

**RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers**

Interviews: Kostelanetz, Richard / "A Conversation with Robert Rauschenberg" / Partisan Review, 1968

Partisan Review 38

1968?

Richard Kostelanetz

**A CONVERSATION WITH  
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG**

INTERVIEWER: In high school you had a reputation as a person who could draw or at least do certain kinds of drawings.

RAUSCHENBERG: I never thought of it as much of an ability. I thought everybody could do it a little bit. Some people could draw a little better than other people, but I never took drawing or painting any more seriously than that.

Later, [Josef] Albers told me I couldn't draw—that my whole childhood was wasted. I had an awful time pleasing him. I was too messy for collage, and I was too heavy-handed in my drawings.

INTERVIEWER: He would like open spaces and thin lines.

RAUSCHENBERG: The Matisse kind of thing.

He would teach a course in form, which he gives year after year, refining it more and more, and a course in the performances of color—a really clinical method. We worked in drawing from the same model week after week. Once a week or once every two weeks, someone in the class at Black Mountain would pose for us. Then, he would talk about the valleys and the mountains and things like that about the figure. Other than that, it was an aluminum pitcher—a shiny volume without a straight line and you couldn't do any shading. It is really the outside and inside that you got to say. You do it with

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE: Although painting is Robert Rauschenberg's dominant interest, throughout his career he has kept an informal connection with theater. Back in the summer of 1952, at Black Mountain College, he participated in John Cage's "prehistoric" happening, an untitled event that established an American precedent for subsequent theater of mixed means. From 1955 to 1965 he designed sets and costumes, as well as controlling the lighting, for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; and in the early sixties he collaborated in theater pieces by Yvonne Rainer and Kenneth Koch. *Pelican* (1963) was his own first piece; and when he all but abandoned painting in 1965, he initiated a series of mixed-means theatrical works—among them *Spring Training* (1965), *Map Room I* (1965), *Map Room II* (1965), *Linoleum* (1966) and *Open Score* (1966) for the New York Theater and Engineering Festival.

Mr. Rauschenberg was born in 1925, in Port Arthur, Texas.

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one line, and you can't do any erasing. You feel that there is air on this side of the line and on the other side of the line is the form. In watercolor, we had it again—once more we used month after month; and it was a terra-cotta flowerpot.

I figured out, at least in the watercoloring classes, that what he really had in mind was something like Cézanne. I found Albers so intimidating that after six months of this, during the first year, my whole focus was simply to try to do something that would please him. I didn't care what I got out of class. All I wanted to do was one day walk in there and show him something and hear him say, "That's pretty good."

INTERVIEWER: I have noticed that you wish to avoid historical interpretations of yourself. In general would you prefer not to say that someone influenced you?

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I've been influenced by painting, very much; but if I have avoided saying that, it was because of the general inclination, until very recently, to believe that art exists in art. At every opportunity, I've tried to correct that idea, suggesting that art is only a part—one of the elements that we live with. I think that a person like Leonardo da Vinci had not a technique or a style in common with other artists but a kind of curiosity about life that enabled him to change his medium so easily and so successfully. I really think he was concerned with the human body when he did his anatomical work. His personal curiosity, apart from any art idea, led him to investigate how a horse's leg works so that he could do a sculpture of it.

Being a painter, I probably take painting more seriously than someone who drives a truck or something. Being a painter, I probably also take his truck more seriously.

INTERVIEWER: In what sense?

RAUSCHENBERG: In the senses of looking at it and listening to it and comparing it to other trucks and having a sense of its relationship to the road and the sidewalk and the things around it and the driver himself. Observation and measure are my business.

I think historians have tended to draw too heavily upon the idea that in art there is development. I think you can see similarities in anything and anything by generalities and warp.

INTERVIEWER: They are concerned with identifying influence and, thereby, continuities.

RAUSCHENBERG: There's another thing. Now we have so much information. A painter a hundred or two hundred years ago knew very little about what was going on in painting in any other place except with his immediate friends or some outstanding event. It wasn't natural

for him also to take into consideration cave painting and fold it into his own sense of the present.

I think, if you want to make a generalization, there are probably two kinds of artists. One kind works independently, following his own drives and instincts; the work becomes a product, or the witness, or the evidence of his own personal involvement and curiosity. It's almost as if art, in painting and music and stuff, is the leftover of some activity. The activity is the thing that I'm most interested in. Nearly everything that I've done was to see what would happen if I did this instead of that.

