lyotard - and offer these perspectives as an alternative to the fixed, exclusive definition of the artist as a privileged, autonomous entity, that was proposed by Rosenberg in his descriptions of 'action' painting.

CHAPTER 3

Art as a Reflection of Life

During the 1950s and 1960s in America, Greenberg and Cage formulated two distinct functions for art¹⁰. Greenberg's beliefs regarding the function of art are a consequence of the definitions that he provides for modernism. Greenberg declares that "[t]he essence of modernism lies ... in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself" (Risatti 1990:12).

In the same way that Kant uses logic to establish the limits of logic, Greenberg asserts that "Modernism criticises from the inside, through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticised" (Risatti 1990:12). The nature of such a self-examination is necessarily exclusive as it entails an 'elimination' of those conventions which are not deemed essential to painting.

Cage's belief concerning the function of art was that art should "change ways of seeing [and hearing], to open up one's eyes to just seeing what there was to see" (Sandler 1978:164). For Cage, the purpose of art is

a purposeless play [which] however, is an affirmation of life - not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord. (Sandler 1978:166-167).

The significance of Cage's proposals as an inclusive alternative to Greenberg's own definition of art is highlighted by Rose who suggests that

Cage's own definition of art as a kind of revolutionary behaviour ... was particularly attractive to the radical younger generation, many of whom interpreted Greenberg's insistence on quality as an attempt to impose an official authoritarian canon in the form of a rigorous definition of the limits, which quickly seemed the rules, of art. (1980:110).

¹⁰ In 1961, Greenberg's influential collection of essays entitled Art and Culture, and Cage's book entitled Silence, were published.

In this quote, Rose implies that Cage's definition of art presented an alternative to any artist who may have felt that Greenberg's definition of modernism was too restrictive, too limiting, and too pervasive.

Cage's proposals, based on an inclusive function for art, imply a broadening of the narrow, fixed definition of Greenberg's formalist account of modernism. Cage's influence upon Johns and Rauschenberg (most notably Rauschenberg) is significant in that certain of their works from the 1950s and 1960s propagate his proposal of an inclusive function for art by undermining Greenberg's proposal of a 'self-criticism' in painting which resulted in an exclusive function for art.

The denial by Johns and Rauschenberg of the expression of subjectivity in painting was shared with Cage. Uninterested in the expression of the artist's inner life and its emotional content, Cage was more interested in aspects of the exterior world, those things that are experienced by the senses (Sandler 1978:164).

The focus upon images and events from the every day physical environment as the primary source for painting as opposed to the expression of personality is qualified by Rauschenberg who explains that

Painting is always strongest when in spite of composition, color etc. it appears as a fact, or an inevitability, as opposed to a souvenir or arrangement. Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.) (Fineberg 1995:179).

Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrate his efforts to work in the 'gap between art and life'.¹¹ Irving Sandler asserts that "Cage's theorizing about commonplace objects, images, and events was a stimulus in the creation of the combine-paintings" (1978:177). It was Cage, however, who noted that Rauschenberg's works "remind us of a multiplicity of events in time and space" (Sandler 1978:177). This observation was possibly prompted by the multiplicity of objects and materials from the environment that are displayed in the 'combine'

¹¹According to Diane Waldman, Rauschenberg coined the term 'combine' "to differentiate his paintings from more traditional collage and assemblage ..." (1992:252).

paintings.

Rebus (1955) (fig.6) for example, is a three-panel combine connected by a profusion of collaged, painted, and textured elements. These include objects such as posters, comics, magazine photos, art reproductions, pieces of cloth etc. which are woven together by a tapestry of gestural painting reminiscent of 'action' painting.

The multiplicity in the 'combine' paintings results from the combination of unrelated objects that have been gathered from diverse sources in the environment. Sandler asserts that

[t]his multiplicity can be considered the essential content of the combine-paintings, and they provide viewers with ways of perceiving and experiencing their environment. (1978:177).

If this is so then Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings epitomise Cage's belief that the function of art is

to reveal to people the immensities of the changes taking place in their lives so that they could be "free to enter into the miraculous new field of human awareness that is opening up". (Sandler 1978:167).

Referring to the multiplicity in the 'combine' paintings, Alloway comments that "[f]rom 1955 Rauschenberg's art proposes an aesthetic of heterogeneity in which divergent parts retain clear evidence of their scattered origins" (1976:5). The heterogenous nature of Rauschenberg's 'combine paintings' has links to Cage's interpretation of Zen Buddhism's notion that

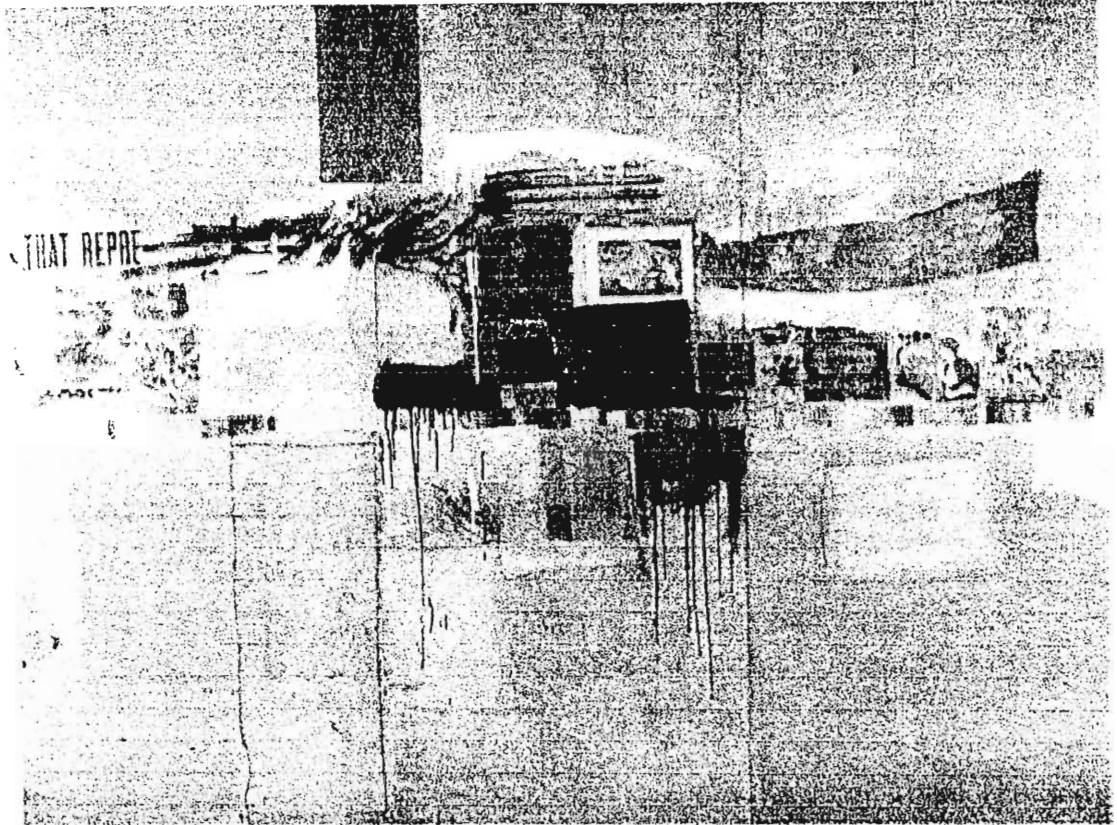
Everything and everybody ... is the Buddha. These Buddhas are all, every single one of them, at the center of the Universe. And they are all in interpenetration, and they are not obstructing one another. (Sandler 1978:167).¹²

According to Sandler, Cage understood this to mean that

"every material or sound here and now is valid in itself" (1978:167).

¹² Sandler comments that

Cage began to study Oriental philosophy in 1945, during a crisis in his life, at which time he looked to Zen rather than to psychoanalysis for the solution of personal problems. (1978:167).



**fig 6 Robert Rauschenberg, Rebus, 1955, oil, pencil, paper,
fabric on canvas, 243.9 x 331.4 x 4.5 cm, collection: Hans Thulin**

The belief that each element is equally valid is implied in Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings and results from the heterogenous nature of these pictures. Heterogeneity occurs in the 'combine' paintings because Rauschenberg does not impose himself upon the objects by altering them or arranging them according to a principle focus. Hence each object is its own centre and valid in its own right. Alloway attributes Rauschenberg's use of multiple, "almost unassimilable objects" to "a desire for partial decontrol" (1976:5).

Rauschenberg's use of heterogeneity in a work like Rebus approximates Cage's use of the I Ching coins as both are devices which enable the artist to divest his work of the controlling influence of personal judgements.¹³ Cage explains his subsequent use of I Ching coins to compose music through the operations of chance:

Therefore [beginning in 1950] the use of chance operation, indeterminacy ... the non-erection of patterns of either ideas or feelings on my part in order to leave those other centers free to be the centers. (Sandler 1978:167).

The incorporation of multiple images and objects from diverse origins within the same work not only results in heterogeneity, it also illustrates the eclectic nature of Rauschenberg's work. Rauschenberg's attitude towards the object is clarified when he asserts that "There is no poor subject". Rauschenberg declares, "[a] pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting than wood, nails, turpentine, oil and fabric (Wheeler 1991:127).

The issues of figuration and three-dimensional illusion, the denial of which is central to Greenberg's definition of modernism (1963:18) are also pertinent to this examination of Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings. Greenberg explains that

The task of self criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered

¹³ The throwing of I Ching coins was Cage's method of composing music along the lines of Zen. Cage explains that "The moment I opened the book [I Ching, The Book of Changes] and saw the charts and hexagrams which were used for obtaining oracles according to the tossing of coins...I saw a connection with the charts I had been using on my Concerto for Prepared Piano. (Bither 1980:52).

'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. (Risatti 1990:13).

Only optical elements unique to painting, such as flatness are permitted according to Greenberg's definition. Greenberg describes how

[i]t was the stressing, however, of the ineluctable flatness of the support that remained most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism ... Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else. (Risatti 1990:13).

According to Greenberg the elements of figuration and three-dimensional illusion are common to both the disciplines of sculpture and theatre and are thus strictly proscribed (Risatti 1990:14). The essence of modernism, for Greenberg, lies in the elimination of 'expendable' conventions such as figuration and three-dimensional illusion. Greenberg elaborates:

It seems to be a law of modernism - thus one that applies to almost all art that remains truly alive in our time - that the conventions not essential to the viability of a medium be discarded as soon as they are recognised. (1973:208).

Figuration, which appears in objects such as the postcards and photographs that are displayed in Rebus are thus considered 'impure' according to Greenberg's definition. This is because they deny flatness (which is a defining feature of modernism) by suggesting pictorial depth by means of three-dimensional illusion.

Greenberg explains that

Realistic, illusionistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting - the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment - were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly. (Risatti 1990:13).

These issues of representation, illusion, and flatness are central to the functioning of Johns' art. The flag in Flag is an inherently flat object that exists in the world. The sense of composition is abolished because the boundaries of the canvas are identical with the boundaries of the image. The only basis for formal interpretation

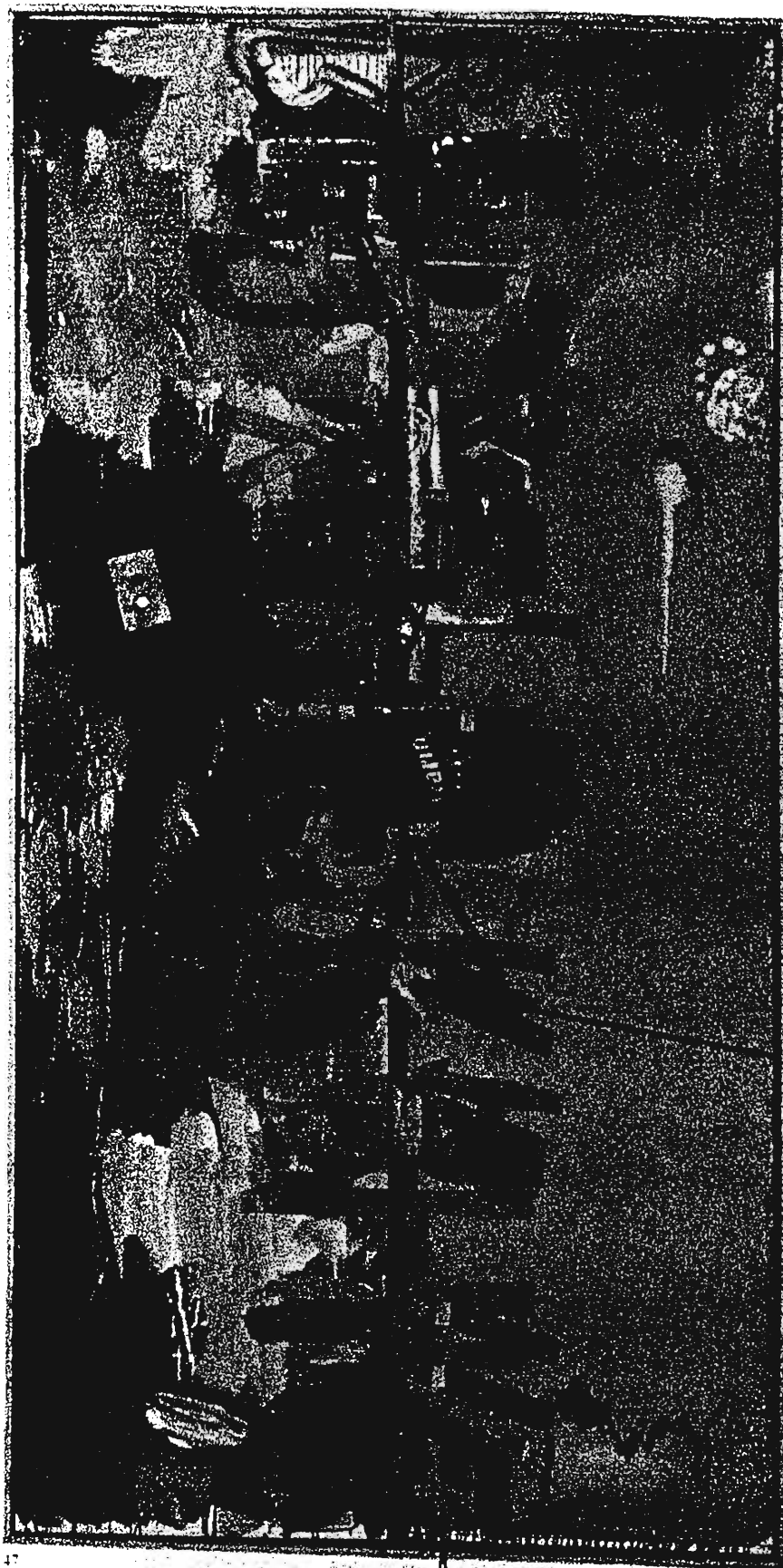
is the treatment of the surface. This object which is literal enough to be a flag has been rendered in a painterly fashion with artistic materials. Because of the prominence of the painted surface the flag oscillates between object and work of art, between being a thing that is presented and something which is represented. Johns sets up an ironic situation in Flag as it oscillates between painting and object, art and reality. The effect of this irony is summed up by Johns who says that he recalls: "Somebody said, 'It's not a flag, it's a painting'. But that's not what I meant. It's not a painting, it's a flag" (Alloway 1974:69).

Similar ironies occur in works such as Field Painting (1963-64) (fig.7). Field Painting features three-dimensional letters which are hinged onto a flat painted surface. The moveable letters are able to lie flat against the painted surface upon which an image of their imprint has been painted. The conceptual nature of letters and numbers is contradicted by the solid three-dimensionality of the letters. Johns implies the imprints of words but then obstructs these by adding actual objects to the letters. The juxtaposition of three-dimensional letters with the flat imprints results in irony as it contradicts the two dimensional nature of letters. This is further compounded by the shadows of the three-dimensional letters that are cast upon the canvas.

The imprints of letters in Field Painting approximate a 'mirror image' of the three-dimensional letters which in turn are 'mirrored' by the shadows that they cast onto the canvas. Johns denies an exact 'mirror-image' between the hinged three-dimensional letter and painted letters by placing objects between them which obstruct or distort that 'mirror-image'.

Further ironies occur in Field Painting where words such as 'red' and 'yellow' do not correspond to the colours that they are painted in, for example the letters in the word 'red' are painted in a variety of colours from orange through to grey. Johns' interest in the relation of thought and language to the world of objects recalls the language games played by Ludwig Wittgenstein:

You really get such a queer connexion ... when the philosopher tries



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fig 7 Jasper Johns, Field Painting, 1963-64, oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 93.3 cm, collection: the artist

to bring out the relation between name and thing For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*. And here we may indeed fancy naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of an object. (Fineberg 1995:214).

Wittgenstein comments that "[t]he use of the word *in practice* is its meaning. Imagine it were the usual thing that the objects around us carried labels with words" (Fineberg 1995:214). Johns applies this approach directly to Field Painting and to works such as Jubilee (1959) (fig.8) and False Start (1959) (fig.9) where a 'mislabelling' occurs. This mislabelling occurs because the colours of painted words do not correspond to the colour that they refer to. This is especially pertinent in Jubilee which is painted for the most part in black and white.

The comparison between Johns and Wittgenstein's theories is significant because

Wittgenstein's notion of language games seems to offer a theoretical heuristic appropriate to postmodernity because it stresses the simultaneously parochial and rule-bound nature of social activities. (Boyne and Rattansi 1990: 18).

Much in the same way that Wittgenstein's language games insinuate a "repudiation of the metanarrative"¹⁴, (Boyne and Rattansi 1990: 18) Johns' exploration of the semiotics of the art object suggest a rejection of the exclusive, fixed definition of painting proposed by Greenberg.

This attitude anticipates Lyotard's postmodern attitude which is characterised by an "incredulity towards all statements which make out that things have to be done in a particular way, and that way only" (Boyne and Rattansi 1990:17).¹⁵ The suggestion that Johns' works have no single meaning is a rejection of an 'either/or' syndrome:

When John Cage published Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas in 1964 he put the dissenting point of view in two short sentences: "The situation must be Yes-and-No not either-or. *Avoid a polar situation.*"

¹⁴ A repudiation of metanarratives can be described in the following manner:

The grand discourses of Western society, which is to say all of the legitimating narratives which purport to provide valid and definitive principles, in any sphere, applicable across all societies, can now be seen to be defunct. (Boyne and Rattansi 1990:16).

¹⁵ Lyotard provides the following as examples of metanarratives: "'the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, the creation of wealth'...." (Boyne and Rattansi 1990:16).



