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II-B-70
Artists' Quotes

II · Old C T
Interviews

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II. B. 70 Interviews

Johns: Writings, Interviews, Statements (Vol.II of MOMA Catalog)

Johns's sketchbooks in fact contain more words than pictures...Reputed as being difficult of access...he has actually been quite open...consistently thoughtful responses may often seem koanlike in their embedded ambiguity, but who never condescends to or trivializes the occasion of discussion.
- Introduction.
(See also brief summary of career development)

Writings

"Sometimes I see it and then paint it..." - p.19-20 ("Sixteen Americans")
(also, "At every point in nature there is something to see... Changing focus on the eye")
On Duchamp, 1968 - includes phrase "negate any concern with art as transportation." - p.22-23. (whole quote is important.)

Sketchbook Notes

"An object that tells of the loss, destruction, disappearance of objects. Does not speak of itself. Tells of others. Will it include them? DELUGE." - p.52

Take a skull
cover it with paint
rub it against canvas -- p.52

Beware of the body
+the mind.
Avoid a polar
situation.
Think of the
edge of the city +
the traffic there -p.58

WATCHMAN and Spy notes - p.61-62

Corpse and Mirror notes - p.70

To give up
or
To do the work
To doubt that the work needs doing?
At any rate, the time passes. -p. 76

What (for me?) drives form
in a certain way? The
possibilities for connection,
division, modulation are

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numerous and, themselves,
subject to such connective,
divisive, modulating forces.
Odd, that any thing is arrived
at, if it is. For some, the
question of style might be
important here. - p.79

Interviews

"It all began with my painting of an American flag. Using this design took care of a great deal for me because I didn't have to design it. So I went on to things like the targets -- things the mind already knows. This gave me room to work on other levels."
- p.82

(For flag ptgs, see also p.123) 98-99

"I don't think you can talk about art and get anywhere. I think you can only look at it."
- p.82

Leo Steinberg note on how things JJ said to him were a pastiche
- p.84

"...I don't see any point in simply stating something that is easily available...It seems to me that you do what you can't avoid doing, and you do what is helpless, and unavoidable. That seems to me to be more interesting than any other position at this moment -- for me, anyway."
- p.87

"...I prefer work that appears to come out of a changing focus -- not just one relationship or even a number of them but constantly changing and shifting relationships to things in terms of focus...
"I am concerned with a thing's not being what it was, with it's becoming something other than what it was, with any moment in which one identifies a thing precisely and with the slipping away of that moment, with at any moment seeing or saying and letting it go at that...
"Occasionally someone will see the work in a way that even changes its significance for the person who made it; the work is no longer 'intention,' but the thing being seen and someone responding to it."
Tells story about the beer cans
- pp.92-94

JJ, discussing flag paintings with Tono, says "It is the gray zone between these two extremes that I'm interested in -- the area [where it] is neither a flag nor a picture." Goes on to tell about dreaming of a flag and then painting it.
- p.98-99

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"My idea has always been that in painting the way ideas are conveyed is through the way it looks and I see no way to avoid that, and I don't think Duchamp can either. To say that you don't care how it looks suggests something that I think is not quite possible, if what you're doing is making something to be looked at. Then, if it looks one way, it's one thing, and if it looks another way, it's another thing. But one thing is not another thing,

- p.108 (Hopps invu)

Re use of flags, targets, etc.: "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 can be dealt with without having to judge them; they seem to me to exist as clear facts, not involving aesthetic heirarchy.

"...Now the idea of 'thing' or 'it' can be subjected to great alterations, so that we look in a certain direction and we see one thing, and we look in another way and we see another thing. So that what we call 'thing' becomes very elusive and very flexible, and it involves the arrangement of elements before us, and it also involves the arrangement of our senses at the time of encountering this thing...

"I think what one wants from painting is a sense of life...

"And I think that the picture isn't preformed, I think it is formed as it is made; and might be anything. I think it resembles life...

"Well, intention involves such a small fragment of our consciousness and of our mind and our life. I think a painting should include more experience than simply intended statement. I personally would like to keep the painting in a state of 'shunning statement,' so that one is left with the fact that one can experience individually as one pleases...

In other words, if your painting says something that could be pinned down, what it says is that nothing can be pinned down, that nothing is pure, that nothing is simple.

"I don't like saying that it says that. I would like it to be that."

- pp.113-121 (Sylvester invu)

JJ on getting rid of the necessity to judge - p.125 (neutrality)

"I think most of my work is involved with a kind of ambiguous statement, or multiple possibilities of some way of working, or of some ways of working."

- p.127

"...that whole range from precision to imprecision to disappearance interests me. A large part of my work has been involved with this."

- p.130

"I like the idea of taking these discrete operations and using them in such a way that doubt is cast upon them, and one is not sure what to regard as a discrete thing." - p.132

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"I am interested in the idea of sight, in the use of the eye. I am interested in how we see and why we see the way we do."
What did you mean by the expression "to make something new for people?"
"When something is new to us, we treat it as an experience. We feel that our senses are awake and clear. We are alive."
- p. 136

(Vivien Raynor, Artnews, March 1973: He has a remoteness that, while very amiable, makes all questions sound vaguely coarse and irrelevant.)
- p. 142

"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." (1973)
- p.145

JJ story about Beckett looking at etchings with flagstone and cross-hatch patterns - both patterns "given" by chance.
- p.153

"A while ago I went to a show of my drawings in England. I walked through them and was appalled -- so much stuff. The amount of work was outrageous. Then the director told me there was another floor of them. No, really, I think I've already taken up too much space."
- p.154

"I try to be straightforward, but I don't know. [...] Sometimes I can't think of what to say, and sometimes my mind conjures up the negative of what I'm thinking, and I try to see if that's equally valid as what I'm saying."
- p.159

Grace Glueck on derivation of flagstone and crosshatch patterns
- p.164

JJ on Cézanne's The Bather: "it has a synesthetic quality that gives it great sensuality -- it makes looking equivalent to touching." (1977)
- p.166

"I usually begin with some sort of an idea of what I want to do. Sometimes it's an image. I always want to see what it will make. Then, I actually start working. During the process I don't have any morality about changing my mind. In fact, I often find that having an idea in my head prevents me from doing something else. It can blind me. Working is therefore a way of getting rid of an idea. The manner in which I work constantly involves a feedback. I paint out parts, change others, and add and subtract as I go along. I don't think about chance. One's initial ideas may have to do with chance, but as one continues, one watches and controls the effects."
- p.169

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"Everything I call an idea evolves from an actual experience,"
- p.172

"My experience of life is that it's very fragmented. In one place, certain kinds of things occur, and in another place, a different kind of thing occurs. I would like my work to have some vivid indication of those differences."
- p.174

JJ on the accident of timing that brought him and Leo together.
- p.176

"I think artists are the elite of the servant class." (Crichton, p.17)
- p.179

JJ on why he prefers things that are "not mine", ie. designed by others - objectivity and subjectivity - the question of seeing (1978)*
- p.182

JJ on The Critic Smiles and The Critic Sees: "I think of them as cartoons."
- p.184

"Let me put it this way. My feeling about myself on the subjective level is that I'm a highly flawed person. The concerns that I have always dealt with in picture-making didn't have to do with expressing my flawed nature, or my self. I wanted to have an idea, or an image, or whatever you please, that was not I...I don't know how to put it. I don't know what supports what. I wanted something that wouldn't have to carry my nature as part of its message. I think that's less true now [1978]...I don't know whether my work now has bypassed that concern, or includes it, or what. But I don't think I'd express that thought now." (Goes on to agree that his work now contains private, personal meanings.)
- p.187

"I'm always interested in the physical form of whatever I'm doing and often repeat an image in another physical form just to see what happens, what the difference is. And to see what it is that connects them and what it is that separates them."
- p.208

JJ asked whether period 1962-65 was period of crisis for him: (Laughing) "Every period is a period of crisis, isn't it? Those paintings all speak some sort of unsettled language. There is something ambiguous about them. When they say something, at the same time they say the opposite, but they have no equilibrium. That's how I see it working, but I could be wrong."
- p.212

"I was impressed with Leo Steinberg's comments on my work; it seemed to me that he tried to deal directly with the work and not put his on map of preoccupations over it. He saw the work as something new, and then tried to change himself in relation to it,

* "...I was interested in the kind of nuance, modulation, play between thinking, seeing, saying, and nothing." (182)

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which is very hard to do. I admired him for that...But of course sometimes you wonder about a critic, How could anyone possibly think that?"

- p.216

"In my early work I tried to hide my personality, my psychological state, my emotions. This was partly to do with my feelings about myself and partly to do with my feelings about painting at the time. I sort of stuck to my guns for a while, but eventually it seemed like a losing battle. Finally, one must simply drop the reserve. I think some of the changes in my work relate to that..."

- p.217 (see also p.256)

JJ on Racing Thoughts: "I had had a period of a kind of anxiety, I suppose, where when I was trying to go to sleep, images, bits of images, and bits of thought would run through my head without any connectedness that I could see. And I was having dinner with I think a psychologist that I had met, and I explained that I had been having this for like a week, this situation, and he said: 'Oh, we call those "racing thoughts."' And I was very pleased that there was a name for my condition (laughs)."

- p.224

JJ on The Seasons: "They're not really self-contained, but to a large extent they're an effort to see the limitations of one's work and to try to overcome them. They have to do with control and skill, and curiosity about what painting could be." (See also p.252)

- p.225

JJ on Picasso's 1936 Woman in a ~~Blue~~ Straw Hat: "...It's rich in a kind of sexual suggestion, and extremely complicated on that level. And it seems so offhand..."

- p.226

JJ on Warhol's early work: "Somehow I felt that something had been 'omitted' from the pictures...and I didn't like it. Then, with the silkscreens, it seemed to me that he had solved what I didn't like about the other paintings: he had found a way of making a painting that in itself left out things, it was more complete, stronger,."

- p.231

JJ on John Cage; on Happenings - p.23~~8~~-7 Origin of Foundation for C.P.A.

JJ on his own childhood: "It wasn't especially cheerful. Everything I do is attached to my childhood."

- p.242

JJ on Grunewald altarpiece: "Looking at them [the details in the portfolio sent him by a friend], I thought how moving it would be to extract the abstract quality of the work, its patterning, from the figurative meaning. So I started to make these tracings...in all

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of them I was trying to uncover something else in the work, some other kind of meaning."

- p.258

JJ on his use of images from other works: "It's difficult to understand because it's not based on a decision, but on the activity of making pictures."

- p.282

JJ on duck-rabbit image: "What interests me, in part, is that something can be seen in two different ways, and the question whether seeing it one way necessarily obliterates seeing it the other way. Or whether it's possible to see both at once."

- p.283

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JJ Interviews (add)

Are you interested in what critics and other people say about your pictures?
Yes, very interested…" (p. 99)

"Unfortunately, everything I do is intentional." (p.104)

Duchamp - Christmas dinner, story about not intending to stop painting (151) – the set for Merce with *Large Glass* elements (152) – meeting Duchamp (154) – three works that have been important to him: Picasso's *Demoiselles*, Cezanne's *The Bather*, Duchamp's *Large Glass* (166) – not close to Duchamp, saw him only about a dozen times (179) – had probably heard about the Mona Lisa earlier, but had not seen the work until 1959 (227) – more on Duchamp (277) – I think he's more cheerful in his skepticism and more detached (*than I am*)…I'm aware of my own morbidity, my feelings of shortcomings. (286)

His one day of "higher education" at Hunter (162)

John Cage - his generosity; "one of the first people I met with a very strong intellect" (199) - "His curiosity was wide-ranging and athletic, and he was able to connect his work to other fields of thought – to nature, philosophy, science, and whatnot (236) – "Well, he was a great talker, a teacher…who was constantly expressing ideas, and deliberately organizing ideas…I felt that I was learning something, usually, when I was around John" (270)

The attention paid the work (*after his first show*) was interesting to me. It made my life easier. I think it gave me confidence to go against it, to be free to do what I wanted. To be obstinate. I don't think I ever really imagined I'd have a large audience." (199)

The "completely art-free" environment of his childhood (211)

I think my work lends itself particularly well to a great deal of thought in the area between understanding and misunderstanding. To me these interpretations are never illuminating; sometimes I find them interesting and sometimes confusing." (212)

Everything I do is attached to my childhood. (242)

Autobiography in his painting after The Four Seasons: They're not particularly autobiographical. Where is the autobiography? (251) [No narrative either] (252)

I think that's where art comes from, from the young and the poor… (253)

Well, I suddenly became very old as soon as I hit sixty… (266)

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Re accident and chance: "I'd love not to be in control, but that's not what I'm interested in. I think there's a play between the subjective and the objective that is in operation constantly when I'm working that tackles the idea of chance from both directions. (287)

"My early work seemed to be an attempt to see what I was or could do, that other people weren't or couldn't. To some degree, the works were limited or focused by such concerns. Later, as practice and skill increase, the sense of possibility enlarges.(298)

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JJ on Duchamp

"Duchamp's *Large Glass* shows his conception of work as a mental, not a visual or sensual, experience in which one thing can mean another. With Duchamp language has primacy, and the *Glass* is a pun on opaque meaning and transparent material. He presents in literal terms the difficulty of knowing what anything means – you look through the glass and don't see the piece itself." (MoMA cat., p.43)

Johns's Sketchbook Notes modeled on notes in Green Box (ibid).

Litanies of the Chariot, 1961 drawing, is first direct appropriation of another artist's work. (ibid, 44). In *No*, 1961, Johns used MD's bronze sculpture *Female Fig Leaf* to make imprint on upper left; the imprint appears again in *Field Painting* (1963-64) and in *Arrive/Depart* (1963-64). *Passage* (1962) refers to *Passage of the Virgin to the Bride*. Aspects of *According to What* (1964) refer to *T u m'* (ibid, 45). Etc.

"Though Johns's occasional explicit references to and quotations from Duchamp would find echoes in countless 'appropriations' in the 1980s, they were less important than his transformation of Duchamp's way of not making art into a way of making art. Johns turned an abstemious elegance of thought into hands-on physicality, and remade a deft wit into a darker and more troubling psychology." (Varnedoe, MoMA cat., 97)

"Marcel Duchamp, one of this century's pioneer artists, moved his work through the retinal boundaries which had been established with Impressionism into a field where language, thought and vision act upon one another. There is changed form through a complex interplay of new mental and physical materials, heralding many of the technical, mental and visual details to be found in more recent art…The art community feels Duchamp's presence and his absence.. He has changed the condition of being here." - Artforum 7 no.3, November 1968 (MoMA cat II, p. 22)

"He was the first to see or say that the artist does not have full control of the aesthetic virtues of his work, that others contribute to the determination of quality. This concern for things moving and stopped…brings into focus the shifting weights of things, the instability of our definitions and measurements…It may be a great work of his to have brought doubt into the air that surrounds art…Marcel never gave you the confidence to be sure of any statement you might make about him. He never made the claims that you might make for him." - Art in America, July-August 1969 (MoMA cat II, p.22-23)

JJ received copy of Box-in-a-Valise as a gift in 1958 (ibid, p. 127). Met MD in 1959 (164). Bought Green Box in ?? ; bought Female Fig Leaf in Paris, in ??; Villon's etching of The Bride in ??

See also CT interview with JJ on 3/17/78.

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Crichton

"I think artists are the elite of the servant class." (p. 17)

"I can't play chess," he said once. "I don't have the right head for it. I can't think of all those possibilities in advance." (18)

Asked how he works on a painting: "Well, I begin at the beginning, and then I go on from there.." (18)

"I'll tell you a secret. I don't know anything about art." (21)

Why he uses encaustic – it dries faster than oil. "I wanted to show what had gone before in a picture, and what comes after." (30)

On Cage: "Knowing John has had a great effect on my work. John was intellectually generous and also he had a kind of tendency to teach which was useful to other people. He was capable of grasping ideas in different disciplines and making relationships among them. He was probably the first person I met who took such pleasure in ideas." (33) – see story ff about car breaking down, and John pulling out the Scrabble board.

The impersonal aspect in the early paintings (35)

Johns's saying he is a poor colorist (39)

On Duchamp's influence: "After one's youth, an 'influence' really implies an underlying congruity of thought." (40). His dream about Duchamp, which led to *According to What.* (50)

"My [work] has no conscious goal in relation to the viewer." (41)

Wittgenstein - "is preoccupied with language, meaning, measurement, structured relationships, and the interpretation of visual information." (46)

According to What a response to Duchamp's *Tu m'* – (50)

Re *Harlem Light* - "Whatever I do seems artificial and false to me…If I could have traced it I would have felt secure that I had it right. Because what's interesting to me is the fact that it isn't designed, but taken. It's not mine." (53)

"That's what hiding is – you know it still exists." (54)

"In my early work, I tried to hide my personality, my psychological state, my emotions. This was partly due to my feelings about myself and partly due to my feelings about painting at the time. I sort of stuck to my guns for a while but eventually it seemed like a

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losing battle. Finally one must simply drop the reserve. I think some of the changes in my work relate to that." (62 – from 1978 invu)

His gloomy mood while painting *Dancers on a Plane* (1979). Looking at Tantric art, and "thinking about issues like life and death, whether I could even survive." (62)

Perilous Night and the images from Grunewald – "I had the feeling there was something in the way these things were structured that was important, and free of the information that the images convey…I wanted to get rid of the subject matter, and find out what it was…" (64)

The Seasons - "In a sense, ~~not~~ none of it represents me. And in a sense, all of it represents me. You can say that it does, or you can say it doesn't." (69)

Untitled (1983-84) – his annoyance with earlier "decoding", and decision not to tell anyone what the traced image was. (72)

His moral sense – "right conduct" in life and in art (73)

Crichton: "One can argue that Johns can best be understood as an artist who is blessed and burdened with a profound self-awareness…His actions, speech, and dress have a striking simplicity." (73)

"I think I have a kind of resentment against illusion when I can recognize it." (74)

Crichton: "One could argue that Johns is an artist who has chosen, throughout his working life, to place himself explicitly at the juncture of abstraction and representation. His work always seems to oscillate between the thing and the representation of the thing." (86)

"The later works of any period have often been taken to suggest desperation, entrapment, or exhaustion on the artist's part." (94)

Mark Rosenthal on *Perilous Night*: the prevalence of death. (96)

"My thinking is dependent on real things…I'm not willing to accept the representation of a thing as being the real thing…I like what I see to be real, or my idea of what is real." (99)

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The Drawings of Jasper Johns
(Nan Rosenthal and Ruth Fine, Natl Gallery, 1990)

On his use of tracing, etc.: "Well, I was never trained as a draftsman…At any rate, I seem to be attracted to such things and frequently work with them. Images that can be measured, traced, copied, etc., appeal to me, and I often enjoy that my finished work should contain the suggestion that I have used such procedures…I've used all these techniques, but what I mean is that once something is established in my mind as an image, I go to great lengths to reproduce it by whatever means." (70)

Re *Diver* – "I was just making a study for the painting. That is the way it started. And I thought it looked nice and decided to finish it as a drawing." Did he think of it as a diagram of a swan dive? "I did, but now it would take me a while to recover the original thought." Is the rectangular shape at the top a sort of diving board? "Well, it suggests it, doesn't it?" (74) Most of his drawings were made after the paintings; this one was started before, and finished after.

His "bad habits" of work (76)
Isenheim altarpiece – He went to see it in Colmar twice, in 1976 and 1979. In 1980, a Dusseldorf dealer named Wolfgang Wittrock gave him a portfolio of details from Grunewald, and he traced some of them. Was the diseased demon a reference to the Aids epidemic? "…it is easy to have such a thought." Did you intend this? "No, but it is probably an unavoidable observation at the moment." (82)

"No, my drawings have no conscious goal in relation to the viewer. That people attend to my work is a bonus for me and, I hope, for them, but the accomplishment of the drawing is what I have in mind when I work, and when I look at what I have done, I usually am considering what to do next." (83)

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JJ – other sources

"Art is either a complaint or appeasement." - Rosenthal, JJ: Work Since 1974, p.11

"At times I will attempt to do something which seems quite uncalled for in a painting, so that the work won't proceed so logically from where it is, but will go somewhere else." (ibid, 26)

"…my work feeds on itself." (ibid, 47)

"I was never well trained as a draftsman…I don't think I ever did it very well." - Rosenthal and Fine, "Drawings" cat., p. 70. See also J's quote in Jill Johnston, p. 37.

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Johns - CT Interviews

I asked about his published comment on Duchamp's Glass negating "any concern with transportation." What did he mean? He thought for a while, then said that many paintings tried to place you somewhere else, but that the Large Glass did not. "It involved you with yourself, and with the room you were in -- it was very much in the present tense." (6/6/89)

On Duchamp's insistence that the readymades had no aesthetic quality: "He was wrong."

How he acquired Villon's acquatint of MD's Bride - 1/19/91.

The idea of an art that was non-self-expressive was very much in the air in the late 1950s - Cage's talk about Zen, etc. They felt it strange that the second generation of Ab-Ex, who were so interested in the self, did work that looked so much alike. This was the moment when JJ decided to stop going to become an artist... - 1/19/91

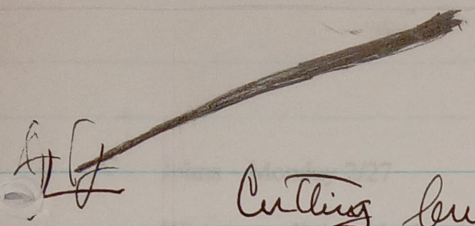
What impressed JJ and RR was that Marcel made a connection between making art and thinking. That seemed new at the time. - 6/22/93

Johns on Rauschenberg - 3/17/78. See also RR invu, no date.

* Duchamp/Johns notifs: thermometer, book, measuring devices, cast shadows, color scale, circles, signs, plaster casts, words, puns, eroticism. A "system of negations."

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Cutting brush -

"The problem is, Calvin, I'm not very coherent. From the point of view of analysis or memory, I wouldn't be very good at that."

(I say I'm not v. coherent either, but maybe ~~by~~ combining our incoherence we might arrive at something interesting.)

"Well, Calvin, if you want I'm willing to give it a try. But with the understanding that it might be a failure."

He's very busy just now, could I call in late January...

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Saint-Martin

Johns – Monday 2/27

When we call from the hotel at 3:50 pm, and say we still can't get into our room, he says that's ridiculous, "I'll be right over." Arrives five minutes later in a tiny white car, a Renault "Twingo" he recently acquired. Stick shift. He's in shorts and a black shirt. On the five-minute drive to his house, he points out all the new building going on here. A medieval village is going up, on both sides of the road and up the hill; it will have a deep water harbor to accommodate large boats, and a four-story parking garage. He's not sure yet whether it will be visible from his house.

He started coming to Saint-Martin in ~~the 1960s~~ 1969, at the suggestion of Cy Twombly, because he wanted a warm place to spend the winters. Rented a house on the property for a while, and bought the ~~property around 1970~~ present place (in 1979), he's not sure of the date – "I don't know, you'd have to look it up in the MoMA chronology." Phillip Johnson came down, and sketched out the house, but he didn't want to design it, so Jasper got two young architects to do that. He didn't like their plan, took it back to Johnson, and then the young architects built it pretty much Johnson's way.

There's a high stone wall with a sliding wood door that opens electronically. Then an allee of trees, another stone wall on the right (local stone). The driveway ends at the cliff overlooking the water. Garage and entrance to the right (also a guest house). Through the entrance, there's a long covered walkway running alongside the house, which is a simple rectangle to the left, with a high pitched ceiling and big sliding glass doors overlooking the wide lagoon. Mexican tiles on the floor. White walls. The living room is about forty feet long by twenty wide. Kitchen at one (left) end, behind half-wall. ~~Twelve-foot~~ round dining table, marble, with marble lazy susan. To the right, a smaller round table with four big wooden armchairs, and on the end wall a recent painting, called "Bushbaby." It's big, about ten feet tall by four feet wide – he doesn't know the exact dimensions. Divided roughly into three sections: harlequin-pattern diamonds on the right, colored circles on the left, and dark gray in the center. There's a geometric black figure on the left that's repeated in gray in the center. Also, two tall wooden slats, upright and overlapping, with a string hanging down from the top of one of them. The string moves gently in the breeze coming through the sliding glass door. He did it last spring, to replace an earlier painting done for this space, which has gone to the gray painting show in Chicago. (TITLE TK). "I hope this one stays," he says. It's the only art work in the room. The overall impression is spare, simple, but comfortable. Monastic comfort.

"When I first came there were no houses over there," he says, pointing across the water to a hilly section on the right. "It was just green." The town of Marigot is visible at the far end of the lagoon, with boats in the harbor.

He offers us freshly made lemon-grass iced tea, which we take to a sort of loggia overlooking the swimming pool. The loggia echoes the house – same proportions, same Mediterranean tile roof and terra cotta tile floor. His bedroom and studio are continuations of the living room, but reached through a separate door. "Can we see the studio?" Dodie asks. There is a pause. Then, "Some time."

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His dog, Pepper, very old now, friendly but quiet, with strange markings. Jasper found him on the beach, as a puppy, a stray, and brought him home, along with his sister, Alice Faye, who now lives in Sharon. Like the ones that Teeny Duchamp adopted and took back to France with her. Jasper says she's a wonderful watchdog – when anybody comes to the house, she just hides. We talk about the trees. There's a big one near where we sit. He brings out a large volume, "Trees of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands," put out by the government in 1964, with wonderful drawings. The tree in question is called loblolly, or mapoo. There's also a gum tree, and a tree that drops sticky things that the mongooses like to eat – he's seen them entirely covered with the stuff, like some exotic costume.

Conversation is a bit stiff. He's cordial, as always, but does nothing to put you at ease. We discuss the troubles at Dia, and the recent Jed Perl article attacking Glenn Lowry and the new MoMA. He knows about it, and about the Harvey Shipley Miller gift of drawings to MoMA, and doesn't agree that the attacks are justified. (I remember he's close to Jennifer Russell, who was down here last week). Then Dodie brings up the recent benefit show for his Foundation – we went to the opening last week – and asks him questions about the Foundation. He looks at her quizzically. "You don't read," he chides her, laughing. And a moment later, after another question, "You are so ignorant!" (Later, he brings out a pamphlet that explains his Foundation). Dodie, who is easily wounded, doesn't find this at all wounding. Jasper is not mean.

We ask if we can take him out to dinner somewhere. He says he doesn't like going out to dinner, prefers to dine at home. "You could come here," he said, "if you don't mind couscous. I do go out to lunch sometimes. I will take you tomorrow. I go to the same place." We leave to go back to the hotel around five – Jasper drives us.

He picks us up again at 7:30, and we go back to his house. The Magic Flute is playing on the stereo – speakers are up in the rafters near the ceiling. He busies himself in the kitchen, and we look at the books piled on the smaller table: "A Short History of Nearly Everything" by Bill Bryson; "Kafka On the Shore" by Haruki Murakami; "The Liberal Imagination" by Lionel Trilling; "Gaudi" by Gus van Hansbergen; "My Love Affair With Modern Art," Katharine Kuh; The Complete Poems of Ted Berrigen; "Beethoven" by Edmund Morris; "Cezanne and the Eternal Woman;" the TLS; catalogs for the Munch and Redon exhibitions. Most of these have been sent to him by friends or admirers. On the dining table are two different translations of Cezanne's writings – he had one, and was sent the other, and is interested by how the translations differ.