INTERVIEWER: You would believe then that art is not a temple to which you apprentice yourself for future success.

RAUSCHENBERG: It's like outside focus and inside focus. A lot of painters use a studio to isolate themselves; I prefer to free and expose myself. If I painted in this room — the stove is here and all those dishes are there — my sensitivity would always take into consideration that the woodwork is brown, that the dishes are this size, that the stove is here. I've tended always to have a studio that was either too big to be influenced by detail or neutral enough so that there wasn't an overwhelming specific influence, because I work very hard to be acted on by as many things as I can. That's what I call being awake.

INTERVIEWER: People are enormously impressed by the variety of your work. How do you look upon your past work as a painter — as an evolution, or merely a succession of islands upon which you've put your foot?

RAUSCHENBERG: Looking back, I can see certain things growing, as well as a slackening of interest in another area because I am familiar enough with it. So far, I've been lucky enough always to discover that there's always been a new curiosity that is also feeding and building while I'm doing something else. I can figure out some logical reasons when I look back far enough, but I never do when I'm making the work.

INTERVIEWER: Let me take a particular example that interests me — say, the White Paintings [1952]. Here you have created what, if you believe in linear notions of art history, is a dead end. Did you look upon it as a gesture toward a dead end?

RAUSCHENBERG: No. It just seemed like something interesting to do. I was aware of the fact that it was an extreme position; but I really wanted to see for myself whether there would be anything to look at. I did not do it as an extreme logical gesture.

INTERVIEWER: But wasn't there an idea there — not a notion derived from art history but of a simple experiment, which was to see if a painting could incorporate transient images from outside itself? There-

fore, once you discovered the result of that idea, then you could go on to another.

RAUSCHENBERG: You could speculate whether it would be interesting or not; but you could waste years arguing. All I had to do was make one and ask, "Do I like that?" "Is there anything to say there?" "Does that thing have any presence?" "Does it really matter that it looks bluer now, because it is late afternoon? Earlier this morning it looked quite white." "Is that an interesting experience to have?" To me, the answer was yes. No one has ever bought one; but those paintings are still very full to me. I think of them as anything but a way-out gesture. A gesture implies the denial of the existence of the actual object. If it had been that, I wouldn't have had to have done them. Otherwise it would only be an idea.

INTERVIEWER: Claes Oldenburg said that he has a dream that someday he would call all his things back, that they had not really gone away.

RAUSCHENBERG: I have another funny feeling that in working with a canvas, say, and with something you picked up off the street and you work on it for three or four days or maybe a couple of weeks and then, all of a sudden, it is in another situation. Much later, you go to see somebody in California, and there it is. You know that you know everything about that painting, so much more than anybody else in that room. You know where you ran out of nails.

INTERVIEWER: You can look at it then as a kind of personal history.

RAUSCHENBERG: It's not like publishing, for each one is an extremely unique piece, even if it is in a series. I like to look at an old work and discover that is where I first did a certain thing, which may be something I may just happen to be doing now. At the time I did that earlier piece, I didn't know it was the lower right-hand corner that had the new element — that that part would grow and that other parts would relate more to the past.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever started something that you couldn't finish?

RAUSCHENBERG: Yes, but I really try hard not to. I work very hard to finish everything. One of the most problematic pictures I ever made was something I was doing for a painters' picture series in a magazine. I had started the radio sculpture thing, which became *Oracle* [1965]. My mind was more in sculpture or objects free of the wall. I found I was uncomfortable from the new difficulties metal afforded, because I really didn't know what to do with it. So I figured that if I was to be scrutinized, I'd do a painting instead. I said I'd do it, and I try to do what I say I will do. That painting went through so many awkward changes, unnecessarily. It was large, it was free-standing. Then I put

it against the wall, then I finally sawed it in half and made two paintings out of it. I wrecked one of them.

I didn't know what to do when Rudy Burckhardt came up and said, "How far did you get today? Can I take the picture tomorrow? Why did you do that? What do you have on your mind?" It just didn't work out. I knew I was compromising at the time; and when the article went in, I insisted that they photograph what I was not doing too. If those things are going to mean anything, they somehow ought to be the truth. In those days, it seemed like that would be your only chance for the next twenty years to get your picture reproduced in color. Now I have this lousy painting.

