Cézanne's solitary male bathers provided another model for Johns's figures [see page 94]. . . . Cézanne's bathers . . . seem relatively static and contemplative, but they are linked in their themes and expressive qualities to Johns's more active divers. Awkwardly posed and introspective, Cézanne's figures convey emotional vulnerability rather than heroic monumentality. . . . Johns's interest in Cézanne's bathers in the early 1960s may suggest a need on his part to find a type of figure that could be read as anonymous and at the same time enabled him to introduce his own experiences into his work. . . .

While Leonardo and Cézanne provided Johns with models for figuration, the artist he addressed most directly during the 1960s was Duchamp. His works are full of Duchampian references, some intentional, others the result of the two artists' shared concerns. . . . With Duchamp language has primacy. . . . He presents in literal terms the difficulty of knowing what anything means . . . [T]wo ideas that have been integral to Johns's work since the time of his engagement with Duchamp [are] an expanded emphasis on the conceptual aspects of art, and the importance of recognizing how meanings shift. . . .

More important to Johns than the similarities critics had initially recognized between his paintings and sculptures of familiar objects and Duchamp's readymades was the wide range of interests and values he shared with Duchamp concerning the nature of art and the artist's role. While his contact with Duchamp's ideas was expansive for him, it also crucially affirmed what was distinct about his own work, particularly his commitment to visual sensation, and to exploring the eye's relation to the mind.

Robert Rauschenberg

Bed. 1955
Illustrated on page 368

James Leggio, in *Essays on Assemblage*, Studies in Modern Art 2, **1992**, pages 79, 80, 81, 104, 105

Bed derives the rich, almost disconcerting ambiguity of its aesthetic effect from the way Rauschenberg mixed and played with the many associations its material components had for him. . . . [T]he tale of how Rauschenberg came to paint *Bed* has been recounted many times.[1] He awoke one morning and found himself without materials on which to paint. As he looked about, his eye was drawn to a quilt that had been given to him a while before by a fellow student at Black Mountain College, Dorothea Rockburne. At first he stapled it to a stretcher and applied paint to the patchwork, trying to "turn the quilt pattern into an abstraction,"[2] but that did not seem to work. Then he added at the top a pillow and part of a sheet, which seemed better; instead of just a quilt, it now became a bed, and the white of the sheet and pillow gave him a fresh surface to paint on. Finally, up it went on the wall.

But there is a little more to it than that: the question immediately arises of the distinction between the artist's intention—conscious or unconscious—and the spectator's perception. For what the first viewers of this object *thought* they saw was not just a pillow and bedclothes with some paint on them. It seemed instead the evidence of some horrible crime—an axe murder, perhaps. . . .

Rauschenberg says that the "murder bed" reading is wrong, and he has consistently rejected it. He speaks of the work in a very positive way: "I think of *Bed* as one of the friendliest pictures I've ever painted. My fear has always been that someone would want to crawl into it."[3] . . .

[F]rom a very early point in the work's perceptual history, *Bed* was taken as evidence of, as a sign for, an absent human body. This idea of signaling the existence of a body that is not presented directly does, I believe, play a central role in the mode of perceiving *Bed*, for works that deal with the human body at one remove, in the form of signs, make up a very important and characteristic segment of Rauschenberg's production as a whole. . . .

All assemblages, all collages, depend to some extent on juxtaposing disparate elements in an unexpected way, releasing an unaccountable jolt of new meaning. When each element retains its separate identity, and continues to tug in its own direction, an illuminating sense of "wrongness," of the different components' irreconcilable "otherness," results: a sense that the conflicting elements somehow attract each other even as they are repelled. . . .

In the case of *Bed*, plenty of things could be construed as "wrong." Most obviously, the orientation is "wrong," being vertical rather than a bed's expected horizontal; and, of course, the appearance of the fluid medium on this particular cloth support seemed "wrong" enough seriously to disturb the first viewers. At the same time, we are looking at the "wrong" category of art object: the quilt is a product of folk arts, but it is marked with oils and stretched, thus compounding needlework crafts and easel painting. Moreover, the pillow and the swag–like draping of the covers seem to place *Bed* in a limbo somewhere between painting and found–object sculpture. Finally, the very notion of a bed combines, in one ambiguous place, deep–seated yet contradictory associations attaching to both the beginning and the end of life.