How does he get his news of the world? "I don't." Doesn't subscribe to the Times, rarely looks at TV – there's one English-language station, but it's terrible; it shows "Passions," a sitcom so bad that he figured it must have been relegated to the Caribbean, but then discovered that it was all the rage in NY.

Dinner is delicious – a chicken stew, served in a large bowl with couscous and broth, all home-made, and a salad. He won't let us help clear the table. Dessert is a passion fruit tart, very delicate. "I don't know what it is until I taste it," he says.

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Art talk at dinner. We discuss Bill Rubin, who bought Jasper's White Numbers painting, and then sold it to pay for an apartment. Later he asked Jasper to paint him another, saying he'd thought there would be more on this theme. Jasper didn't, of course. The conversation doesn't *flow*. There are silences. But then, occasionally, Jasper explodes in laughter, red-faced. He asks how he and I first met, and says wasn't it to talk about Cage? I think probably. We sat on the terrace of the apartment he had then at 106th street and Riverside Drive, the apartment Susan Sontag took when he left it. No taping today. He says he hates the tape recorder, but not that we can't use it.

Tuesday, 2/28 –
J. picks us up at bout 12:30. He's wearing a vanilla shirt and baggy white long pants and sandals. Elegant. His white hair, going thin on top, and white eyebrows. We drive to Marigot, about fifteen minutes on narrow winding road. The town is tacky but not unpleasant. We park, and walk up a flight of wood stairs to the Mini Club, a large room open ~~to the harbor~~ on three sides. Terrible murals on the walls, but a great view. Many boats at anchor. On the hill, an old fort. The waiters the maitre d' all know him here, but nobody else seems to. Jasper is no celebrity.

I ask if he didn't think some years back of moving to some other island, since this one was becoming so built-up. He says he bought land on Nevis a couple of years ago, sight unseen. Helen and Brice Marden have bought an old sugar plantation there. Jasper went over last year (?) to see his land, which is on a hillside, with pretty view. He's waiting to see what Brice and Helen do. But doesn't think he'll leave Saint-Martin.

Is that Marigot Harbor? I ask. "Well, it's a harbor, and it's in Marigot, but I've never heard it called Marigot Harbor," he says, with a laugh. We ask about St. Barts, which is so popular now. He says he's been a couple of times, but not lately. "It's white, and expensive, and crowded."

Global warming is mentioned, which leads to our asking how he met Michael Crichton. Jasper was working on prints at Gemini in L.A. Sid Felson said "I'd like you to meet Michael Crichton," and Jasper looked up to see "this seven-foot teenager," very young and very tall. "I liked him right away." Had read and admired "The Andromeda Strain." They became friends on the spot. When Tom Armstrong asked Jasper who he would like to write the main catalog essay for his Whitney retrospective catalog, Jasper gave him three names: Susan Sontag, TK, and Crichton. "I wanted someone outside the art world." (~~but Kozloff was inside~~). Tom chose Crichton. "And Michael ended up writing something quite art-historical." They see each other about once a year – Crichton comes to visit in Sharon. "You don't have to convince me. I don't buy his argument about global warming being a hoax. But Michael is not an idiot." (Later, asked who he would like to write about him today in that form, he named Leo Steinberg, Max Kozloff, and Robert Rosenblum).

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Jasper tells us about John Cage's book on Finnegan's Wake, which was privately printed and cost something like $1000 a copy. "John said" (high voice) 'I'd like you to have it,'" –so Jasper had to buy one. He has it in Sharon, but can't read it. "John has used 'Finnegan's Wake' in lots of his music, but I have no idea what he thinks about it. John's mind thinks about so many different things – not all of which are interesting." (I recall Boulez's comment: "I love John's mind, but I don't like what it thinks.")

Has he read Proust? Says he once went to Staten Island with Bob R., years ago, and in a small bookshop picked up and bought a second-hand copy of part of "Remembrance" – not the first book, but another one, he doesn't know which. "I read it, and said to myself I'm going to read everything this man has written, but I never did." He says he hasn't read most of the great novels.

"Bushbaby" - it's a new version of an earlier, smaller painting with the same title. Bushbabies, he thinks, are small animals found in Africa. "Titles are hard to come by – if you find one…" *

The island of Anguilla is visible in the distance. Long and low. Jasper says that in the fifties it was English. "There was a revolt, and apparently you could sit here having a drink and watch the British paratroopers land on the island."

Jasper is not drinking, for the time being. He has two frozen daiquiris, without rum. "It looks like a child's drink," he says. "It should have a little paper umbrella in it." As we learn later, he quit drinking after his car accident last winter, in Sharon. Booze had nothing to do with the accident – the road had iced over – but he was in the hospital for a couple of weeks, and couldn't drink, and just hasn't done so since. He says he was a vegetarian once, "for about ten days."

We go back to the house. He puts a Bill Irwin tape on the TV, a one-hour performance, very funny. In one sequence, Irwin is wearing a clown suit with a harlequin pattern, like the one in the painting. Jasper thinks Irwin is brilliant, would like to get him to perform at one of his Foundation benefits. The phone rings while we watch. It's Bill Katz. Jasper says he's on his way to Easter Island with Edward Albee.

Jasper says the deaths of David Whitney and Susan Sontag hit him very hard. "I really miss them," he says – and bursts out laughing at the implication that he's the one to pity.

Tape One
(Re Duchamp)

"I think I met him at Nico Calas's apartment. That's the first time I remember being with him…" Doesn't remember when he got the Boit-en-valise, whether it was after or before their meeting. "I was given that by Donald Peters." And the Green Box? "I got it after Richard Hamilton's [typographic version of it] came out. Because I couldn''t read French, and I didn't see any point in having it before. Once the notes were available in

* Bushbaby: – "Any of several varieties of small, nocturnal African primates... having dense, woolly fur, large round eyes, prominent ears, and a long tail." (American Heritage Dictionary)

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English, I wanted it. And I got that from Marcel." He had gone to Philadelphia with Bob before they met Marcel.

Duchamp's paintings in Philadelphia, on that first visit – "I don't know that I was particularly interested in them at that time. I'm not sure. They were like paintings, whereas the Glass was something quite different. And I think it interested me more. I was probably just focused on the Glass, and not really paying attention to the other work." He looked at them "off and on" since then. Is his painting "Passage" related to D's "Passage from the Virgin to the Bride"? "Not deliberately." Is there an affinity between your work and his, in these paintings? "I don't have that feeling."

The Glass - "I haven't thought about it in a long time. It's like one of those works that are packed with meaning, that one never thinks about. They're just standards. I don't know what to say." Did you spend a lot of time with the Green Box notes? "I wouldn't say a lot of time. But more time than I usually spend with things." (laughs) What about the word "delay" and D.'s use of it? "That's hard for me to grasp." "Who knows what was play in his thought? Obviously, he was examining what thought could be, I think."

The "beauty of indifference"? "That's an important idea, I think. To me, and to a lot of people. It suggests a kind of a stoic attitude – I don't know if that's the right word -- toward the world."

What about the notion of putting it in glass? "What about it?...Not too much of that work is a painting – it's something else. It's more of a sandwich." (laughs)

Did Duchamp's notes have any bearing on your sketchbook notes? "Well, I never thought so, but other people have thought so. I think something like that could just be – I don't know the right word – unconscious. Certainly it wasn't deliberate on my part. It may just be that that way of doing things appeals to me." Did any of his notes preceed his reading of the Green Box? "I don't know when I began keeping a notebook. I think the earliest sketchbooks that I kept were burned. One could check the date, I don't know. [Burned in the fire at Edisto]

MD. on the creative act being completed by the spectator - did Jasper ever talk with him about this? "Certainly not. I never talked with him about any of his ideas." But has the idea of the spectator ever been on your mind? "I think those ideas relate to a lot of other ideas about reality, and about the definition of what things are, and to whether things are in us or outside us." Could you explain what you mean? "Well, on some level, is the question of how meaning is constructed. Whether it's the presence of this thing in front of me, or my presence in front of it. Or whether it's some relationship between those things, and whether it's other things as well, in the world, influencing it and me. Marcel suggested that the object itself had no definite life without the perception of it, the interpretation of it, or whatever you want to call it. I think in the readymades he reinforced that idea, establishing these objects, choosing these objects which then you could say acted as, certainly came to be treated as works of art, which they had not been previously. So there's a sense of constant transformation going on in the work and the

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thought about the work. Perception is a complex activity, which involves the whole society and the way we think. That something then can become something else. I wonder if he saw that. You don't know whether he actually projected it in that way, or whether it's just an accident that it came to be that way. And you wonder about this man who just damaged the urinal in Beaubourg, I think it was, and claimed he did it in the spirit of Duchamp. You wonder what Marcel would have thought. I mean, we know what everyone else thinks – we think we do. But you do wonder what Marcel would have thought about that."

Johns's early works that invite the spectator to be involved, like "Tango" and the toy piano piece – "Yes, it was an idea that I think was in the air at the time. But I shared it with Bob Rauschenberg, and I think it relates to Happenings and all that. My own things were a little more, I think tighter in what freedoms there were. I tried to analyze what it was that one did when one approached a work of art. So things like how far away you stood, whether you moved, and what moved and what didn't move, whether it moved, and did it do anything other than just sit there – all of those kinds of things interested me. A lot of that shows up in Duchamp's work, like in the piece you're supposed to look at in a certain way, and the last piece, where you have to put your eyes up against that door. It starts further back. Cezanne is involved with the same kind of continuous pattern of thought. Marcel was interested because he often posed things in a kind of rigid way, and then one has to break from it. He makes that piece that you have to put your eyes to the door in order to see – you can still move your eyes; nothing in it is moving, except this waterfall; things are pretty fixed, but it's very peculiar that that thing is not. It's a very strange organization. It's very artificial."

Cage's comment on "Etants Donne," how it contradicted almost everything Marcel had appeared to stand for, and how wonderful it was that someone could embrace such contradictions. "It's interesting that John thought that, if he did. Usually he praised sticking to one's guns." (laughs and laughs).

The notion of Cage being the one who prepared the way for Duchamp' re-discovery - "I never understood that. I didn't know that John knew Marcel, until – very late. I may have known that he had met him. But I never understood why they seemed to have no contact for years. And during those years, why did they not?" John said because he was in awe of Marcel, admired him so much that he didn't want to impose on his time. "I don't believe that." What do you think it was, then? "I don't know. That's what I wondered. I wondered if it had to do with wives. I don't know…" John saying he finally got up the nerve to ask if Marcel would give him chess lessons. "I don't believe that for one second! But I have no alternate explanation. I just find it very peculiar that at a certain moment, John became involved with Marcel, and saw him frequently." How Marcel taught, but having John play chess with Teeny. "And he said to John, "'don't you ever want to win?'" (much laughter). (see p. 11)

Jasper read the "Dada Painters and Poets" at around the same time the Lebel book came out. "The Lebel book was remaindered. First it was this fancy thing up at Janis, a hundred and fifty dollars, with one of the gas and water signs. And then it was remaindered, and

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you could get it for ten dollars or something, and I got it then and started looking at it. I'm not sure of the order of things, but somewhere in there the material was available in English, and that was important to me. Also, when I had a show at Leo's, my work was referred to as Dadaistic, or neo-Dada, so I thought I should know what these people were talking about."

"I think probably the first person to speak to me about Duchamp was Bob Rauschenberg. That's my guess. There had been a show at Janis, with the crumpled paper – when was that? I didn't see that, but Bob saw it and was impressed, and he talked about it."

What really struck Jasper at the Philadelphia Museum was Schaumburg's "God." Also the Duchamp "Why Not Sneeze," with the marble cubes, one of which Bob tried to steal. He thinks it dropped on the floor, "something happened to make a noise."

Seeing "Etants donné." "I saw it in Marcel's studio, just after he died. John told me about it. I don't remember how I went over there to see it. I don't think Teeny was with me…I just remember going." Was it a surprise, to find he had been working on something? "I wouldn't say it was a surprise. It was a contradiction, because he had suggested that he wasn't." Jasper had bought an early replica of the "Female Fig Leaf," not by Schwarz. "I knew he was doing things off and on, and overseeing things. I suppose when that work showed up, it was like something very major, and it was a surprise to people that someone hadn't talked about it. I was delighted." A lot of people hated it. "A lot of people still hate it! It seemed so – what would you say? It didn't seem affected by any habits he would have formed making the work he had made. That's what was interesting about it. So it had a kind of youthful quality…I wouldn't call it contradictory. But it doesn't seem to be building on his strength. He seems to be not thinking about himself."

"Marcel was not a laborer…I never formed the habit of working in a sustained way, myself, but I think I am a laborer…I had this interview with the Emperor of Japan, with a translator and an audience, and I told him I thought I was more of a day laborer than a Chinese poet. Just a few years ago. When I got something called the Premium Imperiale, which is given every year or every two years to a group of people in different fields."

Questioned again about his response to "The Large Glass," he became irritated. "I don't know what my response was. I looked at it, and I was interested, and I read about it…"

Matta's idea that Duchamp was trying to paint "the moment of change," and Jasper's own comments about an object that changes, becoming something other than it was, etc. "The part about what Matta said that would not interest me is the part about 'the moment.' That sounds like a photograph. But the idea of involving the work in change, or involving change in the work, certainly does…" (after a silence:)"What do you want me to say?" (laughs). "I think the physicality of 'The Large Glass' is very insistent. And the – what do you call it? – the idea content is also very persistent. And there is a necessity to somehow relate these two things. And you have to do it by bouncing back and forth, and moving about." [END SIDE A] "Why did he present these ideas in such a physical

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form? And in a sense it seems to me that the ideas have no [long pause] – the life that the ideas have without the physical work is quite different from the life they have in relationship to the work."

Do you think Duchamp might feel that the physical work without the ideas has no meaning at all? "I wonder. I doubt it. You couldn't say that about anything…The ideas were what allowed him to make the work. It's a question of whether the work contains the ideas, whether you have the work and you put the ideas in it, or whether the ideas give birth to the work. It seems to me that there's a constant play from both directions, in relationship to the Large Glass. It's a pleasure to know that there are meanings that you can grasp from it, and that he had thoughts that related to these things, to what he did. And it's interesting to know that. But I don't think it's the only insight into the work."

"But life is full of experiences like that, where some kind of knowledge alters what you've seen."

What do you think the relationship of the verbal to the visual is in his work? "I imagine it's a conflict that he focused on, in trying to resolve."

If the artist is the elite of the servant class, what is the critic? [laughs] "I don't know. I'm not sure what the role of the critic is, or what the needs of the society are that produce the critic. It spreads out interest, in a way. And maybe gives interest a different kind of form. Sometimes it seems to be a closed practice that hasn't much function."

Duchamp's notion of "infra-thin"? "I've never understood it."

Jasper's saying that Duchamp's introduction of doubt was maybe an important work of art – what did he mean by that? "I don't remember what I meant. I always say he was suspicious of language. He has the same attitude toward the Glass. He's afraid it will not convey the ideas that it needs to convey, without help from another source. It seems to me a constant TK of what things are, and how they gain their value. The readymades are one thing…You don't know exactly what they are. I would say he didn't. But he was concerned with not knowing exactly what they were. He did it out of good will, and a feeling of wit, and optimism, but basically they convey a kind of pessimism, or what I would call doubt. He may just come to terms with it. You could say that they become expressions of a fact of life."

(see 5)

D's definition of art: "anything made by man." Do you have a definition of it? "No." (laughs).

Did Duchamp come to your shows? Not to the first, and he thinks maybe not to the others at Leo's. "I think he and Leo were on the outs, as a result of something in the past, from before Leo had a gallery. At some point there was a reconciliation, I think around the time when Teeny was re-introducing Marcel into the art world. It must have been

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after Calas introduced Marcel to Bob and me. Teeny was taking him to Happenings and things like that, and I think he was at Leo's gallery, I don't know what the shows were."

"According to What" was painted in 1964. Jasper gets the MoMA catalog to look it up, having supposed it must have been after Marcel died. "Incredible. I wonder when I did that edition of that print of his profile, called 'A Shadow of His Former Self.' It's not in here. Well, I didn't call it that…"

Duchamp never commented on your work? "He was friendly. He included my 'Target With Plaster Casts' in the Dada-Surrealist show in Paris, and then in New York. He said something in an interview in maybe 'Show' magazine, he made some reference to Bob and me, he called me 'Jaspers,' I think he suggested that the spirit of Dada might be showing up again in our work, so he must already have visited us by that time. He inscribed the Green Box to me as 'to Jasper Johns, the Sibyl of Targets.' So maybe only the target was stuck in his mind! When he visited me and looked at work I don't remember at all what he said. I have no idea."

Late in his life, Duchamp said he thought of art as "a bridge to take me somewhere else." This sounds like a contradiction to Johns's idea that D's work placed you exactly where you were. "I agree. But for me it was the necessity to locate oneself in relation to all these fixed reference points that interested me. A very strong sense of being alive, and being there. There being a slightly shifting space. Not like the depiction of a wonderland or something of that sort. But the experience of locating ourselves can make you feel that you have gone somewhere else! (laughs)."

Duchamp always seemed to suggest that he had a happy childhood, but this seems not to be the case with you. "No, I certainly did not have a happy childhood. But Duchamp seems to have had a family life that was reinforced in various ways. He seemed very fond of Villon."

[END TAPE 1]

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Johns – Wed.
(3/1/06)

his solitude

Lunch again at Mini Club. Johns said that when he woke in the night last night he read a book of aphorisms by Jorg Lichtenberg, an 18th century German doctor. Someone sent it to him. People often send him books they think he might like. He goes to bed early as a rule, sometimes at 8 pm, and often wakes and reads. Gets up early, and works or gardens. Many of the friends he used to have on the island have died or moved away. Ellsworth Kelly and Jack Shear were down last week, staying at La Semana; Jasper saw Ellsworth on the street when he went to buy groceries, and waved to him from the car – "That was my visit with Ellsworth." There's a woman here he plays backgammon with sometimes. Although people seem to come down to see him all the time, he gives the impression of being very much alone, and ~~content with that.~~ by choice.

We talk about Victoria Newhouse's book "Art and the Power of Placement." Jasper says he doesn't really agree with the premise. "I don't know why a work of art can't be seen in one place as well as in another. A work of art should be able to stand on its own…Of course I know a work looks better in some situations that in others…" (see p. 28)

Jasper used to hang all the shows at Leo's, including his own. They often had different ideas about it. "For example, Leo always wanted to put the most important picture on the wall facing you as you entered. I thought that was terrible – people would glance at it, and walk right by." But he thinks the kind of meticulous efforts that people like Walter Hopps went to, moving things a quarter of an inch and so forth, are ridiculous. Jasper feels that museum curators hanging his shows should be able to do their job without input from him, and he doesn't get involved, unless asked to.

Tells a story about installing a John Chamberlain show at Leo's. One of the sculptures was lying on the floor, and Jasper thought it looked terrible. Jasper raised it up on a pedestal. Chamberlain was furious – he wanted it on the floor, so of course it went back there. "And then I bought it! I've had it all sorts of different ways, up and down and in between. It doesn't really matter where it is." (The piece is called "Fantail.")

Jasper's car accident was last Thanksgiving night, in Connecticut. He was driving, and there were two others in the car, after a dinner party. On a hill, the road had iced over, and the car went out of control, turned around and then slid off the road into a telephone pole. Others cars were skidding, and Jasper feared one might run into them. He was hurt, with several broken ribs; the others were OK. A car stopped, and took them back to Jasper's house, where he got his other car and drove them all to the hospital, where he spent the next week or so. "Alcohol was not a factor" in the accident, but he couldn't drink in the hospital, and he hasn't drunk since. "It was a frightening experience."

Driving back to the house after lunch – driving fast, as usual – he went through a red light on the bridge, the signal that the bridge was being raised. The guard yelled, and Jasper yelled back, "Sorry, I didn't see it!" He said he was concentrating on what he was saying, and not on his driving.

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He shows us the garden – tomatoes, arugula, and a few flowers. One zinnia plant (he has another cut zinnia in water, on the kitchen counter inside, between two amaryllis (one pink, one cadmium red). When I asked what he did for exercise, he said he swims and he gardens.

Today he seems more relaxed than yesterday. There were a couple of times yesterday, during the interview, when he stared at me so hard and so long, after a question, that I thought he might be going to ask me to leave. But then he laughed and answered – he thinks hard before answering, and wastes no energy being ingratiating. He likes to tell stories. One today was about Allan Kaprow, when he was an art student. His teacher gave the class an assignment, to do a painting using only one color. Another student in the class, who had been thought unpromising, came to class and asked the teacher to step outside into the hall. The student removed his shirt and pants, and revealed that his body was painted blue from head to toe. "What ever gave you the idea to do that?" the teacher asked. The student replied, "I've *always* wanted to do it."

Tape 2 (3/1/06)
"It's hard to go into the past, and try to remember what you used to think."

How did he meet John Cage? "I met him at Shari Dienes's apartment on 57th street. I was working in a bookstore nearby…Let me say I'm not sure this was the first time I met him, but it was the first time I remember listening to him talk. He was just moving out to the country, I think."

Why do you doubt Cage's explanation of why he didn't approach Duchamp sooner? "I never noticed that John was particularly in awe of anyone, certainly not to the point of being intimidated by approaching him. I wonder, when he resumed his friendship, if it was after Teeny and Marcel were married – I think it was. So then I thought maybe it had something to do with that, and with the fact that Teeny had been married to Pierre Matisse. Teeny was very active in bringing Marcel together with a lot of people."

"I was once at John's house in Stony Point with King Lee, do you know that story? The Inokumas, a Japanese artist and his very elegant wife, were friends of – I don't know who brought these people together, but they were friends of ours, John, Lois Long, me, and for some reason they knew King Lee, who had been deposed, or whatever he was, from Korea. They were going to bring King Lee out to Lois Long's for dinner. John was to be there, I was to be there, I don't know whether Bob Rauschenberg was there that time or not. So Lois worked and worked, and made whatever she made. The evening came, and no King Lee, no Inokuma. I was staying with John, on The Land. The following morning, Lois called John frantically, and said 'King Lee is arriving a day late!' We had eaten all the food. Lois said what shall I do? I think she sent the guests to John first, so she would have time to prepare something for dinner. So King Lee came into that room, with his wife, and the Inokumas. John had that one padded thing to sleep on. The King's wife entertained us by writing names backwards and forwards at the same time. And then someone said, 'King Lee will now take his nap.' So we all had to stand up so King Lee

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could stretch out and have his nap. We went over to Lois's, and she was still working in the kitchen. Someone came over to Lois and said, 'King Lee will have peanuts with his beer.'" (prolonged laughter at this). "And then I remember another thing, someone saying, 'King Lee very sad, lost all his treasure.'"

Working with Merce – "The first thing that Bob did was the Minutiae set. I helped him a bit with that, and everything he did after that I helped during the period that he and I were close. I just helped him. I never did anything until they had that falling out, and I sort of took over." With *Summerspace*, "I'm reluctant to say what I have to say, because the last thing I told you, Bob denied it. But he said what a combine was, and I don't think he knew what a combine was at that time. Actually it's interesting, and I'll tell you. When Bob was going to do the set for *Summerspace*, he wanted to paint flowers on the curtain. And I suggested that he not, and instead to do this thing that he did. And then he found something readymade, I think it was metal, perforated, and I don't know who-all helped. He, I – I think it was down on Front Street. It was much smaller than it is now, about six feet tall, the curtain. I don't know how many times it's been redone."

Did Jasper get the same thrill from the theater that Bob did? "No. I loved working with him, and helping, working toward performance by the company, but not having the responsibility for the project. When I had to do it, I didn't like it. I dyed costumes, did different things to costumes, several sets of costumes."

Cage's idea of the purpose of music ("Purposeless play…" "imitation of nature in her manner of operation") - "John was like a teacher, and one paid attention to what he said. He often offered these kinds of remarks, without wishing them to be disputed. He didn't like to argue. I like to argue. It annoyed him tremendously. So from my point of view, I observed what he said and did very carefully, and it had great meaning for me that he was so organized in his thinking. I had never known anyone like that. I would say I was not a good student, but I was attentive." Cage said in his piece on you that your work was engaged with the imitation of nature in her manner of operation. "Anything he admired, he connected to his thought, of course." (laughs)

See p. 17

Do you have thoughts about the purpose of art? "Occasionally, but probably not in such a systematic way. I have thought that art shifts the way things are perceived. And I thought about what causes that, and what that causes. Often, it seems to me that either something happens accidentally, or that it seems to be something in the air that requires a shift in the kind of thought that people are having about art. Usually we focus on a person, that a person did something, and then other people imitated it, or developed it. But I think it's questionable. I don't know, it may be a combination of all the different forces acting."

Is it that shift that gives art its function in life? "Well, when you're aware of it, and it's happening, it gives a buzz, an excitement. There must be huge adjustments that are made, but then just become commonplace. But sometimes you run into someone, a friend or something, and you say, how can you think like that? We all have that kind of

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experience. We think that we see things in a way that makes another person's way of seeing either out of date, or useless, pointless, frivolous, whatever."

Chance and intention - Did Cage get beyond his personal taste? "Well, from one point of view he achieved it. From another point of view I think that John's main flaw was his pride in having done that. His pride in his sense of discipline. I don't see any other word for it."

"Merce of course is a completely different kind of mind. He never presented himself in the way that John did. I was very surprised, and I still don't understand this, because I don't understand music, and I always told John that it was of no value to him that I enjoyed his music [laughs], but he took a different point of view – at least, at times. But you know the recording that you were talking about, of the 25th anniversary concert – on that is the Concert for Piano and Orchestra, which was the most recent work performed, a major event. Someone -- a woman musician, from Europe, when I was living on Riverside Drive, came to me. She learned that I had that recording, and she wanted to hear it. She came to my apartment, and she sat with the Cage score, and listened to the music. It had never occurred to me that anyone could do that, could relate what they were hearing to this written score. I still don't understand it. I don't think I know much about listening to music, either."

Merce's mind, as different from John's – "Early on he was a great performer, and I think that everything he did was centered in himself. It was his use of his own body, and of his mind, of course. That he could do these physical things was very important, and separated him from the other dancers who couldn't do them…The company was originally called Merce Cunningham and Dance Company, and you had a very strong sense that it was him, and them. Not one thing. As he got older and was less capable of dancing, I think his choreography changed, and became much more – complex. Complex in a very different way. Originally he had used the skills of particular individuals, basically to support himself. That's not quite true, but that was sort of the effect of it. And now, of course, he's not even in it."

Jasper's first trip to Japan – "I was in the infantry. I was supposedly trained as a heavy weapons infantryman, at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. But for most of the training I hid out in the bushes and played cards with friends. So I never fired a bazooka – there were various things I didn't do. At any rate, I was sent to Japan, to Sendai. I thought I was going to Korea, but I had so little time left in my service that it wasn't worth their while to give me the extra training which they gave people. So they sent me up to Sendai, and there I worked in what was called Special Services. I made posters, and things like movie schedules for movies being shown on the base, and various odds and ends. I was there for about six months, maybe a little less." Did you travel around? "Not much. I was very stupid. I'd never been anywhere, I don't think I'd been out of South Carolina except once, when I went to New York. I made one trip north of Sendai, I don't remember where it was, with a friend. I went to Kyoto for a week, when I had a leave, and had a bicycle

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and rode around in Kyoto." Saw temples, "but I had no idea what they were…The experiences were mixed. It was very important to me."