INTERVIEWER: In looking at your career, critics customarily tote up all the forms you have used: blueprint paper, white painting, black painting, collage, assemblage . . .

RAUSCHENBERG: I call those things "combines," because it was before the museum show of assemblages. Earlier I had this problem with the paintings that would be free-standing — not against the wall. I didn't think of them as sculpture. I actually made them as a realistic objection; it was unnatural for these to be hung on a wall. So when the sculptural or collage elements got so three-dimensional, then the most natural thing in the world was to put wheels on it and put it out into the middle of the room. That gave two more sets of surfaces to work on. It was an economical thing. I think I've been very practical. Sometimes the underneath surface is also a painting surface, because that would be viewed. In that one there is a mirror on the side so that you can see what is underneath there without bending down, or you're invited to.

I thought of them as paintings, but what to call them — painting or sculpture — got for some people to be a very interesting point, which I did not find interesting at all. Almost as a joke I thought I'd call them something, as Calder was supposed to have done with "mobiles," and it worked beautifully. Once I called them "combines," people were confronted with the work itself, not what it wasn't. Sometimes you can choke on these things; people have called my drawings "combine drawings." The word does really have a use — it's a free-standing picture.

INTERVIEWER: Just in passing, let me say there is one work of yours I can't deduce. That is the set *Factum I* and *II* [1957].

RAUSCHENBERG: There I was interested in the role that accident played in my work; so I did two paintings as much alike as they could be alike, using identical materials — as much as they could be alike without getting scientific about it. Although I was imitating on one paint-

ing what I had on the other, neither one of these paintings was an imitation of the other, because I would work as long as I could on one painting and then, not knowing what to do next, move over to the other. I wanted to see how different, and in what way, would be two paintings that looked that much alike.

INTERVIEWER: How, then, did some critics consider this a comment on action painting?

RAUSCHENBERG: I think Tom Hess said that. Again, you see, if you do anything where an idea shows up, particularly in those years when an act of painting was considered pure self-expression, then it was assumed that the painting was a personal expressionistic extension of the man. The climate isn't like that now. We've had a history of painting here now, and I think it's unfortunately getting to be a lot like Europe. We have enough reserve work so that it is very easy for a tradition to exist here which also includes any new ideas, which are immediately tacked onto where we were yesterday.

INTERVIEWER: A painting is pushed into historical perspective before it has become history, as well as critically classified before it is perceived.

RAUSCHENBERG: I would like to see a lot more stuff that I didn't know what to do with.

INTERVIEWER: In several earlier statements, you said that your paintings were not the result of ideas. What you've said now, however, suggests that they stem from a certain kind of idea.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think the ideas are based upon very obvious physical facts — notions that are also simpleminded, such as, in the *White Paintings*, wanting to know if that was a thing to do or not, or in *Factum*, wondering about what the role of accident is. Those aren't really very involved ideas.

INTERVIEWER: That is different from the idea, say, of doing a painting about war, or the idea of realizing a premeditated form.

RAUSCHENBERG: They are more physical than aesthetic.

INTERVIEWER: Rather than posing a thesis, you are asking a question and then doing some artistic experiment to answer it or to contribute to an answer.

RAUSCHENBERG: But I do it selfishly. I want to know.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of idea, if you can remember, was present in, say, *Monogram* [1959], which contains a stuffed Angora goat?

RAUSCHENBERG: I have always worked with stuffed animals, and before that, stuffed baseballs — and other objects. But a goat was special in the way that a stuffed goat is special, and I wanted to see if I could integrate an animal or an object as exotic as that. I've always been more attracted to familiar or ordinary things, because I find them a

lot more mysterious. The exotic has a tendency to be immediately strange. With common or familiar objects, you are a lot freer; they take my thoughts a lot further. Not only for content was the goat a difficult object to work with, but also because Angora goats are beautiful animals anyway. I did three versions of that painting. For the first one, it was still on the wall; I got him up there safely attached to the flat surface. To make him appear light — and this is the way my mind tends to work — I put light-bulbs under him, which erased the shadow of the enormous shelf that supported him. When I finished it, I was happy with it for about four days; but it kept bothering me that the goat's other side was not exposed; that it was wasted. I was abusing the material. So, I did a piece where he was free-standing on a narrow seven-foot canvas that was attached to the base that he was on. I couldn't have him facing the canvas, because it looked like some kind of still life, like oranges in the bowl. So I had him turned around, which gave me another image which didn't occur to me until, this time, only two days after I had finished it — a kind of beast and vehicle. It looked as though he had some responsibility for supporting the upright canvas or that pulling a canvas or cart was his job. So, the last solution stuck, which was simply to put him right in the middle — to make an environment with him simply being present in it.