**fig 8 Jasper Johns, Jubilee, 1959, oil and collage on canvas,
152.4 x 111.8 cm, collection: private**



fig 9 Jasper Johns, False Start, 1959, oil on canvas, 170.8 x 137.2 cm, collection: private

(Russell 1981:336).

The warning to 'avoid a polar situation' is Johns'. Johns' attitude implies that the process of making art should be inclusive rather than exclusive. Avoiding polar situations requires avoiding situations where one point of view is seen as absolutely right and another is seen as absolutely wrong, and where there is no middle ground. Rather, let it be a situation that allows both possibilities.

The irony in works such as False Start and Jubilee is further compounded by Johns' use of stencilled letters. This irony is achieved because the build-up of paint of the stencilled letter gives the letter a sculpted contour so that the letter becomes an object rather than a painted representation. The 'mirror-image' effect is further emphasised by the imprints of Johns' hands in Diver (1962) (fig.10). The imprints of Johns' hands are on top of the surface of the canvas which implies his presence in front of the picture plane in the space of the viewer. This device satisfies the criterion of flatness which is central to Greenberg's definition of modernism. Greenberg explains that

It is not in principle that Modernist painting in its latest phase has abandoned the representation of recognizable objects. What it has abandoned in principle is the representation of the kind of space that recognizable, three-dimensional objects can inhabit. (Risatti 1990:14).

Although Johns provides a representation of his hands by means of the imprints he does not do this at the expense of flatness. This is because the hands are not illusionistically rendered, which would create the impression of a three-dimensional space behind the picture plane. In fact, because the hands are imprints in paint, they emphasise the element of flatness by drawing attention to the plasticity of the medium. Johns stresses that this is paint on canvas which is further emphasised by the suggested motions of the diver's hands which are tracked through the paint over the surface of the canvas.

Diver illustrates how Johns was able to incorporate representation into abstract painting without contravening Greenberg's insistence on flatness. The charcoal image of the artist's face and hands imprinted upon the paper in Study for Skin I

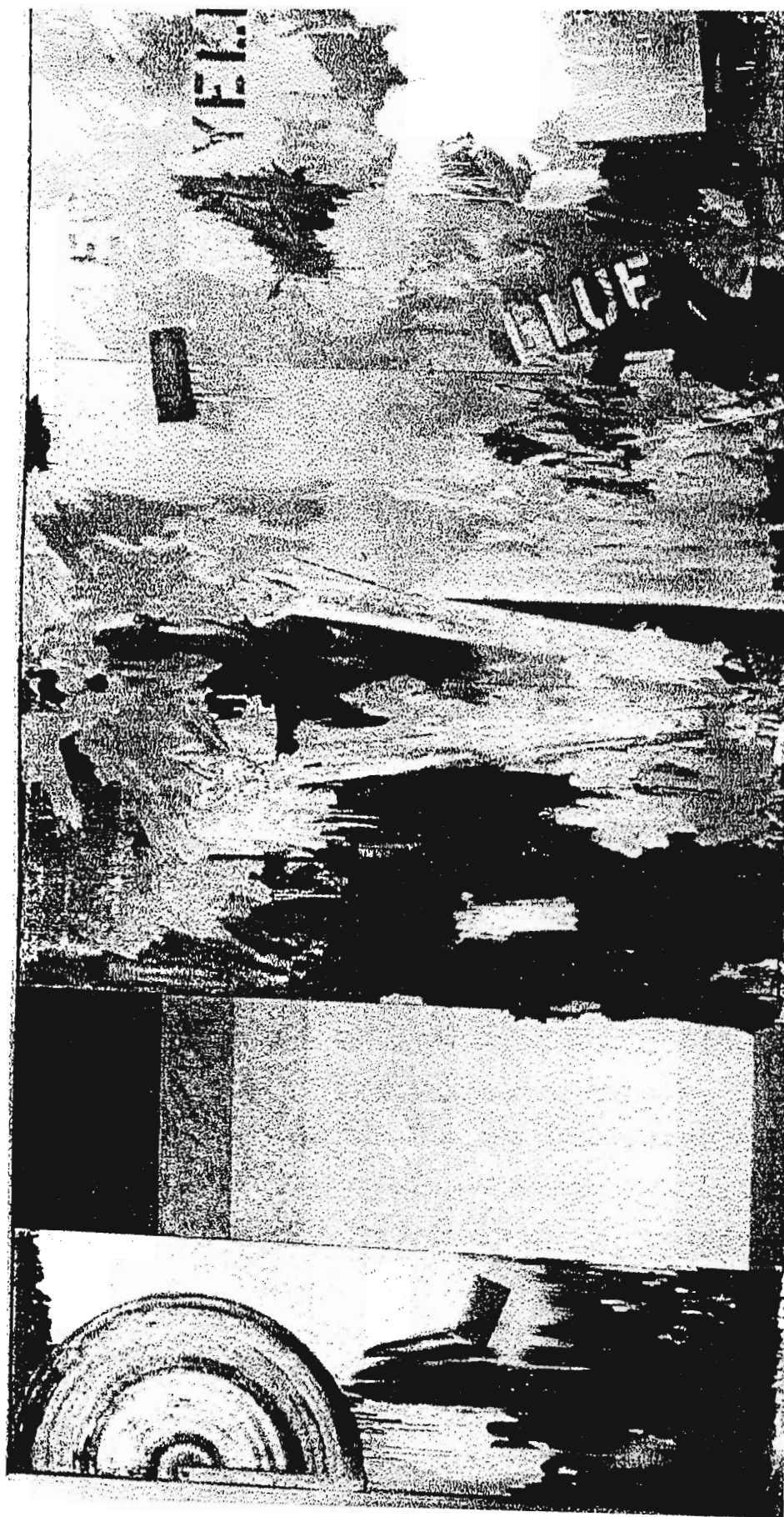


fig 10 Jasper Johns, Diver, 1962, oil on canvas with objects,
228.6 x 431.8 cm, collection: Norman and Irma Bramen

(1962) (fig. 11) presents an almost opposite point of view to that of Diver. The representation of Johns' face and hands are the result of 'rubbing' over the objects (face and hands) which are behind the paper, as in frottage. The resulting image creates the impression that Johns is behind the picture plane looking out at the viewer.

It can be argued that Study for Skin I represents a form of figuration which infers three-dimensional representation. This serves to "alienate pictorial space from two-dimensionality which is the guarantee of painting's independence as an art" (Greenberg 1963: 14). Even though Johns' face and hands are not illusionistically rendered (as in an Old Master's painting) they can still be regarded as representations which infer the existence of the artist in the actual space behind the picture plane. Although Johns does not construct this space by means of perspective, as an Old Master might, it is by inference that the recognisable objects in Study for Skin I - Johns' face and hands - inhabit a three-dimensional space behind the paper. Thus Johns adheres to Greenberg's principles as he does not 'represent' the space in which three-dimensional objects exist yet he tests the limits of those principles by inferring that kind of space.

The attachment of three dimensional objects to the surface of the canvas, such as the letters in Field Painting further stresses the notion of flatness as the defining feature of modernism. The emphasis of this flatness through the incorporation of three-dimensional objects is evident in works such as Johns' Painting with Two Balls (1960) (fig. 12) which literally shows the existence of space behind the canvas. The work consists of three painted panels, the top two being separated by two wooden spheres that have been centrally inserted between the panels. Gaps are left so that the wall behind can be seen. The literal penetration of the picture plane ensures that the closed world of the picture is penetrated. Although the picture space is penetrated it is not achieved by illusionistic means (through the use of perspective). Steinberg explains that

Johns eliminates this residue of double dealing in modern painting. Since his picture plane is to be flat, nothing is paintable without



fig 12 Jasper Johns, Painting with Two Balls, 1960, encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 165.1 x 137.2 cm, collection: the artist

make-believe but what is flat by nature. And if for some reason he wants something 3-D, let the artist insert the thing, or a cast of it. (1972:42)

In this way Johns infuses his work with objects from life, a means which is shared with Rauschenberg whose work also features objects, such as a book in Hymnal, or a clock, bottles, or a playing radio. Rauschenberg also incorporates three dimensional elements and objects in Canyon (1959) (fig.13) where a pillow is suspended horizontally from the lower frame. Objects such as the pillow and the stuffed eagle call attention to the space beyond and in front of the picture. The objects also literally connect the artwork to the reality of life by making use of the 'real' space which the viewer inhabits.

Bed (1955) (fig.14) is probably Rauschenberg's most literal example of this function. It demonstrates his policy of appropriating even the most banal objects from the environment for inclusion into painting. Bed is essentially an object from the environment onto which paint has been dribbled. The fact that it was hung on a wall may have elicited a two-dimensional reading which ensured that it is 'read' as a painting rather than as a sculpture. Bed essentially undergoes a transformation from an object of the world to an art object and back again. The fact that it was exhibited as an art object confers upon it the status of art, yet its identity oscillates between reality and the pictorial world thus affecting a closing of the gap between art and life.

Even though the incorporation of three-dimensional objects in the work of Johns and Rauschenberg serves to emphasise the flatness of the painted surface it also blurs the distinction between the disciplines of painting and sculpture. This undermines Greenberg's notion of the application of a Kantian self-criticism which entails "the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself - not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (Risatti 1990:12).

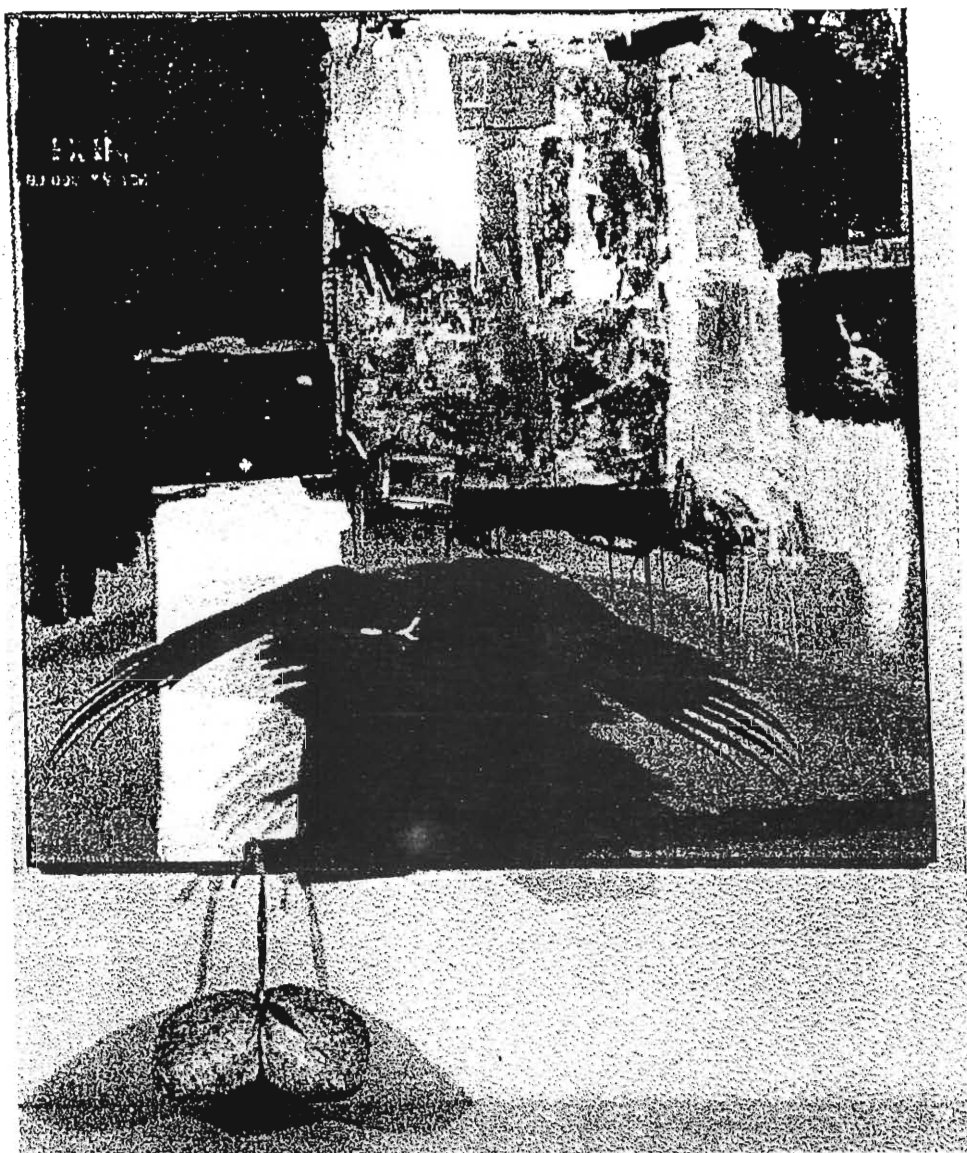


fig 13 Robert Rauschenberg, Canyon, 1959, oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, and wood on canvas with objects, 207.6 x 177.8 x 60.9 cm, collection: Ileana Sonnabend, New York

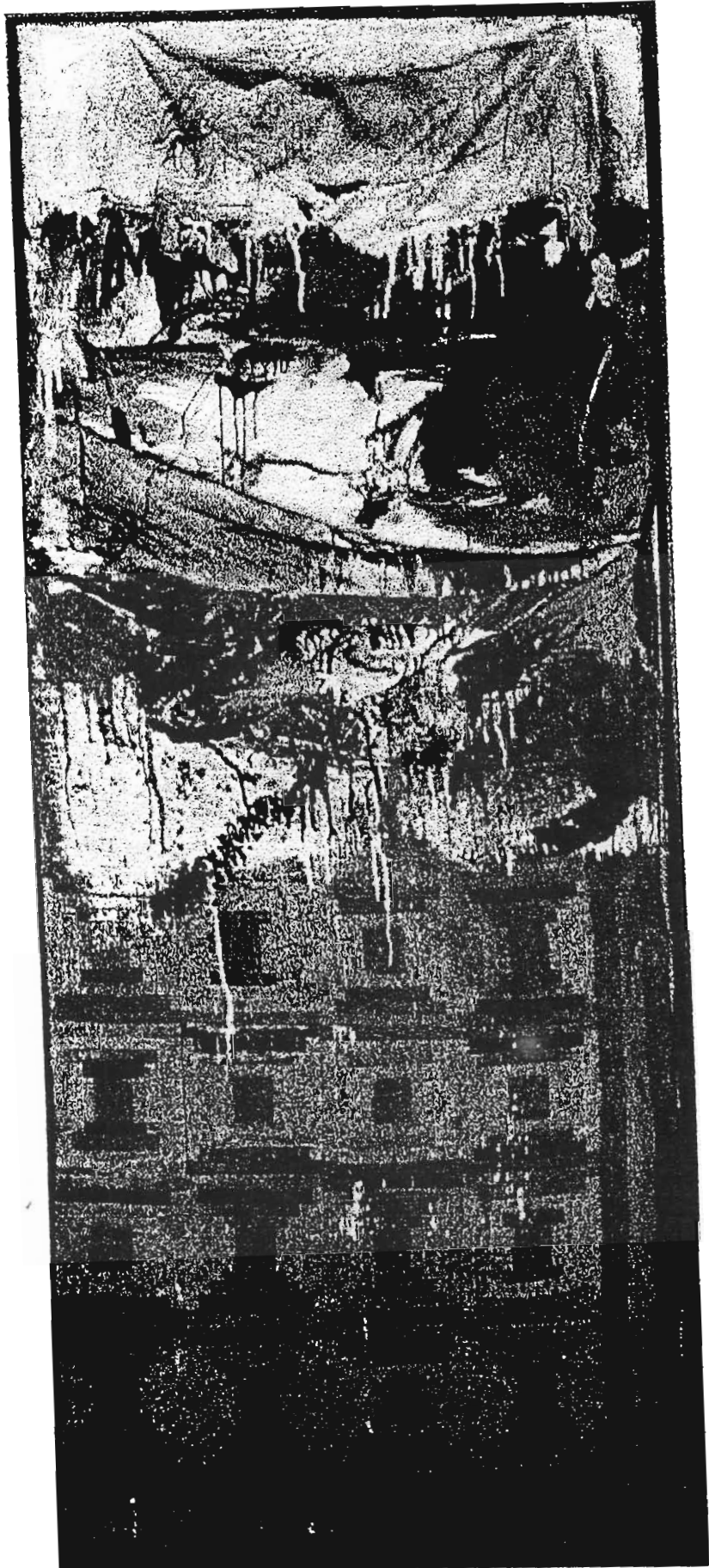


fig 14 Robert Rauschenberg, Bed, 1955, oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 1837.3 x 629.1 x 20.3 cm, collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Works such as Johns' Painted Bronze (1960) (fig. 15) or Rauschenberg's Bed can function simultaneously as three-dimensional paintings or painted sculpture. This is significant as it implies a broadening, or reopening of the narrow area in which abstract painters had to operate as a result of Greenberg's insistence on the strict separation of disciplines in pursuit of the 'essence' of painting.

The most obvious source for the appropriation of objects from the environment for the purposes of art must be Duchamp's notion of 'readymades'. The major point of departure, however, is Duchamp's iconoclastic, or nihilistic intentions which are absent in the work of Johns and Rauschenberg. Johns' Drawer (1957) (fig. 16) can be considered to be an extension of Duchamp's notion of the 'readymade' in that it is a commonplace object which is presented as a work of art. The difference, however, is that Drawer is not functional, a snow shovel is. By divesting Drawer of its functional capacity (it does not open) Johns draws attention to the paradoxical nature of paintings that are objects (and viceversa), rather than providing a nihilistic criticism of art as Duchamp had.

Although Johns and Rauschenberg's work has been likened to Dada in various sources (Steinberg 1972:23 and Wheeler 1991:131) their works suggest more positive intentions than the nihilism of Dada. Their works are closer in spirit to Cage's affirmation of life. Rauschenberg confirms that his work is not intended to shock people, as Duchamp's had, when he comments that "[p]eople and taste have to change, and people change their minds about what shocks them. That's why I don't consider shock as a possible ingredient in art" (Swenson 1963:66). Likewise, Johns' Painted Bronze reveals a deeper intention than iconoclasm. The status of the ale cans as commonplace objects from the environment ensures that they are static and familiar to the point of being visually inert or banal.