"I always thought that I must have been incredibly stupid, because I saw so little. But I saw things like the Kabuki, and went to some of the museums, I went to the temples in Kyoto, and to some of the gardens. One important show that I saw was – Barbara Castelli thinks she knows what it was, I talked to her about it. It was an exhibition which seemed to be of a Dadaist and Surrealist nature. One of the objects I remember was an elephant's foot resting on a stand, with a woman's glove with one finger under the foot, and the glove hanging off the edge of the platform. There was that spirit of things, which I found very interesting, combined with this ancient culture – most people were going around in kimonos. Women were working in the roads, which I had never seen before. To see this kind of humorous, slap-in-the-face spirit in all of this I found very interesting. This was long before the Gutai. I don't know what it was."

The next time he went to Japan was after his trip to Hawaii with Cage and Lois Long. In 1964. He had a studio in Tokyo, and made *Souvenir*. During a performance of Cage and Tudor in San Francisco that March, he had seen a light bouncing off the walls, and discovered it was a woman looking at herself in her compact mirror. "I said, 'I want that in my next painting.' And so when I was in Japan, I made two paintings called *Souvenir,* which had a mirror in them and a flashlight. The first night I was there, I was walking around, and I saw these souvenir plates with photographs on them, and I knew I wanted to have one of those. I had my photograph put on a plate, which is in this painting. I had two of those made, and I broke one and had another made, the people thought I was crazy…I had met Toru Takemitsu in Hawaii, and he had returned to Japan. We had become sort of friendly. I knew a man called Yoshiaki Tono, whom I had met when he took his world tour and come to New York. I was living on Front Street. In Europe Tono had met Jean Tinguely, and Niki, and a few people, and they had told him about us. There was a kind of network of people in different disciplines, painters and musicians, so I was welcomed into that group. There were performances, and shows, and things like that."

Did you feel in Japan an affinity to the kind of thing you were doing? "There was an affinity with this small group of people, who were so gracious to me. Everything else was novelty. I loved Japanese people, the ones I have known. Every time I'm there, I think oh, this is so wonderful and so easy to be here, I must come back in a couple of weeks, but of course I never do. Most places I ever go to, I go because I have work to do. I've only gone on two or three pleasure trips. I went to Rome a few years ago, for a few weeks, and moved around Italy a little bit. Went to London one weekend to see Merce dance…" [END SIDE A]

Cage and "towards theater" quote - Jasper says he only served as Merce's artistic advisor "because I was asked to do it, and I thought I could do it better than other people who were available at the time. But I decided later it should be people who enjoy it, who do it…I don't see anything particularly interesting that theater resembles life, I don't see what's so interesting about that." Did he enjoy any of the Happenings? "Yes. I enjoyed

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Red Grooms's 'Burning Building' very much, and got John to go, and John thought it was very old-fashioned and conventional German Expressionism."

His relations with Tinguely – "I had been in Paris, having a show in Jean's studio in the Impasse Ronsin, and I was very friendly with Jean and with Niki. Niki made these things that you shot at, and one of them had to do with images from my work, and I had to shoot it. Then they came to New York at a certain point, and I saw them for a while then. I saw Jean very rarely after that – occasionally when I visited Teeny." He went to see Jean's "Head" in the forest of Fontainebleau.

Jasper and John kept up the friendship "to a large degree" after Jasper stopped being artistic director. I thought toward the end of John's life that he became more closed, and less outgoing, at least toward me and I thought probably toward everyone. We both worked for the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, so we had regular meetings on that level. Relatively late in John's life he had some – disturbing personal problems, which he wanted someone to talk to about, and so there was that. I think he thought of me as a friend."

Did John's interest in Zen affect you? "Oh, yes, certainly. I read some Suzuki, I read Zen in the Art of Archery, I read Watts, I read a lot. And of course John, when he was studying with Suzuki, always repeated what he had just experienced when he came out of the class, and so you got that – that was wonderful to get fed to you in that way."

Cezanne – "I did think about him frequently. And I have." His saying Cezanne made looking equivalent to touching – "In much of Cezanne's work there is this kind of displacement, of positions or something? It's as though when you're touching one, you're not touching the other one. It's as though you're feeling your way. And visually, what's recorded in his painting is what's seen when the eye shifts position. When I see *this* in the painting I'm looking there, and when I see *that* I'm looking there and not looking there. The paintings build on this kind of – I don't know the word for it – but you'll see this on a table, and you'll see that this goes up behind that, and when you look over there, this line is no longer there, it's up here – it's changed. You have an awareness that his eyes are moving, constantly. And somehow that's recorded in the painting."

He first saw Cezanne's *Bather* when he first went to MoMA. Was that the first thing he did when he got to New York? "No, probably the first thing I did was to locate Horn & Hardart's!"

"Cezanne and The Eternal Feminine" book - "I have a study for it, and this man, Wayne Anderson, some years ago when Barbara Rose had that Art Newspaper, he was showing a slide of this painting, and he looked at it and said 'That's not the way that painting looked when I last saw it.' Someone had painted in her eyes, and maybe rouged her lips – made her much more feminine! [laughter]. Apparently some dealer had taken these liberties with the painting. I think the Getty bought the painting in that condition, and I assume they removed those parts. I have a very finished – it's a gouache or watercolor that I have. Here it is reproduced. All of these men are of different professions, who are

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praising her, I suppose…" Jasper also has a photograph of a bather that Cezanne is supposed to have had. "I suspect that many of his paintings were taken from photographs. Artists could buy photographs of poses, to work from. This is the only one that's known. People know that he had the photograph and made the painting." Jasper's is a copy of the original photograph.

On the two upcoming exhibitions - "I don't even know what the exhibitions are at this point. I don't think the Chicago exhibition has been picked, quite. What is gray? – that's what they are trying to decide, I think. How much color they are going to allow into it."

The Combine show - "First thought was that it was wonderful. Another thought was that the word combine had come to include things that it hadn't originally included, since it was invented after many of those things were made. Now you even have something called combine drawings. It's the interesting that the word has taken on a kind of currency – it's like mobile, I guess, which had a specific and limited meaning originally. The aging of the materials of the work is very upsetting to me, but it's unavoidable. And I guess some aspect of all work changes over time. Looking at the work, one of the interesting things is the specificity of the images that Bob used in these accumulations. I think originally one thought of them as aspects of this glut, and now they look so thoughtful, not everything, but there is a kind of beat of meaningful images that run through the work. I don't think I noticed that when they were made. I'm not sure whether I did or not. But it's very surprising, the images which suggest a particular kind of sensitivity that he had to imagery…"

Many of the combines belong to you… "Well, I'm a more generous lender than most people! What did I lend, three?" I say it was more, but he says there are some in the catalog that are not in the show. "There's the paint cans; what I call the knee pad but he calls *Honeysuckle* – it has what's actually an ankle brace, but he thought it was for the knee, so he called it *Knee Pad*; and the little painting. I think it's three. They're going to Los Angeles, but they haven't asked me – I heard the show was going to Europe. I hope they're not assuming that I am. That was not in the original loan agreement, I think. I must check that. It's terrible not to loan them – they will probably never be together again. Well, maybe they're more likely to be together than we are, but it seems unlikely, doesn't it?"

"The unfortunate thing in those works of Bob's is that they take on the quality of being relics. And when they were made, that was certainly not part of it. I don't think people can recall the original sense of those works. But maybe it's not important. Maybe all work goes through that kind of thing. They were fresh, immediate, not precious, apt to be overlooked, picked up here and there like a minute ago and stuck up there." Is it being in a museum that makes them look so different? "No, it's the materials."

On *Rebus*: "It does something to your heart. One is delighted to see the work, and seeing it also draws you into a memory of the work, and who knows how accurate that is, of course. But they are two different images that don't exactly match."

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The word combine "originally meant works that really were three-dimensional, and could have been called sculpture."

Jasper's work in this period has deteriorated less, because he was using less ephemeral materials – "although I've used my share of shoddy materials."

Did he feel that his work in that period was particularly "American" – the flags, the maps etc. - "I didn't think uniquely American, but I knew that I was certainly extremely limited in my training, and my background. And that certainly all I was, was American. Not cosmopolitan American, even." But was there any impulse to do something that would be perceived as American? [Long silence] "Only to the degree that the work was to come out of what I was. Certainly one didn't want to misrepresent that."

I mention the difficulty now of defining American art, since art is international. "I think that's true. It changed very strongly in the sixties. Communication and travel – I guess it probably began after the second world war. But certainly in the sixties, everybody began knowing about everybody, and when computers started being available, unavailable things made themselves present."

On arguing with John Cage – Jasper feels you can learn from arguing, "but John was more of a teacher than an arguer." (see 18)

Jasper's decade as an abstract artist – "What are you talking about?" The crosshatch paintings – what drew you into that, and what pulled you out? "I don't think I thought of it in that way. If you consider that abstraction – those stupid marks." (Most people do.) "Well, what makes them vary? Since they all repeat this kind of marking…I don't know that I think of the others as representational. This is an idea that isn't mine. If I meet someone that I don't know, someone slightly naïve, and they ask me what I do, I say I'm a painter, and if they say what kind of a painter, I say an abstract painter. It's just a way to get out of saying anything else. I wouldn't say I was a representational painter. I don't think I would ever say that. So I say I'm an abstract painter. I don't know what I mean by that. I just say I'm a modern artist, but I don't know what kind of artist I am."

Leo Steinberg saying abstract art would come to be thought of as a "starvation diet" – "I just haven't thought that I make abstract paintings or representational paintings. They seem to me a continuation." The question doesn't arise for him. He tends to agree with Leo Steinberg about Mondrian, that the earlier paintings work better, the apple trees and the plus and minus pictures, and the very late ones, which have more physicality. "But I relate much of my interest in art not to the art, but to my own tastes and interests. So I don't expect all art to fulfill my needs. And I think it's rather wonderful that it's so varied, and that it has become different things at different times. It's interesting that we can call it all art, isn't it?" He's not concerned with getting beyond his own tastes? "Well, in a sense that is part of one's own taste and interest – is getting beyond. It's like a double negative, or something." [END TAPE 2]

Tape 3

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"I don't think John ever allowed the argument. But I think these kinds of things were brought up occasionally, and John was able always to brush them aside and dismiss them. I don't think he thought any kind of semantic thought was very interesting. And I think that's why he didn't like argument. He wanted to teach you what he knew – or express it. That's always a mystery with him. You wonder how much was lost. Talking with you has made me have this thought, but there was so much you forget over time that might be of interest…

He says John lost interest in mushroom hunting. Once, later on, Jasper brought him some morels he had picked in the woods, and Cage was quite dismissive of them. "When I want mushrooms now, I just buy them," he said. Jasper continues to hunt them.

He has a spider lily on the dining table (native to this region). Two amaryllis on the kitchen counter, with a single zinnia between them. "I have another one coming in the garden."

Why didn't Jasper show in NY from 1996 until last year? "I had no identification with any particular gallery after Leo died. So there was no need. I felt no obligation to show. Occasionally with Leo, I would feel if I don't have a show sometime Leo will suffer…There wasn't that kind of need. Only a couple of people asked me to show, and I didn't always want to show with them. I got involved with Matthew [Marks] because he helped with a show of these catenary things that went to the San Francisco Museum and Yale. And Matthew sold some of those paintings to clients, and had become very aware of what I was doing. I think he felt that he would like to show these things, that they hadn't been seen in New York." Weren't there a lot of people after you? "Not that I recall. Who would it be?" Larry Gagosian? "Well, you got that one right." [laughs]. Pace? "That's true, too. Actually there were several. But I didn't want to be connected to them."

His feelings about the MoMA retrospective? Any slowing down of his work afterward? "No deliberate slowing down. I probably had less connection to other people, to galleries – I don't remember."

Negative reviews of show at Marks – "Well, one prefers to be praised. Umm – I remember one critic who wrote approximately what he had written about I think it was the Whitney show. It was mostly a repetition of the same idea.[Schjeldahl? Yes]. You would think someone might have some different ideas, but maybe not."

I say it sounded to me like the kind of critical backlash that has afflicted many much-praised artists, including Picasso. "It may be that it's just a way not to repeat what's been said. That must be a difficulty, and it must be very boring to deal with, constant re-examination of the same thing." The references to a hermetic quality in both negative reviews, and being irritated by that – "Well, I can't deal with that, since that would not be my description!"

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Jasper was not involved in Kirk's selections for the show, with one exception: "I think I asked him to include a watercolor and a pastel. I think that was my only request." [He did.] "He installed the sculptures in a particularly straightforward way, everything frontal in this case, and I shifted a couple of those a little so that they were a little more relaxed. I think that's all."

"I'm meeting with the people from Chicago when I get back, to decide on what is grey. So we'll see what that amount to. I told them earlier that I thought the more limited it was to actual grey, the more interesting it would be for me, but that probably that would be less interesting for the public. They can't limit it to just pure grey, I think…"

Does he spend any time thinking about his place in art history? "You mean on the large scale? I don't think so. I think I have been treated so well that I am probably overly comfortable! [much laughter]. I have certainly been treated with a kind of concern that I could not expect when I was young. My first show that I had, with Leo, got a lot of attention. I thought at that time that my work would interest a few people. I thought there was something interesting about my work, that would appeal to a few people, and I thought that would be very rewarding to me. And then it was a little more widespread, the interest. It wasn't as limited as I had thought it would be. And from then on I just – what's the point of imagining ahead of time? It became something I didn't imagine."

"Artists suffer in many ways. They can torture themselves over almost nothing."

No slack periods in his work? "Well, I haven't thought so, but I think other people have thought that on occasion."

What are some things you've tortured yourself about? "I don't think I want to tell you!" [laughter].

On his saying he suddenly became very old at sixty - "That was so long ago, I've forgotten!" Do you feel old now? "Certainly. I *am* old now."

How did he start reading Wittgenstein? "David Hayes introduced me to Wittgenstein. I think he loaned me the first book I read. I read quite a lot, in a period of time. I don't know whether I could now. I've just been reading a book of Ted Berrigan, his Collected Poems have just been published. I read some of that last night. I had used a cover of a book of his in a screen painting. He did a book called 'The Sonnets'…which interested me." He read it in the middle of the night, aloud. "Sometimes I read it in the tub, in Sharon."

Picasso's *Demoiselles* – do you remember your impressions on first seeing it? "No. I don't know when I first saw it. It's been reproduced so much, it's hard to know. I haven't looked at it in a long time." Dodie asks if we can go with him to MoMA to look at it. "No! [laughs] That's something different. If I were looking at the painting I don't know what I would think, right now. But it's just generally a landmark work, that stands out from other work. It certainly comes out of his experience with Cezanne. It has the kind of

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toughness and ugliness of some of Cezanne's work, though I think Cezanne is much cruder than Picasso, much blunter, I don't know the word. Stronger. Picasso tends to refine more than Cezanne. I doubt that it's a quality that Cezanne tried to get, it's a quality that he was stuck with."

Woman in a Straw Hat - "That's going to be in the Whitney show, I understand. You know they're doing a show of Picasso and American art, which should be interesting if it's not too didactic. To me it was like a poem, a compression of feelings and images and thoughts, a simple thing that in your mind opens into -- multiple experiences." And the sexual charge you mentioned? "Definitely, but it's much more elaborate than just sexual. It conflates so many different things, that it's like a compression of real thought and real imagery. And an aspect of it is sexual. And an aspect of it is poetic. You wonder how someone comes to create such an image, to think it, and then you discover – I don't know how it came to it, but you discover it slightly mutated in drawings and other works, the same thing, so you feel that maybe – what it looks like came to him with no expenditure of energy. It may have come through very hard work, I don't know how you find that out. It certainly conveys a lot with very minimal fuss."

David Whitney - Jasper moved to Riverside Drive in 1962 or 1963, and must have met David then. "He showed up at my apartment late one afternoon, unannounced, he was quite drunk, and I think I gave him dinner. He stayed a long time. He was very – I don't know what we talked about. It was a very interesting encounter. He went home, and the next day, Philip called me, to say that he hoped David had not troubled me, or something of that kind. From then on – I don't know how long after that, he began to work for me. For a period of time. He took care of the correspondence, he took care of records, mostly he was good at throwing things away. He loved to get rid of anything that shouldn't be there. Actually he threw away a couple of very valuable things!...And then, when I moved out of there, I used his studio on Canal Street, he had a loft on Canal Street, although he was really living uptown, and I used that as a studio while Houston Street was being fixed up. And then I think he was still helping me when I moved into Houston Street – I'm not 100% sure. I don't know when he was working for Leo."

Susan Sontag - "Did I tell you that the death of these two people has been the most, the heaviest thing that's happened…I don't know why. How did I meet her? I don't know. It was also when I was living on Riverside Drive. My friendship with David was more or less constant, my friendship with Susan more or less slacked off. But I consistently admired her. I liked her critical work more than her fiction. She probably didn't. She was certainly lively in her thought, and her willingness to encounter things."

With reference to the qualities that Cezanne was stuck with, what quality are you stuck with? "Self-definition, self-description – I don't want to do that. Self-description is a dangerous thing. You'll have to do that yourself."

Warhol – what did you feel was left out in the early work, and that became present in the silkscreen paintings? "I don't know what was left out. The early ones were sort of like sketches of something else. And parts are missing. Whereas the silkscreen paintings,

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everything is simplified in a particular way that's completely even, everything that needs to be there seems to be there. You don't sense any hesitations or falsification, whether you like them or dislike them doesn't matter. They're thoroughly what they have to be." Did his work that retain this quality? "Well, not for me. It didn't hold my interest in that way. But I'm not that knowledgeable about his work."

No real interest in Manet. When National Gallery in London asked him to do something based on a picture in the collection, and sent him the catalog, the only work he thought he could do something with was the painting that had been cut up and later re-assembled by Degas.

We walk in the garden. Banana tree. "A citrus, I don't know what it is." Lignum vitae. A blue flower which has a yellow-orange seed pod, with bright red seeds inside. The cottage where he lived when he first came here. Sea grape bushes. Petraia (looks like lilac). Many birds. A curry plant from the Sarabai house in India. A big old turtle in his house, asleep, very old – got him "decades ago." White bougainvillea.

[END TAPE 3]

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Johns-Thursday.
(3/2/06)

Tape Four (Childhood, etc.)

We sit outside in the loggia. It's another beautiful day. I start by asking about his grandfather.

"He was a farmer. That's the part I know, and he was involved with the bank – and the way things were organized" in that small town. "I just got a glimpse of that much later. I knew him as a farmer. He got up very early in the morning, at four o'clock. Occasionally I would drive with him – not often because I found it so boring. I didn't understand how he knew what any of those things, those fields – he would say that's cotton, or that's corn, and I didn't know how he knew that, and it didn't interest me at that time, unfortunately." Did you like him? "Oh, very much."

"I think I must have been about two, or two-and-a-half when my parents split up. I think I was with my mother briefly, and I think my father took me away and put me with his parents. That's what I think, I'm not sure. Actually, his parent, because his father had married a much younger woman, I think younger than his oldest daughter. His first wife, my father's mother, having died at some point. I never knew her.

"I was born in Georgia – because that was the closest hospital, in Augusta. They lived in South Carolina – Allendale. I lived with my grandfather and step-grandmother. At some point, I believe when I was in the second grade, I'm not sure, I moved in with an aunt and uncle and their children. They had twins my age, and I moved in with them for a bit less than a year. I think I did something that disturbed people, and I moved back in with my grandfather. Something happened, and I think I said I wanted to come back to my grandfather's house. And then my grandfather died, I think when I was in third grade – I would have been about eight or nine. What did I do then? I went to live in Columbia with my mother and my stepfather and their children – they had two at that time, later they had another child. So I went to school one year at A. ~~Seymour~~ C. Moore Grammer School – 'A. C. Moore ~~Seymour~~ we love you, there's no school above you, even though we do work hard, we love you true.' [laughter]. I had an aunt who lived on Lake Murray, and many of the children of relatives liked to go there in the summer. I went one summer, and I was informed at the end of the summer that I was to stay there. And so I stayed there with her for five years – fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth – six years. It wasn't a town, it was an area. The people who lived there called it 'The Corner.'

Jasper felt closest to his grandfather, but because of all the moving around, "Most of my life, wherever I lived, I felt I was a guest."

The aunt in The Corner was a schoolteacher. "She taught in a one-room country schoolhouse. I went to school there for fifth, sixth and seventh grades." She taught all the grades. "She was very short. What was she like? She was just like Aunt Gladys. I had known her through visits, but one's relationship changes when you live with someone."

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Was she a good teacher? "I have no idea. What I enjoyed was diagramming sentences, which she taught very clearly – taught with passion, or something – and I think I was the only person who – there were only three people in my class – the only one who really enjoyed it. It was so wonderful, these chains of things."

He liked reading, "but it turned out to be discouraged. By my aunt, interestingly enough. I think it was before I was living there. I remember reading something, I don't know what it was – it could have been Mark Twain, something well known. And I was under a couch, lying on the floor reading it. She stopped me, and said that I couldn't understand it, whereas I understood perfectly well what I was reading. I never understood why she had that attitude – unless it was that she wanted me to do something instead of reading. It made me distrust her judgment of my understanding! [laughs]."

He was told he had talent – was this for drawing? "Something like that happened." He keeps saying he can't remember, not evading the question but simply being unable to give the answer. "My problem is, describing something that happened in my childhood and not making it too important in my life later – as a child, I think drawing was a way to attract attention. If you want to think about it as talent, maybe you can. I think children use whatever they can do, to attract attention and to get through their lives."

His grandmother had painted, and there were a few of her paintings in family homes. Tells story about the artist who boarded at his grandfather's house for a week or so, while he was painting decorations on mirrors in a Greek café in the town. Jasper, age five or thereabouts, stole some of his oil paints and brushes, thinking they would never be missed – there were so many. They were missed. "I made a mess of everything." The cook dealt with the problem, returning whatever was returnable – Jasper doesn't remember being punished, aside from the embarrassment.

"I think I always wanted to do it, as far back as I can remember. [make art]. What I find curious is why I didn't do something about it, why I didn't train myself, which I did not do. I was trying to remember the other day, when was my first awareness of modern painting, and I think it was when I was in the fourth grade, and home ill with mumps or measles. Something was in like a Life magazine, and I saw some pictures. I don't know if my memory was a real one or not. And I associate it with a similar situation, with a paintings of Stamos's. It doesn't make sense to me in timing. He had a painting called 'The Sound in the Rock,' or something like that, and whenever I saw that, it struck me, because of the, what do you call that?, that an image could be a sound interested me. But that could have happened when I was twenty-five, for all I know! [laughter] My first memory of a kind of ?? picture is when I was in, maybe the first or second grade, it was a stamp, in some magazine there were sheets of stamps, and I remember having this stamp, which was a painting of sunflowers by Van Gogh. I thought it was so ugly! I had never seen sunflowers, and they looked so heavy and unpleasant to me. And then later, when I went to France and saw the same things growing everywhere, it was so incredible."

His ethical sense and where it came from– his grandfather, for example? "I'm not aware of it. I've never thought about anything like that. I had two aunts who were —>

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schoolteachers, who took it upon themselves to train children to behave. Maybe something from that." Was he a well-behaved child? "I don't know whether I was or not. I think that I was able to at least present a front of good behavior." The woman who told him he must be from the southern aristocracy was Jean Follette, at the Museum of Modern Art.

Religion? "My family were all Baptists. I don't know that it was a big part of my upbringing." Living with Aunt Gladys, there was a church service either every other week or once a month – so few people and so little money that the preacher alternated among several churches. In the summer there would be a week of revival services, and you went every day to church. His aunt played the piano for church singing. Jasper was baptized, wearing a white linen suit, in Lake Murray, "which was red water, and my suit came out red."

After tenth grade, he went to Sumter, S.C. to live with his mother and step-father. He thinks this was the year the state switched to a twelve-year system in public schools – it had been that eleventh was the last grade. Sumter had switched a year early, so eleventh had very few people in it. He'd had three years of public high school, commuting by bus from The Corner into a school that served the towns of Batesburg and Leesville (it was called B and L). Moving into town was a pleasure. Was he a good student? "I don't remember. I was good in some things and not good in others…" It was difficult to make friends when he was commuting, because the social life was in town.

Entered Univ. of South Carolina in Columbia. "I had no interest in most subjects. I had no sense of history. I didn't know there was a world beyond where I was. So I didn't do terribly well. I was taking an art class or two, and found that very interesting, and by the beginning of my second year, maybe even the second half of the first year, I stopped studying, and took only art classes." Art history of studio art? "Both. I was no good at art history, that was beyond me. I don't think I was aware of Pollock until I got to New York. What did I know about? I knew about Picasso and Matisse in college, and I had a woman teacher who would go in summers to study in various places, so I would get word that there were artists. She studied with Hofmann in Provincetown one summer, with Ozenfant, and the Greek painter who was married to Chryssa. She and another woman, her sister-in-law, who taught art history, they would go in the summer, and come back with word of these interesting artists and what they were doing…Some smattering of understanding of someone else's work. I had no sense of anywhere to go, until I really decided I wanted to go somewhere, and then I didn't know where to go…I remember that one of the teachers mentioned Black Mountain when I was thinking of going away, and said it was not structured enough, and I might be lost there. I just wanted to get away from where I was, so I went to Parsons and studied there – it must have been in January, second semester. And I studied through the following summer there."

"I had no money, so I didn't move about in the city very much. School was in Long Island City, and I lived up at a hundredth-and-something and Riverside Drive. I had a room in a huge apartment building with two old women…they were relatives of a friend.

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I went up to New York with another person, another student from Columbia, and we both took rooms with the family.

"What I was studying was supposed to lead to work in advertising, and I didn't have an interest in it. I was forced to do certain things which may have had some effect on me later, but at the time I didn't see any rhyme or reason for what I was doing. I don't remember what I was doing – certainly not painting. I didn't call anything I did painting." Parsons His teacher in S. Carolina had sent other students to ~~Pratt,~~ and was friendly with people there. She spoke to someone, and said Jasper needed a scholarship. "This woman said I could have one, but that I was receiving it because of their connection to Catherine, my teacher, but that I didn't deserve it. I was quite insulted that she would say that – not that I thought I deserved it! – so I said well then I'm not going to accept it, because this isn't what I'm going to do anyway, I'm going to be an artist. She said, if you leave Parsons you'll never be an artist.\

"So I left. And then I had to get a job, so I got a job as a delivery boy, messenger boy, for an outfit called Reuben H. Donnelly, a direct mail outfit. I think it published the New York telephone directory at that time. Then I thought I wanted to go to school, to learn something. Cooper Union was free. You took examinations, and did whatever they asked you to do. So I did that, and I was accepted. And I realized I had no money and couldn't afford to go. So I didn't accept that. And shortly after that I was drafted into the army."

While he was in NY, he saw Munch and Klee shows at MoMA. Also Demuth (at Whitney?), Cezanne at the Met. But no great revelations.