INTERVIEWER: How dominant is he?

RAUSCHENBERG: He is dominant but I wouldn't worry about that as much as how dependent is everything else on him. I think that the painted surface and the other objects were equally interesting, once you see what the goat is doing there.

INTERVIEWER: But doesn't this presume that you forget about the goat to a certain extent?

RAUSCHENBERG: You forget about how arbitrary a goat is in the picture; that was never the point. It was one of many challenges, but it wasn't a function of the work to exhibit an exotic animal interestingly. Also, the tire around the goat brings him back into the canvas and keeps him from being an object in himself. You don't say, "What is that goat doing in that painting?" but "Why the tire around the goat?" And you're already involved.

INTERVIEWER: This, like so much of your other work, reflects a decided interest in working with unusual and challenging materials. What was your painting *Pantomime* [1961] about?

RAUSCHENBERG: I thought of it as making a surface which would invite one to move in closer; and when you move in closer, you discover it has two electric fans which then join you. I thought of it as kind of an air relief. Any physical situation is an influence on not only how

you see and if you look but also what you think when you see it. I just knew that if you were standing in a strong breeze, which was part of the painting, that something different would happen. If I did make a point, it is that even the air around you is an influence.

INTERVIEWER: It's a way of saying to the spectator that the Metropolitan Museum right now, with all the pollen in the air, is a lot different from midwinter.

RAUSCHENBERG: Also, looking at pictures from one place to another, and also from one season to another, makes them different. That's why, then, the business about masterpieces and standards is all archaic.

INTERVIEWER: The notion of masterpieces presumes that if someone puts the *Mona Lisa* in a stuffy New York museum and you have to push your way through a large obnoxious crowd to see it, you should still be greatly impressed.

RAUSCHENBERG: Put it in the Greenwich Village outdoor show and see what happens. Put it in the Louvre and send it in with an armed guard, and people will see it. I like the idea of that kind of dramatic carrying-on, for that's part of our time too.

INTERVIEWER: Now that you have become so involved with theater, have you given up painting?

RAUSCHENBERG: No. That was a mistaken rumor. Giving up painting is all part of that historical thing.

INTERVIEWER: Will you be able to work on a painting while you are doing theater work?

RAUSCHENBERG: Absolutely, I always did that. You see, it sounds interesting for the painter to give up painting.

INTERVIEWER: It's the myth of Duchamp. Actually, I was thinking more of Claes Oldenburg's statement that when he did a theater piece he temporarily gave up painting.

RAUSCHENBERG: The last year before I went away with Merce [Cunningham] when I was doing a lot of theater [1963-64], I did more painting than I ever had before. If you're working on something, it seems to me that the more you work the more you see, the more you think; it just builds up.

INTERVIEWER: You would prefer, then, a more varied regime than a single setup.

RAUSCHENBERG: Absolutely. I find that when I'm working on paintings, I can do drawings I like very much, although I am forced to adjust to flat surface and a different scale.

INTERVIEWER: How did you become involved with theater?

RAUSCHENBERG: I've always been interested, even back in high school. I like the liveness of it — that awful feeling of being on the spot. I

must assume the responsibility for that moment, for those actions that happen at that particular time.

I don't find theater that different from painting, and it's not that I think of painting as theater or vice versa. I tend to think of working as a kind of involvement with materials, as well as a rather focused interest which changes.

INTERVIEWER: How did you become the author of your own theater pieces?

RAUSCHENBERG: That skating piece, *Pelican* [1963], was my first piece. The more I was around Merce's group and that kind of activity, I realized that painting didn't put me on the spot as much, or not in the same way, so at a certain point I had to do it.