For Duchamp, 'selecting' a 'readymade', or taking an object from everyday life and putting it on a pedestal involves little or no effort, insisting on an art of the mind rather than mere manual skill. Johns, on the other hand, chooses the ale cans and subjects them to processes of manual labour that recalls the methodical, controlled

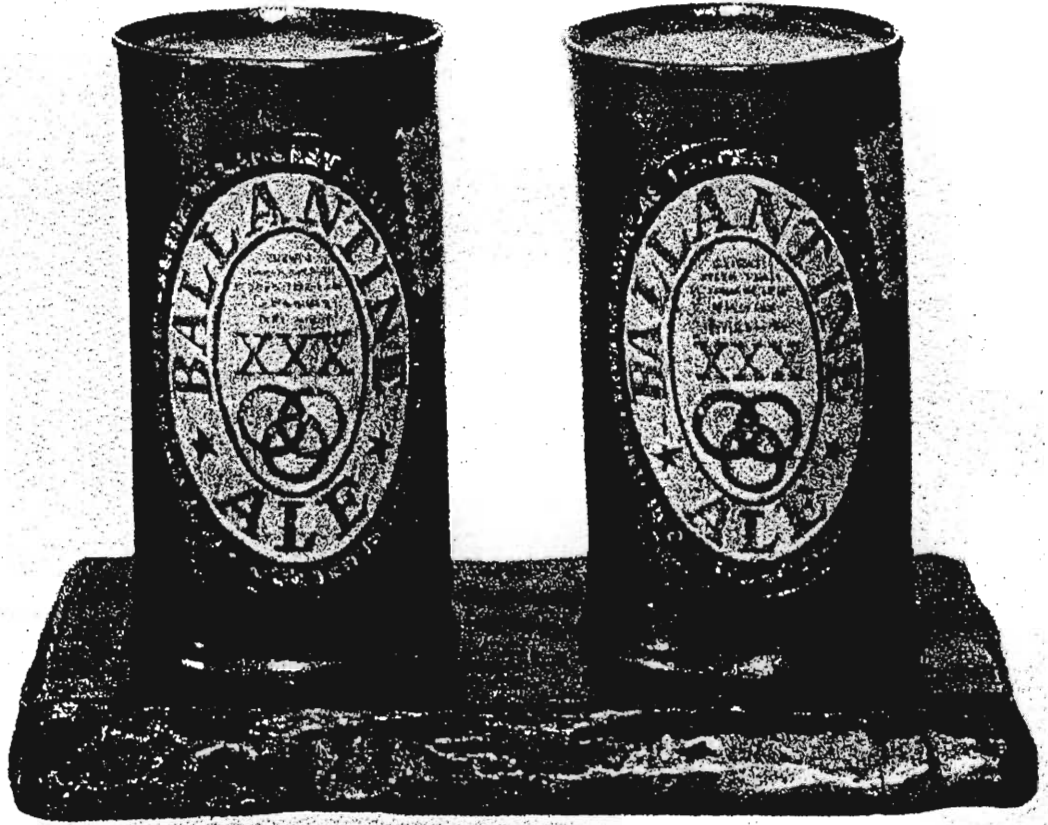


fig 15 Jasper Johns, Painted Bronze, 1960, painted bronze, 14 x 20.3 x 12.1 cm, collection: Ludwig Museum of Art, Cologne

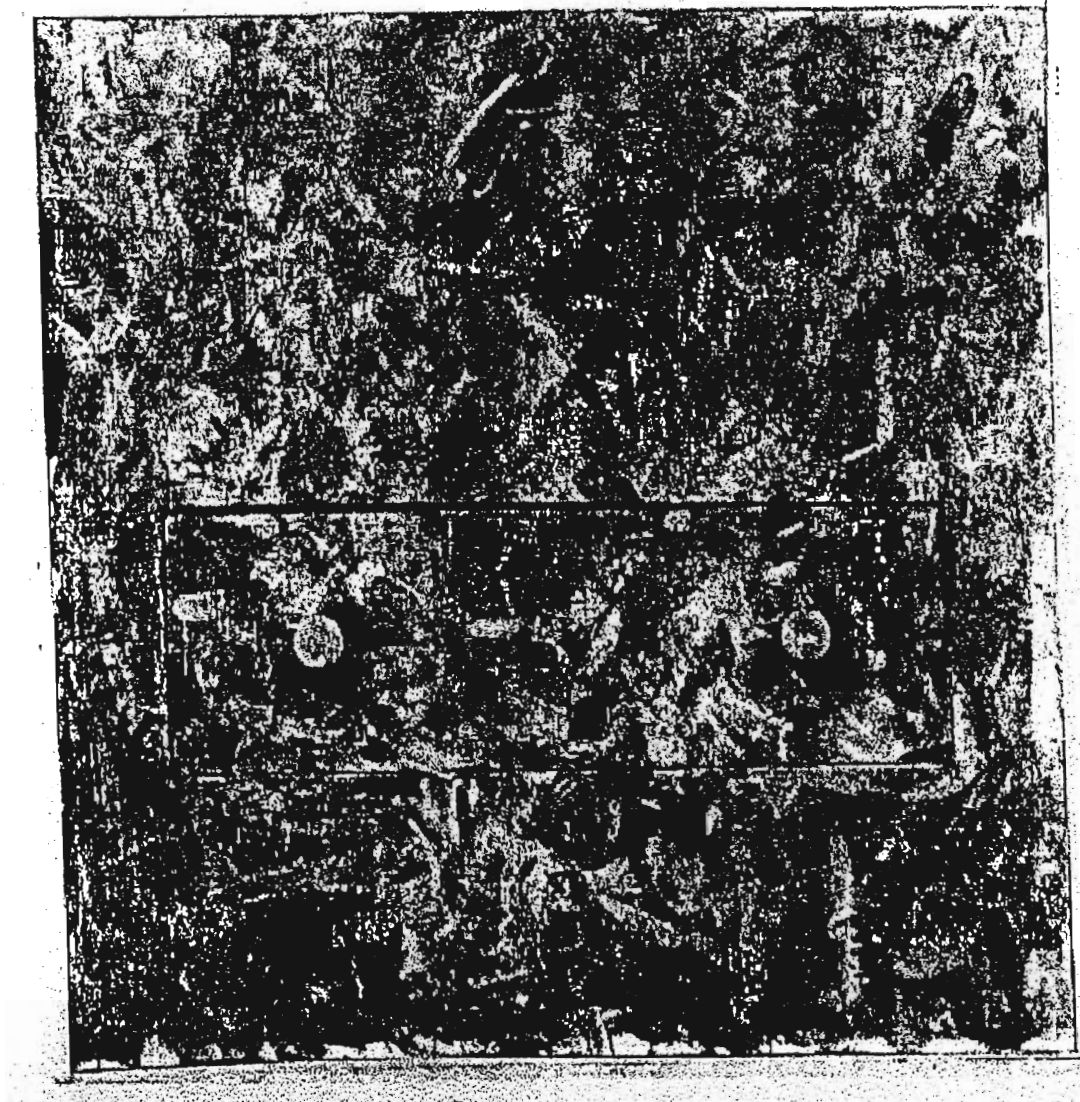


fig 16 Jasper Johns, Drawer, 1957, encaustic on canvas with objects, 77.5 x 77.5 cm, collection: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University

application of encaustic. The cans and base are modelled from scratch and cast in bronze, with all blemishes and imperfections preserved; the labels are hand-rendered accurately and studiously. Attention to detail extends to the depiction of different models of Ballentine cans; one is the Florida model and is slightly taller than the other.

Although Johns' three-dimensional objects recall Duchamp's 'readymades', they are different because of the manner in which Johns 'processes' them. Johns subjects his objects to traditional art procedures and methods like bronzing. The attention paid by Johns to the procedures of processing in his artworks, such as the preparations for casting, is also a major difference between Johns and Rauschenberg's work.

The objects in Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings, such as the Angora goat or a stuffed eagle are not 'processed' in the same way as Johns' objects. Rather, Rauschenberg's working method results from his use of unaltered objects or whole forms which limits the number of procedures required to constitute the artwork. By doing this, the original functions of the varying objects from divergent sources are clear in the final image.

Then he can modify the cluster of found images, working from a whole, as in the Erased de Kooning Drawing, 1953, in which he certainly began with a whole. The result is that the final works, though unified visually ... retain a certain separateness of the parts. It is essential to his aesthetic that this heterogeneity be preserved. (Alloway 1974:53).

The positive, affirming nature of Johns and Rauschenberg's work links them to Cage who acknowledges "this concern which interests us more than anything else: the blurring of the distinction between art and life" (Sandler 1978:167). This attitude enables Cage to

turn Dadaism's essentially negative attitude towards society into a positive one, accepting of what is, by introducing into his thinking ideas culled from Zen Buddhism, which did not much interest Duchamp. (Sandler 1978:167).

Greenberg's insistence on the reduction of painting to its essence by means of a 'self-criticism' narrowed the limits of art for painters to the expression of flatness. The inclusion of three-dimensional objects into the work of Johns and Rauschenberg implies a desire on their part to extend the boundaries of painting across the discipline of sculpture and into life.

Under Cage's influence the disciplines of painting, sculpture, and theatre were permitted to merge with the arena of life in performances, or 'happenings', in which both Johns and Rauschenberg took part.¹⁶ In 1952 Johns took part in Cage's Theater Piece #1. People read poetry while standing on ladders; Rauschenberg's White Painting hung overhead while he played Edith Piaf records; Merce Cunningham danced in and around the audience being chased by a barking dog; coffee was served by four boys in white; and Cage sat on a step ladder for two hours - either reading a lecture on the relation of music to Zen Buddhism or listening silently.

Cage's suggestion that the artist draw inspiration from the everyday environment and embrace contemporary life finds its ultimate expression in 'happenings'. It is a possibility that 'happenings' constitute the culmination of the attempts of Johns and Rauschenberg, under Cage and Duchamp's influence, to affect a reopening or broadening of the narrow and restrictive focus of modernism as stipulated by Greenberg. This is because 'happenings' are inclusive rather than exclusive; they cut across all the boundaries between disciplines by combining elements from painting, literature, sculpture, and the theatre, resulting in art that approaches life. All of these disparate elements brought together yet each is valid in its own right with no emphasis being placed on a single aspect at the expense of another.

Like Rauschenberg, who works in the "gap between art and life" (Hobhouse 1977:48), Johns' art also approaches life. Johns' participation in 'happenings' is

¹⁶ Rauschenberg was the artistic advisor to the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1954 to 1964. An example of one of Rauschenberg's productions is Nine Evenings (1966) in which he cast more than thirty engineers from Bell Labs in a complicated event comprising dance and technology inspired staging. Rauschenberg also founded Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.).

an example of how he moved, like Duchamp had, "through the retinal boundaries which had been established with Impressionism into a field where language, thought and vision acted upon one another" (Sandler 1978:170). It is the inclusive nature of 'happenings' that epitomises the spirit in which Johns and Rauschenberg made their art in the 1950s and 1960s as a reaction against the restrictive and exclusive definitions formulated by Greenberg in his account of modernism.

CHAPTER 4

The Viewer as Participant

One issue that both Rosenberg and Greenberg's theories have in common is that painting must be free from representational elements that refer to reality. Subsequently, their recommendations are that painting must be 'liberated' from these representational elements. This can be seen as an attempt to 'purify' painting by ensuring that it is self-referential and autonomous.

This 'purification' of painting, through a denial of representational elements, results in an exclusive viewer function - that of the artist as viewer. Robert Hughes sums up the problem when he asks "[c]an abstract art, elitist and demanding by nature, survive as anything but an historical event for an audience force-fed from birth on mass-media images?" (1996:56).

Hence, a viewer standing before an example of 'action' painting is inextricably linked with that which is viewed, i.e. artist as subject. The problem with this is that the modernist artist's personal style originates with him and thus only means something to him - it is a mark of the artist himself. The result is that the artist is the only person relevant to the interpretation of the work and, unless the viewer is aware of the artist's intentions, the meaning of the work can only be determined according to a subjective response. As a consequence the viewing function is transferred away from the viewer and to the artist.

The idea that modernism alienates the viewer is reinforced by Michael Leja who says the reason why Abstract Expressionism initially failed to attract a mass audience is that it was not understood by the public (1993:3). He maintains that 'lowbrow' audiences were largely unaware of it:

Only the 'highbrows' - members of urban literary and artistic circles and certain adventurous patrons and followers from the social, economic, and political elites - demonstrated any interest in or support for this art, and even their interest was articulated in terms that were often quite esoteric. (Leja 1993:3).

Leja goes as far to say that Abstract Expressionism was frequently reviled and mocked by 'middlebrow' audiences who could not identify with its esoteric nature and did not understand its recondite language of internal reference (1993:3). The alienation of the viewer in modernism is expressed by Robert Motherwell who says of modern painters:

Not able to identify with debased social values, they paint only for their colleagues, even if this is to condemn them to formalism remote from "a social expression in all its public fullness".... (Kozloff 1973:45).

The alienation of the public as viewers in the visual arts mirrors events in architecture. In The Language of Post-Modern Architecture (1984) Jencks distinguishes between a postmodern and a late-modern style in architecture. He defines postmodernism in architecture as that architecture which reacts against the International Style of modernism. He explains that postmodern architecture combines

Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects ... Modern architecture had failed to remain credible partly because it didn't communicate effectively with its ultimate users ... and partly because it didn't make effective links with the city and history. Thus the solution I perceived and defined as Post-modern: an architecture that was professionally based and popular as well as one that was based on new techniques and old patterns. Double coding to simplify means both elite/popular and new/old. (Jencks 1986:14).

In much the same way that modernism in the arts displayed elitist tendencies towards the viewer, International Style modernism had alienated the user, or inhabitant. Postmodern architecture can thus be seen as a response to the social failure of modern architecture - as a result of "cheap prefabrication, lack of personal 'defensible' space and the alienating housing estate" (Jencks 1986:15). Dual coding, identified by Jencks as a feature of postmodern architecture, is a device which enables the building to be appreciated by both the public and the architect. Essentially, this constitutes an attempt to deconstruct the elite/popular opposition in architecture. Similarly, selected works produced by Johns and

Rauschenberg during the 1950s and 1960s prompt a closing of the gap between art and the public in the visual arts. These works achieve this by enticing the viewer to participate in the creation of the artwork. Furthermore, they invite the viewer to participate in the work of art as a process. They demonstrate that the notion of relative definitions for artistic identity and an inclusive function for art extends equally to the function of the viewer. The result is the reinstatement of the viewing function back to the viewer.

Johns' Target with Four Faces (1955) (fig 17) is one such work. It displays the casts of four faces placed in boxes above a painted target. The faces are cut off at eye level leaving only the lower part of the nose and the mouth visible. The viewer is presented with a work composed of disparate elements which seems to have no fixed reading. Steinberg recalls asking, "[c]ould any meaning be wrung from it?" (1972:12).

David Sylvester, attempting to decipher Target with Four Faces, suggests that

We speak of a target as a "face"; this is a conventionalized face surmounted by real faces. But are these "real" faces so very much more like faces in reality that the targets are? ... The plaster faces have no more identity than masked faces ... If the target is there to be shot at, maybe the casts are there to be shot at: their absent eyes give them the look of men blindfolded before a firing squad. (Crichton 1994:90).

There are no obvious links between the target and the cast faces. There are also no clues suggesting the nature of the relationship between the elements that might aid in the interpretation of the work. Sylvester's explanation therefore requires a purely subjective response to the elements arranged before him.

The possibility for multiple readings of Target with Four Faces stems from its ambiguous nature. This ambiguity exists because Johns refuses to impose a fixed meaning upon the work. Crichton explains that ambiguity is achieved when an object is taken from its original context and introduced into a new unfamiliar context (1994:90).

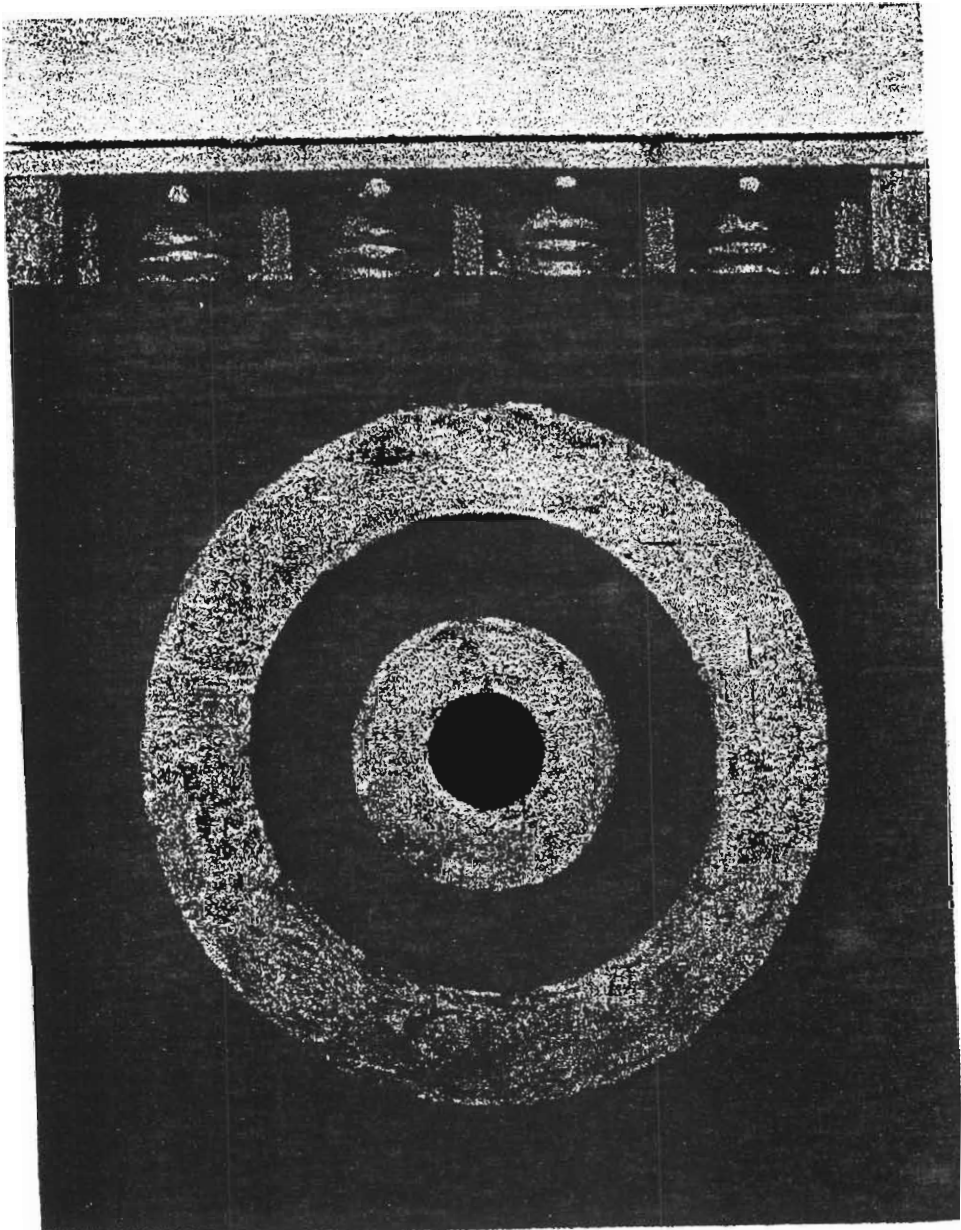


fig 17 Jasper Johns, Target with Four Faces, 1955, encaustic on newspaper over canvas with plaster casts, 85.3 x 66 x 7.6 cm, collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Hence, a painting of a target oscillates between representation and abstraction, between fixed meaning and floating meaning. The ambiguity allows the unconscious mind of the observers the freedom to play, or choose their own meanings. The target, a familiar image, becomes unfamiliar because it is out of place in a new setting, and because it is treated in a new way. It is up to the viewer to decide whether a target is a target (in the functional sense) or whether it is a representation of a target, or whether it functions as both simultaneously.