Having registered in South Carolina, he was sent to Fort Jackson. [END SIDE A]. After basic training he was assigned to Special Services there. "While I was goofing off from basic training I sometimes went to a service club that was run by a woman named Augusta Birch. She was a widow of a general, or something like that. We became friendly, and at the end of basic training I think that she asked that I be assigned to the branch that she was involved in. Somehow, she got General Collins to open something that she called the Culture Center. It was a Special Service club devoted to the arts. I worked there. One of the things I did was made exhibitions of work – by an old teacher I'd had at the school, or by friends I knew. Once I did an exhibition of children's work, and some general – I think he became head of The Citadel; Mark? – at any rate, this general came to visit when this exhibition of children's art was on the wall, and he looked, and said, 'What these men need is a teacher!'" [laughter]

Jasper says he doesn't remember if he was doing paintings of his own then, or showing his own work at the club. He does recall opening a little gallery in the museum in Columbia, the Fort Jackson Gallery, and being in charge of that, "and I probably exhibited something of mine there." Of his work then, he says, "I think everything would have been a very unsophisticated idea of what someone else did."

He thinks his tour of duty was a year and a half. After a year at Fort Jackson, he was sent to Japan. (see earlier interview). Returning to South Carolina, he got a job working at

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Shaw Air Base, near Sumter – painting signs, painting designs on airplanes, etc. In order to get the job he had to join the Air Force. This was just for the summer, after which he moved to New York.

"I thought I should go to school, so I enrolled at Hunter College. I thought I was going to school on Park Avenue, and low and behold, that was only for women. The coed place was in the Bronx. So I went to the Bronx. I think I went for one day. I must already have been working at Marlboro. I lived up in Yorkville. I went shopping in a grocery store on the corner, and I passed out on the street. Someone helped me, who thought I was drunk – I must have had a flu or something. I went back to my place and stayed there, and never went back to school." Why not? By then you had the GI Bill to pay for it. "I think the experience was so uninteresting. I had three classes that day. I had an English literature class, where the woman was teaching Beowulf, and talking about the mead hall. I was a late enrollee, so classes had already been going on. What was happening in this class was they were talking about Beowulf and the mead hall. And then I went into a French class where I absolutely – I couldn't related to it in any way. And then I went to a drawing class, and there was a rather handsome, red-headed lady, and we were drawing from the model, and I remember her looking at my drawing and saying 'Mahvellous line quality, mahvellous line quality.' [laughter]. By the time I recovered from being sick, it didn't seem to me reasonable to go back there, so I didn't."

Was he doing art then? "I was doing something." Not the potato drawings that Bob saw – they came later. "I don't know what I was doing then. I was still doing kind of nothing, and wanting to be an artist, I would say. I don't remember."

The decision to be an artist, not just going to be an artist – "It was, I think, after I moved into Pearl Street, where Rachel Rosenthal had found the two lofts. Each of us was going to be an artist. I realized, what is the difference between me, who is going to be an artist, and these people that I meet who are artists? So I decided – it's very hard to recall, but I established some principles, I guess. I thought, well, this is what I am; if I'm ever going to be an artist I'm going to be it now. I'll just have to accept the responsibility." Is this the point where you destroyed all your earlier work? Yes. "That was part of the decision." Did meeting Bob have something to do with the decision? [Long pause]. "Well, I guess. I'm not really clear about how to think about it. Bob had an incredible importance for me, but I don't know how to put it in relation to that. He was certainly an example of an artist, and perhaps the example of an artist that I was most intimate with. You could say that I learned what an artist was from watching him, on some level – I think on a practical level. Everyone else that I knew in art was a teacher, or something else, not just an artist."

Did that decision come as a relief? "I don't know about relief. It was certainly a change. It was, I think to some degree – I think of it as an act. I don't know whether that's correct or not. An act of growing up. And I was at an age where clearly something would have had to have happened, wherever I had been. So it's very hard to tell what happened because of influences around me and what happened because of the necessity of a stage

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of life. It seemed to me that I was very lucky to have some connection to Bob and John and Merce, all really serious people in their work. It was a privilege."

~~DeKooning~~ and that generation – "I only learned about de Kooning around that time. When I returned to New York, I guess around the time I met Bob Rauschenberg, de Kooning was very stylish. I think maybe he had just gone to Janis – left Egan and gone to Janis. His pictures sold for money, and Bob was very interested in that. What I learned about de Kooning was at that point. I hadn't seen any earlier work of his. The Women were being talked about and shown." Did you meet him? "Only when I had a show at Leo's. He came to the gallery during the first show. We had dinner – Leo took a group of us to dinner at, you remember that restaurant that used to be in a bath on 57th Street? Café Nicholson. We had dinner there. At one point, Bill said to me, 'You're a sign painter. I'm a house painter.' I understood what he meant by me, but I didn't understand what he meant by him. [laughs] I didn't see him as a house painter. I don't know." He's read the new de K. biography – "I enjoyed it…I got sort of annoyed with the writer, over that thing about Philip. He did an Op Ed piece in the New York Times after Philip died, attacking Philip, putting Philip down in every way he could, and sort of dwelling on his Nazi background. I wondered why he'd done it…It seemed so odd to me."

"I met Pollock. I didn't really know him. He scared me. I regret I wasn't friendly to him. He was very nice to me. He was very drunk, and very nice, at a party at Elie Poindexter's. I had gone with John and Merce, and Pollock approached me and said something. My reaction was to get away, which I did. Of course John loathed Pollock." Did Bob know him? "I don't know. I always thought Bob knew everybody. He attended those meetings at The Club."

Clem Greenberg – "I never read his writing."

CT: "I've run out of questions." JJ: "How nice."

In the garden: The vine is called Petrea.

In the studio: Music playing on stereo. The drawing he's working on – "This is going to be a mirror, in the glass over." India ink. There's a painting on the wall, "basically a detail of the painting inside [Bushbaby]." He's doing two paintings like this, different details.

Jasper tells story about the Jewish Museum show in 1957. The man behind it was named Richter, and Jasper and Bob thought he was the Dadaist Hans Richter, but it turned out to be a peach grower from North Carolina. This man had picked three or four of Jasper's paintings and had them sent to the museum. On a Sunday before the opening, Jasper went up to the museum to help Bob install his Goat combine, which was then in the state of the goat mounted on a shelf in the painting. While doing so, he noticed that two of his (Jasper's) pictures, White Numbers and Tango, were in a group of rejects. Meyer Schapiro was there. Mr. Richter came up to Jasper said, 'Jasper, I think you should speak

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with Dr. Schapiro about your work.' And I said, 'I have nothing to say to Dr. Schapiro about it.' He said, 'Dr. Schapiro, Jasper Johns would like to speak with you about his work.' I said, 'Dr/ Schapiro, I'm happy to speak with you, but I have nothing to say about my work.' Meyer was a very sweet, gentle guy. I don't know what he said, but he was being nice. At which point Mr. Richter came over, and said, 'Oh Dr. Schapiro, there's another work of Jasper's here, but we didn't have room for it in the gallery. I would like to show it to you.' At which point he led us to a broom closet, and pulled out my Target With Plaster Casts. I was so angry, and trying not to show it. I went back and said, 'Bob, I'm leaving, I'll see you back at the studio.' And I started out through the gallery, and this man came back in from the broom closet, and said, 'Oh, Jasper, Dr. Schapiro thinks that this target of yours should be in the exhibition, but my associates say that if I put it in I'll lose my job. So wouldn't it be more interesting and add to the mystery of the piece if we locked some of the compartments?' I said, 'Perhaps it would, but that doesn't interest me. I'm going home, please send my works back.' So I left. At some point Meyer described Bob's work as 'contraptions,' as a negative description. I was so angry…The following day, this little man whom I had met, I don't know his name, called, and said, 'I want to come down and pick a work for this exhibition, may I visit?' I told him to come ahead. So this man came down, and he talked about Zen and the Art of Archery, and it was as though he fell in love with my Green Target, in this connection to whatever his zen ideas were. He wanted this picture to be in the exhibition, and I said fine. And then I think he went to Bob's and picked something. So, the other works were returned and those were not."

Addenda on installation – "Well, my feeling is that they shouldn't be tied to place. Obviously some places will appear to be better than other places, a work will look better in one place than in another. But I don't like it when the place gets to be more important than the work."

[END TAPE]

We have lunch there. Pasta with tomatoes, canned tuna, black olives, and peppers; white asparagus; salad. Diet coke for Dodie, along with extra ice – he'd noticed this when we had lunch at the Mini Club, and provided it without asking. Coffee and biscotti, the coffee served with hot milk the way Dodie had it at Mini Club. Again, he won't let us lift a finger to help.

Dodie asks if he collected living artists? "I don't make that distinction. If you're one, you soon become the other." He owns ten Cezanne drawings. "I just bought two more today, I hope." Does he own a lot of his own work? "Not as much as I used to."

A rain shower. Jasper speaks of watching the rain come, "like a curtain in front of the mountains. It's so beautiful. You see it coming, and you see it pass." [end a piece?]

Monastic luxury.

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His painting, Bushbaby, is done in encaustic. The one in progress in the studio is a detail from this one; he's going to do another painting, of another detail. The drawing is a memorial to David Whitney and Philip Johnson, whose initials (reversed) are drawn at the bottom. It's in black ink, with a catenary curve (drawn) and a small circle in the center, where he'll put a mirror. The table in the studio has old-looking utensils for heating wax, and pots to mix pigments with wax. There is no studio assistant here. Jim comes down from New York to stretch canvases, but doesn't stay.

The vine growing up the trunks of two trees in the garden, with huge leaves, is philodendron.

A young black woman in a straw hat walks by at the far end of the garden, slowly, her carriage wonderfully erect. Does he employ her?

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Jasper Johns 5
(5/12/06)

At his studio in Connecticut. Rainy day.

Begin with the Cezanne exhibition in Washington, which he saw a few days before we did. His small Cezanne "Bather" is in it. He thinks he got it "before the Basel exhibition – I got it when that show was being organized, that's how I knew about the painting. It's been away, and I always resent it – but it's back now, because it didn't go to Europe." When did he get it? "I don't remember, I'm terrible with dates. I got it before the exhibition of 'Bathers' in Basel. It belonged to a man – either a Swiss or a German dealer, and his father had acquired it from the Degas sale. Degas had had it, and then when he died, this family had it." And you say that it was not a study for the large 'Bather'? "How do you know that I said that? [Jeffrey Weiss told me. He doesn't want this printed]. When the catalog for it came, in the text, he [Conningsbee) refers to it, just in passing, as a study for the other painting that's in the show. And in the list of works in the exhibition in the back of the book, it's called 'Bather With Outstretched Arms (study)' – all in the same boldface, as though 'study' were a part of the title. So I complained that I thought that – I wrote him two letters, but finally I said that since the dates of these paintings were not known, I didn't think he knew that it was a study. I didn't think it should appear in the catalog without any other qualification, as a study, and certainly not as part if its title. I thought that was misleading. I also said that I hoped that if there were wall labels, that it was not labeled in that way. I didn't say, but I thought with the prestige of the National Gallery, that people would assume that this was correct, from now on. And I think it modifies how the painting is regarded…It is corrected on the wall, but not in the catalog…I wouldn't call it a study, because it doesn't look like it, except for the pose – but there are probably five other paintings with the same pose, which are clearly not studies for that. The quality of the paint is very different from that, and is much more related to the 'Bather' in the Modern, I think. I just think it's wrong to say something is a fact and not know that it is."

(Pellerin)

The dinner for Merce and Bob last month - "The evening was less unpleasant than I'd always imagined those things will be. The costumes -- I don't know, I was surprised that they still exist. On the one hand, I thought most of them looked very hand-made, and not the way things would be done now. I liked that, but then I thought the presentation and the makeup and all was not --. The demeanor was quite different."

Merce's work and what it meant to you – "One of the things, early, that was so impressive, was Merce as a dancer, and his presence on stage…have we talked about this?" [Yes. But the way he worked, and the way you work]. "It's different, so it's hard to speak of what the complexity of it is for each of us. I can't be that objective – someone else would have to. One thing that interests me is the, I guess you would call it abstract quality of the dances. From some point of view the de-humanization of them. And then, at the same time, there is conveyed a great sense of human activity, human feelings, and somehow all of this comes together. And you think it must be a kind of a language that allows that, ~~too~~ two extremes to meet somehow. That interests me. Highly technical-seeming

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events can convey emotion." It sounds like what you do, doesn't it? "Well, often one's description of something else is a description of oneself! [laughs]."

Saw Merce's work first at the Henry Street Settlement, he thinks in 1953. "Soon after the first New York performance. They had been performing at, where, the Cherry Lane? Somewhere in the village. And then they gave another performance at the Henry Street Settlement. When I first met some of the people connected to Merce, the ones I remember would be Bob, Shari Dienes, Suzy Gablik. They were talking about the performance at the Cherry Lane, if it was the Cherry Lane…"

Did the work seem related to what you were doing then? "Not that particular event. I don't know what work I had done…At any rate, it was through repeated viewings and watching what he did – that created a feeling of irreversible interest for me. It was not a sudden insight from the first viewing. It was a thing that built."

The use of gray in his work - "I don't think I think about it any more. When I first worked with it, I think it was an attempt to rid the painting of the distraction of color. Maybe of the beauty of it. I don't know – the sentimentality of it. I don't know what. I think the idea was to get something more, more obviously factual, would have been the thought I had at the time. More literal, without color. Less ambiguous. Through repetition, I probably no longer thought about it, and used it in many different ways."

There are two paintings on the studio wall today, similar, one gray and the other in color. He says he did the gray one in the 1980s, in Stony Point, and recently got it out to work on it again. The title so far is 'Within'. "I would like to have a title, I'm so tired of having 'Untitled.' But often whatever I call it, I can't remember what the titles are. But anyway, I decided that 'Within' was the only suitable title for this, but I wasn't quite happy with it. And then I saw, in a magazine, I think an ad for an artist's exhibition in California, someone I know but I can't remember who it is. And the picture had the title, 'Within!' So I don't know whether I'm going to use it or not. I probably will."

How do you go about finding a title? "I don't know how to explain it. I don't know why one has a title and why one doesn't. I notice that Bob Rauschenberg went back and gave titles to things from the past, just made them up and wrote 'Honeysuckle' where there had been nothing…In my own case I would like to have a title, but if I can't think of something that seems to me meaningful I don't do it. I did a painting that I have that's called 'Beckett.' I have a sense of that. It's just because while I was working on it, I remembered Beckett looking at work I was doing on the book with him, and the images were the same images that are in these works, flagstone and crosshatch. And Beckett said, 'I'll tell you what I see. Here I see you try all these paths in all different directions, but no matter where you go, you come up against this wall.' That's what I thought of when I was working on that gray painting."

The other one is called "Momoyama." "It's a period in Japanese history, it means 'each mountain.' I associate the colors, the green and orange, with momoyama ceramics for some reason."

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"Duchamp said a title was like an extra color. So Duchamp said it affected the meaning of the painting. That was my interpretation of what he said. Either intensified or broadened the meaning of the work."

"Originally, I wanted things to be very literal. I still don't like them to get too fancy! [ringing laugh]. Usually my sensation is that the relationship is something rather blunt…I have a painting called 'Out the Window,' and I lived on Front Street at that time, over a hero sandwich shop. And on the other side of the street was a parking lot surrounded by three rather grim walls. One of my sisters was visiting me, and she looked out and said, 'Looks like you paint what you see out your window.' So the painting I was working on was 'Out the Window,' and I decided to call it that. Another painting, a friend was looking at it, and said, 'Any fool would know that that's a broom.' It said 'Broom,' with an arrow. And so I called it 'Fool's House.' Those are just lucky things."

titles

"Henry Cortesi gave me the word 'catenary,' which I didn't know. Later, I discovered that Bob Morris had works that he called catenaries, I think some of his felt pieces."

The success of his first show at Leo's, did it open up new possibilities? "I don't know. I think, as you work, you sometimes see what you're doing in a way that makes you want to extend the range of it. So that you don't feel you are simply repeating what you have done. And even with an idea, you may want to behave in a certain way, but at some point you may wonder about all the territory that's left in the world where that behavior seems – kind of nothing, and you want to do a little more, encounter the world in a different way. So when you start trying, and thinking about other possibilities – most of the works in my first show, the colors were very confined to really limited spaces, and I think I saw that as a restriction that I didn't want. I wanted to find some way not to have all of my paintings look like –filled in between straight lines or curved lines. Some other kind of space. That led me to try other things."

"I don't know that I had imposed restrictions on myself, in any conscious way. I think it was just the form of my thought that made these pictures this way. And then your thought grows, or is modified by the experiences that you have, so that the work you produce is also no longer confined to the previous terms that you were working with."

How did your father's death about this time affect you? "Not that I'm aware of. I don't think so. I was not particularly close to him. I went to his funeral, in Allendale, South Carolina…I think I remember bursting into tears because I was going to have to do home! [laughs] And be with my family." He thinks this was right after the Jewish Museum show, not after his first show at Leo's. He stayed overnight in Allendale, then came back.

The dark paintings ("No," "Liar"), did they reflect your feelings at that time? "Well, I hope so!" He had used body parts in his work before that.

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"Heavy" (end of piece?)

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John Cage's piece on you, his saying your work was heavy rather than light, and that this was "something he knows and regrets." - "I haven't read that piece of John's in years…I think it's fair. I'm not sure of what he meant. But I think there is a kind of – hesitation, or feedback in my work that would give it the sense of heaviness rather than lightness. It doesn't just move forward gracefully. And probably John might have seen that as something quite peculiar, because John usually had a program, and you follow it right through, and never look back. He was very critical of adjustments that other people made in things that were supposed to follow a program. He was very critical of Virgil [Thompson] over certain things he had done… [END SIDE A] He saw it as a weakness of Virgil's, to have done that. And I remember he complained about Morty [Feldman] always being anxious about his performances – he thought that, I don't know, unmanly, or something."

Do you regret this heaviness? "I think – what I assumed he meant was that the heaviness itself came from a sense of regret, not that it caused a sense of regret. Am I mistaking what he said?" I say I think he meant you would rather that your work not have this sense of heaviness. "Oh, I would. I would certainly prefer to move ahead in a cheerful way, and without hesitation. Anyone would, I think. One would like to have a life that caused no confusion. Not you, Dodie! [laughter]." But if your work grows out of this continual process of self-correction, why should you regret that? "No, the basic question is, whether you think life is a wonderful condition, or not. Isn't it? I mean, I don't, particularly. So, it doesn't seem to me – it's amazing, but it's not entirely to my liking! [roars with laughter]." (see also p.34 →)

Apropos of Cage's comment that he preferred laughter to tears, I say that John did have a sunny nature. "He promoted a sunny nature, certainly, and to a large extent I think he was. But there were other aspects. I remember Merce saying, 'They come here to interview him, and they think he's so wonderful, but they don't hear what he says when they leave.'" [more laughter].

Jasper's statement about using images the mind already knows, because it allowed him to work "on other levels" – I say I'd wondered what did he mean by other levels? "I wonder too." Long silence. "Well, I think -- that I may have meant that – by making these works that followed existing patterns – there is still something there – to see, to think about, to be concerned with, other than just those patterns. I think it's something very simple. It's just something other. It's true of anything, any term that we use, if you focus on it, it can open up into something that is divisible or multiple, rather than becoming more centered, more singular. I think that's it."

Another statement of Jasper's, about being interested in "the whole range from precision to imprecision to disappearance" – "Are you quoting me? I like that. Where did I say that?...It simply means to me something that does interest me, and that is that one senses something, locates a position, and – all of that is apt to falter, and disappear. And that life seems to me to be very much like that. That all points that we establish are apt to be lost among other concerns and other points."

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The Seasons – a new direction in his work, an ambitious new step? "I can't remember. There's a connection to somehow being asked to do an illustration or something for Wallace Stevens – that has to do with the snowman, and thinking of winter. Whether I had already done summer, I can't remember. Sorry." Did the Picasso "Minatour Moving" painting have a triggering effect? "I don't know. I really can't remember. I think the piling on of – actually not so many, but personal objects into the pictures, that was probably triggered by the Picasso thing, with all his possessions piled up on the cart. The idea of moving things that are important to one."

Did this give you pleasure? "Painting itself is a pleasure. Particularly when it's – it's most a pleasure when it's going along in a light-hearted fashion, and you're not thinking about it. And occasionally when you have come up against a kind of uncertainty, or a problem, a hesitation, then you find a way to overcome that and you are grateful."

"I remember, Philip Guston describing painting once, and talking about scraping the paint off and how awful it was, how difficult it was. This is a long, long time ago, and I was very young and silly, but I found this so annoying, talking about scraping the paint – why does he put the paint on, if he's going to scrape it off? [laughs]. Later, I became more sympathetic."

Any thoughts about photography? "I just bought a camera, but I haven't really used it. I have taken very few pictures over the years. Some are not credited – in fact, I noticed one of Bob Rauschenberg, a very early photograph of Bob that I took, it must be in the catalog to the combine show. It's of him and the Odalisk, with the chicken. I took that photograph. It's probably in Bob's files, and he doesn't know who took it. He needed a photograph for – there was an exhibition I think at the Stable gallery, and Tom Hess was doing a piece about it in ArtNews, and Bob didn't have a photograph of himself. I took that with his camera. He has a scar, or a scab on his nose – he had done something to his nose, that's how I remember. How did I get on that? But I've used photographs occasionally in my work. What I've noticed is that now, the photographs that people are working with, they manipulate in ways that are astonishing. They're not what people like me think of as photographs…It must be incredibly interesting for the people who are doing it, because there are so many things they can do." His new camera is digital and very advanced – a friend came from Europe with one and said he had to have it, you can't get these in America. "It can take movies, too."

"A young man that I know because of his family just sent me a video that he had done, which I found very interesting. He's a Japanese-American. I have no way of knowing whether it's any good, because I've never looked at anything else. This is abstract."

[We go to lunch at the main house. Delicious, as always. Sarah Taggart, the whole crew. To 241 on Side B – nothing after).

Jasper Johns 6 (same day, after lunch)

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At age 76, does he feel any differently about his work? "I don't feel that I'm overloaded with ideas that I have to express urgently. But I don't know that I ever felt that way. I did at one time feel that there would always be pressure to make further work, that there would be no shortage of impulse to move. And I don't know that I feel that so strongly now."

Do you think the impulse might ever run out? "I don't feel it might run out, I just don't feel the pressure of it now…I feel more freedom to do anything that I think to do. But I'm not sure what I think to do is freer than it used to be. My range of choices may be more limited. I'm old enough that I see in my work ?? (020) that probably other people might not see. I know there are limitations, repetitions, states of mind that seem limited. And so sometimes I have a sense of those things before, or while I'm working." But no lessening of the intensity you've always felt in working? "No, I don't think so. Part of working for me is a certain amount of anxiety, a certain amount of – boredom. There's a certain amount of hesitation. Frequently I think about things for a long time before I do something. And yet, over the years, I've decided that that was absolutely pointless. – Actually, when one works, one comes to a solution much more quickly than when one sits and thinks. But I can't avoid it. I can't manipulate the materials. I just sit and wonder what should I do? I don't *think* that used to happen, but I'm not so sure what's true. It may just be a different sense of time."

What critics say - "Usually I have read what critics say. I always find it interesting that they have anything to say. Because I find it difficult to say much, and certainly not to sum things up, which is what they have to do. To that extent I read it, I don't hold on to what they've said. More recently, I pay less attention."

Do you think about the audience for your work? "I think about audience when there's an audience. You hope people will enjoy it…What else is there to think about?" Duchamp said the audience completes the work. "I agree with that. The use of the work is very important. Obviously it's the audience that determines what pictures are kept, protected, valued, whatever. Without that, everything would disappear."

Duchamp wanted a body of his work to be kept together - "The point I'm making is – my impression is that after Philadelphia decided they would acquire the [Arensberg] collection, Marcel had the idea that there should be a room devoted to his, so that this would be a separate thing. I think he wrote to Arensberg saying that he could not discuss this possibility with the museum, but that Arensberg should discuss the possibility. So that made me wonder to what degree – that in itself seems to me to suggest that he wanted his work together, not just in the collection of the museum. I haven't had that feeling [about my own work], that it all has to be together. I have thought about the possibility of – because other people have mentioned it to me – of having a lot of work in one place. And I have had the feeling that I wanted my work to be among other artists's work, that makes more sense. But I like the idea that there should be enough of my work, and actually of everyone's work, to see more than one painting…A lot of people are talking about museums devoted to their work. Somehow I find that unpleasant…"

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"I'm talking about how an artist's work exists in the world we live in. I can't think of who is talking about museums and individual artists."

What would be your ideal situation? "I think a room of my works in a museum with other art would be very satisfying to me if I could come back and revisit it!" Something like Dia Beacon? "No, I don't want anything that limited…I want to be somewhere where there is older art, and European art, and American art…But I can't control that. It's a fantasy of what I would like."

Do you own enough of your own work to make this possible? "I doubt it. I don't have that much of my own work – I used to have more."

He's thinking about taking an apartment in NYC, so he can spend more time there.

Dealing with his reputation as the Great American Artist - "Well, I've been very fortunate to have had a large enough number of people interested in my work over a long time. Who they are has varied somewhat." It's rare for anyone to sustain this high a level of work for so long. "It's nice you think that." Doesn't this create extraordinary pressure on you? "I don't think so. I think, having had the kind of generous reception my work has had, has allowed me to be much more – free, in my own decisions. I think. It's hard to know…I feel that I have benefited from the kind of attention I've had, rather than having been hampered by it."

We look at some of the art works in his house. The Schwitters that the artist gave to Henry Cowell; a Renaissance drawings of hands by Passerati (?). The photograph that Cezanne may have used for his 'Bather.' More Cezanne drawings. (There is also a very small Cezanne drawing in his studio, of a nude, just to the left of the door as you come in).

Postnotes - In the studio, entrance hall, there is a series of drawings by Ellen Gallagher of people in wigs. And a beaded curtain with image of the Mona Lisa on both sides, a gift from Terry Winters and Hendel. In studio itself, a tiny Cezanne nude (female) ~~(nude)~~, recumbent in bed. Also two casts of numbers, one in bronze and one in ??. He'd like to have the piece of his in Lincoln Center done over in bronze (?). In the print studio were four "Bushbaby" prints.

He was wearing an old plaid flannel shirt, nondescript kahki work pants, rawhide laceup farmers boots. He wanted to show us his morels growing in the garden – we had them for lunch. Lunch was halibut with a green sauce, morels, asparagus (white), salad, and lemon pound cake for dessert. Nobody had wine.

The Cezanne 'Bather' just came back yesterday from the National Gallery. It had the original simple wood frame – the National Gallery had reframed it in the ornate frame that Degas had on it. Hangs over fireplace in living room of main house.

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A flock of guinea fowl on lawn – his birthday present last year from Jim, the studio assistant. Twenty are left – one eaten by fox, another was run over – they think the car is their mother. They eat Japanese beetles. [END]

More Notes on the main house: a de kooning black + white drawing in the library, along with a large flat-screen TV. Late de kooning oil in the hall.