In some places, like London where [in 1964] the group was held over for six to eight weeks, and we did the piece of Merce's called *Story* three or four times a week, well then it was very difficult to do a completely different thing every night. A couple of times we were in such sterile situations that Alex Hay, my assistant, and I would actually have to be part of the set. The first time it happened was in Dartington, that school in Devon. The place was inhabited by a very familiar look — that Black Mountain beatnik kind of look about everybody; but they occupied the most fantastic and beautiful old English building, all of whose shrubs were trimmed. There was nothing rural or rustic or unfinished about it. For the first time, there was absolutely nothing to use; you can't make it every time. There was a track at the very back of the stage that had lights in it; so the dancers couldn't use that space. About an hour before the performance, I asked Alex whether he had any shirts that needed ironing, which is a nice question to ask Alex because he always did and he always ironed his own shirts. So, we got two ironing boards, and we put them up over these blue lights that were back there. When the curtain opened, there were the dancers and these two people ironing shirts. It must have looked quite beautiful, but we can't be sure absolutely. But from what I could feel about the way it looked and the lights coming up through the shirts, it was like a live passive set, like live decor.

INTERVIEWER: Would you do it again?

RAUSCHENBERG: I won't do that. You see, there is little difference between the action of paint and the action of people, except that paint is a nuisance because it keeps drying and setting.

INTERVIEWER: The most frequently heard criticism of *Map Room Two* [1965] is that it was too slow.

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't mind that. I don't mind something being boring, because there are certain activities that can be interesting if they are

done only so much. Take that business with the tires in *Map Room*, which I found interesting if it is done for about five minutes. But something else happens if it goes on for ten more minutes. It's a little like La Monte Young's thing, [*The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*]. At some point, you admit that it isn't interesting any more, but you're still confronted by it. So what are you going to make out of it?

INTERVIEWER: However, there is a difference between intentional boredom and inadvertent boredom.

RAUSCHENBERG: I'd like it if even at the risk of boring someone, there is an area of uninteresting activity where the spectator may behave uniquely. You see, I'm against the prepared consistent entertainment. Theater does not have to be entertaining, just like pictures don't have to be beautiful.

INTERVIEWER: Must theater be interesting?

RAUSCHENBERG: Involving. Now boredom is restlessness; your audience is not a familiar thing. It is made up of individual people who have all led different lives.

I've been with people who have speech problems. At first it made me quite nervous, later I found myself listening to it and being quite interested in just the physical contact; it can be a very dramatic thing. I've never deliberately thought about boring anyone; but I'm also interested in that kind of theater activity that provides a minimum of guarantees. I have often been more interested in works I have found very boring than in other works that seem to be brilliantly done.

INTERVIEWER: What was it that made them more memorable to you?

RAUSCHENBERG: It may be that that kind of pacing is more unique to theater-going. The role of the audience, traditionally, I don't find very interesting. I don't like the idea that they shouldn't assume as much responsibility as the entertainer does for making the evening interesting. I'm really quite unfriendly and unrealistic about the artist having to assume the total responsibility for the function of the evening. I would like people to come home from work, wash up, and go to the theater as an evening of taking their chances. I think it is more interesting for them.

INTERVIEWER: I'm bothered about this juxtaposition of interesting and boring. What you're doing, I think, is setting up an opposition to entertainment.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think that's it. I used the word bored to refer to someone who might look at a Barnett Newman and say there ought to be more image there than a single vertical or two single verticals. If someone said that that was a boring picture, he was using the word in relation to a preconceived idea of what interesting might be. What

I am saying is I suspect that right now in theater there is a lot of work described as boring, which is simply the awkward reorientation of the function of theater and even the purpose of the audience. Just in the last few years we have made some extremely drastic changes. Continuity in the works that I am talking about has been completely eliminated. It is usually different from performance to performance. There is no dramatic continuity; the interaction tends to be a coincidence or an innovation for that particular moment.

INTERVIEWER: What else do you think is characteristic of mixed-means theater?

RAUSCHENBERG: An absence of hierarchy. The fact is that in a single piece of Yvonne Rainer you can hear both Rachmaninoff and sticks being pitched from the balcony without those two things making a comment on each other. In my pieces, for instance, there is nothing that everything is subservient to. I am trusting each element to sustain itself in time.

INTERVIEWER: What do these changes imply?

RAUSCHENBERG: All those ideas tend to point up the thought that it would be better for theater that, if you went a second night, you found a different work there, even though it might be in the same place and have the same performers and deal with the same material. I think all this is creating an extraordinary situation that is very new in theater; so both the audience and the artist are still quite self-conscious about the state of things.