What is implicit as a consequence of ambiguity is that the function of the viewer as participant is crucial to the interpretation of a work by Johns. In Target With Four Faces Johns concedes to the spectator the right to determine the meaning of the work. Johns also provokes participation by closing some of the boxes with the added hinged flaps. This example is set by Duchamp who suggests that:

The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. (Alloway 1974:66).

Johns' Drawer is not only ambiguous in its meaning, but it also contains an element of paradox. Presumably, the viewer's natural response is to want to open the drawer. In this way Johns invites the physical participation of the viewer. However, the drawer is not functional and so the participation of the viewer on a physical level is denied. The suggestion is that of a space behind the picture frame. The paradox lies in the fact that the observer attempts to open the drawer in order to demonstrate what is already known - that there is no space behind the picture frame. Crichton observes that while Renaissance perspective suggests space beyond the canvas, Johns achieves this by enticing the literal participation of the viewer (1994:91).

Study for Skin also proposes that the position of the viewer is unfixed. The charcoal image gives the impression that the artist is behind the picture plane looking out at the viewer. Johns creates the impression of space behind the picture plane by suggesting his literal presence there. Actual viewer participation is also encouraged in works such as Field Painting where a light switch is provided for the

viewer to switch on or off. The hinged, moveable letters in Field Painting also invite viewer participation. Crichton observes that

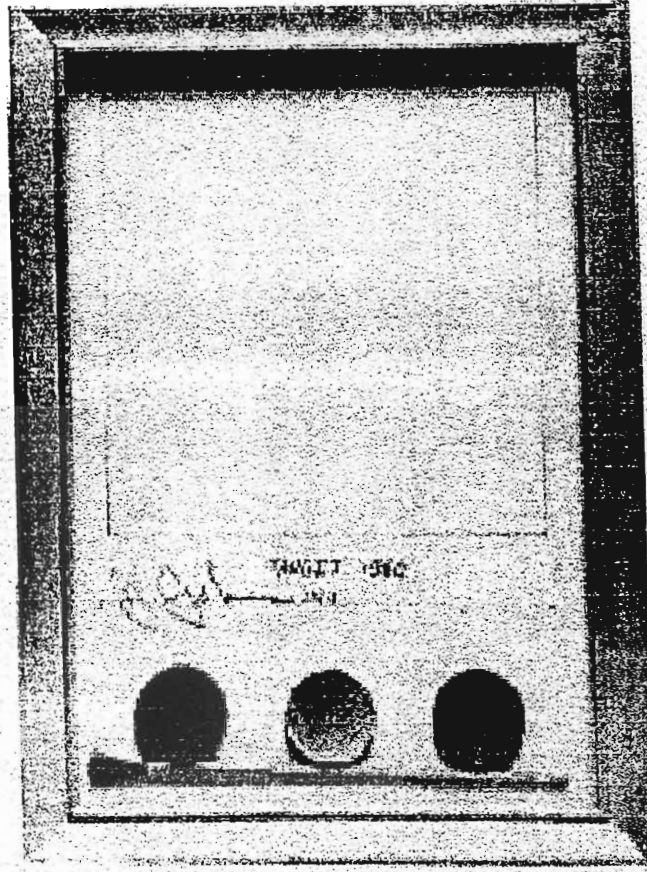
In earlier paintings, Johns was interested in having the observer move in relation to the picture; so why couldn't the elements of the painting move as well? Here they can - a relativistic situation in which the viewer's position and the painting can both change. The participation of the observer is directly implied - he can alter the shape of the work, with a touch of his hand. (1994:93).

The same applies to the hinged doors which conceal the plaster casts in works such as Target with Plaster Casts (1955) and Target with Four Faces. Johns takes actual viewer participation to its limit in Target (1960) (fig. 18) where he provides a blank sheet of paper and a pencil so that the viewer can complete the image. There is even a space alongside Johns' signature where the viewer may sign his name.

The unfixed position of the viewer is also implied in Fool's House (1962) (fig 19). The title, Fool's House is painted across the top of the canvas in stencilled lettering. The title, however, is broken up and positioned in such a way that suggests that the canvas surface is meant to be cylindrical instead of flat - USE FOOL'S HO (Fineberg 1995:214). The result of this is a perceptual ambiguity. The introduction of handwritten labels plays the word off against the painted, or real object.

Apart from the writings of Wittgenstein, the method of contrasting what is known with what is seen has a possible source in the art of Rene Magritte. Magritte presented a realistic image of a pipe with the title inscribed in large letters below - **This is Not a Pipe**. Magritte explains: "An object never performs the same function as its name or image" (Gablik 1970:140). But, "in a painting the words are of the same substance as the images" (Gablik 1970:139).

In Fool's House, Johns transforms all familiar household objects into artist's tools. For example, the cup has black paint in it, the broom is a paintbrush, and the towel is a paint rag. However, Johns reintroduces these objects back into their 'natural' context by labelling them. In this way Johns plays with the notions of truth and appearance and the connections between contexts: that of the painting and that of



**fig 18 Jasper Johns, Target, 1960, pencil on board with brush
and watercolour disks, 17.1 x 11.8 cm, collection: private**

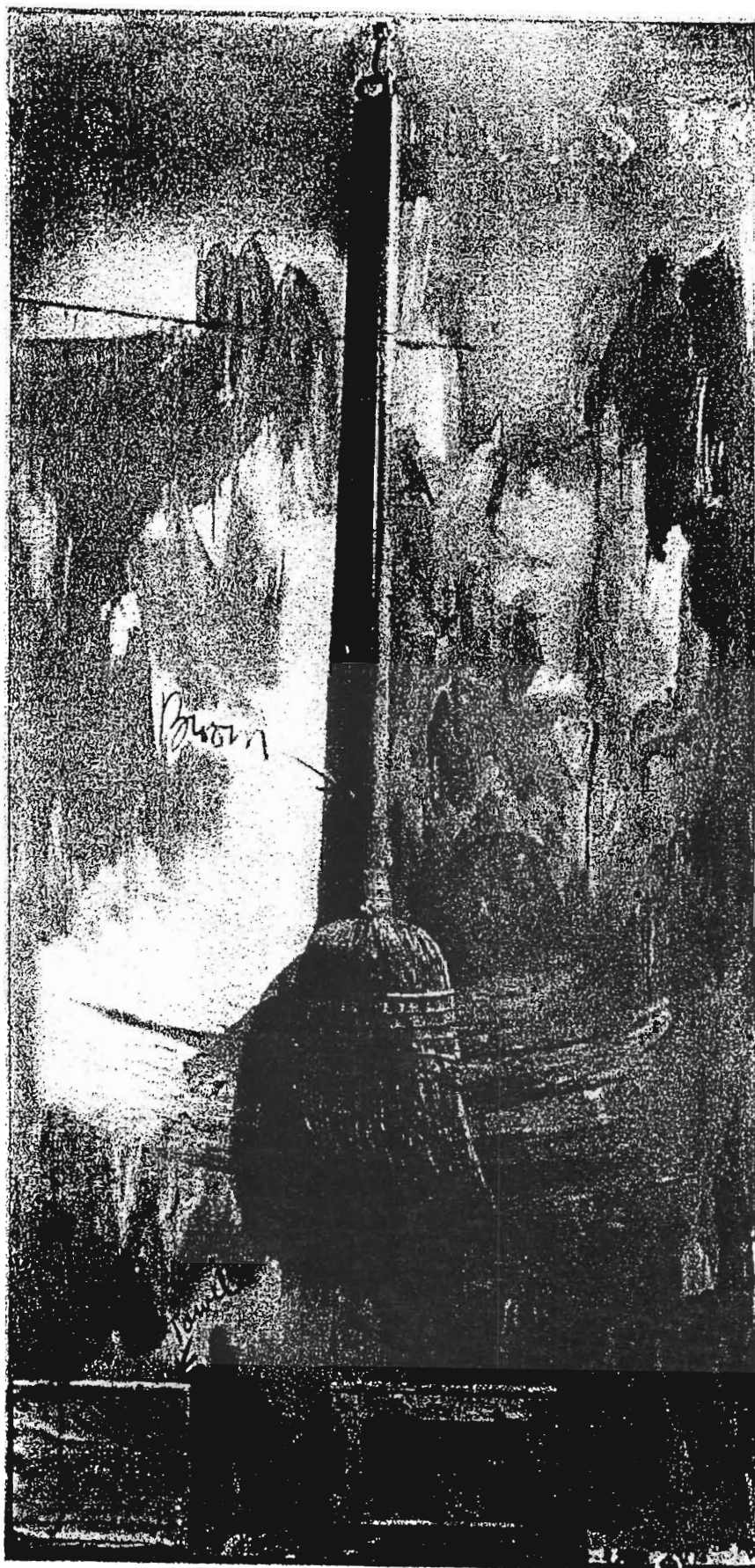


fig 19 Jasper Johns, Fool's House, 1962, oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 91.4 cm, collection: Mr. Jean Christophe Castelli

the real world. The unfixed position of the viewer is taken further in According to What (1964) (fig 20) which consists of painted vertical canvas panels to which various objects are attached. A band of silkscreened newsprint runs across the panels. A small canvas with the silhouette of Duchamp on the front is attached face-down to the far left panel. Johns' signature and the title of the work appear on the backside of the smaller canvas. A cross-section of a chair and the seated mold of a leg are attached to the top left corner of the work. The back to front smaller canvas viewed along with the mold of the leg, which is seen from the back, creates ambiguity as to what is in front of the picture plane and what is behind.

The compilation of a diversity of objects with no discernible emphasis being placed on any in particular also means that the viewer can 'read' the work from a number of perspectives. Fineberg observes that Johns' work illustrates the fact that the world is viewed in fragments from varying perspectives and perpetually changing contexts (1995:216). Fineberg adds that Johns' games with identity and definition "suggests a detached world in which things have no intrinsic identity", and that

Johns anticipated the stress on the defining role of the linguistic or interpretive context by such French poststructuralists as Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard (1995:214).¹⁷

The spatial ambiguities in Johns' art, combined with the fact that many of his works lack a principle focus, are significant in terms of the viewing function. Fineberg explains that by composing a work which has a multiple focus, the actual position of the viewer in reality is emphasized - as someone looking who is looking around them in various directions (1995:116). This is contrary to the notion of the single perspective that sets up an illusionistic space into which the viewer is drawn.

Crichton comments that

It is Jasper Johns' peculiar gift that he has been able to assimilate the advances of twentieth-century art, and shift the experience of the observer away from the painter and back to the audience. Not surprisingly, audiences have responded with pleasure, even though the dilemmas he presents them

¹⁷ In the discourse of Derrida and other poststructuralists: the signified is only a moment in a never-ending process of signification where meaning is produced not in a stable, referential relation between subject and object, but only within the infinite, intertextual play of signifiers. In Derrida's words ... the meaning of meaning is infinite implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signified ... (Best and Kellner 1991:21).

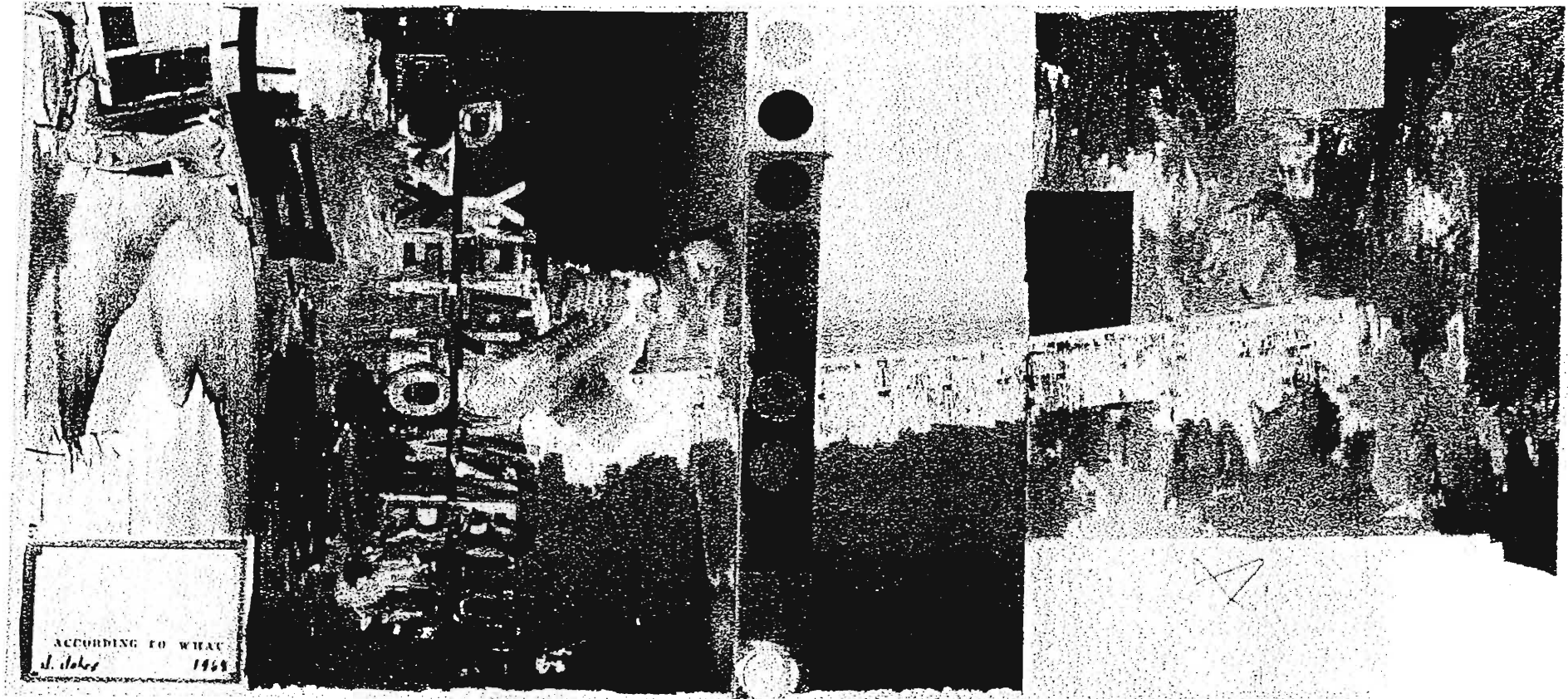


fig 20 Jasper Johns, According to What ?, 1964, oil on canvas
with objects, 223.5 x 487.7 cm, collection: Mr. and Mrs. I.
Newhouse

are often very great. (1994:86).

The notion of multiple focus is also to be found in Rauschenberg's work. However, whereas Johns achieves this through ambiguity and paradox, Rauschenberg accomplishes it through multiplicity and heterogeneity. Cage observed of Rauschenberg's 'combine paintings': "It is a situation involving multiplicity" (Alloway 1976:5).

This multiplicity is a result of Rauschenberg's use of a diversity of objects found in the environment. Rauschenberg incorporates multiple objects from 'life' into an art context. The diverse nature of these objects implies a non-judgemental attitude on Rauschenberg's part. He does not attach priority to certain objects over others because he deems them more suitable for use within an art context. Cage observed: "There is no more subject in a combine than there is in a page from a newspaper. Everything that is there is a subject" (Alloway 1976:10). Alloway's observation testifies to the non-hierarchic nature of Rauschenberg's work.

The use of multiple non-related objects, with no overt emphasis being placed on one object over another, is problematic for the viewer who anticipates or searches for a principle focus within the work of art. Perhaps this is why Alloway describes Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings as possessing a "nonhierarchic simultaneity" (Alloway 1976:10).