Living room table against wall has group of Jomon Japanese clay vessels, "the earliest pottery recorded," acc. to his studio ass't. Jasper: "I love these. I wanted fine, and now I have fine."

a Schwitters collage – had been owned by Henry Cowell, who didn't like it. Also, a Picasso drawing. Over the fireplace is the Cezanne "Bather." Twelve Cezanne drawings on another wall. A Chamberlain sculpture.

Hall - one of Warhol's Marilyns, "and a scrap of Bob's" (1955-57)

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Johns 6
(7/23/06)

Susan Sontag - "We went around together for a period of time, socially. I don't remember how we met." What was she like as a friend? "I don't know what you mean by 'as a friend.'" I say I was always intimidated by her, afraid to open my mouth because what I said might strike her as stupid. "Oh, really. Well, of course she was enormously bright, and exhibited that to a certain extent, put that forward. But I always loved that quality. I loved talking with her. We got along very well. I would go with her occasionally to a kind of literary gatherings, which I could never understand. She seemed to think that my presence there should be very interesting to everyone else, though I think other people couldn't understand what they were supposed to find interesting about me. People like Lionel Trilling and such. I just went to a couple of these things…It was not part of my world.

"She was asked to write about this show that Anthony d'Offay did, of John, Merce, and me, and she wrote the catalog essay for that."

"I didn't see her for a long time. And then she had breast cancer, and we had contact again at that time. And after that – the d'Offay thing was after that."

Picasso and Johns – Michael Fitzgerald's writing that Johns was influenced by the dark, wartime Picassos in the Ganz apartment when he painted "No" and "Liar" - "Not consciously," says Jasper. "You never know about unconsciously. I think I paid attention to those paintings later, actually, if he's talking about the still lifes, with the forks and knives…"

J. says he saw the show in Paris, of Picasso paintings that were going to the government, many of which had been in Duncan's "Picasso's Picassos." "I saw the figure in the doorway, with the shadow, but didn't like it at that time. I would have seen, I think, the painting with the hat ['Woman in a Straw Hat'], but I don't remember seeing it. I only became interested in it when I was actually looking at the photograph in that Duncan book. At that moment it had meaning for me…" Those pictures became very important in your work? "Yes – not Picasso's theme, but my theme. Because, for instance, the thing of the minatour moving house was – it was sort of a literary, condensed version of something that was happening to me, and I made a connection that I also was moving house, had these houses and possessions. I had three houses – maybe four [laughing]. I had St. Martin, and Stony Point, and – I think I had gotten rid of the bank – and I was going from place to place."

He was painting "The Seasons" then, and starting to use more autobiographical references in them. "Again, it's a question of order. If you make paintings like that you can say that you're using more autobiographical references – otherwise you can't make things like that! When you're painting, you can have a central thought that pulls in various kinds of details, and that's the way you make the painting. You go in a direction, and you gather up whatever has to accumulate to move that way. It's not necessarily that

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you have planned to make a picture like this. You make the picture like this because you're thinking in a direction." But how is that direction different from the direction of a painting like "According to What"? "I don't know that it is. It makes a different kind of picture…" Then the autobiographical element is not important, it's just what you happen to be working with? "That's what I think. It's now – well, now let's say something about myself! [laughter]. You're saying, now let me make another painting, and what will I do?"

You used to say you didn't want your painting to be about you. "Well, one realizes that that's a failure, that effort. It produces something, but it doesn't produce that. It's an attitude, and it allows you to filter, I think, certain things, and that gives the work a direction, or the sense of a direction. As other things are filtered or allowed in, you get a different kind of image…One would like to control that, but it is more or less a hopeless procedure…"

The idea of having someone trace your figure, and using that – what led to this? A desire to have your personal presence in the picture? "I think it was that, but I'm not a hundred percent. I wanted it to be, as it were impersonal, or presented impersonally. Years before, I remember – and I only thought of it after Julian drew that shadow – Bob Morrris had asked me to, I guess you'd call it pose for a work. It was to be my shadow, which he drew. I think he made an outline of it on paper, on the floor, and his idea was to cast it in cement. I don't know what happened – he never completed the work. So I associate that with it. Also, I remember a play at the Living Theater many years ago, somewhere up on Broadway, I don't remember whose play it was, it could have been Paul Goodman, but one of the details I remember in the play was that someone goes around picking up shadows, and they had shadows cut out of fabric or paper or something on the floor. I just saying that to show that there are other backgrounds besides Picasso for the shadow." But the Picasso shadow painting was very striking to you? "No, not at all. I saw it, but it didn't interest me. Later, it became more interesting."

Picasso's 'Harlequin' – "Ever since Picasso's Blue Period we've seen that kind of imagery. I suppose it has a slight – well, it is a pattern, a way to break up a space, and probably many people including me connect it to a Harlequin costume, and so connect it to vagabond theatre, whatever associations that has. It's in a tremendous number of paintings, of all kinds, not just Picasso."

The Pyre paintings – "They're owned by the Kravises. They're going to be shown at the Whitney for the first time [in Picasso in America]." He brings out the print he's done of them, Pyre I and Pyre II. [He did the two paintings, then made a print, then an etching]. The title suggests a funeral – was he thinking of people who died? "I don't think so. I don't know what I was thinking! I was thinking about making a painting. [much laughter]…This is a literal repetition of this, without its color…All that kind of alteration interests me, and is in a lot of my work. A kind of mechanical aspect of all of that interests me, if mechanical is the right word; but also, all the kind of loaded symbolic quality of it also interests me…There is this suggestion of a body there, at the bottom, but

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I'm not thinking of a body. It's a figure, with legs, and feet, and the belt. Or it refers to that -- it isn't that."

Asked about the deaths of Susan Sontag and David Whitney, he says he was not referring to that. "I don't mean to scorn what you're saying. I think such things do come into play, but I think to focus on them is a mistake."

"Picasso was a giant figure in art, but like certain other artists, who are so, in a sense large and complete and -- formed that they seem to belong in a different world from the world that I inhabit, so there is no room for me there. My idea was that I was not part of that, and that I had to do something quite different, basically, to find out who I was. I think as a very young student, that would have been what I thought to do, but I didn't know how to do it – to try to imitate. At a certain point I gave up that route, and that's when I started to become an artist."

Samuel Beckett - no other recollections. "I only saw him a few times. I had read a good deal of his work." The gray painting on the wall behind us, with flagstone motif, is called 'Beckett.' He associates the writing with a polarity between deep pessimism and hilarity, comedy. "And of course the theatrical. He was someone I admired very much. I think when I was working on my first etchings, Tanya Grosman said that these should be with a text of Beckett's. Or that I should do a work with a text of Beckett's. Something like that. Of course she always had in her mind the idea that she wanted to do books." Later, Vera Russell came with a proposal that he and Beckett work together on something. They met in Paris, and Beckett agreed to translate some fragments of texts he had from French to English, and send them to Jasper. He did so, but to Jasper they seemed like very finished, polished writings, not something he could include in a print. So the images and texts were done on separate pages.

The "Beckett" painting in the studio – "It's called Beckett because while I was working on it, I kept thinking of showing Beckett one of the works that was in the book I did with him, which was half crosshatching and half flagstone. And Sam said, 'Let me tell you what I see here. Here' – pointing at the crosshatching – 'you go in all these directions, but no matter where you go, you come up against this wall.' I kept thinking about that while working on this, so I decided to call it 'Beckett.' And then, while doing that, I remembered that I had this canvas behind the wall, of the cross-hatching. It was the remains of a painting – you see the cross-hatching underneath the covered part? – I had begun at Stony Point. It was going to fit on my dining room wall, but I never completed it. So I put it aside, and brought it here when I moved, and it had been behind the wall all that time…So I decided to make this painting, superimposing the two things in this way." The big one is called "Within." (END SIDE A]

The skin drawings – what was the motive? "It was like trying to draw a map. Trying to put a round surface on a flat surface."

Tanya Grosman - Jasper started working with her at least two years before Bob did. She'd brought two stones to the building on Front Street, and Bob got a bum to help carry

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them upstairs. Jasper drew on one, then had it taken out to Tanya's to finish, and worked there from then on.

On having no facility for drawing – "I have none. There was an article recently in the paper, about that people should learn to draw. I wish I could! [laughter]." He says there is a connection between his lack of facility and his use to tracing, measuring, copying, etc. "I mean that I couldn't sit down and draw you. I wouldn't know what to do. I could probably learn – so could you! That's what this article was all about…But I don't think I'm going to do it. You know, I did a bit of it in school, but I have nothing to show for it." What did he draw as a child? "I have no idea…Along this line of measuring and copying things, my mother, late in her life, was very impressed that as a boy, I had made a painting, of Mexican peasants or something, sleeping, with their sombreros, against cactus, something of that sort, and at the bottom it said, 'Copied by Jap Johns.' She found it very interesting that I had written 'Copied by' instead of just signing it. It was interesting to me that my mother had that degree of subtlety." He has no idea what happened to the painting.

Do you feel yourself to be in a direct line of descent from western art since the Renaissance? "Well, not in terms of practice, only in terms of the organization of the material we have. What I do is – how to express it? – an indirect line of descent. What has been passed down has both – aspects of it have deteriorated over time, and new aspects have been added, so it's become something else. That's what I think."

In our time art has gone in all these different directions (performance, installation, etc) But you have stuck pretty closely to the tradition of painting. "It's interesting, that's true. If there weren't this other work, my work wouldn't have that relationship, that's my feeling. That all of these things that you mentioned have entered, and are now considered the proper terrain." Have you ever been tempted to try working with clay? "I made a couple of hideous ceramics when I was in the army, that's the only time."

"Every now and then I see that computers would be useful. And I see some artists who work with computers to achieve an image, and then they paint that image, and I find that a little odd. And yet when I think about it, why shouldn't they do that? Why shouldn't they establish their image and then paint it? But to me it's a little like painting a photograph. In these paintings I'm working with, the imagery is more or less the same, but the proportions vary, so that the image has to be stretched in different ways for these different canvases. It suddenly occurred to me, why don't I do this on the computer? The computer could do this in a second…Maybe if I were more at ease with the computer I would do it. Most of what I do in my work, I do. There is very little that anyone else does. That's my feeling. In printing, there's a lot of technical stuff that has to be done by the printer, but I don't – some artists and some printers think of printmaking as a collaboration, and some printers think they're feeding in information which makes the print, and some artists go along with that. But I always feel that I am completely responsible for the work that is produced. In a way it isn't true…but I still don't feel that it's their work. I feel it's my work."

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Talks about seeing the Liberman painting we gave at the Met. "I was so happy to see it there…It's one of my favorite paintings. It just looked so terrific, and then I saw that you had given it."

Merce Cunningham – your saying he was your favorite artist in any field – "God, the remarks one makes that never get erased! Well, when I made that remark it was absolutely true. Over the years, I've had the most enormous pleasure from his work. His work meant probably something different to me when he was dancing. When he danced the works that he had choreographed – there are a lot of remarkable dancers, but there was something about the connection between his dancing and the fact of it, his thought, that made it incredibly moving for me."

Did you have a comparable feeling about Cage's music? "No. It's probably more complex, but it's complex from a – well, much of the later work is complex through operations that were carried out by a computer. The complexity in Merce is that it's always a person, there's nothing added or amplified – the amplification is done by the body. That's what's touching about it."

The 25th Anniversary Concert of Cage's work - "The three of us decided that it should happen – Bob and I had a little money, so we thought we could each spend a thousand dollars. I don't know whether De (d'Antonio) had a thousand dollars or not, probably not." De made all the business arrangements, publicity, etc., and he located Town Hall for it. "It was done very quickly. We decided to do a show of John's manuscripts at the Stable Gallery to help attract attention and to raise money. There were discussions of who should sing The Wonderful Widow of 18 Springs. Marlene Dietrich? [laughter]. We went around selling tickets. John was involved with the musicians, and he planned the program. There was that orchestra piece, and Merce conducted for the first time…"

"I think we thought that John had a kind of musical history, which nobody mentioned, and that people should have the opportunity to experience it. John himself was very reluctant to deal with his past work – he had no interest in it. He wanted to do what he was doing now, and would rarely discuss what he had done in the past. So all of these earlier pieces were a revelation to me. And I think they were to many people." Was John grateful? "In his way! I think he was touched that his friends wanted to do this. On one level he had a kind of zen indifference to the whole thing…"

John's comment about the friendship of Jasper and Bob, how they complemented each other in so many ways that being with them made him feel he didn't need any other friends. "Well, for a while the four of us were ~~very~~ a very interesting group, at least to us! If to no one else. Because there was complete open communication, and different levels of experience and knowledge. I've certainly never experienced anything like that, now before or since."

The beer can piece was something Bob was working on first? "He didn't do it. I asked him not to, because I wanted to do it. I thought my idea was better than his. He let me do it.! What he was going to do was just going to be a detail in a larger work. He had

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imagined something like 'Treasures,' something of that sort, with perhaps twenty objects that he would be presented as kind of a single work…One thing he was going to do is take a can – we used to do it – and bend the two ends in. He was going to do two at the same time, so one lapped around the other one." This was in response to deKooning's remark about Castelli. [END TAPE 6]

II - News & Interviews

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Johns 7
(7/23/06)

Lunch in the main house. There's no one else today (a Sunday) except the chef, who has lunch laid out on the long table on many small plates – a sea food salad, corn salad, various cold dishes all very good. Blueberry cobbler with vanilla ice for desert, the blueberries from his garden. You get the sense of how alone he is in this house, and how entirely agreeable this is to him. There are three pictures in the dining room: a Twombly blackboard painting on the long wall, a Rauschenberg silkscreen (black and white, title is *Cove*, 1963) at one end, and a Johns flag in aluminum relief, the smallest of the three, at the other end, over the fireplace. Jasper carried the big red extension cord over from the studio, so we could hook up the tape recorder.

He's lived here for more than ten years – first in the gardener's cottage up on the road, while the studio was being done. Then in the studio, for about two years. He thinks he's setting up a studio and an apartment in NYC, but hasn't begun yet. "I may use it and I may not."

He usually goes to St. Martin just before Christmas, depending on the weather.

Jasper laughs uproariously over what Frank Stella said about his "three" shows at MOMA, the third being Elizabeth Murray. "Isn't that interesting, that he thinks so."

"Artists are making all kinds of demands now." But not you. "I haven't thought of the right one."

Jasper frequently chews ice from his glass of water. He's very genial.

The long side table is French – he bought it in Connecticut. Nearly 12 feet long. The long table in the studio is American, made as a dining table for workers on a hops farm in upstate New York. The table we're sitting at belonged to his college art teacher, Catherine tk. "I made it. It's plaster of Paris, on top of wire that's resting on a table. I've made it wider and longer. I had the table it was built over, which my college art teacher had had made for herself. I used it in my studio in New York. Everything in her house was black or lime-green, and this was covered with black lacquer. She had white hair, and aluminum doorknobs, and this table, which I ate at many times and I was always very fond of it. Late in her life, she retired to a home in North Carolina, near Ashville. She had had to give up all of her furniture. The table was made of strips of wood which were laminated, and she had lacquered it black." The man she gave the table to was a woodworker, and he stripped it down [END SIDE A]. She asked Jasper if he would like to buy it, and he said yes.

The property used to be a dairy farm, but a rich family lived here, with lots of children and servants. Built around 1910-1920. Before, there was another house in the style of the barn (studio), built in late 19th century – the new owners built this one on the same site, maybe as a summer place. Jasper has something like 140 acres.

Tom - New CT interviews

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Celebrity and how he's avoided it – "It was only in the art world that I was known, not in the media world, like Andy. It was a very different situation." Not very different today – "I'm just an older artist." Jasper has been on the cover of Newsweek, but not Time. "I don't know what connection you think I have to celebrity. I'm interested in my work being known, not in I being known…I only did two things on television. One was a hideous thing that was broadcast on the American Masters. The Philadelphia Museum had arranged the show, and someone wanted to do a film. I didn't want to do it. It was stressed that it would be an incredible help to the museum. I did that. And then in the early sixties, there was a series of program done on Channel 13 by Alan Solomon and Bucky Fuller's son-in-law [Robert Snyder]. They did a thing…" But a lot of other documentary film-makers had wanted to do films on him, and he turned them down. "It's like this interview with you. I don't really see that much can come of it!" [laughs uproariously]. [END TAPE 7]

Art in the House

Main hall: small, crude sculpture on a pedestal near the staircase, called "The Iron Man" – it came from Adele Ernest's folk art gallery in Stony Point, and was done by a slave. A small gold Marilyn by Warhol over the fireplace.

Living room: his Cezanne bather with outstretched arms over the fireplace. A Franz Kline drawing he's just bought resting on a chair. Two new Cezanne drawings in the bookshelf with the others. A John Chamberlain sculpture. On the long side table, an ancient Chinese pot at one end, and at the other the five Jomon prehistoric Japanese ceramics.

Upstairs landing: late de Kooning on one wall, small Joel Shapiro drawing on facing wall.

Jasper's bedroom: Juan Gris drawing, "À Madame Rousseau." Seurat drawing of a woman in profile. Two Barnett Newman drawings (or prints). Jasper's painting of ??.

Second bedroom: Large Eric Fischl drawing of girls at the beach. A Kline watercolor dated 1948 – "I thought it was a De Kooning when I first saw it." A1964 Twombly drawing over the bed. A scientific photo of a woman's head stretched out flat, which someone gave him after he did the Skin Drawings. Brice Marden drawing in the bathroom.

Back bedroom: Frank Stella concentric squares.

Studio shelf

The two Duchamp self-portraits in profile. "Squirt Wee-Boy," one of several novelty toys that have little boys pee on you. A geode with water inside. A Joseph Cornell box. A gourd. A sea horse. A framed Preying Mantis. Two or more children's drawings. A very large framed tarantula, and ditto beetle. A micro-teapot made from a penny. A dark

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brown bottle of myrrh – "Give me your wrist," Jasper says to Dodie, and dabs some on. All these items have been given to him

II.B. News CT interviews

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Johns 8
(7/23/06)

(Back in the studio)

His work habits - "I tend to have the radio playing, whatever's on. Usually public radio, but sometimes it's unbearable and you have to change it…I usually come here between nine and ten in the morning, and work until about six in the evening. We all have lunch together at the house." Work can be going on in the print shop, and then he goes back and forth. He doesn't go to ULAE any more; they do the work here, and send the plates out there and they do the editioning. John Lund, his printer here, used to work at ULAE.

The studio assistant is James Meyer. Has been with Jasper since Houston Street.

The collector who had owned his Cézanne before is Pellerin.

He's working on one painting here now, a red-yellow-blue flagstone pattern called "Nines." Each of the three colored shapes appears nine times. I ask if this is a return of the flagstone motif. "Apparently it is. I didn't think of it that way. It is, but it wasn't meant to be that."

He's also doing a series of prints based on the paintings in the studio, some of which are part lithography and part etching – to echo the part encaustic, part oil in the paintings. The complexities of the print process means that "your mind has to be very agile, while you're doing it." Yale is doing a show of his prints when the museum re-opens there, he doesn't know the date.

Big sliding doors on either side of the studio, opening on one side toward the main house, on the other to a vista of rolling meadows and hills.

On far wall are two relief paintings of numbers, one in aluminum and one bronze. It's an experiment, "Because I have always had in my mind that the piece of mine in Lincoln Center should be cast in aluminum, so they can get rid of that Plexiglas and red rope that they have in front of it. I did these to test the foundry. I don't know what's going to happen – I haven't discussed it with anybody at Lincoln Center. This worked – it's encouraging. I don't even know if they would want it done. They put the glass and the rope in front when they decided to sell it," and found how valuable it was – a few years back. If it gets re-done in aluminum, it will have to be called a sculpture rather than a painting.

Jasper still crunching ice cubes.

[END TAPE 8]

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J.Johns 9
(11/5/06)

There are two paintings called "Bushbaby," plus several drawings and two or three prints. The first painting is dated 2003. Came after the Catenaries. How did he arrive at the title? "It's a personal association." Something he doesn't want to talk about. They have monkey-like features and very large eyes. He's never seen one except in pictures.

The Bushbaby painting in St. Martin's is the same size as the three other big paintings he's had on that wall. The last one was – he can't remember.

M.Marks show – none of the paintings were for sale? He thinks this is correct, because they were all sold before. There were some drawings for sale, and also prints. It wasn't because Jasper was keeping them for himself - "I only have one of them. They were done over a period of couple of years. People are interested in what you do, they come to see you, and some people want to buy them."

Do you consider Matthew Marks your principal dealer? "If I had a principal dealer, it's Matthew. But I don't feel that I have."

Do you keep a lot of your own work? "Well obviously you keep things that you don't sell." [Laughter]. "I think it's a myth. People think that I have stacks of my work, and I really don't. I probably wouldn't have kept anything of Leo hadn't suggested, at the end of my first show there were a couple of works left, and Leo said now I want to have one of these, and I think you probably want to keep one for yourself. I thought, well that's a nice idea. I do have a certain amount. You can see what I have…I'd prefer to look at other people's work most of the time. Most of the things of mine that I have, of any scale, are on loan to museums.

T.G. News Cl interviews

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If you do something new, you like that somebody else likes it. [Laughs] If you do something that is unexpected, you're grateful if someone shows an interest in it. Occasionally, something has a personal meaning…"

How many paintings do you do in a year, on the average? "I have no idea. Sometimes I do almost nothing."

ULAE – "I think that on paper, Bob and I each have some sort of interest in it." But not in practice.

Does he work on one painting at a time? "Not always. But I tend to work on one."

"Beckett" – what Sam said to you about it: doesn't this sound like it's more about his work than yours? "Don't you think that all of our interpretations of other people's work sound like us? That's what's interesting – you get to see yourself."

"Beckett" is all flagstone motif, no cross-hatching. "Within," the one he did in Stony Point and put away unfinished, them brought out again recently to work on again, used to be all cross-hatching; he overlaid it with flagstones. It's considerably larger than "Beckett," and mostly gray. "Beckett" is all gray.

The two other recent flagstone paintings are "Nines" and Momoyama."

Irving Blum story – it wasn't Ballato, it was a chic restaurant uptown. It wasn't "White Numbers," it was the "White Flag," the one the Met just bought. "I wasn't going to sell that painting."

Why didn't he go to Cooper Union? "I couldn't afford to go." But wasn't it free? "I had to live."

III.A.1 New York interviews

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Couldn't you work and go to school both? "I didn't. I was very – I don't think I was very resourceful, or knowledgable about how to accomplish such a thing."

Does he own Magritte? Yes, a painting and two drawings, all in the LACMA show. The painting is divided into rectangles, each of which contains a word and an image; the image does not always correspond with the word. The words are in English unusual for Magritte.

Duchamp and the readyades: "a fact of life." Could this be the fact that there can be no definition of art? "Any definition of art has to include the possibility of a change in that definition…Of course, there can't be a permanent definition of anything, it seems." The readymades undermine any previous definition, wouldn't you say? "Yes, but if you see that as a program, I don't know if that's true or not."

Duchamp's important work of bringing doubt into art – "What do you think? Do you think Duchamp was an optimist or a pessimist?" I say I think he was a pessimist, but he had a light-hearted attitude about it. "Exactly. That's what is so hard to understand. His seeming indifference to tragedy." [Laughs]De Kooning talked about working "out of doubt."

"I think it's a common thought now, in our time. It's certainly associated with Cezanne. It must have become part of the fabric of our thought in the 20th century."

"I'm not thinking about Marcel's work now, although there was a long period when I was."

J's statement "I think I have a kind of resentment against illusion." Why? "I assume that means one would like to contact reality, not an illusion. One

II.B. New CT interviews

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would like to understand true mechanisms or activities, rather than an illusion which would make you think differently from the truth." Would this resentment of illusion prevent you from enjoying a painting by Raphael? "Well, I don't think *that's* what would prevent me." [Laughter] "With both Bob's work and my work, that remark would apply to an earlier time. It would be hard for me to recover the kind of thought I had then."

The great end-game – is re-inventing yourself something you think about? "I don't think that I've ever been invented!...I feel no difference in relation to my work now than I did at a different time." No pressure or urgency to astonish the art world? "I don't think so. I don't think I have that kind of thought." [END SIDE A]

The criticism of J. as being hermetic, painting coded pictures to which only he has the key – "I don't believe that I'm painting pictures in a code. Every artist paints in a particular way, makes certain gestures which are personal to him, deals in certain kinds of images which he is interested in. To say that it's a code suggests that there is something deliberate that can be interpreted if you have the right key. So that if you knew something, you could then read this in a different way. I don't have the clue! That's not how I think my work is constructed." Did some of this discontent come about because of the mystery of the "Green Angel" form, and your saying you would not say what it is? "It's possible, but that's the only instance where that's happened. The idea was not to create a mystery about the derivation of my image, but to free the image from the other thing. To free the viewer not to make the association. Of course, the way it's treated is as though I had hidden the association, and told everyone to find what it is, which is silly. I was trying to find out something about how our minds and eyes work, and what creates

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a new or original thing, or image. What information do we put together and say, this is something. And what information do we ignore, and say this is nothing. That's the variant that's interested me, in doing what I do."

The child in his paintings is Spencer Monk, the son of Bob and Diana Monk.

The Chicago "gray" show includes paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures, up to the present. It comes to the Met, his first one-man show there. (He was in Henry Geldzahler's show there, not since.)

Japanese friend Ima Kutazara - she gave him a curry tree from India, which he planted in his garden in St.Martin. It's from the Sarabhai's property. She brought it to him in New York. Now it's about 12 feet tall.

The long table in his studio was a dining table for the workers on a hops farm in upstate New York. It is approx. 16 feet long, quite narrow, very beautiful.

Pictures in the dining room: The flag – "It's a cast of a painting that belongs to Bob Rauschenberg. The painting was done around '62, '63, I'm not sure. It was done in North Carolina. I made a painting for Bob – he wanted a painting of a flag, so I made one out of sculpmetal and collage. So it looks like imitation metal. Later, I took a cast of it, took a mould of it, and this was a cast in silver. There is also a bronze of this, a variation.

The Rauschenberg silkscreen painting on the far wall is called "Cove." It's one of the black and white series.

II. New CT interviews

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On the wall above the door is a page of a musical score by John Cage. He bought it from a woman. There is a longish black rectangle on it, which stands out. Jasper asked John Cage what it represents. John said, "Oh, it represents divorce. She got divorced and didn't want her husband's name on it, so she blacked it out."

In the living room – the Kline drawing is black and white, no red, and it now stands on the side table, at the other end from the Jomon pots. On the wall behind this table is a large Catenary drawing. The Warhol boxes used as side tables are Heinz, not Brillo, and there are four of them. In the other built-in bookcase, there are drawings by Picabia, Picasso, and Schwitters; a page of a score by Morton Feldman; several Navajo pots; a stone arrowhead found on his property in St. Martin, probably Arawak; etc. [END TAPE]

T1: New CT interviews

In the studio, after lunch - a new painting on the wall, just finished. Smaller than "Beckett," but also a flagstone picture, with red yellow and blue flags on a white ground, and two wooden slats attached to the bottom of the frame, with string hanging from the top of one. Extremely vivid in color. No title yet. Hinged sections on either side. The new one is like "Nines" only smaller, maybe 2 x 3'. Beckett is all gray flagstones, no cross-hatching. "Within" hanging next to it, also mainly gray.