INTERVIEWER: You would agree with John Cage, then, that one of the purposes of the new movement is to make us more omniattentive.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think we do it when we are relaxed; all these things happen naturally. But there's a prejudice that has been built up around the ideas of seriousness and specializing. That's why I'm no more interested in giving up painting than continuing painting or vice versa. I don't find these things in competition with each other. If we are to get the most out of any given time, it is because we have applied ourselves as broadly as possible, I think, not because we have applied ourselves as singlemindedly as possible.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have then a moral objection to those dimensions of life that force us to be more specialized than we should be?

RAUSCHENBERG: Probably. If we can observe the way things happen in nature, we see that nearly nothing in my life turned out the way that, if it were up to me to plan it, it should. There is always the business, for instance, if you're going on a picnic, it is just as apt to rain as not. Or the weather might turn cold when you want to go swimming.

INTERVIEWER: So then you find a direct formal equation between your theater and your life?

RAUSCHENBERG: I hope so, between working and living, because those are our media.

INTERVIEWER: You would believe, then, that if we became accustomed to this chancier kind of theater, we would become accustomed, then, to the chancier nature of our own life.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think we are most accustomed to it in life. Why should art be the exception to this? You asked if I had a moral objection. I do, because I think we do have this capacity I'm talking about. You find that an extremely squeamish person can perform fantastic deeds because it is an emergency. If the laws have a positive function, if they could have, it might be just that—to force someone to behave in a way he has not behaved before, using the facilities he was actually born with. Growing up in a world where multiple distractions are the only constant, he would be able to cope with new situations. But, what I found happening to people in the Navy was that once they were out of service and out of these extraordinary situations, they reverted to the same kind of thinking as before. I think it is an exceptional person who utilizes that experience. That's because in most cases the service is not a chosen environment; it is somebody else's life that they're functioning in, instead of recognizing the fact that it is still just them and the things they are surrounded by.

INTERVIEWER: So you would object to anyone who finds the Navy an unnatural life.

RAUSCHENBERG: It is a continuation of extraordinary situations. We begin by not having any say over who our parents are; our parents have no control over the particular peculiar mixture of the genes.

INTERVIEWER: Looking back over your involvement with theater, do you see any kind of development, aside from the obvious development that you have now become the author of your own theater pieces, rather than a contributor to somebody else's? Also, do you see any development in your company of more or less regular performers?

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, that last is mostly a social thing of people with a common interest, and we have tended to make ourselves available as material to each other. It is in no way an organized company, and it changes from time to time—people move in and out. However, where a play could be cast with different actors and you would still get the same play, if I was not in constant touch with these people, I could not do those pieces. The whole concept would have to be changed, if I had new performers—if I let Doris Day take Mary

Martin's part in a musical or used the Cincinnati Philharmonic rather than the New York Philharmonic.

INTERVIEWER: You write for these performers, and they have learned to respond to the particular language of your instructions.

RAUSCHENBERG: It goes beyond interpretation of following directions. From the outset, their responsibility, in a sense of collaboration, is part of the actual form and content and appearance of the piece. It makes them stockholders in the event itself, rather than simply performers.

In *Map Room Two*, a couple of the people involved said that they had now gotten some kind of feeling about what I was after. Because this is my fourth or fifth piece and these people, if they weren't in them, had seen them all, then I think there is a body of work. If someone is working with an unfamiliar kind of image and if you see only one, it looks like a lot of things that it isn't and a lot of things that it is; but you don't really understand the direction. In five of those new things you're more apt to see what they are doing. It's like signposts; you need a few to know that you are really on the right road.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel stronger and more confident now in approaching a theater piece?

RAUSCHENBERG: Confidence is something that I don't feel very often, because I tend to eliminate the things I was sure about. I cannot help but wonder what would happen if you didn't do that and if you did this. You recognize the weaknesses in *Map Room Two*, for instance, that weakness of the neon thing coming last. *Linoleum* is probably one of the most tedious works I've ever done, the most unclimactic. If you're in the audience, you simply move into it with your attention and live through this thing. At a certain point it's over.

INTERVIEWER: How did you conceive *Oracle* [1965], your environmental sculpture?