Alloway asserts that "Rauschenberg's art proposes an aesthetic of heterogeneity in which divergent parts retain clear evidence of their scattered origins" (1976:5). It is the multiplicity and heterogeneity that allows for a relative interpretation of the work of Rauschenberg by the viewer. Rauschenberg does not impose himself upon his work to the extent that he creates a 'correct', definite reading or meaning for the work. The meaning of the work depends upon the multiple interpretations of the spectators. Rauschenberg may have taken his cue from Duchamp who said: "[i]t is the spectators who make the pictures" (Crichton 1994:83). Crichton comments that one can infer from Duchamp's statement that the work of art stands midway

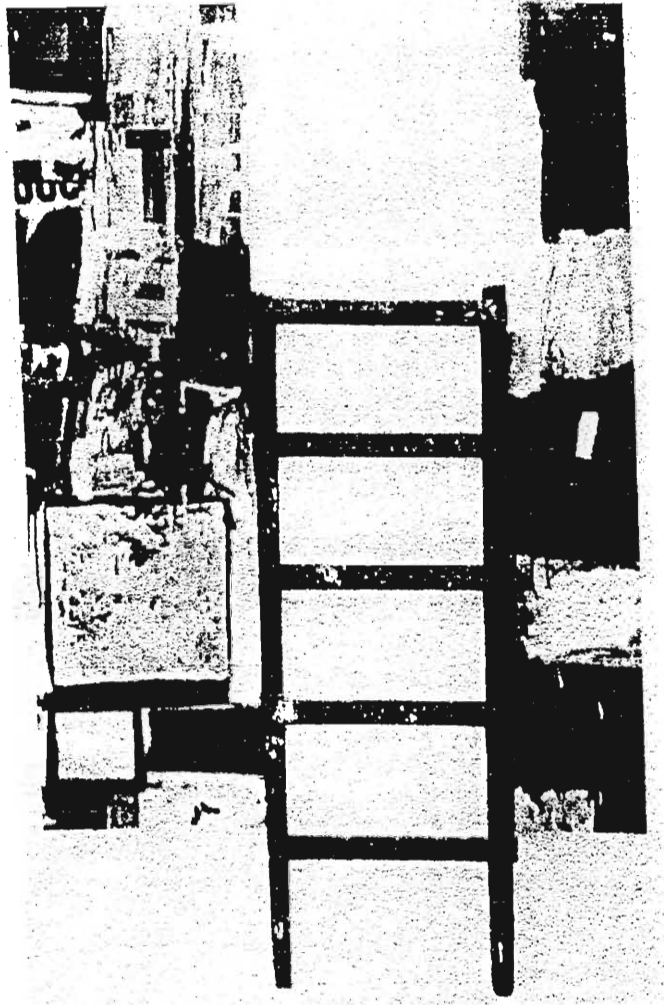


fig 21 Robert Rauschenberg, Winter Pool, 1959-60, oil on canvas with ladder, 219.6 x 147.9 cm, collection: Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz, New York

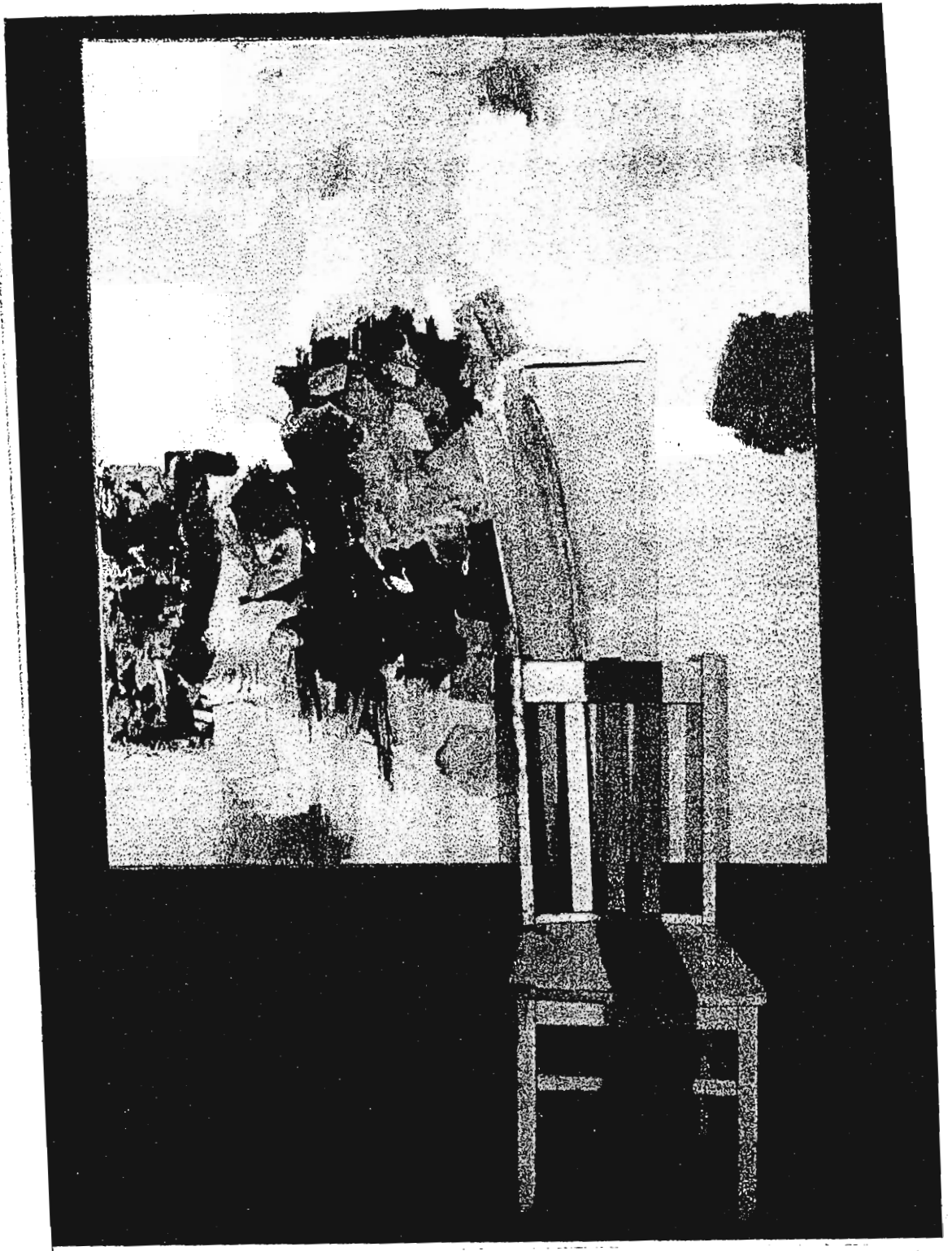


fig 22 Robert Rauschenberg, Pilgrim, 1960, oil, pencil, paper, fabric, on canvas, with painted wooden chair, 201.3 x 136.9 x 47.9 cm, collection: The Folkwang Museum, Berlin



fig 23 Robert Rauschenberg, Black Market, 1961, oil, paper, wood, metal, rope, and objects, 152.4 x 127 cm, collection: The Ludwig Museum, Cologne

between the creator and viewer. The implications of this point of view are considerable: the identity of the work of art (what it is), what the work of art means, and how it is perceived, are dependant not only on the artist's action but also on the viewer's response to it.

Like Johns, Rauschenberg entices the actual participation of the viewer in his work. He inserts a grounded ladder between the painted panels of Winter Pool (1959-60) (fig 21). Likewise, in Pilgrim, (1960)(Fig.22) Rauschenberg stands a chair against the wall with the painted panels behind. Objects like the ladder and chair entice the viewer to climb or sit upon the artwork, in the same way that Johns' Drawer wants to be opened. These objects are a device which enables Rauschenberg to fuse the pictorial world with reality. The artwork essentially becomes part of the world of the viewer as opposed to belonging to the autonomous realm of art.

Black Market (1961) (fig.23) can be seen as the equivalent to Johns' Target (1960) as it entailed the participation of the viewer in a direct manner. Viewers are allowed to swop objects of their own for the objects that were in the case that was attached to the picture by a cord. The only condition was that the viewer had to supply a drawing of the object on the drawing pads or clipboards.

Although pictures such as Winter Pool and Pilgrim are hung on the wall, the intrusive non-art objects refer back to their horizontal orientation and to the actual world outside the work, the world in which the spectator lives.

Steinberg describes the type of surface constructed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Rauschenberg as "post-Modernist" (1972:91). He observes that Rauschenberg's pictures, "no longer simulate vertical fields, but opaque flatbed horizontals" (Steinberg 1972:84). The `flatbed' picture plane does not "depend on a head-to-toe correspondence with human posture" (Steinberg 1972:84). Rather it

makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards - any receptor surface on which objects

are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed - whether coherently or in confusion. The pictures of the last fifteen to twenty years insist on a radically new orientation, in which the painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of operational processes. (Steinberg 1972:84).

Monogram (1959) (fig.24) is possibly the best known example of the 'flatbed' picture-plane. The normally upright picture plane is transformed into a flatbed surface or pasture for a stuffed Angora goat with an old tyre looped about its midsection.

Steinberg says that the 'flatbed' surface describes a change in the relationship "between artist and image, image and viewer" (1972:91) and that

this internal change is no more than a symptom of changes which go far beyond questions of picture planes, or of painting as such. It is part of a shakeup which contaminates all purified categories. (Steinberg 1972:91).

Steinberg implies that the shift that occurs in Rauschenberg's 'flatbed' works is one from nature to culture, and that it can be considered to be postmodern because of this displacement (1972:91). This shift in Rauschenberg's art is a shift from a reference of the world to a narrative representation. Steinberg explains that

it seemed at times that Rauschenberg's work surface stood for the mind itself - dump, reservoir, switching center, abundant with concrete references freely associated as in an internal monologue - the outward symbol of the mind as a running transformer of the external world, constantly ingesting incoming unprocessed data to be mapped in an overcharged field. (1972:88).

According to Steinberg's description, Rauschenberg's 'flatbed' works operate along the lines of 'thought', or language. The analogy to language, or discourse, in Rauschenberg's art can be seen as postmodern in spirit as a departure from "modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse" (Krauss 1985:9).

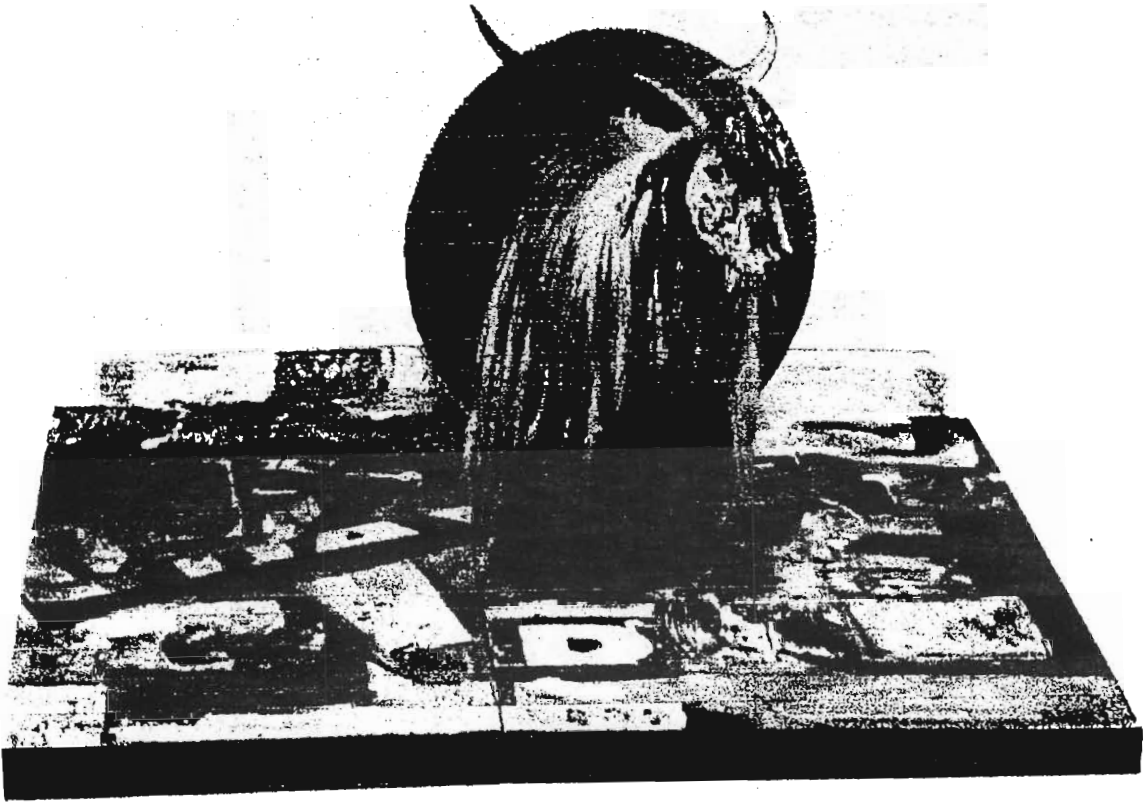


fig 24 Robert Rauschenberg, Monogram, 1955-59, oil, stuffed goat, tyre, wood, canvas, and paper, 107.6 x 182.9 cm, The Modern Museum, Stockholm

CHAPTER 5

The transition from modernism to postmodernism

Thus far, this dissertation has described how the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s can be regarded as a reaction against the exclusive and potentially restrictive artmaking theories of Rosenberg and Greenberg. This interpretation of their artwork as a reaction against these particular modes of modernism, however, may not suffice to justify a postmodern reading of their work. Hal Foster explains that

"Postmodernism" is a term used promiscuously in art criticism, often as a mere sign for not-modernism or a synonym for pluralism. As such, it means little - only, perhaps, that we are in a reactionary period in which modernism seems distant and revivalism all too near. On one hand, this distance is the very precondition of postmodernism; on the other, this revivalism signals the need to conceive it as other than mere antimodernism. (Wallis 1984:189).

It is also possible to interpret Johns and Rauschenberg's reaction against prescriptive and institutionalised forms of modernism as an attempt to revive or recall an earlier less restrictive and more revolutionary version of modernism. Newman explains that

[m]any of the arguments which assume Greenberg's theory of modernism and assert a postmodernism using post-structuralist categories may in effect be retheorising a pre-Greenbergian modernism. This is an attempt to maintain a reflexive radicality, a questioning of the institution of art, and an emancipatory ethic - art as a contribution to knowledge and social self-awareness; but without a utopian conception of historical development and, in most but not all cases, without any commitment to a specific political project. (1986:32).

Certainly, it can be argued that in some ways Johns and Rauschenberg's work from the 1950s and 1960s encapsulates the adversary or revolutionary spirit of the European avante-garde. The alternatives suggested in these works concerning the identity of the artist and the function of the viewer along with their enquiries into the status of the artwork as an object clearly question the manner in which artworks are presented and perceived. This essentially constitutes a questioning of the institution of art and could possibly be considered as a "contribution to knowledge

and self-awareness" (Newman 1986:32).

Moira Roth suggests that neither Johns nor Rauschenberg was committed to any form of political project (1977:48). She suggests that along with Duchamp, Cage, and Cunningham, Johns and Rauschenberg were the "key exponents of the Aesthetic of Indifference" (1977:47). Roth explains that as a direct result of an alienating psychological atmosphere that was experienced during the Cold War, "[t]hese artists made and talked about art characterized by tones of neutrality, passivity, irony and often negation" (1977:48). Roth's claims are debatable. However, she does describe Johns and Rauschenberg as being detached from, rather than actively involved in, sociopolitical developments in America during the 1950s (1977:48).

Whether or not this is the case there seems to be some justification in the proposal that the work of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s marks a return to a pre-Greenbergian modernism. Huyssen explains that

[c]ritics like Bell and Graff saw the rebellion of the late 1950s and the 1960s as continuous with modernism's earlier nihilistic and anarchic strain; rather than seeing it as a postmodernist revolt against classical modernism, they interpreted it as a profusion of modernist impulses into everyday life. (Huyssen 1986:190).

This dissertation's description of Johns and Rauschenberg's artwork from the 1950s and 1960s as reactionary aligns them with the revolutionary spirit of previous "avant-garde movements such as Dada and Surrealism" (Huyssen 1986:191) against aspects of "high" modernism. The possibility that the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg represents an extension of avant-garde ideology seems even more plausible given Newman's assertion that there are certain tendencies within modernism "which are towards heteronomy rather than autonomy, and all of which were closed off in Greenberg's revisionist theory" (1986:33). One of these tendencies

is that of the avant-garde critique of the aesthetic as an autonomous realm ... it emerges in the ontological tension of the Cubist collage, because, as Peter Burger argues, it is only after Symbolism that autonomous art becomes perceivable as a social institution or form

of life. (Newman 1986:33).

Issues such as the deconstruction of the artist as an autonomous subject, as discussed in Chapter 2, can be traced back to the European avant-garde. Newman claims, for example, that "Surrealist heteronomy involved the break-up, under the influence of Freud and Jung, of the univocal, rationally self-conscious subject..." (1986:33).

Similar attitudes prevailed in other areas of avant-garde art. Diane Waldman notes that Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque used to avoid signing their artworks on the front in an effort to signify "impersonal authorship" (1992:19). Waldman comments that Picasso and Braque had "proposed a depersonalised art, one that was so conceptual in its premise that its realisation could be accomplished by anyone" (1992:19). Waldman relates how

Picasso specifically spoke of selling the plan for his sheet-metal construction Guitar of 1912-13. The notion that the work of art could exist as pure idea and be realized by someone other than the artist was, according to Rubin, adopted by the Russian Constructivists. Years later it was invoked again by the American Minimalist and Conceptual artists as a critical part of their ideology. (1992:19).

It is possible that Johns and Rauschenberg inherited Picasso and Braque's inclination towards a depersonalised art and that subsequently, their attitudes regarding the autonomy of the artist and the 'origin' of the artwork are an extension of avant-garde ideology.

This is not to imply that Johns and Rauschenberg were completely successful in their attempts to divest their art of the 'aura' of a privileged autonomous subject. It is unlikely that this is possible. It has, for example, been observed that despite Johns' best intentions to avoid the expression of his 'aura' or personality, that his pictures are clearly recognisable as his (Hobhouse 1977:49). Amelia Hobhouse provides a possible reason for this. She suggests that Johns' use of the primary colours have become "a sign for Jasper Johns" (1977:49). The suggestion is that the occurrence of primary colours in works such as Flag and Numbers in Color can be interpreted as Johns' particular 'signature' or trademark. This is ironical if one

considers that Johns made use of the primary colours in many of his works in an attempt to conceal his personality. Additionally, Hobhouse observes that

[t]he presence of the artist in Johns' early work is announced by the passionate brushstrokes with which he depicts the signs of language - words, numbers, colors, emblems - and implicitly by the subjects themselves, the ways of knowing and contacting, perceiving and possessing the world that is outside the artist. Gradually, in the work of the early '60s the objects in the works become more closely associated with the person of the artist - the fork and spoon in In Memory of My Feelings - Frank O'Hara of 1961, the cup in Good Time Charley of the same year and the artist's studio objects of Fool's House of 1962. (1977:49).

Hobhouse suggests that these personal objects along with the imprints of Johns' hands and face in Study for Skin, for example, are more than just an indication of the artist's presence because they reveal something of the artist's personality (1972:49). This could be construed as a continuation of the modernist tradition of "self-actualisation" (Fineberg 1995:177) through the act of painting.

The expression of Rauschenberg's `aura' or personality, is likewise betrayed by his choice of objects as subject matter. Fineberg supports this view (1995). He refers specifically to objects such as the quilt and pillow in Bed or the stuffed bird, the flattened can, and the family photographs in Canyon (1959) which apparently refer to life back home (Fineberg 1995:177). Fineberg suggests that Rauschenberg extends the

action painter's stress on self-actualization through the spontaneous act of painting by exploiting the vividness of the associations attached to real things. (1995:177).

Rauschenberg himself has commented that he thinks of painting "as reporting, as a vehicle that will report what you did and what happened to you" (Swenson 1963:67). Given this, his art can be regarded as autobiographical in that it is a record of his personal point of view regarding his experiences.

A fundamental difference, however, between Rauschenberg's work and 'action' painting is that

[i]nstead of discovering oneself in the act of painting, one perpetually reconstructs oneself in the process of adapting to one's encounters with the world. (Fineberg 1995:177).

According to this interpretation, Rauschenberg's art does reveal an artistic identity. This identity, however, is constantly in flux and continually reconstructing itself and changing in response to the world. This is as opposed to his work being an example of 'original authorship' which presumably remains unchanged and reflects the unique personality of the artist as an autonomous subject.