He shows us something someone has sent him, an image of Christ made entirely out of lines of text, The Lord's Prayer etc. He had just mounted it on paper, and it was weighed down by heavy litho stones. Under that is something else, a watercolor version of the new painting, fresh and dazzling. He rarely uses watercolor. On the long hops table is a

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print he's working on, of one of the flagstone paintings; half of it is watercolor, the other half is etching.

The two Duchamp profiles – one he got in Paris the same time he got the Female Fig Leaf, it's part of an edition. The other, smaller one was Julien Levy's; "Anne d'Harnoncourt asked me to get it, and to give it to her when I die, so I thought I would."

The Cornell box was a gift from Leo Castelli.

The guinea hens – he started with 30, and is now down to 11. The foxes got several, and the dogs got a few too. But they are sitting on four eggs, so there may be more. Jasper eats the eggs and says they are delicious. One got run over by the car – "They think the car is their mother." [END]

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III

YEVALE

III - News CT interviews

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RR ~~Notes on Jasper~~

"Nothing is left to chance with Jasper" (RR)

Eldefield story: Frank Stella to Aggie G., "You know, most artists have five years." Aggie: "Really? Does that include you?" Stella: "Probably."

Eldefield: "with Jasper, there's been a sense of continuing public interest, owing to the continual supplement of the work, and the sense of something gnomic and aloof and distant. When Bob is more wearing his heart on his sleeve, like de Kooning."

Schimmel: Jasper's work "is very much within the history of 20th-century art. They are exquisite objects."

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JULIAN LETHBRIDGE
(1 Nov 06/on Jasper)

(off the record)
(The perception of Jasper is that he's a very solitary person, and I was wondering if you see him this way)
Can we back up a minute. It sounds terrific to me to read a piece that is just between Tad and Jasper. That sounds so refreshing...I'm happy to talk, but with two provisos. How to say this? I have two inhibitions. One is a kind of self embarrassing one. The self conscious one is that I think I suffered as it is by the kind of proximity to Jasper.

(To be seen as the artist who is the friend to Jasper)
Yuh. And so many people who are friends of his, celebrate that aspect of their identity. And I do whatever I can to suppress that aspect of my identity. And it's the kind of thing because we've been friends for so long, it's hard to escape it all together. But I don't want to do anything to encourage it, so by and large, I avoid any conversation that would affirm that aspect of it. Does that make sense? What I'm trying to say is that I would love not to see my name in the article. Now, obviously, in the same sense, I don't want to betray Jasper in that regard because I'm a friend of his. So if there's some way where it's really important, then of course I would come forward. But other things being equal, unless you really ask it or explain it, I would prefer not to see myself in the piece...Like the Duchamp book, which I enjoyed so much, which seemed to me about the communion between souls rather than...

(What is the second point)
I think that most people around Jasper wouldn't feel that way, and also it may be that I'm deluding myself by thinking it makes any difference. But other things being equal, I would prefer not to do anything to add to a kind of...And having said that, I would say that I'm devoted to Jasper. I would be unlikely to say anything that I think he would have trouble with anyway...Even the first thing, if it comes up that it's really important or Tad really wants to, then just ask me, that's all. Because I don't want to be a complete party pooper...

(The perception of Jasper is that he's a very solitary person. Do you see him as this way? Do you think that that's an accurate way to describe)

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No, I think that's an accurate description of one facet of a multifaceted person. The thing about Jasper is that he's full of enigmas. And one of them is that he, in some senses – he doesn't isolate himself, but in some senses, I think he places himself in a place which is best for his work. I'll say it differently. I think that one of the things about Jasper is that he's so empathic to people, and in a way, he's so much a social person because he's extremely good company – he's witty, he's curious, he's engaged with everything around him. There's nothing that doesn't get his curiosity, that his nature is extremely affable like that. And I suspect that one of the ways that he protects himself or the relationship that he needs to do his work and to accomplish it, is to contrive a kind of isolation at times. But he's not like an ascetic, phometic monk somewhere who can't deal with the people around him.

(It's almost a way of protecting himself for the work)
I think it's a way of saving himself for the work, rather than protecting himself. Saving his energy and his concentration.

(And as he grows older, has anything changed in his life as a result of getting older)
I think as he gets older – I think that the amount of energy that he puts into his work is the same, but as he gets older and the energy diminishes a little bit, there's less for the other stuff. So I don't think it's his nature that's changed, I just think that the things that leave his life first are the ones that are the least useful to him in relation to his work. Does that make sense? When I first knew him, which was years and years ago, he would entertain a lot, he loved to cook, he was always surrounded by people. And he would still have moments where he would be so single-minded and not exactly by himself but self contained anyway. And I think those things have lessened over the years. But his nature – he's just as affable and kind of excessable to those he chooses to be accessable to as he's ever been. He's shy. That's the other thing. And the thing is that he provokes a sort of shyness and reserve in other people. So I think that that dynamic between the effect he has on people and his own shyness suggests a kind of isolation, which is misleading I think.

(Jasper does go out, to dinner parties. He's not a hermit...)
I think that's rubbish. I don't see him that way at all. I never have.

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(Does he give dinner parties now? In the past he did)
Less so. But he certainly entertains – he's an extremely gracious host. I think he does it less than he used to. He certainly does it. He's very hospitable. He spends time by himself, but I would say he's mostly not by himself. His work day, he's surrounded by people who help him with his work. And then there are professional people who go up there all the time to see him. And then there are friends. So I would say, he doesn't lead an isolated life by any means. I don't think you can occupy the place that he does in our society, in relation to his work, and have the kind of attention that his work draws and be completely isolated.

(Yet, he's been able to put off that kind of celebrity status – he's been able to not be disturbed by that sort of thing)
No, he's been very rigorous like that. But I think he'd always been that way. I think other artists of his generation certainly, maybe less so now – he's become too far away from them. But right now I'd say at least two or three generations after him, he's been such an example for some of us to how to lead your life without the wealth and the celebrity and everything else taking you over and subverting what your work is. And again, I think that's something that Jasper's always been very conscious of and again has used devices to help that not happen.

(And it happened to him at a very young age – to have Alfred Barr come in and buy three things out of your first show...)
Exactly.

(And he was in his 20s)
One symptom of that is how many people were completely devastated by Jasper's participation in that Wizard of Oz business. You must have some idea about that. But it was an absolute...

(I was the one who called him to do it, and I was uncomfortable...But right away he said yes...Chuck came over to me afterwards and said Brice and I wouldn't do it until we saw Jasper did it...It's almost all right because Jasper did it)
I think that's true, but I wasn't meaning to say something about Jasper. I was saying something about his place in the art world, for artists.

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(Yes, the fact that he did it...)
So many people were devastated by that. And more than disappointed. Just really...I'm not talking about the people that were in it, but the world at large. So in a sense, I'm saying something about the place he occupies, rather than himself...This may be making too much of it. But I think that as the art world has become more and more corrupted by its success or as its drawn in more and more power and aspects of society – I don't mean in a bad sense – as all the things that come with that kind of wealth and this quantity and attention, I think that Jasper's example has been something that has suggested that it anchored one part of one's integrity, and the integrity of the work and the art is the center of this universe in a place that was inviolable. And that was the thing – it was like that anchor slipped when Jasper participated in a sort of Jeff Koons extravaganza. Everything about Jeff's work is consistent with that. And that isn't true of Jasper, so in a sense it was as though, here he was capitulating in something that again, I don't think it's his responsibility of how other people use it or the fact that a lot of people in the art world and a lot of artists had gotten in the habit of using him as a kind of barrier, so that something is protected from the tsunami of wealth and fashion.

(With Jasper, I thought he would never say yes to that. And the fact that he did made me realize that you can't ever be certain of anything. Jasper is going to surprise you)
And things happen at different moments. In Duchamp's Pierre Cabanne thing. He answers questions eventually that he spent his entire life avoiding.

(Something I want to ask Jasper is did it have something to do with his close connection with Susan – that because it was Annie. Was that the reason why)
I have no idea. I assumed it was a lot to do with you. It was kind of a complement to you. I think those things are often over determined. I also think at some point, Jasper may think he's bored of being the high priest who's preserving the integrity of this part of the art world. Telling people to look after themselves. You may just have to say to hell with it. Or it may on some level the impulse may have been to with a way of contradicting that thought that he's this sort of iconoclast hermit who won't ever get his hands dirty with the real world. Or any number of things. And maybe to do with Susan and Annie

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too. But I suspect it's a mixture of all kinds of things. And it may have just been a contemporary aberration. Or it may be that he doesn't feel the way he used to feel about certain things. Or that he thinks that his work is at this stage of his life he's not risking his relationship to himself and his work in the way he might have felt – I don't think he does many things for effect. I think in his life he's by and large kept himself out of the ways of temptations that would interfere with his commitment to his work. And it may be that at that age in his life he didn't need that any more. He could do whatever he wanted to do. I have no idea. But I wasn't trying to analyze his reason to do it. I was drawing attention to the fact that his doing it had on so many people.

(Did you talk with him after that? Did you tell him what you thought)
No, because on some level I suspect he would know it by my silence. Also, it came up once or twice when other people brought it up and I was there. And there was one time when I made some remark where he just roared and roared with laughter. But I can't remember what it was now. Something nuanced with ambiguous meaning...

(How long have the two of you known each other)
Since 1970 probably.

(How did your friendship come about)
This is all interesting, but this I really wouldn't want... Indirectly I met him through Mark Lancaster. When I was an undergraduate at Cambridge, Mark was the artist in residence at Kings College. But it wasn't through Mark. Anyhow, Mark and I became friends, and then when I joined Morgan Guarantee, cause I was kind of confused and didn't know what to do. And it was a way of coming to NY. And then all my friends were artists. I think while I was somewhere away, Jennifer Bartlett was having a romance with Stephen Buckley, who was close to Mark Lancaster...And Mark met Jennifer and at some point, Mark said you have to meet Julian when you're in NY because he's there now...So that's how I met Jennifer, and then Jennifer and I had a romance, which was from her point of view a summer thing. Because I was only here for a temporary period. And I was quite a bit younger than she was – I guess I still am. To begin with, she was very embarrassed about that. We would never go out to anywhere. But at some point I moved in – I guess I was living in her loft, but we never went out in public any place. And then one night, I'd come back from work –

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Lois Long had had lunch with Jennifer and they were still there drinking. So they must have been a little bit smashed. And I joined them. And Lois decided that Jennifer and I were just the hottest best thing imaginable. This sort of absolutely perfect couple. So she started inviting us for dinner. And in those days, Jasper and Merce and Lois and John Cage would have dinner at least once a week in each other's house. So I think they saw each other probably three times a week, and they would alternate. There would be one night at Jasper's house and one night at Lois's and one night at John and Merce's. Or maybe twice at Lois's because she was more of the kind of entertainer. But they certainly rotating around that circle. And it was often just the four of them. And Lois started including Jennifer and I in every single one of her evenings. And then after a while, Jasper started inviting us when it was his turn to do it. And that's how we got to be friends. And then I went back to England. And then Jennifer fell in love with somebody else, and I was very upset. And then I was coming back here for a visit and I think I canceled it because I was so upset. And by that time, Mark Lancaster, who hadn't been in NY all the time before when I'd been here, then he was here because he had had a show at Betty Parsons. And he was doing the work for it. And at some point, I think I told Mark that I wasn't coming because of this thing to do with Jennifer. And then I rang Mark up and I said I wanted to stay at his house because I thought to hell with it. And I knew he was staying at Jasper's but that he had this separate studio where he was doing his work for his show. So I asked Mark if I could stay in the loft he'd sublet, for two or three weeks. And I think Mark must have mentioned that to Jasper said, don't be silly. You must come stay here. So then I stayed with him, which I didn't particularly want for that time, because I thought it would be too much of a strain. But it just happened because he's so gracious. And at the end of that period, we basically been friends since then. We were friends before it, but we were more closer friends since then.

(There's been a certain amount of adverse criticism of Jasper's recent work. I wonder how you feel about that) Well, um, I don't altogether understand it because there are no artists whose work I revere whose work I revere who feel that way about it. And I think Michael Kimmelman is a kind of really third rate mouse, and he always has been. Peter Schjeldahl has things that he sees and sometimes he doesn't see. But I guess in a way, maybe he was just

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cruising for a bruising. I think it's difficult work. I think the show at the Whitney – that Picasso show – I think that the way Jasper's work is used and the kind of witless, dumb thinking behind the show makes it easier to attack him for things that are completely not his fault. It gives another vehicle to take pot shots at him. But I find it kind of upsetting, when you think of what he's achieved. That those rather trivial minds can say the things that they say. But on the whole, so what. I'm thinking about it when I was first in NY or still living in London, nobody had a kind word to say about any of Picasso's work. It was vilified. Just the senile doodlings of this kind of leacherous old man. You couldn't find anybody. Artists. There wasn't a single person anywhere. And now that work looks absolutely stunning and fresh and sensational. So it doesn't seem to me that it'll affect posterity too much.

(It also comes from the same place – Picasso was the number one, the person to...)
Knock off. I think that's a lot of it. I think you get these rather second rate people trying to establish their own identities or egos by [illegible]ediply knocking off a big one...Nobody has said anything thoughtful or intelligent in their criticism of it. But Scott Rothkopf's piece I think is one of the most brilliant pieces of scholarship since Leo Steinberg's piece...I would say that the kind of depth and insight that Scott brings to that work, that's what's going to last. And the kind of flak he's taking at the moment will just evaporate.

(How do you think Jasper feels about what's been written)
We haven't really discussed it. I can't imagine he isn't, on one level, deeply hurt by it. But on another level, I think he can take it in his stride. I don't see how you could not be upset with that. The personal attacks. And the fact that he's basically never gotten that treatment, except from Hilton Kramer and a few people, probably makes it worse. He doesn't have too much practice. But on the other hand, I also think that he's full of assurance and self knowledge. There's a thing to do with that – I could have this conversation with you for three weeks...
Here's an analogy. When I first came to NY, I had very little money and I was trying to buy and I had the idea – I had a little bit of money because I'd sold tk for my apt in London and at that time you could buy a loft in SoHo for like $10K. For $15K you could get something very substantial. And I was staying at Jasper's house. This is after I'd moved here and looking for my place. He said,

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listen, if you find it, I'm thinking of selling this Bank, so if you find a place you like, maybe I'll buy it with you. Actually, the first thing he said was, cause he'd gotten his house in St. Maarten by that time, but he was going to sell this place, but in the meantime I should use his house – the Bank. And I thought about that. And I thought oh God, how does one say no to somebody. The thing is, I'm trying to start my own work and just couldn't possibly do it here. It has too little relation to my circumstances and it's too full of resonances of your work. I just couldn't do it. And he said that if he was in my position, he'd say the same thing. So that was fine. And then a few days later, he said, I don't know why I think I have to sell this building. If you find something you like, let me look at it, and maybe we'll buy it together. So that's how this whole thing got started. This was years and years ago. Anyhow, at some point, I was in Stony Point. It was before I had my house there and I think John Cage either had or he had a house across the street or maybe he'd given that up, but I was at Jasper's for dinner. Maybe I was staying at his house. I can't remember. And John Cage was there, and we must have been talking about buying a building or I must have found a building that I was describing. Somehow it had come up in the conversation. And I remember getting this long rather high-minded and impressive and powerful philosophical lecture from John about how I didn't understand America, because in America life wasn't about ownership. Actually, I have to switch stories. I'll finish this one first. I'll come back to the one I was telling before. Because in America, our relationship to things, it's not about ownership. It's about use (or youth). He was making feel like I was just really bourgeois English kind of ingénue who'd came to America with all these old world ideas about thinking you need to buy a building when you didn't understand that that wasn't what we were about here. We were just about the moment and living and things. You know how powerful and fun what John is. It was hard not to be affected by this conversation. At some point it drew to a close. And I remember Jasper, who hadn't said a word throughout, there was this long silence. And then he just said, roaring with laughter, "Well, John, all I can think is I hope you can always afford not to own where you live."

And then of course five years later, I didn't bother to remind John, then I observed Christoff de Menil buying him and Merce a loft in some place on 6th Avenue, and there was no mention about use (youth) and no ownership. But that

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wasn't the story I mentioned. The story also involved John Cage and it may have been the same night. And I was coming back into the city, so I drove back into town with John and in the course of it, we were talking about that. It was the same evening, cause John mentioned that conversation. He went back to it. In some sense taking back his previous thought. And he said, when he first knew Jasper, he absolutely no money. And when he began to sell his paintings and he bought the place up town and then the Bank and this and that, it made John very nervous. And he remembers saying to John at some point, he thought he shouldn't spend his money like that. And he said, what happens if people stop buying your paintings? I guess in retrospect, John didn't understand that all long, Jasper had kept so much of his work. And he's never ever been in debt. So he's never bought anything without paying for it out of his own...Anyhow, John said that when he said all this to Jasper, he said Jasper listened to him, didn't say anything, and then at the end he just said, John, I've lived most of my life without any money, and if I have to, I know I can do that again. And John said that was the end of the conversation. There was never any more reason to discuss that issue ever again.

I'm making an analogy between that state of mind and the hostile criticism. Do you see what I mean?

(end tape)

(His life must have changed a lot when Leo died. Leo is another example of Jasper's loyalty. Leo protected him in the world that way. How has Jasper...)
I question your premise, that Leo protected Jasper from the world.

(From the buyers of the world. Jasper didn't have to deal with that)
I don't know.

(I would imagine that the world descended upon Jasper when Leo died – dealers wanting to represent him, get a piece of him)
That had been going on for a long time, when Leo was around. Even when he was healthy, there were people who were hoping to dislodge him. I don't think that people are so reticent that they wouldn't try to go directly to him without paying attention to Leo. Now Jasper could bounce it back at Leo if he wanted to. But also, it's sort of

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gratifying for an artist to have some relationship to your collectors and the people who are interested in your work. I think emotionally, there was a great mutual loyalty and devotion, and I think it kind of pissed all of Leo's other artists off cause he could never get through three sentences without bringing Jasper's name into it. And I think all of that. And I think it was very useful to Jasper have Leo when he didn't – but I don't think there was a sudden change when he died. Because I think that a lot of the stuff that one would think Leo was dealing with it, he was a participant in or knew exactly what was going on.

To begin with, obviously Leo was completely and utterly important to Jasper, and did everything. But I think partly because of his sudden success and partly because of his nature and the kind of attention he got, that fairly quickly, I think Jasper was operating on a level that was the equal of Leo's. Even in relation to his work. Certainly it was convenient to have a place to show, it was convenient that he didn't have to deal with the Irving Blums and the Larrys and everybody else who vultures, trying to eat the flesh off his bones. But out of that, I think the actual dealing with the attention – and it's not as though Jasper makes that many paintings either. And he keeps things. So it's not such a huge deal to – and then to be involved in selling one thing – if you can live off that for a year. Anyhow, I don't think that suddenly Leo's diminution in his capacities, which was a very gradual thing, and then his death, was this sudden radical change in Jasper's situation. I think that it was a collaboration from the very beginning. And then I think as Leo's attention sort of wandered as evidenced by your anecdote (Jasper's comment to me about Tad's profile of Leo), and as he aged a bit, Jasper was doing a lot of that stuff or paying greater attention to it when Leo was around, in a way that it didn't make such a difference when suddenly he wasn't.

(That quote in NY Mag from Jasper about going to Matthew Marks..."He's the only one who asked me.")
That could be true in a way. But in a way, that's a very misleading answer. But what it omits is that maybe Matthew was the only person who had known how to and had worked in a way that put him in a position where he felt able to ask.

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(I don't think it's fair to say that Jasper is part of Matthew's gallery. He showed there. He's shown with Barbara...)
I don't know how he would describe that. I think he's in association with Matthew more than somewhere else. But he doesn't really need a gallery. And in way, he brings more to a gallery than a gallery brings to him. That's what I was trying to say about Leo. I think that long before Leo was diminished, that was already true. And it wasn't true at the very beginning. So in a certain sense, if that's true, then when Leo was no longer around, it doesn't make the same difference.

(But there's a loss)
Yes, a big loss. But a friendship, apart from anything else. Because they'd been through a lot together. Even if at the end most of the weight is being pulled by one person, it's still, because of loyalty...And also, if you're basically an artist where you're creating a life out of your own work and your thoughts, anything that's helped you along in the past — well, Jasper particularly, he doesn't let go of things too easily. It was certainly a big loss. But I don't think it meant that his life was hugely complicated just because Leo was no longer around.

(Do you think that Jasper is more comfortable with women than with men...)
I'm trying to think. I don't think I do think that. No...I think over long periods of time, he tends to be more comfortable with people who don't project their self absorption. Perhaps that applies more to men than to women. I don't know. Because the thing about Jasper is that he's obviously completely involved with himself and his thought and his work. But he really doesn't demand that...

(we get interrupted)

(There's a grandness complemented by a complete simplicity about Jasper. He is one of those artists who has known to keep back work. He's not interested in having a museum of his own. It's very Duchampian...)
I don't think it's a kind of strategy. And I don't think it's about money, cause he can't have started that way. I think he keeps it back because he likes to have it and look at it.

(It's part of him, isn't it)

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Exactly.

(It's also a way of being able to keep it together for whatever happens.)
I doubt that was ever – I think if that were the issue, he probably wouldn't have begun to have disperse it the way he has. So I don't think it's important to him that it all be kept together in one museum or one collection. This is something I've discussed with him. This is deeply off the record. Because in the first place, he doesn't see himself that way. And secondly, one of the things is – and this is me talking rather than him, but I think in a sense, Jasper's work is almost unique in that it's so tightly edited himself. For instance, when he did the show at the Modern with Kirk, one of my feelings was that the missed opportunity – of course, it doesn't leave much room for the curator and now it can never happen, but I thought it would have been great if somebody just decided – and Jasper was the only really great artist that I thought you could even entertain an idea like this, that one should just have a show that was installed chronicalogically, and like a catalog resonae, you'd try to include every painting he'd ever made. Because in a way, he's made so few, and that each painting is so singular that in some sense I thought that that could work. That it would be interesting to do that as a kind of theoretical idea, to take some of his work and just show everything. And I couldn't think of another artist for whom it would be worth doing where it would be physically possible to do it.

(What do you mean everything)
It's the premise to the retrospective that you try to borrow every single painting he'd ever made. I don't know how many that was at that time, but it was a number where a thought like that was imaginable. It would have been a smaller show than that Picasso when it reopened the time before. I thought that for an American artist, the only artist almost of any stature that I could think you could do it for is Jasper. It seemed to me that if the Modern had done for him what they did for Picasso, which was to empty out all the galleries and take every painting he ever made and install it without a curatorial selection, that that would be completely fascinating and it would be instructive in relation to everybody else's work as well. Just to see one complete body of work, unedited. And the reason I'm saying that is because I think one of the reasons it would have been so interesting is that by and large, each individual painting is so singular. I mean,

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I'm working on five or six or ten paintings at once. Jasper, by and large, he doesn't start another painting until the previous one is finished. And in a way, that's because whatever he learns or whatever went into the previous painting, has to be completed before he knows how the next one would be or what would go into that.

(Because he has to see the one that comes before it) Exactly. So that they become a very kind of sequential thing like that. And that in the same way as the experience of working on one painting so that it's fed back into that painting, in the same way the experience of working on the previous painting is fed back into the next painting. Now, all artists do that, but usually we do it over a body of work. Or several paintings. And in Jasper's case — I don't know about Picasso, but he was so prolific, you couldn't do it. But in Jasper's case, it's a singular activity like that. So I thought that would be a thrilling show. I thought it would be interesting just to do that to an artist. To any artist. As a sort of philosophical thought. But then if you decided that was an interesting concept, I don't know who you could do it for. I guess you could do it for Vermeer, but you still don't have all his work. You just have the ones that are left. So just to get back to that — so if you take somebody like Andy Warhol's work, for instance. It makes sense to have an Andy Warhol museum, because there is so much work that it's perfectly possible to have a work that basically reveals pretty much all aspects of his work. And still every other major museum in the world can have one also. Or multiple ones. In Jasper's case, that's simply not possible. So at some point it seemed to me that — again, supposing somebody had all prescient foreknowledge and also absolute control, and if you'd kept as much work as he had, you could decide whether essentially to concentrate in one place, so that was an approximately close experience in one body of work. Or disperse it. And it seemed more interesting to me, given the nature of his work, that it should be dispersed. So that different aspects of his work, like singular paintings or dual paintings or something would exist in the company of other artists work in multiple museums. Since you couldn't do both, that seemed a more interesting thought to me than concentrating in one place. That I have discussed with him. That's certainly my idea. But in relation to our discussions, I don't there was any space between his thinking and my thinking about that. There was one time when there was one museum in particular that was trying to get the huge batch

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of stuff, and he asked my advice about that. And the other reason why I think that makes sense with Jasper's work is because it sort of is possible to do that with his prints. And in some sense, that's been done. I think the idea that one place should have the complete prints, that's a way, in some sense, of accommodating my thought about the whole body of work. At least within this one medium you can do that. It carries all the same – it's so dense and it carries so many ideas and so many of the ideas that are in the paintings, that it's a very complete body of work in itself. It's a completely equivalent – it's an equivalent activity. So I don't think he kept his work as a way of being able to establish...

(end interview)

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Maurizio Cattelan
(10/26/06)

What comes out of Johns today?

"It's another kind of animal. You know the kind of animal that reproduce themselves? They have both the female and the male part. [Johns only reproduces himself.]"

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Roberta Bernstein
(9/28/06)

"The image of him is that he's a loner, he's so austere, he's uncomfortable with people, etcetera etcetera. I think he really does take pleasure in so many things, like cooking, and gardening, and reading. I think he truly enjoys the company of people who he has an emotional connection to…I think right now in his life, for whatever combination of reasons, that he's much more relaxed, much easier, much more perceptible able to enjoy what he enjoys."

How she came to connect with him - "It goes way back. When I was in college, at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, I had started taking art history. I had a professor who was very much involved in contemporary art. And then John Cage came to our campus. I went to his concert, which was an amazing experience. He was basically typing, and the typewriter was hooked up to amplifiers…The audience went crazy, and most of them left. I was just fascinated. And at the end, he very graciously offered to answer questions, from the handful of people who were left…I went up to him and asked where I could see a performance again, and he said Merce Cunningham was performing at Connecticut College, so I got someone to drive me there. I talked with him again. And I think I may have read his piece on Jasper Johns, which captures so much of who Jasper is. And John was telling me of an exhibition in New York which I should see, and that was the Johns retrospective at the Jewish Museum, in 1964. So I got myself to New York. Seeing that exhibition was one of those life-transforming things that one has when one is young. It's hard for me to put my finger on what it was. But after that, I saw the world differently. I really connected with his art at that point. And then when I came to New York to go to graduate school at Columbia, I was determined to do a dissertation on a contemporary artist…Nowadays a lot of people do that, but at that time no one had ever done one on a living artist at Columbia. Luckily, I had proven myself enough that I got support. I did a masters paper on Rauschenberg. And my advisor, Theodore Reff, who was working on early Picasso and Matisse, and had worked on Cezanne and Degas, and I think would have given anything had he been able to know them personally—I think he sympathized with me wanting to work on a living artist, and agreed to let me do a dissertation on Jasper Johns."