RAUSCHENBERG: I finished it after I got back from Europe, after touring with Merce Cunningham. Technically, it had to be completely rebuilt, because ideas which had been impossible when I started in 1962, later became possible.

INTERVIEWER: In the technological sense?

RAUSCHENBERG: Yes. It is a single work with five pieces of sculpture. Each piece has its own voice. The controls are a console unit which is embedded in one of the pieces; and all five have a sound source. Each piece can be played independently, because the console has five volume controls, one for each piece. A scanning mechanism goes across the radio dials and provides a constant movement, so that what you control is the speed of scanning. All this gives you the maximum

possibilities of varied sound, from music to purely abstract noise and any degree in between. Each piece can be adjusted accordingly. One of the ideas was to make it so simple that you would not have to be educated to do it — so that the thing would just respond to touch.

INTERVIEWER: When this sculpture is displayed, is someone working the dials or are they merely present?

RAUSCHENBERG: Anyone around it can change it; and it can also be set up so that the sound is constantly changing, independently of anyone's control.

One of the pieces, a cement-mixing tub, is also a fountain, because I wanted another source of sound too in running water. I didn't want to imply that these sounds all had to be electronic.

INTERVIEWER: Do you consider this an "environment" or a "combine"?

RAUSCHENBERG: Sound is part of the piece; it is not a decoration. It is a part of the climate that piece insists on. You really do get a sense of moving from one place to another, as you shift from the proximity of one piece to another piece.

INTERVIEWER: Because the field of sound is constantly changing. Several questions come to mind: Why the field of sound? How does the sound relate to the visual elements?

RAUSCHENBERG: The sound relates to the pieces physically by the material interaction — the particular kind of distortion the sound of a voice has as it is shaped by its context. "Why sound?" because hearing is a sense that we use while looking anyway.

INTERVIEWER: One of the myths of modern culture — I associate it particularly with Lewis Mumford's *Art and Technics* [1952] — is that art and technology are eternally opposed to each other and that one succeeds only at the decline of the other.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think that's a dated concept. We now are living in a culture that won't operate and grow that way. Science and art — these things do clearly exist at the same time, and both are very valuable. We are just realizing that we have lost a lot of energy in always insisting on the conflict — in posing one of these things against the other.

INTERVIEWER: In contrast to nearly all contemporary artists, you did not need to find your own style by first painting through several established styles — by taking them as your transient models. From the start, you were, as we say, an original.

RAUSCHENBERG: I always had enormous respect for other people's work, but I deliberately avoided using other people's styles, even though I know that no one owns any particular technique or attitude. It seemed to me that it was more valuable to think that the world was big

enough so that everyone doesn't have to be on each other's feet. When you go to make something, nothing should be clearer than the fact that not only do you not have to make it but that it could look like anything, and then it starts getting interesting and then you get involved with your own limitations.

INTERVIEWER: As an artist, do you feel in any sense alienated from America today or do you feel that you are part of a whole world in which you are living?

RAUSCHENBERG: I feel a conscious attempt to be more and more related to society. That's what's important to me as a person. I'm not going to let other people make all the changes; and if you do that, you can't cut yourself off.

This very quickly gets to sound patriotic and pompous and pious; but I really mean it very personally. I'm only against the most obvious things, like wars and stuff like that. I don't have any particular concept about a utopian way things should be. If I have a prejudice or a bias, it is that there shouldn't be any particular way. Being a complex human organ, we are capable of a variety; we can do so much. The big fear is that we don't do enough with our senses, with our activities, with our areas of consideration; and these have got to get bigger year after year.

INTERVIEWER: Could that be what the new theater is about? Is there a kind of educational purpose now — to make us more responsive to our environment?

RAUSCHENBERG: I can only speak for myself. Today there may be eleven artists; yesterday there were ten; two days ago there were nine. Everybody has his own reason for being involved in it, but I must say that this is one of the things that interests me the most. I think that one of my chief struggles now is to make something that can be as changeable and varied and alive as the audience. I don't want to do works where one has to impose liveliness or plastic flexibility or change but a work where change would be dealt with literally. It's very possible that my interest in theater, which now is so consuming, may be the most primitive way of accomplishing this, and I may just be working already with what I would like to make.

INTERVIEWER: How will our lives — our ideas and our responses — be different after continued exposure to the new theater?

RAUSCHENBERG: What's exciting is that we don't know. There is no anticipated result; but we will be changed.

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