Newman's reference to Cubist collage - as exhibiting the avant-garde's "critique of the aesthetic as an autonomous realm" (1986:33) - is particularly important to this investigation into the art of Johns and Rauschenberg. Their artwork from the 1950s and 1960s can be seen as either modernist or postmodernist depending on the interpretation of the collage that appears in their work.

'Collage' is a term which occurs frequently throughout discussions of postmodernism. Taylor claims that "it was precisely collage and other devices of anti-painting that first announced the idea of a break with modernism proper, according to post-modernism, as far back as 1912" (1987:53).

Taylor draws a parallel with architecture: he observes that "collage (together with 'collision') is the thirtieth of Jencks' categories in his summarisation of the post-modernist ethic in architecture..."(Taylor 1987:53). Taylor continues to explain the relevance of collage to discussions of postmodernism. He says that "[p]oets such as Mallarme, Lautreamont, and even Joyce, insofar as they adopted a collage-like style as a method, have also been claimed as progenitors of a post-modern sensibility" (Taylor 1987:53).

On the other hand, it is also possible that the tension between high and mass culture, which is implicit in Cubist collage, is extended in the work of Rauschenberg. Like Rauschenberg, Picasso and Braque had also drawn on commonplace and familiar subjects from the environment. (Waldman 1992:19). The tension between

high and mass culture in both Cubism and Rauschenberg's work occurs as a result of the appearance of imagery and objects from mass culture within a high-art idiom. The variety of objects used by Picasso in a work such as Still Life with Chair-Caning (1912) such as rope, oil, cloth etc. are all sourced from consumer society. Similarly, Rauschenberg appropriated the tyre, wood, and stuffed goat for Monogram from his immediate environment.

Christopher Butler suggests that one major difference between the collage found in Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings¹⁸ and modernist collage derives from its 'disparateness' (1980:86). Rauschenberg's objects are sourced from a variety of locations and often seem to be totally unrelated. Butler also explains the difference:

Modernist collage had usually inhabited a single and intelligible world. Since cubism, with its guitars, musical notation, wine glasses, and newsprint, there had been some attempt both to reflect a way of life, and to use the outlines of the elements of the collage to make an ingeniously satisfying formal design. Dada and surrealism had of course imported a frequently mysterious 'psychological' element, but had largely remained intelligible, particularly with respect to its stance within the society surrounding it. (1980:86).

Rauschenberg's works on the other hand do not inhabit a single and intelligible world. Steinberg describes Rauschenberg's 'flatbed' works specifically as

a conception which guarantees that the presentation will not be directly that of a worldspace, and that it will nevertheless admit any experience as the matter of representation. And it readmits the artist in the fullness of his human interests, as well as the artist-technician. (1972:91).

It has been observed that Rauschenberg's use of discarded elements from mass culture also recalls the collages of Kurt Schwitters (Varnadoe 1990:326). The discrepancies, however, that detract from this interpretation of Rauschenberg's work stem from the specific nature of his relationship to mass culture and how this is manifested in his particular method of collage.

¹⁸ Rauschenberg coined the term 'combine' "to differentiate his painting from more traditional collage and assemblage..."(Waldman 1992:252).

The process by which Rauschenberg selected the profusion of disparate elements from mass culture as subject matter - from the tyre around the stuffed goat's middle in Monogram to the newsprint and photographs in Rebus - is summed up in this description:

'The concept I plantation struggle to deal with ketchup is opposed to the logical continuity of lift tab inherent in language [*sic*] and communication. My fascination with images open 24hrs is based on the complex interlocking of disparate visual facts heated pool that have no respect for grammar'. (Butler 1980:87).

Perhaps the fundamental difference between a postmodern reading of Rauschenberg's work and a modernist reading has less to do with the decentering of the subject and more to do with a particular conception of the world in which the artwork exists. As has been pointed out, the Cubists held a similar attitude to Johns and Rauschenberg regarding the decentering of the artist as a autonomous subject (Waldman 1992:19). Furthermore, Newman has commented how "Surrealist heteronomy involved the break-up ... of the univocal, rationally self-conscious subject" (1986:33). This raises the question as to whether or not Cubism and Surrealism should be considered within postmodernism, a fuller discussion of which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. A possible explanation is given by Taylor who says that

Steinberg... identifies post-war collage not as something somehow knocked sideways by a theory of the missing subject, but as precisely the record of a subject faced with unmanageable information from an *external world* which lacks a coherent form or centre. (1987:65).

Following on from this, Taylor suggests that perhaps "It is the world that is de-centred in this post-modernism, not the subject itself (1987:65).

Like Rauschenberg, Johns' use of collage relies upon the incorporation of objects into his artworks. The use of objects in their work allows Johns and Rauschenberg to present their views without having to resort to representational illusionistic devices. In Johns' collages the object is either amalgamated within the picture; as is the case with the objects in Field Painting, or the object becomes the subject

itself; like the flag in Flag. In both cases the issue of flatness as a modernist concern is emphasised.

Johns' two-dimensional objects such as the flag in Flag are inherently flat. This ensures that his paintings remain flat. Steinberg explains that these objects are not replicas or imitations of anything existing naturally in the environment therefore they do not have to be simulated on the canvas in order to appear as subject matter (1972:28). Each object - such as a flag, number or letter - once manufactured, is the actual object. Hence, the flatness of the image is ensured by the exclusion of any representation of objects in the real world. A number is not represented in a painting, it is presented as fact.

This flatness is guaranteed by Johns' use of a modernist 'grid' in works such as Numbers in Color and Flag. Rosalind Krauss asserts that

[t]here are two ways in which the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art. One is spatial; the other is temporal. In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns it's back on nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface. (1985:9).

The 'grid-like' composition of works such as Flag and Numbers in Color ensures their flatness because as Krauss explains:

Unlike perspective, the grid does not map the space of a room or a landscape or a group of figures onto the surface of a painting. Indeed, if it maps anything, it maps the surface of the painting itself. (1985:10).

The result is the denial of illusionistic space. This is confirmed by Daniel Wheeler who observes that the exact overall fit between the image and the painting support, in works such as Flag, serves to vanquish illusionistic space (1991:135). Steinberg reinforces this view when he declares that "[t]he position of modern anti-illusionism finds here its logical resting place" (1972:28).

Furthermore, Sandler comments that it is the painting of "the entire surface with a

uniform density ..." that results in the "elimination of conventional figure ground relationships" (Sandler 1978:186). This may be facilitated by Johns' use of encaustic. The technique of encaustic entails the mixing of pigment with beeswax and resin. This mixture is then affixed by heat. Flag is a work which is comprised of encaustic that has been painted over torn shreds of newsprint.

Johns' use of encaustic also fulfills another modernist criterion. Greenberg declared that

[t]he flatness towards which Modernist painting orients itself can never be an utter flatness. The heightened sensitivity of the picture plane may no longer permit sculptural illusion, or *trompe-l'oeil*, but it does and must permit optical illusion. (Risatti 1990:16).

The technique of encaustic enables this 'optical illusion' to take place. This is because as the hot wax cools it hardens enabling the first brushstroke to be painted over without being obliterated. The build up of brushstrokes on top of one another creates a shallow depth. Greenberg calls this an "optical third dimension" (Risatti 1990:16). Wheeler supports the suggestion that there is an optical depth present in Johns' work. He suggests that Johns' use of encaustic heightens the paradox of a picture in that the "build up of luminescent brushmarks" gives to a flat, geometric image a "sense of depth and movement through time" (Wheeler 1991:135).

The optical depth and 'all-over' quality in works such as Flag is reminiscent of the shallow depth achieved by 'action' painters. An example of this is Pollock's 'dripped' painting, Number 27 (1950). The technique of encaustic in Johns' works documents Johns' actions by revealing the sequence of brushstrokes as they are built upon one another, in much the same way that Number 27 provides a record of the actions of Pollock. Johns' use of the 'grid' and the technique of encaustic can therefore be seen as modernist means which ensure that his pictures retain the flatness and 'all-over' quality which are central to modernism.

Although the artworks of both Johns and Rauschenberg adhere to modernist notions of flatness - resulting from their use of collage - they also signal the reintroduction of representation into art.

There is an element of ambiguity in works like Johns' Flag, where the object functions as the subject. This ambiguity is a result of the shifting identity of the artwork between two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional object.

This ambiguity between two-and three-dimensionality enabled Johns to fuse in startling ways pictorial elements from past styles commonly considered antithetical: gesture painting superimposed on a ruled design associated with geometric abstraction but put in the service of representational description. (Sandler 1978:187).

Representation in Flag is not achieved through three-dimensional illusion because the painting is essentially a flag. There are no recognisable elements that give the illusion of a space within the picture into which one might walk.

The introduction of representation into painting by Johns interested Greenberg who observes that

The original flatness of the canvas, with a few outlines stenciled on it, ... [represents] all that a picture by Johns really does represent. The paint surface itself, with its Kooning-esque play of lights and darks, is ... completely superfluous to this end. Everything that usually serves representation and illusion is left to serve nothing but itself, that is, abstraction; while everything that usually serves the abstract or decorative - flatness, bare outlines, all-over or symmetrical design - is put to the service of representation. (Sandler 1978:186).

Johns and Rauschenberg's use of three-dimensional objects as an extension of collage allows them to revitalise pictorial content by including representation in their artworks without recourse to illusionistic devices, in much the same way that Cubist and Surrealist collage had done.

Johns and Rauschenberg's particular use of collage does not only facilitate the inclusion of representation in art, it also reintroduces an element of 'narrative'. This is especially relevant to the work of Rauschenberg. Krauss suggests that through the collaging together of disparate elements

Rauschenberg enforced a part-by-part, image-by-image reading of his work, he guaranteed that the experience of it would share with language some of its character of discourse. The encounter with one image after another would, that is, demand an attention to a kind of temporal unfolding that was like that of hearing or reading a

sentence. (1974:37).

Krauss observes that the objects in a work like Small Rebus (1956) achieve an "equalization" within the space of the picture as they are all treated in the same manner and all "share an equal thickness in terms of their presence to experience" (1974:41). In other words the objects are all considered as equal within the space of the picture, there are no prejudices concerning the nature of the objects.

Because no single object is singled out or privileged in Small Rebus it does make it very difficult to try to find meaningful associations between disparate elements such as the photographs of sporting events, a section of a map of America, a family snapshot, postage stamps, a clock drawn by a child, a horse's head, and scraps of printed fabric that appear in a work such as Small Rebus. Butler suggests that the relationships between these various objects from consumer culture are, for the most part, kept private by Rauschenberg. He describes them as a "Proustian array of evocative objects minus the narrative" (Butler 1980:88). Butler goes on to suggest that

Rauschenberg's statements and work may be taken as symptomatic, of a deliberate rejection of the modernist myth of coherence behind fragmentation The result is an art which is deliberately disjunct, fractured, full of gaps which are supposed to do as much to reveal its meaning as its content does. (1980:88).

The nature of the world that Rauschenberg's objects inhabit is thus unintelligible for the most part. It is the world of the consumer, the realm of high art, and the world of artist simultaneously.

Krauss, unlike Butler, suggests that even though the objects in Rauschenberg's works are disparate and seemingly unrelated, they can still be 'read' according to a form of narrative. She uses the analogy of memory to describe how a work such as Small Rebus can be interpreted. She suggests that resulting from the grouping together of disparate images:

What Rauschenberg was insisting upon was a model for art that was not involved with what might be called the cognitive moment (as in single image-painting) but instead was tied to the *duree* - to the kind

of extended temporality that is involved in experiences like memory, reflection, narration, proposition. (Krauss 1974:37).

This 'reading' of Rauschenberg's work as analogous to the process of memory marks a departure from Cubist collage. Krauss explains that Cubist collage operates by transforming a three-dimensional object - such as a guitar or a wine glass - into two dimensions by transferring it from the real world into the world of the picture which transcends reality:

By making the process of image formation more apparent, they made it seem more paradoxically magical. A bit of newspaper absorbed into the shape of a wine glass can identify itself as a piece of the real world only from within the depths of a whole network of ambiguity. (Krauss 1974:40).

The difference is that, in Rauschenberg's work, "the image is not about an object transformed" (Krauss 1970:40). The object, such as a photograph, is embedded into the artwork yet it retains its identity as an object, "never transcending the material world" (Krauss 1974:40). It is important that the objects retain their integrity because

by giving to images the property of actual physical resistance that objects or actions have in our ordinary experience Rauschenberg endows them with a sense of having to be encountered through time. In this way they are returned to an experience that is fully durational, an experience ... like memory, reflection, narration, proposition. Rauschenberg speaks of the temporality of his work. "Listening happens in time," he said. "Looking also had to happen in time." (Krauss 1974:41).

Hence, according to this interpretation, the functioning of Rauschenberg's artworks that contain objects relies upon this 'durational experience' on the part of the viewer.

The 'meaning' of the artwork is thus dependent upon the interactions of the viewer which implies that Rauschenberg's art is inextricably linked to process. The process by which the viewer makes sense of the disparateness of objects in a work by Rauschenberg depends upon a subjective interpretation of the variety of contexts that occur within the work. Newman suggests that an allegorical reading

of such works by the viewer can aid in the interpretation of the work. Newman claims that

allegory allows a way of structuring and deciphering works of art without recourse to the notion of a constitutive transcendental subject whose intentional meaning, the 'signified' is transmitted through the 'significant form' of the signifier. Allegory, instead of presupposing a self-identical, transcendental subject, allows for the constitution of subject positions which are dynamically entered into, or even repudiated by the viewer/reader/interpreter who participates with the 'author' in the creation of the work. (1986:45).

A similar allegorical reading might be helpful in the deciphering of some of Johns' works, such as Target with Four Faces, and Target with Plaster Casts, where the combination of disparate objects (plaster casts of body parts) seems to have no obvious intended meaning or fixed reading.

The notion of allegorical content in Rauschenberg's work is further compounded by his use of the photo-silkscreen technique during the 1960s as part of the collage process. The images that he uses come mostly from popular magazines and newspapers. Rauschenberg uses photographic imagery as a record of reality which enables him to appropriate objects taken from mass media culture (Perrone 1977:27).

The appropriation of secondary subject matter in Rauschenberg's work ranges from the printed reproductions of old masters' paintings - such as Velasquez's Venus and Child in Crocus (1962) (fig.25) - to reproductions of mass culture imagery in works such as Gloria (1956) (fig.26). Craig Owens defines allegorical imagery as imagery which is appropriated (1992:205). The "allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them [and] poses as its interpreter" (Owens 1992:205). He goes on to relate how the "image becomes something other and adds another meaning to the image" (Owens 1992:203).

The allegorical content in Rauschenberg's work, as a result of his appropriation of imagery from secondary sources, can be considered postmodern. Newman

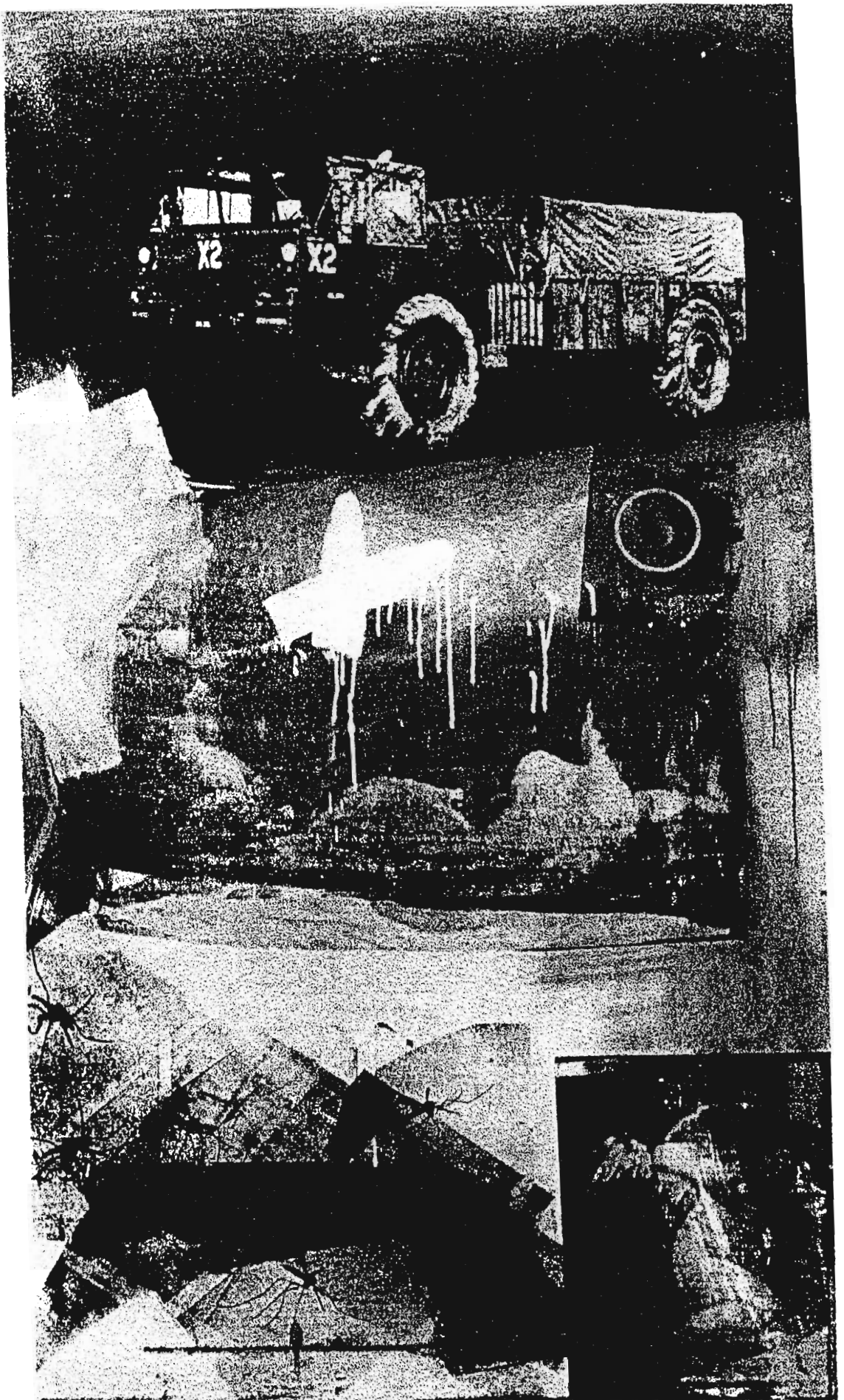


fig 25 Robert Rauschenberg, Crocus, 1962, oil and silkscreen on canvas, 152.4 x 91.4 cm. collection: Leo Castelli Gallery



fig 26 Robert Rauschenberg, Gloria, 1956, oil, paper, and fabric on canvas, 168.3 x 160.7 cm, collection: The Cleveland Museum of Art

explains that

The revaluation of allegory in recent criticism contests the theories of art since Romanticism which privilege the formal and expressive element over the discursive. Postmodern allegory replaces the redemptive, purified and organic concept of form with textuality and the arbitrariness of meaning as it is read into an already existing fragment rather than emerging from an original totality. (1986:42).