She met Jasper. Had already met Warhol, and worked at the Factory. Going to galleries a lot, especially Castelli. Had started grad school in 1966- Jasper was in Japan at the time. But one day she walked into Castelli and Johns was there, talking with Roy Lichtenstein. She had a poster she wanted him to sign, and he said he'd be glad to. A couple of weeks later she got up nerve to call, and he said of course, come on over right now. "One of the wonderful things about Jasper is he likes to keep the spontaneous element in his life – he doesn't like to plan." She went over to the Riverside Drive apartment, with her poster and Leo Steinberg's book for him to sign. While she was there, Merce C., John Cage, Richard Hamilton dropped by. Looking at *Field Painting*, she noticed that the neon wasn't turned on; the flipped the switch, then couldn't get it to turn off. Very embarrassed, she went out and confessed to Johns that she had turned his painting on and now it wouldn't turn off. He laughed, and said "Well, isn't that what a painting is supposed to do?"

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She ended up working for him when she was in grad school. This was when he was working in David Whitney's loft and living at the Chelsea Hotel. When he moved into the "bank," she continued to work for him part time. Choosing her dissertation topic, it was between Johns and Rauschenberg, and she chose Johns. This changed their relationship a bit – no longer just a friend. They both understand that line now, but at the time it was a little fuzzy. Finished the dissertation, revised it for the book. Johns was very positive about the book, wrote her a letter. Jasper rarely praises something directly or easily, but his letter was "very, very positive." She thought maybe that was it, she'd move on to other things. But then she was asked to do other writings on Jasper, got involved with the later works. Kirk invited her to write a major essay for his exhibition, and asked her to be a consultant on it. After that she decided she wanted to do another book, a sort of sequel to the first. She started working on it, but then the catalog raisonne project came up. She's revising her first book (1954-1974) , doing a second, follow-up book, and working on the catalog raisonne. It's in the third year of what was planned as a five-year project – just on the painting and sculpture, no drawings.

Q. – her saying JJ's early work might have had a romantic or even a sentimental quality. '"*Toy Piano*, to me has a sentimental quality to it, a nostalgia, and I thought that's a clue to where he was coming from as well as a clue to where he was going. Also, he told me he really liked early Picasso. At the time this surprised me – of course, those have a very romantic quality, scenes of poverty. Other things he would say that hinted at it. There is that side to him. None of his work could be called romantic, but I think there are sentimental touches, references to childhood, *Montez Singing* 'Red Sails in the Sunset'…"

"I think he responded to the repressed romanticism in Cezanne."

"He still feels very strongly" about not acknowledging his early work. He really found himself as an artist with *Flag*. Some people have questioned whether it really came from a dream, but she thinks it did. Everything that came before was so minor, and didn't really pertain to what he became.

His saying he has no facility in drawing – "That surprises me…[END SIDE A] He clearly did it as a child, and people said he had a talent for it. I think when he says that, it's a comment on the fact that he hasn't really done much drawing…I don't think it's a lack of confidence. The taking of things…is somewhat generational. Maybe it's a post-Picasso thing. Picasso did everything, and what could I do?"

His relationship with Cage – She saw them together a lot. "It seemed like a very close, warm friendship. I remember John coming to lunch a lot at the Houston Street bank. A lot of mushroom talk." His arguing with John – she saw it as a kind of teasing, not unpleasant. "Jasper wants to be precise, and he wants you to be precise – that can come off as being kind of contradictory or critical. But it's just how he is."

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Jasper and Bob – very important for Jasper to establish his identity apart from Bob, and this is another reason why *Flag* was so important. "Jasper found a way to direct himself as an artist, and how to distinguish himself from Bob enough so they really could be peers. I think his use of encaustic was part of this. Bob was using collage – but by using collage with encaustic, Jasper could do collage that was very different from Bob's collage."

The late seventies when Jasper's pessimism left him feeling he might not be able to continue - she wasn't seeing him much then, can't comment. He'd moved out to Stony Point. Jill Johnston's book covers that period. "I don't agree with her interpretations of his art, the 'privileged information' approach. His art is very accessible, I think. I don't think he's hiding things purposely, or putting them in for the few insiders. But she did do a lot of research, talked to a lot of people…I think she did uncover some interesting information, and it sheds some light on what he was going through in that period."

The autobiographical details in Jasper's later work are very important to Jasper – he went to great lengths to get the floor plan of his grandfather's house. "But what I think he wants the viewer to get is…that everyone grew up in a space, what do those spaces mean to us? I think he wants the viewer to wonder how did the spaces I grew up in shape who I was? It's not Jasper saying I want you to know who my grandfather was, or my father…"

The undisclosed "Green Angel" image – "I would never ask him about that, because I felt that it's about not knowing. [see her MOMA essay]. Some day somebody will probably find out, and will it matter? Probably not so much. A lot of Jasper's work has been about how a work generates meaning. A lot of his tracings have dealt with that – what does it mean when you just trace the structure of something, do you still get something of what the original means? And when you trace the structure of an original that you don't know, does it still retain meaning? I think that's what that image is about…That doesn't mean I don't look everywhere for it! Every Picasso I see…But that's part of it."

JJ and Duchamp on *Walkaround Time* - "That was so special, for me to be there. Jasper was so respectful of Duchamp…He set the piece up in David Whitney's loft." Jasper picked up Duchamp on a cold morning and brought him there in a cab. Duchamp very gentle with Jasper, who had just gotten a terrible review by Canaday, tried to make him feel good. At the loft, Duchamp very gracious about what had been done, very supportive. Jasper said he didn't want his name on it, but Duchamp insisted both their names be there.

Jasper also met Magritte. Had seen the Magritte show at Janis in 1954. There's a show on Magritte's influence at LACMA in December, for which Roberta has written a catalog essay.

Jasper is not a snob about anything – flowers, hot dogs, etc. He's "very down to earth, very unpretentious."

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Any plant images in his work? The palmetto leaves in *Studio*, which the Whitney owns. A palmetto leaf from his yard in Edisto, imprinted on a screen door. Can't think of any others. [END]

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FRANCIS NAUMANN
(3 Nov 06/on Jasper)

It's almost impossible for me not to see Jasper getting better and better with every single work I see. And I don't know if it's my own problem that I can't get the distance. It's as if it's something I fell in love with, and I cannot betray these feelings I have. He can't do something that is wrong. And it's hard for me to get a really objective feel. But then I go in to look at the work, and because I'm in love, I can point out exactly what it is I love about it, which is what my letter was about. And he writes back to me a very funny little note saying, you're compliments were too numerous for me to be objective...I still cannot stand Michael Kimmelman saying that he's constipated. What the hell is that about? If that's not a homophobic remark, I don't know what it. Twice...That's so unbecoming of him. He's smarter than that. I don't know why he does that.

(It's not only Michael. It's Peter...)
...He's a smart guy too, but I've never liked his reasons for what he dislikes.

(Michael is bothered by the secretive nature, the holding back...why are we supposed to know where everything comes from)
That's the whole idea. He makes the general assumption that the work of art has to be revealing, because it has to be honest. So in being honest, it has to tell all. It can't hold anything back. And it's so unfair to assume that of the work of art. There's no particular reason. A person has absolutely all the right in the world to hold back, especially if he's making a work of art. Why is that the assumption about it? That's why he uses the word constipated. I know it. And I think it's unfair. He has all the right in the world to not tell you what that particular symbol derives from.

(Why do we have to understand where everything comes from)
I don't get it. Jasper does have that quality. It's his personality. The holding back type of thing is part of who he is. He doesn't tell you everything. You have to ask the point blank question, and sometimes you don't even get the answer.

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(That's the problem. People have asked, and he doesn't answer. Why does that matter? Artists often don't want to talk about their work)
I know.

(But why is it not allowed for Jasper)
That same quality is a very European quality, esp French. When I tried to publish all of Duchamp's letters, Jackie and Teeny were both against it, and they wouldn't tell me why. They said, when you reveal everything, then there's no more mystery left. There's nothing there. They didn't so much say this, but the artist becomes of less interest if everybody thinks what's knowable is all known. It's like a mystery. You've told them the end of the story before the movie begins. You kind of wreck it on them. And in a way, I think Jasper, maybe unconsciously, doesn't want to give everything because even for him, you can explode the bubble of what is the intrigue of a particular image. And maybe that's our attraction to him, because you can never totally solve it.

(Like with Duchamp)
And he sure as shit held back.

(But he was French, whereas Jasper is American)
Exactly, and Americans can't. Americans gotta tell all.

(He's an American phenomenon. Supposedly he doesn't really have a big market in Europe)
Some of his greatest pictures are in European museums, particularly German. Ludwig recognized who he was so early on, he got some of the greatest pictures. When I was working on the catalog resonnae, Jasper printed out for me a list of where every picture was. And I still have it. I've never used it. I could give you a rough idea of 5 years ago where the pictures were...

(The negative talk started to build after the Four Seasons)
The obvious thing is that when somebody is at such a high level, and the market place even recognizes that level and sustains it and keeps it up there – imagine other artists who realize that Jasper Johns walks into the Metropolitan Museum and sells to Lieberman with no dealers involved for $18M, the other artists say, hey, what the hell is this about? I give 50% and I don't anywhere near that. So all of a sudden, you can understand how success can build up a kind of resentment. And a critic who comes along and takes that thing that's at the absolute highest pinnacle and

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stabs at it, obviously gets the kind of recognition he or she otherwise would get too. They're disposed to go in for an attack. No attack was as vicious and as horrific as Charlie Finch's. You can go on line and get it. It's written for Artnet...Charlie Finch is a nasty guy...He says really nasty things. You're wondering what these things are in Jasper's – look between your legs, Jasper. That bad...Forget about him. Don't let Tad look at that.

(Did you see the Picasso in America show)
I was there, and went back and spent a whole day in that...There's a huge mistake that it makes...At the Montclair Art Museum, they're doing an exhibition called Cezanne in America. And I know what's wrong with the exhibition. Michael Kimmelman actually hit upon something really true. He said it's like going to a slide show, where you have these two comparative images. It is because they're next to each other. That's the biggest mistake of all. What you should have are all the Picasso's first and then walk into the room. You know why? Because that's how the artists saw them, detached and separated from the imagery...

(Everybody says that Jasper doesn't look good in this show)
One painting is amazing, though. The Four Seasons with that one Picasso with the stars in the sky that is just a direct appropriation. They sing together. It is a little diffused at the end. I don't know if Tad even knows this. I went up to see Jasper with that guy, David Shapiro, the talkaholic guy. He's a poet. It's impossible to get a word in, saying anything, when you're with this guy and Jasper. It's ridiculous. Jasper doesn't talk. He lets this guy talk. But I'm with him and I walked into Jasper's studio before he did. I looked up at the wall, and there was the Picasso fragment, the one that's in the exhibition. The head of a woman. And I said, Jesus Jasper, is that a Picasso? And he turns to me and he goes, no no. I just copied part of one. And he said, yeah. And the funny thing is, I learned after that it was upside down. And that's the painting that's in the exhibition that he doesn't sign and he reluctantly let them show it because he has second thoughts about considering it a work of his own. Then, in order to possess it and claim it, he did the etchings and the drawings. Those are phenomenal. So that was a wonderful experience, seeing it the first time, being the first person ever to see it...

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This doesn't go unseen when his works are at auction and they break every record each time.

(But the new works/later works don't do well? Is that true)
What do you mean don't do well? He doesn't sell anything. Nothing's for sale. Nothing in the Matthew Marks show was for sale. He sort of protects himself.

(Who owns it)
He retains it. And then Matthew will sell things with great discretion if the right person comes along and wants to buy it, probably for staggering prices.

(Do you know what the prices are – two were bought by Henry Kravis. Do you think Matthew is his dealer of record, or is he the person he had a show with)
I would think he is the only person who comes close to being his dealer now. I also don't know what the percentages are and what gets involved in all of it. But I'm sure each painting has to be in the millions because I remember when Aggie Gund bought that painting for the MoMA. That's a matter of public record. You can look that up. But it was in the millions. One point something. He probably gave her a break for it.

(It's got to be a couple of million)
Yuh...Like my brother says, the air is very thin at that level. You hit that level, and the people who would buy a JJ have already bought their Johns. It's an increasingly thinner market. Except for the young rich people who come along.

(Well, there's a lot of those right now. But also Jasper edits himself so well)
Not that he edits. Edits means you'd have to produce it and then take em out. He doesn't produce them, period. He does maybe four pictures a year.

(At best)
Yuh. It's known generally that he makes four pictures a year. He actually makes more than that...He doesn't come up with a number, but other people seem to, just based on what they know. I can't imagine that someone who spends all that time working – he does prints and other things, too.

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(The criticism) Do you think he takes it personally? Do you think it's hurtful at a certain point? I don't know if it bothers him that much. Does he read it, by the way? I don't know.

They just become predisposed to be negative. It's so easy, if that's what your agenda is, you look for the things that are negative. And they then outweigh any positive thing and you become blind to being able to see anything positive.

(They're so personal the paintings)
Remember, he said that. That's his quote that he said that he had tried to avoid biography from entering into his work, but then eventually it became inevitable. He did say that. And then the whole thing about finding that his great uncle raised the flag in his hometown. That's kind of interesting. For a guy that insists that he made the flag because he'd dreamt it. Maybe he dreamt it because his uncle raised it. But it's funny. He changes all of art history with that flag. Did you read the article in Artforum on the Flag that came out this month?...Kind of dumb...written by this woman who thinks she's trying to say something but in the end said absolutely nothing. Don't bother.

There's something funny about Jasper that I can add. I once wanted Leo Steinberg to go to dinner with him and I remember LS's immediate reaction was why should I go to dinner with a person who scrutizes every word that I ask? And it was a very interesting reaction from him. We eventually did go to dinner. With him and Barbara Rose and Steven Mazoh. I said, but Leo, you scrutinized every word he gave you in an interview. That was what your article was about. That was an unbelievable reaction to get from him. The thing about Leo was that he makes that comment and I always had that in the back of my mind, that he does do that. His responses can come back at you like real jibes and really almost like with a razor blade. I was walking with him one day from his studio back up to the stone house, and I'm looking at the house from a distance. It looked so big and so imposing, I turned to Jasper and said, do you know who built this house? And he turns to me and goes, Why of course the person who wanted to live in it. I just paused for a moment and realized, why am I taking all this shit. I turned to him and said, No shit. I really said it like that. And then he turns to me and goes, Oh, it's a guy...and he gives me the whole history of

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the guy. It was almost as if he did it subconsciously and then when you spun him back around and said, hey, what are you doing, he then answered. That would have been the fun thing about interviewing him. But you'd have to be that assertive. You'd have to say, hey, hold on, you didn't just now give me the right answer and I need it. All I had to do was call him on it, and boom, he was the nicest guy ever...I did my essay on him for the Gagosian catalog, and I was so proud of it. I'm still proud of my first sentence in that essay. Every once in a while, I read it. Because it kind of encapsulates everything I'm about to say...It's what I wanted it to be. So then I send the essay to Jasper. And I wait for a response. And I keep going through Sarah. And she keeps coming back and she's not giving me any – so I said, look, he read it, right? And she said, yeah, he did. And I said, what did he think? Like an idiot at the other end of the phone, hoping to hear some sort of word of praise, and she said, well, he didn't say anything negative, and I have to tell you, that's good. So finally I keep begging for something, and what do I get? I get a sheet of paper with seven lines, and they're all grammatical errors that I made. I'm not kidding. Grammatical errors. For a guy who didn't go to college, that was incredible.

(But he doesn't try to change your thought)
...And that filters through in his work to an extent. Maybe that's what Michael Kimmelman sees as constipated. That he doesn't give, he's not forthcoming, he doesn't add to the conversation. He only responds. It doesn't freely flow. It doesn't come out.

(That's offputting)
Yeah, for a lot of people it is. I love his laugh. A lot of people think – it's a little uncomfortable at first when he starts laughing, because it's so boisterous and overwhelming. You get sort of nervous because when somebody makes a joke or laughs, you have to laugh along with them on a certain level. Just to share the fact that you get the same joke that they get. But he laughs so boisterously and so overwhelmingly, he kind of crushes out whatever you're going to do. So he's still laughing when you're through laughing, and that can be a little uncomfortable. He doesn't have any singular attachment that I'm aware of. I don't know of any other single person in his life. Like all of us have one meaningful person, like if you died tomorrow that you know would inherit

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everything you have. But he doesn't seem to have that person.

(Who is the Japanese woman)
Which Japanese woman?...
She's in According to What. Isn't she the woman he met in Japan...

The dinner that I did go to with Jasper – I'll give you a perfect example of how he can be non-forthcoming. I'm sitting at the table – Barbara Rose is on the other side of the table. And she's trying to take over the whole conversation. And she makes a comment to me about why I made a comparison between Jasper's painting and Gauguin's painting. According to What. And I said, for the reason that I put it in the book, that it's a long horizontal composition, and so it Where Are We Going, the painting in Boston. I was making that comparison. And they can be read narrative-ly, from one end to the other. I said, that's the other point I was making. And Jasper turns to me and says, but why did you make that comparison. And I said, what do you mean? I just answered that. And then she says again, but why Gauguin? And then I said, wait a minute. Did I just hit on something here that I'm unaware of? What are you both asking me that for? And neither one of them would talk to me. And that was very uncomfortable. I turn right to him and say, why are you asking me that, and he won't answer me. And that's at a public table. What the hell's that about? I never got the answer to that. He had to be aware that I was uncomfortable. Because I either had to drop the subject right then and there or make it a very uncomfortable dinner, insisting upon getting an answer.

(And Leo was there)
Yuh. I had my uncomfortable moments with Leo too at the same thing. Jasper was sitting to me left, and Leo to my right. So it's a funny kind of place to be. And I dedicated the essay to Leo. I even remember what I said. For the person to look, so that I could see. And I thought that was a nice compliment. Leo never said anything. And I mentioned to Leo, I said, you know I dedicated it to you. Did you notice that? And he said, yes. I said, you didn't say anything and I wondered why. And he said, because you didn't cite me. I swear to God he said that to me. I said, but Leo, the first footnote is to you. And it was about how he defined gray. And I just cite that there. And he says, but that's it. And I couldn't believe. It

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was so ridiculous. That I didn't cite him sufficiently? I dedicated the f-cking essay to him. You'll never make him happy. Nothing will make him happy. He's going to die a miserable old man. Period.

(That's not true with Jasper)
No no. Not at all.

(Jasper has a lot of humor)
I'll never forget, going into his studio and there was one of those rubber fish. Did you ever see those fish that sing a song? Did he show you that? The fish that you hang on a wall, and you press a button and it sings a song to you. It was the most inane, stupid thing that was popular about two Christmases ago, and somebody mailed one to him and he brings us all in to see this. And he laughed so God damn hysterically. Cause it's a fish singing a song. And it is stupid. It's so stupid. But he was like a child, with a toy. It turned him into a rolling little boy with a toy. It was wonderful, actually. The only time you get the feeling that he is that happy is when he hands you his little Cezanne. He never pulls the painting off the wall. But he pulls the drawings off the wall and lets you hold them. He hands them to you.

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Jeffrey Weiss
(2/29/06)

The four motifs underlying his Jasper Johns show – "All of them come together in various works during that first decade. What I felt I was doing was extracting a narrative that Jasper himself, purposely or not, planted into that first decade. I was trying to be true to the internal logic of the work, not to apply something…"

"I proposed the idea to Jasper when I took him out for a drink after the Kirk's memorial service. Since that time he's really forgotten what the show's about, but at the time his reaction was very positive. In order to concentrate I looked down at my drink when I was talking, in order to concentrate, and peripherally I could see his head nodding, so I knew I was OK, more or less. You know Jasper, it's always the case with him that it's up to all of us to do what we do; he'll object sometimes, but he's not really there to agree or disagree, or even to help you, so much as he is to be supporting with loans. He's certainly not going to get dragged into interpretive dialogue…He's also lending to the exhibition, pretty heavily."

The catalog will not have an interview with Jasper. Don't want to "drag him into" the thesis.

The same period as the Rauschenberg combines – does he see any interaction there? "I don't have anything new to say about that, that hasn't already been said. It will be developed much more someday, when somebody does the big show about Rauschenberg and Johns, and/or Twombly." Kirk was going to do that, and before Kirk died there was such a show in the works at the Met, but it never got off the ground – because Johns is not willing to cooperate. His response is, "Wait until I'm dead." "It becomes more personal than he's willing to be in public…But when you see the combine show, the relationship becomes incredibly clear. There are so many relationships. I still maintain that Jasper and Bob are completely different artists… This show will really be exclusive to Jasper, although Rauschenberg will come up in the catalog."

Show is being shared with Basel Kunstmuseum, he hopes – a little shaky at the moment.

Is this the most important period in Jasper's work? Off the record, yes, for all three of these guys. "But as I go around, the meaning of Jasper's work to young artists is very, very powerful. The role he plays in their lives, the fact that he's alive and working, and producing at this incredible rate, the model that he presents to the art world as someone who takes his work with extreme seriousness – I think young artists find that extremely important, regardless of the ups and downs of the work itself."

But his reputation has declined? "It's a hard thing to account for, except to say that times have changed so much, and young art has changed so much, that critical expectations have changed as well…It's become harder to see painting and drawing in the way Jasper does it. The language is more closely attached to the more distant past than to what's being done now…It's being lost not only to artistic practice but to audiences."

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The catalog: Jeffrey doing the main essay, on the four motifs. He has Catherine Tumas, a Cezanne scholar teaching at Johns Hopkins, writing about Johns and Cezanne. John Elderfield is writing about "Diver." Also Carol Mancusi-Ungaro on the construction of several key works. Also Bob Morris.

Jasper is very annoyed by the people who try to "crack the code" of his images, and find hidden personal meanings. Weiss is staying away from biographical interpretation. But he thinks "Jasper's character is definitely reflected in the work…He was taking a philosophical position in the work, not just being perverse."

The Gray Painting show is being organized by the Art Institute of Chicago. Sounds like just a way to do Johns, not a great premise (off the record). Will open at the Met in fall of 2007. "An opportunity to hang the Johns banner outside the museum."

Jasper "won't ever explain the work. The answers he does give tend to be yes and no. He says things that are very empirical, and the work does, too. But empiricism opens up into a kind of philosophical voice, which is appropriate to Jasper's work." What is that voice in the 1960s? "I'd say it's analytical, and it's deeply ethical. Something about the process of the work has to do with labor, and with honesty, and with abandoning tricks, and that's one of the things that comes across in the interviews. With him, there's something very moral at stake, in art-making. Especially after the histrionics of abstract expressionism, all that subjectivity. He's the guy – not Bob, and not Cy, but Jasper was the first to kind of call them on it, and try to process what had just happened in the recent history of art, and what could possibly come after, given the explosion of that body of work by the previous generation. The voice seems to me an ethical or moral one. And a very circumspect, cautious, and I think philosophically analytical one. It's no surprise that he got hooked for a little while on Wittgenstein and language philosophy. And Duchamp, too. On these questions of process and art-making. As though you were starting over."

"I think it has to with integrity. And this is one of the things Jasper admires the most about Cezanne. This is something Catherine will be talking about in her essay…The way he was speaking at the time actually resembles some of the published things from Cezanne's letters. How they both talk about process is extremely interesting." Vija Celmins talks about this, what she's learned from Jasper and Cezanne– a certain kind of integrity. Catherine is getting at something really new about Jasper – he'll send us her essay.

Weiss is anti-biography – the way certain art historians try to apply the art to the life.

Talk to Frank Stella about Jasper? And Bruce Naumann, Celmins, other artists? [END]

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Jeffrey Weiss 2
(5/4/06)

"I don't want him to feel he's invited to tell us what to do, and I don't think he wants to anyway…He may hate the show. He's lending heavily – works on paper, and two paintings." There will be about eighty works in all – paintings, drawings, prints, no sculpture. Show is going to Basel, but very hard to hold together because of loans. Three stops out of the question for that reason. "The values are going up, everybody is skittish about making loans, and they're getting asked all the time – much more frequently than they used to."

"One thing I want very much to do is make Jasper's work look different than it has in past shows – to de-familiarize it a little bit. The work has become so much common property for all of us -- we've stopped looking hard at the work, because we already know what we think. It's familiar in a way like a real flag, or a real target. I'm trying to get away from some of the clichés, although it's hard to do that."

Have you come to any new conclusions about the work? "No!" [laughing]. "I'm struggling with that. I'm too close to it to be able to tell…I'm writing a very long essay. What I hope is that the show by itself represents a self-evident thesis, that the show without the book will speak for itself, and will be new in some way. And what's new is that it extracts a narrative from the work that's true to the work…but that is in fact exclusionary, that leaves out a number of things, numbers and flags and so forth. I'm asking people to shift gears, and what people will find instead is I think a kind of narrative arc…an arc that concerns a process in Johns's work, but more than that what I would call a thematics of process, the idea that meaning in the work has to be grounded above all in the material and visible nature of it, always. This is the one thing Jasper keeps saying in all those interviews…"

People say Johns (and the work) is secretive – "I think that's wrong, I think that's unfair. The work establishes new terms for interpretation into meaning, and that's what makes it difficult. But it's not about secrets and it's not about codes, it seems to me. When he talks, he talks about the material and physical qualities of the work, as if those are the most important things to him. He actually says once that the way the work is made is more important than anything you can claim that it will mean…"

Weiss says he did try to talk with Jasper about ideas in the work, "but this is the thing he really won't do, so I stopped."

"I think a lot of artists who are involved with painting and drawing think Jasper is god. You see it all the time – kids. He changed the way the mediums were addressed, and they know that. It's not that he's our Delacroix, it's that he actually is the beginning of what these younger artists now have become…Jasper has become sort of like a patron saint."

Was it hard getting 'Diver'? "It was excrutiating. It took two years. We got the painting, too, although the drawing is much more important."

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He shows us the album of reproductions for the exhibition. No flags or maps, which were being done at same time, because they never include references to the other four motifs. The work is very repetitive, which suggests obsession. Drawings always come after the paintings. Show will start with two whole rooms of targets (20). [END SIDE A]

Targets morph into "device" images, where the mechanical process that makes the rotation (the wooden slat) becomes part of the image. This reflects John's growing interest in Duchamp. "Open brush," pseudo-ab-ex manner as critique of ab ex painting. Stencils. Turning the painting into an object. Distancing procedures. Upsetting the conventions of painting. Then the red-yellow-blue paintings take over. The imprint of the body, another mechanical procedure. "Painting Bitten by a Man." Duchamp's "Litanies of the Chariot," with their references to rotation, repetition, boredom.

Skin drawings – phenomenal – painting and drawing as a mechanical procedure only, except now he sneaks himself back into the picture. Johns and Nauman. Ways to critique what had been happening in art since the Renaisssance – something had come to an end with ab-ex painting, a final flowering, time to start over. How? By eliminating forms of painting that were highly subjective and personal, introducing other techniques. "Cut, Tear, Scrape, Erase," is the title of a drawing that Weiss says is his favorite. 'Diver' – Hart Crane – suicide. Dark issues: mortality. 'Diver' has "something to do with the Crucifixion, although you don't want to go there."

'Voice' introduces whole new issue: sound, language. The bodily function of language.