The existence of allegory in selected examples of Johns and Rauschenberg's work from the 1950s and 1960s also presupposes the notion of the work of art as process. A consequence of allegory is that the meaning of the work is inextricably linked to the assertions of the viewer who completes the work by giving it its identity. Thus the work of art is completed only by means of an interactive process involving the artwork, the artist and the viewer.

The use of the photographic silkscreen technique allows Rauschenberg to use imagery ranging from a diversity of sources. Calvin Tomkins, for example, recalls watching Rauschenberg

lay a black-and-white silkscreen of an airplane control panel on top of the four-colour image of the Sistine Chapel, squeegee the ink through it, then step back, looking happily surprised. "It's made a modern painting out of 'The Last Judgement'". (1997:94).

The combination of a variety of contexts and disparate objects within Rauschenberg's work raises the issues of parody and pastiche. Frederic Jameson describes pastiche as being similar to parody:

it is the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody ... (1991:17).

According to Jameson's definition, both pastiche and parody occur throughout much of Johns and Rauschenberg's work. In a work such as Johns' Flag pastiche is achieved through the combination of gestural brushstrokes, reminiscent of 'action' painting, and torn shreds of newsprint:

As in Cubist collage, newsprint - an anomalous abstract-concretion

like the Stars and Stripes - brought to the hermetic confines of reductive art an echo of its own past in the grimy quotidian world, as well as the purely optical "texture" generated by its chiaroscuro pattern of black lines on white paper. Yet, complex and charismatic as this layered facture may be, it is methodical and modulated, yielding a controlled, all-over touch resembling late Impressionism (Wheeler 1991:135).

Pastiche occurs in Flag because Johns appropriates elements of Cubist collage, the 'idiosyncratic' style of 'action' painting, and the all-over scheme of late Impressionism, and combines them to create something new. Johns empties each of these elements of their original functions - i.e. the emotive content of the gesture according to 'action' painting - and recontextualises them within a new context.

Parody, on the other hand, operates in Johns' three-dimensional works, such as The Critic Sees (1961). This work consists of two mouths that have been cast within an oblong block. The mouths are displayed through the eye-holes of a pair of reading glasses that are attached to the side of the block. Crichton explains that The Critic Sees functions as "an optical pun, as an implied comment about the art world...." (1994:46). Johns' derision of the art world is implied in this sculpture. Crichton says that

[i]t is impossible to miss the sense of imprisonment, of being boxed in, that the piece implies. The Critic Sees is funny, but not very optimistic. (1994:47).

It is the derisive nature of such works that result in parody according to Jameson's definition. This parody is also evident in Rauschenberg's Gloria. Varnadoe observes that, through the repetitious use of identical photographs of Gloria Vanderbilt and her third marriage partner, Rauschenberg anticipates Andy Warhol's interest in the repetition of celebrity images (1990:327). However, Varnadoe sees Gloria as a comment on the

cheapening of old values, in the descent of blueblood American aristocracy into tabloid copy. Vanderbilt's picture appears in the work as a literal embodiment of the steady-beat replication that marks mass production, and as a figurative representation of the fickle, inconstant mobility that is just as certainly a sign of modern American times. (1990:328).

Interpreted as a derogatory comment on the declining values of American mass culture Gloria can be regarded as an example of parody.

Another form of parody occurring in Johns' and Rauschenberg's work derives from their high-style treatment of mass culture imagery. This is particularly relevant in Johns' works such as Painted Bronze and Painted Bronze (Savarin Can) (1960) (fig.27) where banal 'non-art' items like the beer cans and the painter's tools are subjected to 'high art' treatment. This can be seen as an example of parody as it brings together two incommensurates - mass culture, in the banal forms of beer and coffee cans and a painter's instruments in Painted Bronze (Savarin Can), and high art. The world of high art being parodied also serves to heighten the irony that is achieved as a result of a mundane object being used initially as an instrument in the making of art, and then as the substance of that art.

Pastiche, allegory, and parody are elements which occur frequently throughout discussions of modernist and postmodernist art. In modernist art, pastiche, allegory, and parody appear in the artwork of Picasso, Francis Picabia, and Magritte among others (Newman 1986:48). Newman suggests that the appearance of pastiche in modernist artworks is a result of another of modernist's art's heteronomous tendencies that were excluded in Greenberg's theories of modernism (1986:33). This tendency is

that of art conceived as an expression of Modernity through a mode of representation or abstraction which is considered to be historically privileged because its form most appropriately manifests the *Zeitgeist*. (Newman 1986:33).

Newman cites Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, and De Stijl as examples in which "such a mode is always threatened with the loss of privilege" (1986:33). The result according to Newman is that "It appears to be almost a cyclical inevitability within modernism that an historically privileged mode will collapse into stylish pastiche" (1986:33). He describes how

by 1917-18, Picasso is using an eclectic range of cubist, rococo, and classical styles. This kind of eclecticism, which could be described as an arbitrary historicism, is also manifested in the late work of de Chirico, Picabia, and *vache* period Magritte ... (Newman 1986:33).

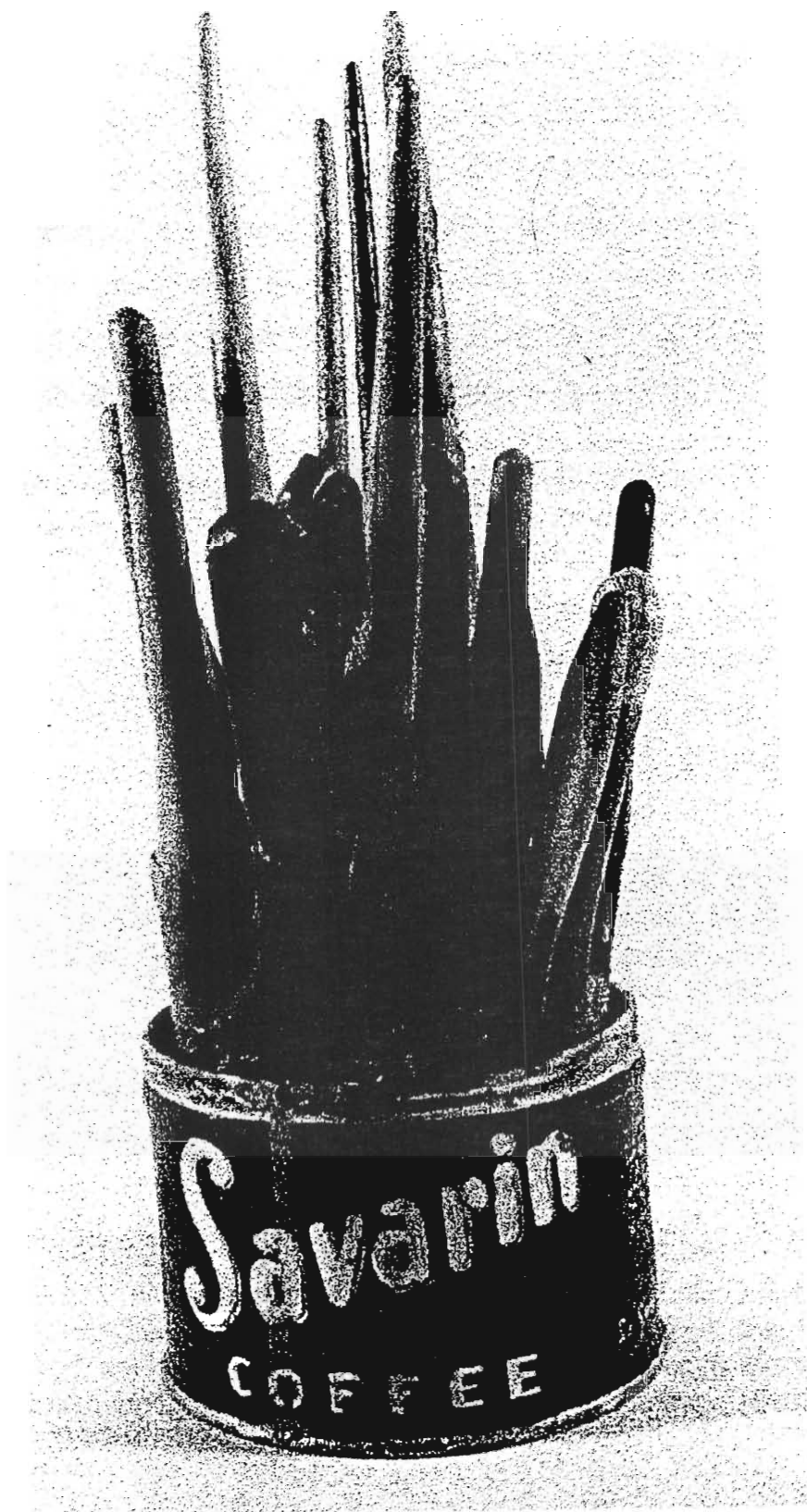


fig 27 Jasper Johns, Painted Bronze (Savarin Can), 1960, painted bronze, 34.3 cm (diam), collection: the artist

The important question is whether the allegory that occurs in the work of Johns and Rauschenberg can be regarded as modernist or whether it is postmodernist. Owens acknowledges the use of allegory in modernist art (1992:222). He claims that

[i]n modernism, however, the allegory remains *in potentia* and is actualized only in the activity of reading, which suggests that the allegorical impulse that characterizes postmodernism is a direct consequence of its preoccupation with reading. (Owens 1992:223).

Owens goes on to say that it is not surprising then that the art of Rauschenberg verges on being postmodern (1992:223). He explains that Steinberg first identified the shift in Rauschenberg's art as being from "nature to culture" (Owens 1992:223).

Owens comments, however, that

[i]n postmodernist art, nature is treated as wholly domesticated by culture; the natural can be approached only through its cultural representation. While this does indeed suggest a shift from nature to culture, what it in fact demonstrates is the impossibility of accepting their opposition. (1992:223).

Owens points out that "Steinberg presumes the nature/culture opposition to be a stable one, a presupposition that postmodern artists ... are determined to subvert" (1992:223). Hence, the shift in Rauschenberg's art should rather be seen as "a shift ... from history to discourse ..." (Owens 1992:223). He explains that "this shift from history to discourse, from a third- to a second-person mode of address also accounts for the centrality which postmodern art assigns to the reader/spectator" (Owens 1992:225). Hence, the postmodern inclination in Rauschenberg's work stems from the transformation of the viewer's experience of art from a "visual to a textual encounter" (Owens 1992:223).

The opposing point of view in the modernist/postmodernist dichotomy is that the appearance of allegory in Rauschenberg's work is a perpetuation of another heteronomous tendency of modernism which had been excluded from Greenberg's theory. This aspect of modernism is

its repeated absorption of that which is extrinsic to the Western high-

art tradition, largely in the pursuit of renewal and reinvigoration. This would include material from a very wide range of sources and the adoption of a variety of different models for the artist's practice: for example primitive art and the art of the insane and of children, commercial and mass media imagery, and subcultural forms such as graffiti. (Newman 1986:33)

According to this point of view the eclectic nature of Johns and Rauschenberg's work, which gives rise to issues of pastiche and allegory, should be regarded as an extension of avant-garde practice.

The 'absorption' of objects and imagery from mass culture in the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg can, however, also be considered as a postmodern strategy. Johns and Rauschenberg's first one-man shows in 1957 are 'frequently cited as the crucial next step towards fulfilling, in the American Pop art of the 1960s, the promise of an engagement with popular culture ...'(Varnadoe 1990:325). Their engagement of mass culture, and the implications that this has concerning the dichotomy between high art and mass culture, are vital to this investigation into the transitional nature of their work.

The choice of mass cultural forms from the urban environment as subject matter in the works by Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s can be viewed as an attempt to overcome the boundaries between high and mass culture. According to Huyssen postmodernism in the visual arts is marked by the assimilation of mass cultural forms which serves to disintegrate the boundaries between mass culture and high-art (1986:ix). Huyssen explains that modernism constituted itself through the exclusion of mass culture as a marginalised 'other' (1986:vii). The incorporation of elements of mass culture in the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg can be viewed as an attempt to deconstruct this mass culture/high-art opposition.

As this dissertation's discussion of collage has revealed, the objects in both Johns and Rauschenberg's works act as a bridge between reality and the pictorial world. Through the use of objects sourced from the city, the artwork becomes inextricably

linked to mass culture. A work such as Rauschenberg's Coca-Cola Plan (1958) (fig.28) "directly engages the rhetoric of product promotion" (Varnadoe 1990:327). Three empty Coke bottles are enshrined and 'elevated' or 'promoted' beyond their familiar and banal context (Varnadoe 1990:327). Rauschenberg draws attention to the Coke bottles which can be considered as mass cultural icons. The 'elevation' of these familiar icons of mass culture draws attention to objects which are so recognisable and pervasive throughout mass culture that they are hardly ever noticed.

Johns' Flashlight, (1958) (fig.29) and Bulb (1959) (fig.30) also make use of mass replicated objects. Like Rauschenberg, Johns draws attention to familiar icons of mass culture. The treatment of these banal objects as subject matter for art is reminiscent of Duchamp's 'readymade' strategy. The difference is that most of Duchamp's objects are not transformed through traditional artistic processes in the way that Johns' Painted Bronze is, for example.

The transformation of Johns' objects from mass culture through traditional artistic processes is one of the fundamental differences between the work of Johns and Rauschenberg. Whereas Johns ironizes the notion of regular repetition associated with mass production by subjecting mundane objects to extensive artistic processes, the production of much of Rauschenberg's imagery is achieved through actual techniques of mass production. Johns' Flashlight, for example, consists of a regular flashlight of the kind one might find in any supermarket. Johns, however, has covered the flashlight with sculp-metal and presented it upon a base manufactured from the same material. The bulb, in Bulb has undergone a similar processing.

Rauschenberg's objects are not transformed in such a way. Apart from a few blotches of paint, the Coke bottles in Coca Cola Plan are the same as they were when existed in reality.

For the most part, Rauschenberg's two dimensional imagery from mass culture is

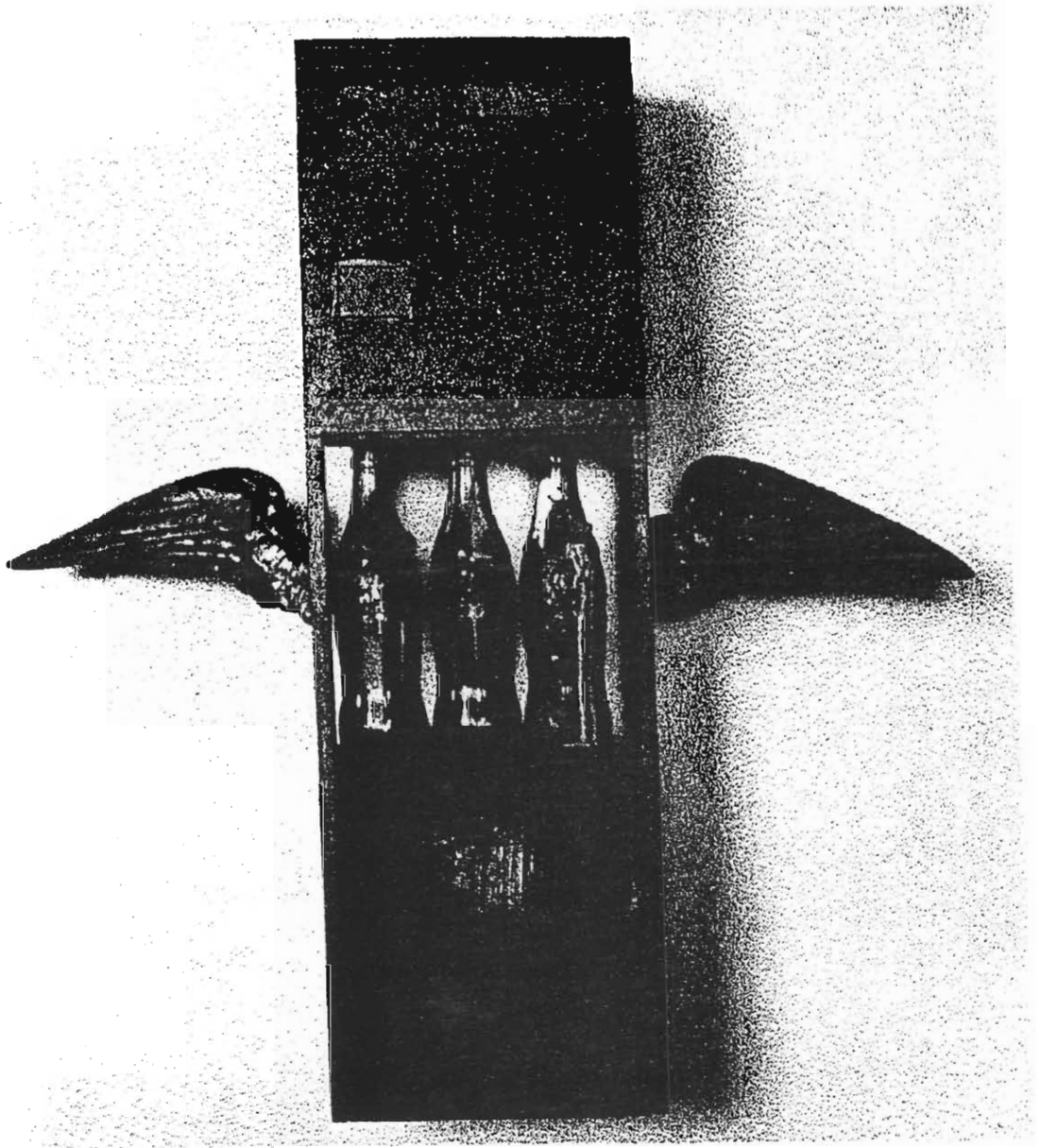


fig 28 Robert Rauschenberg, Coca Cola Plan, 1958, oil paint and objects, 67.9 x 64.1 x 12.1 cm, collection: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

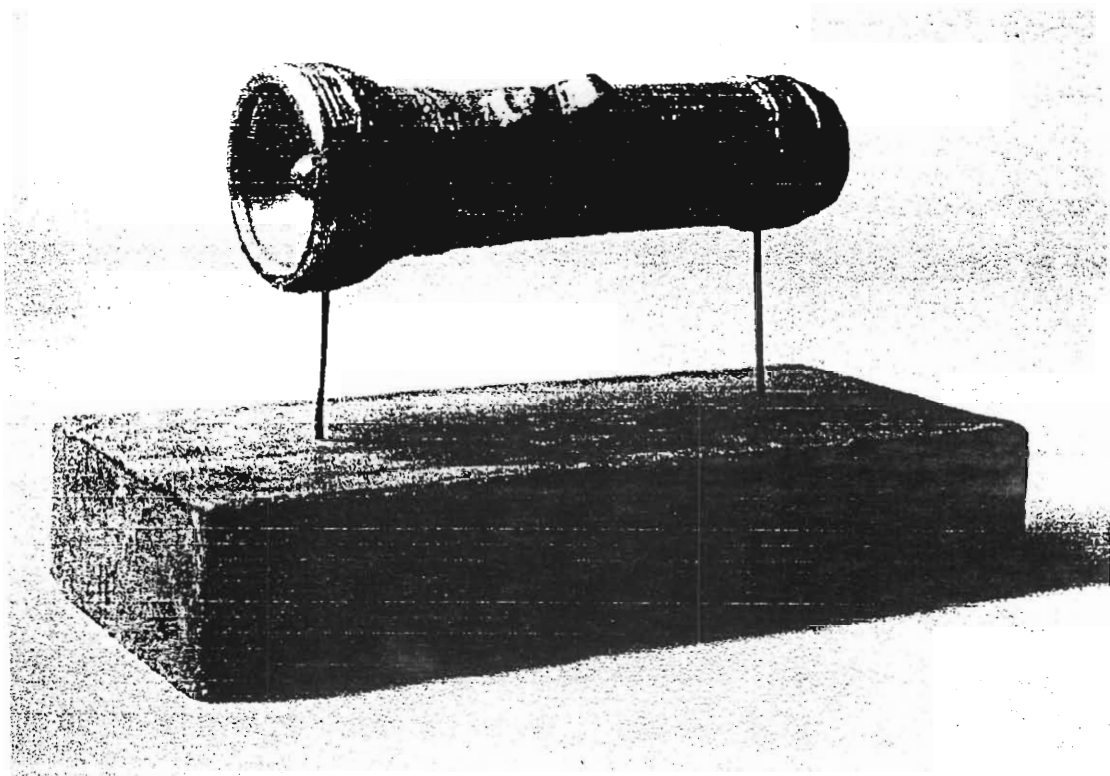


fig 29 Jasper Johns, Flashlight I, 1958, sculp-metal over flashlight and wood, 13.3 x 23.2 x 9.8 cm, collection: private

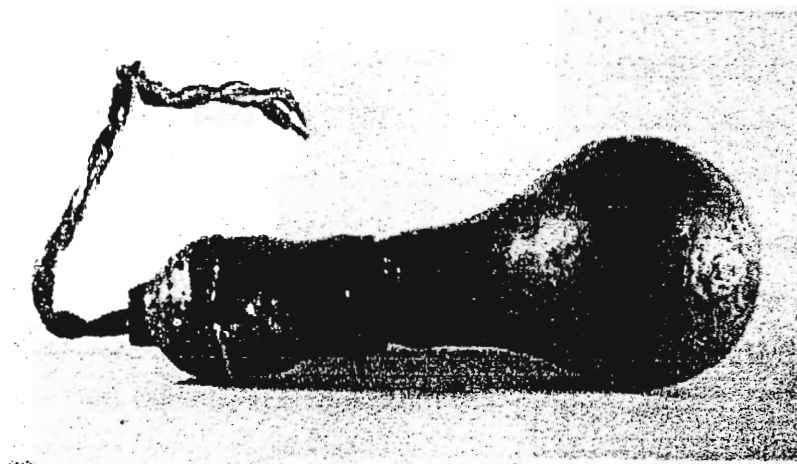


fig 30 Jasper Johns, Light Bulb II, 1958, sculp-metal, 7.9 x 20.3 x 12.7 cm, collection: the artist

also unmodified. Images such as the reproductions of Velasquez's Venus and Child, mosquitoes, the football, and the truck in Crocus are able to be created instantly and replicated exactly because of the silkscreening technique.

Rauschenberg's use of the silkscreen indicates his willingness to merge the disciplines of painting and printmaking within his 'combine' paintings. This can be construed as an attempt to open painting up, to free it from the restrictions placed on it by Greenberg's separation of the disciplines in an attempt to get rid of 'expendable' conventions and tradition.

The appropriation of objects from a secondary reality also has significant repercussions concerning the autonomy of the subject and the autonomy of the artwork. This dissertation's discussion of pastiche has revealed how Rauschenberg's silkcreened works 'appropriate' photographs and imagery from popular magazines and media publications. Because these images are secondary sources the artist is relieved of the effort of invention. Rauschenberg thereby relinquishes his autonomy as 'creator' of the artwork by allowing the artwork to incorporate existing images that are not of his own manufacture.

Similarly, the use of printmaking techniques like lithography by Johns during the 1960s also serve to distance him from the notion of the artist as autonomous subject. This is because, in lithography, the image is subjected to chemical processes which are beyond the control of the artist. Additionally, the image is also subjected to the decisions of the printmaking technicians in the print studio who aid the artist during the printing procedures. Hence, the use of printmaking techniques by Johns and Rauschenberg contribute to the deconstruction of the autonomy of the artist and the art object.

This deconstruction of the autonomy of the artist and the autonomy of the artwork can be interpreted as a break with "modernism's insistence on the autonomy of the artwork, its obsessive hostility to mass culture, its radical separation from the culture of everyday life" (Huysen 1986:vii). This interpretation facilitates a

postmodern reading of Johns and Rauschenberg's artwork according to Huyssen's definition. This interpretation does, however, rely upon the assertion that the mass cultural forms that appear in Johns and Rauschenberg's work are an attempt to deconstruct the mass culture/low-art opposition which is central to modernism.

Alternatively, this bridging of the gap between the real world and the pictorial world through the inclusion of objects in the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg can be seen as an extension of "the avant-garde critique of the aesthetic as an autonomous realm" (Newman 1986:33). According to this view, the appearance of imagery and objects from mass culture should be seen as an attempt to revitalise art by appropriating and including subject matter which are excluded in Greenberg's theory of modernism "in a distortion of the history of modernist practice to serve the interest of the international promotion of American Abstract Expressionism" (Newman 1986:34).

Hence, it is possible that the relationship between the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg's and mass culture undermines the notion of mass culture as the marginalised "[o]ther of autonomous high modernism" (Newman 1986:34). This does not, however, exclude the possibility that Johns and Rauschenberg were simply continuing in the tradition of the avant-garde which "aimed at developing an alternative relationship between high art and mass culture (Huyssen 1986:viii).

The heteronomous tendencies of modernism, which have been pointed out by Newman, account for many issues that have undergone revaluation by postmodernism (such as pastiche, allegory etc.). This supports the notion that avant-garde ideology extends throughout the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s. However, attributing a form of pre-Greenbergian modernism to the work of Johns and Rauschenberg also underplays issues such as 'narrative and discourse' which significantly contribute to a reading of their work as postmodernist. Newman points out that

this sort of strategy might be seen as an attempt to maintain the stance of a modernist avant-garde in conditions where this is no

longer possible or appropriate, and to do so through critical discourse. (1986:32).

Due to the lack of consensus concerning the nature of modernism and postmodernism Newman's suggestion must be considered as just one point of view among many. The work of Johns and Rauschenberg can be regarded as either modernist or postmodernist depending upon the various interpretations of modernism and postmodernism.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have attempted to describe the manner in which selected artworks produced by Johns and Rauschenberg during the 1950s and 1960s signal a departure from the conventions of Rosenberg's 'action' painting and Greenberg's 'American-type' painting - the two dominant modes of modernism that had become institutionalised in American art after World War II.

I have attempted to describe how, as a consequence of their reaction against these modes of modernism, Johns and Rauschenberg suggest alternative strategies for making art. These strategies are based upon the inclusive theories of Cage rather than the exclusive definitions of Greenberg and Rosenberg. Furthermore, I have drawn parallels between their work and 'postmodernisms' in other disciplines in an attempt to describe how Johns and Rauschenberg anticipated various postmodern attitudes and strategies in their works from the 1950s and 1960s.

In this dissertation I have investigated how Johns and Rauschenberg, through their artworks from the 1950s and 1960s, propose a revised identity for the artist, a participatory role for the viewer, and a new function for art. Each of these activities defy simple classification as modernist and indicate a transformation in the art of Johns and Rauschenberg from Abstract Expressionism to a variety of overlapping artistic styles and movements that appeared in American art of the 1960s and later. In order to fully appreciate this transformation it is necessary to very briefly acknowledge the tremendous influence that the art of Johns and Rauschenberg exerted upon movements such as Pop art, performance, and minimalist art in America. Johns stated emphatically, "I'm not a Pop artist!" (Russell and Gablik 1969:82) His work, however, along with Rauschenberg's, exhibits some of Pop art's concerns.¹⁹

¹⁹ Manifestations of Pop Art have appeared throughout the world, in France, Italy, Germany and Japan ... the English and the Americans are generally considered to have been the pioneers of the movement ... each was formed by a particular historical situation and has a distinct character (Russell and Gablik 1969:9).

Johns and Rauschenberg's inclusion of three-dimensional objects into their work, for example, aligns them with Pop art's concern with

the breakdown of the conventions of the picture plane and the use of three-dimensional extensions into the surrounding space, incorporating elements of the actual environment ... (Russell and Gablik 1969:13).

The incorporation of objects and space also prefigures the sculptural compositions of minimalist installations in the works of artists such as Richard Serra, Donald Judd, and Dan Flavin among others.

Johns and Rauschenberg's use of photographic silkscreen techniques and lithography is in accordance with Pop art's "substitution of industrial techniques and materials for oil paints and a pre-occupation with man-made objects as far removed from nature as possible ..." (Russell and Gablik 1969:13). Johns use of flags and targets also exhibit Pop art's interest in man-made objects. The use of industrial materials and man-made objects is also prevalent in minimal sculpture, and the minimalist paintings of Frank Stella. Johns' influence on Stella is documented by Rose who says "Stella understood that Johns' importance as a formal innovator was far greater than his interest merely as a source of pop imagery" (1980:111).

The absence of hierarchy in much of Johns and Rauschenberg's work can be equated with Pop art's deconstruction

of a previously established hierarchy of subject-matter ... and the expansion of art's frame of reference to include elements considered until now as outside its range, such as technology, kitsch, and humour ... (Russell and Gablik 1969:14).

Avoiding compositional hierarchy is also important in minimalist sculpture where repetition is often used "as a way of avoiding the inferences of relational composition" (Krauss 1977:250). As in the work of Johns, Rauschenberg, and the Pop artists, minimal sculptors make use of mass production which "ensures that each object will have an identical size and shape, allowing no hierarchical relationships between them (Krauss 1977:250).

Johns and Rauschenberg's reaction against Abstract Expressionism is also in alignment with Pop art's

move away from the private mythologies of Surrealism and the interior monologues of Abstract-Expressionism to a more extroverted and impersonal subject matter associated with the urban environment ... (Russell and Gablik 1969: 14).

This 'opening up' of art by Johns and Rauschenberg also aligns them - Johns in particular - with minimalist art. Referring to works such as Painted Bronze and Target With Four Faces, Krauss asserts that "Johns and the minimal artists insisted on making work that would refute the uniqueness, privacy, and inaccessibility of experience" (1977:259). Krauss cites Johns' work as one of the "immediate sources of minimalism ... which developed in the mid-1950s and constituted a radical critique of abstract expressionism" (1977:258). One important factor which accounts partly for the overlap of minimalist art, Pop art, and the work of Johns and Rauschenberg is the reintroduction of the 'readymade' by Johns into American art. Krauss declares that

[g]iven its tendency to employ elements drawn from commercial sources, minimal art thus shares with pop art a common source: a newly awakened interest in the Duchampian readymade, which the work of Jasper Johns in the late 1950s had made available to artists of the early 1960s. (1977:249).

The inclusive nature of Johns and Rauschenberg's art and its effacement of the boundaries between life and art shares Pop art's "greater mobility and flexibility toward art in general, whereby every art situation is more total and inclusive of the simultaneous levels which occur in actual experience" (Russell and Gablik 1969: 14). Johns and Rauschenberg's conception of 'art as a reflection of life' - culminating in 'happenings' - can be considered as seminal to the development of Pop art and performance art in America. For the Pop artist

[a]rt, then must have a manifest connection with the environment; it must act directly on experience, instead of being something that stands for it. These were the rudimentary notions from which Pop emerged, together with Happenings and the idea of a painter's theatre in America in the late 1950s. (Russell and Gablik 1969: 14).

Johns and Rauschenberg's interest in performance art was shared by artists such

as Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg who "organized a number of Happenings together (Russell and Gablik 1969:15).

The `theatrical' element of Performance art not only links Johns and Rauschenberg to Pop art but it is also an important element in minimalist sculpture. The `theatrical' element in minimalist sculpture occurs because

[t]he reductiveness of the Minimal object threw the emphasis from the `purely visual' presentness of the formalist abstract painting to the phenomenological experience of the perceiving subject's body in relation to the modification of gallery space brought about by the objects which were, as Donald Judd suggested, to be perceived as a whole and not in terms of formal part-to-part relationships (Newman 1986:35).

This `theatricality', rooted in `happenings' and perpetuated in minimalist sculpture, was also to become an important part of the Conceptual art which was, according to Newman, "in part at least, a response to the unrealized potential of Pop and Minimal art" (1986:35).

The above issues briefly describe the overlaps that occur between the work of Johns and Rauschenberg, Pop art, performance art, and minimalist art. These overlaps indicate that Johns and Rauschenberg's work of the 1950s and 1960s affected a broadening, or opening up of the restrictive boundaries that had been set in place by Greenberg and Rosenberg's theories concerning art production.

The existence of these overlaps also indicates that the work of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s is extremely flexible and inclusive by nature. This inclusiveness occurs as a result of an open-mindedness and a flexible attitude which has been exercised by Johns and Rauschenberg when making art, rather than resorting to prescriptive and dogmatic art-making strategies. The result is that interpretations of their work are constantly changing according to the unfixed perspectives and relativistic ideological positions of the viewer. It is this flexibility and inclusiveness which permits the categorisation of both Johns and Rauschenberg' work within both Abstract Expressionism and Pop art, and the wider discussions of modernism and postmodernism.

The flexibility and inclusiveness of Johns and Rauschenberg's art from the 1950s and 1960s permits both a modernist and a postmodernist interpretation of their work. This has become apparent in this investigation's discussion of collage and the elements of pastiche and allegory. Certain 'heteronomous' tendencies in modernism are able to account for the appearance of these elements "which have enjoyed reevaluation by postmodernist criticism" (Newman 1986:33). Similarly, Johns and Rauschenberg's engagement of mass culture can be interpreted in either modernist or postmodernist terms.

This investigation also reveals that although it is possible to draw parallels between the work of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s and various tendencies and attitudes within postmodern discourse, these works retain clear evidence of their sources within modernism. This evidence manifests itself in the way that certain of Johns and Rauschenberg's artworks adhere to some of the criteria which were put forward by Rosenberg and Greenberg in their definitions of modernism. Examples of this are the manner in which some of their works conform to Greenberg's notion of flatness - in their gestural application of paint, and their 'all-over' scheme. It is also evident in the way Johns and Rauschenberg can be seen to have extended Rosenberg's concerns regarding "self-actualization" (Fineberg 1995:177) through the act of painting.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s cannot be confined solely to a single category. This point of view is confirmed by Swenson who declares that "Rauschenberg's works cannot be forced to fit theories; his art is not didactic; it presents, simply and gracefully, a point of view" (1963:44).

It is not my intention, however, to underplay the significance of Abstract Expressionism, Pop art, performance, and minimalist art within the work of Johns and Rauschenberg's. On the contrary, this investigation has revealed that Abstract Expressionism and Pop art in particular have been seminal to the development of Johns and Rauschenberg's art. I do believe, however, that Johns and

Rauschenberg's art from the 1950s and 1960s should be seen as transformational: having had its roots within Abstract Expressionism, it developed almost independently to inform Pop art and subsequent movements such as Minimal and Conceptual art. Hence, Johns and Rauschenberg's art from the 1950s and 1960s should possibly be seen as having had a tangential relationship with Pop art which resulted in

a hybrid form of Pop. [Where the] subject matter often overlaps, but the style is more painterly, diffuse and multi-evocative, whereas the real dynamic of Pop is best realized when style and subject merge in a single unified *Gestalt*. (Russell and Gablik 1969:11).

Given this, it is possible that Johns and Rauschenberg's art from the 1950s and 1960s has more in common with English Pop art, where works tend to be more disparate and where there is less of a unified style. In English Pop art, artist's

modalities tend more toward the narrative and the picturesque (Phillips and Blake), or toward the autobiographical (Hockney), or toward subliminal and multi-focus imagery (Paolozzi). (Russell and Gablik 1969:11).

The flexibility and inclusive nature of Johns and Rauschenberg's work from the 1950s and 1960s - which accounts for its transformation from Abstract Expressionism to Pop art and minimalist art - also suggests that their work may be interpreted as transitional from modernism to postmodernism. Insofar as the elusive categories of modernism and postmodernism are able to be pinned down, there seems to be no reason why Johns and Rauschenberg's work - which tolerates a variety of styles as diverse as 'action' painting and Pop art - should be excluded from a broader transition from modernism to postmodernism in the arts in America. An interpretation of Johns and Rauschenberg's work as transitional does, however, require the adoption of rigid definitions of both modernism and postmodernism. This is necessary in order to place the artwork of Johns and Rauschenberg in a specific relation to each definition.

Perhaps Johns and Rauschenberg's artwork from the 1950s and 1960s should rather be seen as a repudiation of all that is limiting and restrictive in art. In the same way that their artworks erase the boundaries between printmaking, painting, sculpture, and discourse, they also blur the distinctions between art and life. The

artist, the viewer, and the world are inextricably bound together in an artwork by Johns or Rauschenberg. Their participation in Performance art perhaps best demonstrates their belief that art is life and that life is art. Subsequently, any attempts to confine their artworks of the 1950s and 1960s, to a single category, undermine the inclusive spirit in which they were produced. After all, "[t]he situation must be Yes-and-No, not either-or. *Avoid a polar situation*" (Russell 1981:336).

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