After this first decade of his work, the power gets dispersed a little. "He's still doing great work, but I think the tale comes to a kind of end. And something else starts, he opens another door."
[END INVU]

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Appendix

THE CREATIVE ACT

by Marcel Duchamp

Session on the Creative Act,
Convention of the American Federation of Arts,
Houston, Texas, April 1957

Professor Seitz, Princeton University
Professor Arnheim, Sarah Lawrence College
Gregory Bateson, anthropologist
Marcel Duchamp, mere artist

Let us consider two important factors, the two poles of the creation of art: the artist on the one hand, and on the other the spectator who later becomes the posterity.

To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.

If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist, we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. All his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out.

T. S. Eliot, in his essay on 'Tradition and Individual Talent,' writes: 'The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.'

Millions of artists create; only a few thousands are discussed or accepted by the spectator and many less again are consecrated by posterity.

In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius; he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of Art History.

I know that this statement will not meet with the approval of many artists who refuse this mediumistic role and insist on the validity of their awareness in the creative act—yet, art history has consistently decided upon the virtues of a work of art through considerations completely divorced from the rationalized explanations of the artist.

If the artist, as a human being, full of the best intentions toward himself and the whole world, plays no role at all in the judgment of his own work, how can one describe the

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phenomenon which prompts the spectator to react critically to the work of art? In other words, how does this reaction come about?

This phenomenon is comparable to a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of an esthetic osmosis taking place through the inert matter, such as pigment, piano or marble.

But before we go further, I want to clarify our understanding of the word 'art'—to be sure, without any attempt at a definition.

What I have in mind is that art may be bad, good or indifferent, but, whatever adjective is used, we must call it art, and bad art is still art in the same way that a bad emotion is still an emotion.

Therefore, when I refer to 'art coefficient,' it will be understood that I refer not only to great art, but I am trying to describe the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state—*à l'état brut*—bad, good or indifferent.

In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane.

The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of.

Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work.

In other words, the personal 'art coefficient' is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed.

To avoid a misunderstanding, we must remember that this 'art coefficient' is a personal expression of art *à l'état brut,* that is, still in a raw state, which must be 'refined' as pure sugar from molasses by the spectator; the digit of this coefficient has no bearing whatsoever on his verdict. The creative act takes another aspect when the spectator experiences the phenomenon of transmutation: through the change from inert matter into a work of art, an actual transubstantiation has taken place, and the role of the spectator is to determine the weight of the work on the esthetic scale.

All in all, 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. This becomes even more obvious when posterity gives its final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists.

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Duchamp @ Language

"There is absolutely no chance for a word ever to express anything. As soon as we start putting our thoughts into words an sentences, everything goes wrong." (MD to CT, Duchamp: A Biography, p. 68)

"Words get their real meaning and their real place in poetry." (ibid)

"I do not believe in language. I am a great enemy of written criticism, because I see these interpretations and these comparisons with Kafka and others as an occasion to open the faucet of words…" (ibid, p. 394)

Words "such as truth, art, veracity, or anything else are stupid in themselves, so I insist *every word I am telling you no is stupid and wrong.*" (MD to Seitz, ibid. p.419)

The Spectator

Duchamp once defined the spectator as "the whole of posterity and all those who look at works of art who, by their vote, decide that a thing should survive." But at other times he seemed to have in mind certain highly sensitized onlookers, such as Walter Arensberg, people who were capable, as he said in his Houston lecture, of receiving "a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of esthetic osmosis taking place through inert matter, such as pigment, piano, or marble." (ibid, 397)

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George Condo
(10/26/06)

Does Johns's work have any real relevance for you today? "Yeah, it does… In terms of the flag, he took this ordinary thing that we already know, and turned it into an artwork – as Andy did with the soup can, as Duchamp did. I think when Magritte said 'This is not a pipe,' Jasper turned it around and said 'This is a pipe' That was an intense move that he made…

"Johns ideas have influenced a lot of work. The simplicity, and the fact that he painted simply numbers, or that he painted the map, or the flag…He did something. He's got a power of transformation in his work that would be the essence of what excites me about Johns."

Do you see people coming out of him? "In terms of the way the art looks, not so much. He created a cycle that he's completed himself, so to speak…"

Johns and Twombly have "this kind of cool, reclusive thing…they operate like from a distance, but they're right in the center of it all. Which is what I would like to do."

Sees Johns as "a continuation of Surrealism, to a degree." Cites Suzi Gablik's book on Magritte, with a lot of stuff on Jasper. (NY Graphic Society, 1970)

[END]

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Merce Cunningham
(9/27/06)

Jasper's saying he didn't do much as artistic adviser to Merc – "He would suggest artists, and I just agreed. He would ask them, and more often than not they would say yes. My feeling about Jasper was that he didn't like to work in the theater, because you couldn't do it. I remember once, he had made an idea for a backdrop, which couldn't be reproduced exactly the way he wanted. He tried several times. I didn't blame him. Bob, you see, made it. He was willing to involve himself that way. Very often there would be backdrops, and they had to be done through those union shops in Long Island. They do them very well, it's not that, it's just that you don't have much to do with it. I think that's one thing – he didn't like the idea of working in the theater.

"In Paris, he made that incredibly beautiful piece for the opera, for the Garnier, the large house. There were gray scrims, two of them. We used the whole depth of that stage, which was huge. He had these scrims which could go up and down. And the costumes, again, were gray through black. They were dyed in Germany, but they really weren't done very well, so they had to be re-done in the opera house. Jasper came about three days before, and he was unhappy about them. I was rehearsing down on the stage, and I went up one day to see what was going on, and I met Jasper in the hall, with an apron, which was all covered with paint spots.I said, 'You look as though you're here for years,' and he said, 'I well may be.' But it was not satisfactory to him, not to make it himself."

Bob was more comfortable with theatrical collaboration? Yes, but Jasper's set for the Satie piece, *Socrate*, was brilliant. "He designed a mixed color, and it wasn't until the bow, when he had us lined up in a certain way, you could see that one costume went into another – all of a sudden it was a [spectrum]. He made a number of things that were mostly about the color. His eye was always so fascinating. When he would talk about it – if he did, he never said very much, of course He kept saying 'I hope this will happen,' or 'I wonder whethe

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this can happen,' and the only way you can find out is by doing it yourself. As time went on I had a feeling it was not something he was entirely happy about."

Bob and Jap - "I remember going down to see Bob's work on Fulton Street. Bob we knew from Black Mountain, Jasper we met later. We went to see Jasper's work – I know it had a target, or a flag, I think it was a target. John was slightly, not put off by that, but the subject got in his way. The only thing I could see was the way Jasper painted. I thought it was so astonishing, how he put what he did on the canvas. I remember thinking I would like to do something with this person."

"My impression of Jasper from the beginning is that this was very strong person. Just by the way he was, not by what he said or didn't say. But it was clear that Bob was the one who talked the most at that time. That impression about Jasper has never changed. His mind was taking it all in, and figuring it out from his point of view. Bob was the most outgoing in social circumstances then."

Cage and Johns – They saw each other more often when Jasper lived in Stony Point and John had his house on The Land. Cage's written comment about the "heaviness" in Jasper's work "To me, it's the alone-ness. There is that heavy aspect. It isn't as though he isn't social, but he also has this quality as a person of staying by himself. It's the way he is as a person."

When Merce went to visit Jasper in Connecticut, he looked down from the carriage house and saw a lake in the distance. Jaspe said, "I don't know whether I own that or not."

An affinity between Merce's work and Jasper's? - "He's interested in complexity. That's certainly something that interests me, in a different field. The idea of looking at something and seeing what else you can do with it. The way I work – for example, they're all turning the same way, what would happen if some turned differently? In other words, to add aspects and not be content with what's happened – to wonder what else could be done. In my work, I try to put

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myself in a situation where I don't know it all, and know I don't…It keeps my mind open about it… I think he's very open. I think his eye works that way. When he looks at things, he looks at them shifting slightly…It's always some way about complexity."

John's dislike of argument – "Yes. Jasper always argued with John. I think he would listen, and you'd see his mind working and then he'd come back with something that pushed the whole thing further. In the beginning I think John was shocked…over the years that was always entertaining. Two astonishing minds looking at the same thing, but seeing different things and being able to deal with it in different ways. I remember once they were talking about Bob. 'I suppose,' John said, 'his forms come from Mondrian. And Jasper was just shocked. 'That's terrible!' So they didn't talk about it any more. I think John used the word 'structure -- I suppose Bob's structures come from Mondrian.' Mondrian was one of John's favorite painters. But I think with Jasper, his way of carrying on a conversation is to sort of butt up against what you're saying, and add a statement that you had to think very hard about."

"Bob was so flexible. If something didn't work, that didn't put him off from thinking there must be something else. But Jasper remains one of the most entertaining gentlemen I have ever known…Also his mind jumps from one thing to another, sometimes to a totally different subject."

"Jasper was very interested in philosophical questions. He was also interested in how something was made – he would ask a lot of questions about it. It's a wide mind."

Jasper has given Merce and John a number of his works. Eight artist proofs of the numbers. "Dancers on a Plane." Others. " look at them a lot, passing in the hall, because there always remains something I haven't seen, haven't noticed."

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John Currin
(8/24/06 – on Jasper Johns)

"He was famous when I was a kid, but my first memory of looking at one of those paintings and thinking about it, I think was in Newsweek magazine. There was a picture of a crosshatch painting – maybe 'Between the Clock and the Bed.' I was a teenager, and didn't know much about contemporary art, but it blew my mind. I thought it was an amazing thing…I'd just started to paint, with a Russian teacher, and it was incredibly compelling. My taste then ran toward album cover art and Ivan Albright, and maybe Francis Bacon but maybe not."

How had Jasper been important to you? "One of my first art books was on Jasper Johns. I remember trying as hard as I could to figure out his cryptic statements, and to hopefully be able to say the same kind of thing.

"I ripped off his paintings a whole lot while I was in art school. I ripped off Jasper Johns and then I ripped off de Kooning after that.

"A figurative painting that has a completely, somehow straddles every important movement, and also draws on the strength of American art mainly – I think that's the main appeal in retrospect. It gave up the kind of 1930s socially engaged, Ben Shahn, all that kind of painting. But then with Hopper, and then abstract expressionism, then the American traits seem like strengths…"

Didn't seem like a European influence, almost had "a folk art feeling."

"The use of wax as a way of depicting the abstract expressionist gesture, as bringing a kind of impotence to it – it dries too fast. Sort of a good way of inoculating yourself against de Kooning…I got the feeling with Johns that he wasn't setting out to make progressive art in the same way that it had been promoted by Greenberg.

"I think that Johns's innovations were stylistic. There's a reason why ever art school kid ripped him off for 25 years, because it was a stylistic way out of abstract expressionism. This thing of making it out of wax so it becomes sort of – mummified. Sort of a mortuary of strokes, of shapes and gestures. Kind of like letting abstract expressionist painting lie in state. It didn't help me to become a better painter, but to understand him better."

What makes Johns a great artist? "I think his touch. As far as making targets, or flags, that's not my thing. But his touch, the way he puts paint on…"

Does the later work hold up the flags and targets and numbers? "I think his best work are the cross-hatch ones, *According to What, Painting with Two Balls, For the News, In Memory of My Feelings*. I like that coffee can with the brushes. I think my favorite painting for a long time was this *Untitled* with the dismembered figure, and the flagstones. The cross-hatch are the ones that kill me, incredibly beautiful paintings. I would love to have one of those paintings."

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"I like them better when they're not puzzle-y."

"I admire that he has made his personality part of everything…But I don't like this idea that everyone is supposed to be secretive…Johns has been able to say no in an interesting way, but it takes talent to say no. I don't think there's any particular virtue in saying no, and it takes talent to make that interesting."

"Jasper is probably the only person influenced by Duchamp who was able to do anything with it."

"One thing I do like about Johns is his kind of meandering distance from his own principles, stylistically. I think the touch is what guides him."

Is he one of the artists you measure yourself against? "Oh, yeah. With me it's de Kooning, Johns, and I guess more and more I think about Richter."

Has Johns extended the boundaries of painting? "No, I don't think so. I'm glad that Johns didn't just gobble up everything. When somebody's that good, you hope they don't just take everything for themselves."

"It's not a triumph of painting, what he does. It's kind of making painting do things it wasn't meant to do, and keeping the appeal and the basic erotic attraction of painting…There's nobody like Picasso, first of all. I think Johns has to do with American insecurity – he's the perfect artist for that. You know who Johns reminds me of? Braque. A great artist, George Braque…"

[END]

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JEFFREY DEITCH
(1 Nov 06/on Jasper)

(off the record)
I think Jasper's late work is sad and depressing, and maybe reflects sad and depressing in his own world. For me, one of the big changes is that it seems to be going from the biggest and toughest issues in philosophy of abstraction and representation, the core of what art is and what painting is to the big, big issues that he took on in the 50s and 60s. But recently it's very personal and I think his themes are much smaller. Memories and...

(Self)
Yup. He's sort of retreated into his own world, whereas before he took on the world in the biggest way.

(That's not a value judgment...the critics have been very hard on him...Picasso in America)
That's one of the worst shows I've ever seen in a New York museum. Really sad.

(The critics have taken on Jasper...)
Right, and one of the things, it actually makes Jasper look so bad. And unfairly. It's because of the hanging, and Jasper should look much better. But I also thought that the show at Matthew Marks, where he must have been very involved in the hanging, was also very sad.

(Sad)
Because that's the mood of the work, because his world has become smaller, very self-centered.

(People have died)
I don't know if that's it. It's more like his own spirit died.

(Do you think it's anything to do with Leo's death)
Maybe.

(...When Leo died, do you remember what that scene was like? I would have thought that people would have been knocking down his door)
There was that NY Mag story on Matthew Marks. It quoted Jasper as saying, Matthew's the only one who asked.

(Can you believe that)
Uh. (pause) It's conceivable.

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(Did you have interest in Jasper)
I am, as you see, slowly recasting what my gallery does. I would say a few years ago, no, I would not have been in a position. Jasper would have been out of context. But I hope that I have another decade or more in me (laugh), and I can encompass that part of the business as well. But no, I don't think I was in a position to be a credible dealer for someone like Jasper three years ago.

(Now are you)
Um, I need another space and place, and then it's possible.

(Would you be interested? Saying the work is sad...)
Oh, yes, of course. You're dealing with an entire and amazing career. When I came into the art world, in the NY circle, it was taken as a given that Jasper was the greatest living artist. I'm not a very good candidate for that position. But I'm not sure you would say that now. But certainly, he is one of the greatest artists of our time. And with someone like him, it doesn't really matter whether the last ten years of paintings are sad or not. The whole body of work is so immense, influential, groundbreaking. That's just like in a way taking one of the great modern artists who maybe have declined in the last few years, would you not represent? Anyway, I think that there are immense things to do with Johns, with all aspects. With prints. All kinds of things that you could do.

(Do you think that the work is secretive? It's almost as if the people who are writing about him are mad that they can't figure out that form...)
Yuh, I would think that it would be very interesting for Jasper to work with a curator with whom he had an extraordinarily intimate dialogue to present his late work in a more powerful way. In a way, it's very different, but Andy Warhol had a problem with the late work. In Andy's last years, the art establishment just completely dismissed it. As a joke. And now, that's really turned around.

(Same with Picasso)
Yes. It's a matter of curating it into a context, doing it strong, not being repetitive, that showing showing the late work, you have to be careful cause he does several versions. And that's one of the problems with this Whitney show. That there's too much of similar work.

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(The Pyre paintings, what did you think of those)
Just as I said before.

(Sad)
Yuh, yuh. That's not necessarily bad. That's where he is. That's a very legitimate form of expression, mode of expression in art, literature. A lot of the greatest art, literature, film, is sad and turns inward. We're so used to a much bolder, more humorous Jasper. It just seems that a lot of the humor is out of the work, like Jasper's work at it's best is often funny in a very sophisticated way. Like Duchampian funny.

(But that's gone)
I think so.

(Do you find that he's been – you use the word influential. You can see so many artists coming out of Rauschenberg or Warhol. Who has come out of Jasper)
That's part of the issue. Certainly, the influence in the 60s, 70s, 80s was enormous. Of course, you have Brice Marden, who was once criticized by painting the backgrounds of Jasper and the bottom of Jasper. So work is very much in dialogue with the great artists – Jasper, Pollock, Newman. So that's essential. And then, when you go on into the 80s, Jasper is of immense influence to Jeff Koons.

(To Jeff)
Oh, absolutely. Like Ale Cans and Jeff's cast work. Oh God. Tremendous influence on Jeff. Particularly like on objects, Ale Cans, Flashlight, Saverin Can. Then also some of the images in the paintings are a great influence on Jeff. Tremendous influence on David Salle, in his poetic approach to painting, of poetic use of images, overlaid images. Text and images. With those artists, giant influence.

(What about as you go forward)
Then it really trails off.

(Is that unusual? Are people working in the Rauschenbergian mode today)
Yuh, and Warhol.

(Duchamp)
Yuh. I would say that it's part of the whole situation with Jasper. He was the most prestigious artist in NY up to 1987 or so. Up to the death of Andy. And so he was the

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guy to deal with. And the most sophisticate artists of the mid-80s, like Koons and Salle, they were dealing with Jasper Johns. But since then, the dialogue is much more with Warhol and Rauscenberg's influence is immense, but Andy's really the person.

(Duchamp)
Yuh, but almost through Andy.

(Or Andy through Duchamp)
I would say it's more Andy.

(Because he's the one they know. But then you'd have to say Jeff was always Andy, though)
Yuh, Jeff is influenced by Lichtenstein, Warhol, Johns. They're all influential. I think for some of the concepts, the earlier work, Jasper is of immense influence. But Jeff is influenced by Dali, Duchamp. But certainly Jasper is one of the prime influences. You can see it there.

(What is Jasper's primary market now)
I believe it is museums and some of the long-time collectors associated with museums.

(But the new paintings)
I think that they go to museums. U.S. regional museums, where they can handle the million and a half or whatever it is. It seems that that's where they're going.

(And that's about the price range for a new Jasper painting)
I think so.

(That's less than a Chuck Close or a Brice Marden)
Yes, but I don't know the exact thing of what a new one has been quoted at.

(We know what happens at auction with old paintings. I don't know what the ones with the Picasso figures...)
When they've been up, they haven't done very well. Not that many have gone up, but no, the recent paintings have not done – just look at Art Net. There haven't been that many, but they have not brought spectacular prices.

(So it's pretty much decided that Jasper's late work has fallen off)
Yes, it has. So there are a lot of reasons for it. One, it's just the way the art world works. People like to

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topple their heroes. But there's no question, a lot has to do with Leo's death. And ten years without a real dealer. And Matthew's the dealer, but it's nothing like Leo.

(He absolutely is the dealer of record)
I assume so. That I don't know. That's what people assume. But it's so different than Leo holding court. Whenever I visited Leo, half the conversation was about Jasper. And to have someone of Leo's stature talking about Jasper every day to every influential person...

(Does Jasper need somebody to talk about him today)
In the long run, no. But he certainly should be in a different situation. And everyone likes to be influential.

(He has to leave — his appointment has arrived...)
(end interview)

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Barnaby Furnas
(10/26/06)

Does Jasper's work has a relevance for you today? "Definitely. He's sort of the last of the great blurrings of the line between art and life…That whole idea of, 'Do something to it. Do something else to it.' That's one of interests for the effigy pieces that I've been doing. Like doing something to something, having an art work be something you do something to rather than just something on its own…

"This idea that a piece of artwork is actually a starting point.

"Yeah, I've been thinking about him a lot, ever since the show at the Museum of Modern Art."

"What Rauschenberg did, he tied Duchamp back to painting, for me. Duchamp is a huge problem when you're starting out doing paintings. Johns really kind of solved it. He could make something of the Duchamp legacy. Duchamp's a split in the road for a lot of artists. I think most of my peers are going the other way… That's his big accomplishment for me. I always enjoyed Duchamp's thinking and his work. Johns has brought Duchamp's lessons to bear on a more traditional practice."

Who comes out of Johns today? "Certainly I would be privileged to consider that I was coming out of him."

[END]

IV Published Texts

V Other Items

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"JJ's Paintings and Sculptures, 1954-74"
(Roberta Bernstein

Preface - "For Johns, the eye is an extension of the mind…Visual, conceptual and emotional aspects of experience are always present in Johns' art, and his best works are the ones most intensely charged with their interaction."

"His art can be seen to focus on the nature of art itself and, at the same time, to reflect the most significant contemporary cultural values."

Cage's comment about Johns: "Looking closely helps, though the paint is applied so sensually that there is the danger of falling in love."

"Rauschenberg and Johns were close friends for six years, and many aspects of their work reveal a common sensibility and similar artistic concerns. Their friendship ended in 1961-62, and the tone of emotional crisis reflected in Johns' works from that period is probably connected with that break-up."

Flat Objects and Signs
Leo Steinberg: "The position of modern anti-illusionism finds here its logical resting place. The street and the sky – they can be *simulated* on canvas; but a flag, a target, a 5 – these can be *made*, and the completed painting will represent no more than what it actually is. For no likeness or image of a 5 is paintable, only the thing itself." (1)

"This condition of *ambiguity*, challenging habits of perception, is essential to the meaning of this first *Flag* and Johns' subsequent works." (2)

"I think it is possible that at some early phase of his career, Johns' art had an overtly romantic, even sentimental quality. Johns, in part, eliminated this romantic tendency, in part, repressed it in his works from 1954 on, but it reappears in the form of a profound and complex personal statement in the works of 1961 and after. (5)

"With the *Flag*, Johns was assertively breaking away from the basic tenets of expressionism, as well as abstraction…Johns' position of detachment was to remove himself as completely as possible from the painting so it could be experienced objectively, i.e., seen for what it was, as an independent object." (7)

"There is, however, a passionate intensity in the *Flag* which comes through, changing [charging?] it with a sense of repressed emotionalism, as if some very powerful forces were being held in check." (7)

"The activity of the brushstrokes is not meant to represent the artist's state of mind while creating the painting; it is meant to provide 'possibilities for the changing focus of the eye.'" (7)

Number of stars changes from 48 to 50 (8)

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The two flags of *Flags*, 1965, with afterimage emerging (14)

No political implications (15)

The *Numbers*, 1964 at State Theater in Lincoln Center is in sculpmetal (25)

The superimposed number paintings in 1960-61, *0 Through 9*. (26)

"Maps can be considered his 'landscapes,' the way his numbers are 'figures'…The map particularly reflects Johns' involvement with scale and measurement from 1960 on. His first painting with a ruler was done in 1960, the same year he did his first *Map*." (27)

"Johns has done everything possible to achieve a balance between legibility, so that we can see the details of the map with relative clarity, and illegibility, so that we can experience the abstract qualities of the map-as-painting." (28)

"My evaluation of Johns as fundamentally skeptical and pessimistic comes from the time I spent with him; however, like his art, his character includes what would usually be considered mutually exclusive aspects. He has a tremendous capacity for enjoying and appreciating life which coexists with his pessimism." (30)

Objects and Words: 1954-1962
Tango, 1955, is "the first work in which Johns leaves a blank strip at the bottom edge, reminding us of the canvas beneath the paint. This device is used frequently from this point." (32)

Johns quote on his use of gray in early paintings, to avoid "all the emotional and dramatic quality of color…to allow the literal qualities of the painting to predominate…" (34)

Stylistic shift after first Castelli show – wider range of color, more open and gestural brushstrokes; oil paint as well as encaustic (39-40)

False Start (40-41)

"The idea of disappearance has been an important one in Johns' work throughout his career…" (43)

Shade (1959) and Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* (44)

Device Circle and others in this series, "Johns' first paintings which focus on process: the artist's activity in the studio and the tools he uses become an integral part of the work of art." (45)

Painting with Two Balls (1960) as comment on Ab-Ex, Motherwell etc (48)

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Sculpture
Sculpmetal – what it is (51)

"…Johns' use of light bulbs and flashlights could in part be an homage to Rauschenberg's work." (53)

Painted Bronze described – differences between the two ale cans, etc. (54-55)

The Critic Sees – Johns told Kozloff this "was inspired by the three-minute visit of a critic to one of his exhibitions." (56)

Johns' "Teachers": Leonardo, Duchamp, and Cezanne
"Cezanne is Johns' most important influence in terms of the visual aspects of his art, and Duchamp in terms of the conceptual…Leonardo also balanced the visual and conceptual. Like Duchamp, he kept notebooks where he worked out and recorded artistic ideas; and like Cezanne, he was involved with exploring the nature of visual perception." (59)

For Johns, as for Duchamp, "the experience of uniqueness is essential: it is one of the most important aspects of his repeated versions of the same motif, where each time the motif appears its context and presentation are different." (61)

Johns' *Green Box* is inscribed "Jasper, Sibylle des Cibles, Affectueusement, Marcel 1960." Johns' drawings *Litanies of the Chariot.* "Duchamp is the only artist on whom Johns has written published statements…From 1959 on, Duchamp's art can be considered part of Johns' subject matter…" (61)

Johns' 1959 statement identifies his "changing focus of the eye" with Duchamp's. (62)

Other Johns statements on Duchamp (63, 64). Both made works called *The* (65).

Johns used Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf* to make an imprint in *No, Field Painting, Arrive-Depart*. (67)

According to What, 1964, an homage to Duchamp. (67)

Bernstein notes on Duchamp visit to set of *Walkaround Time (67-68)*

Cezanne and "the rotating point of view" (68-70) (also 74)

"For both Cezanne and Johns, objectivity and self-detachment were important factors in the development of their styles and their choice of subjects…Their works are by no means emotionless, rather there is an extraordinary intensity of feeling which comes through even the most impersonal subjects like still lifes. The controlled emotional intensity of Cezanne and Johns comes from what Reff, in describing Cezanne's *Bather with Outstretched Arms*, called the 'antagonism between sensuality and restraint.'" (70)

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"Johns' brushstrokes resemble Cezanne's in the deliberate, controlled way they are applied: each one asserting itself as a mark on a flat surface, while at the same time participating in creating a sense of depth." (71) "The controlled brushstroke of Johns' paintings from 1955-58 also seems to have come from a need to eliminate subjective tendencies and establish a sense of detachment. Johns' controlled brushstroke was in part a reaction to the openly expressive brushstrokes of de Kooning and other Abstract Expressionists, the way Cezanne's was partly a reaction to the spontaneous brushwork of Monet and other Impressionists…" (72-73)

"Johns' monochrome gray corresponds to Cezanne's overall blue…like blue, gray is associated with sadness (or gloominess) and Johns often uses gray to suggest a mood of sadness (coldness, emotional withdrawal), especially in his 1961 paintings like *No* and *Water Freezes*…" (73)

The Mood Changes
The change in 1961, from impersonal to "a restrained but intensely charged emotional condition, suggesting feelings of bitterness and anger, personal loss or emptiness. Memory becomes an important theme…" Color subdued, "mostly gray." (75)

Liar – characteristic of the new mood – "comes across like a blunt, bitter accusation directed toward someone who has betrayed him…" (75)

"*Liar* could also be an accusation by Johns to the viewer-critic who looks at art without really seeing and, therefore, makes 'false' judgments. This interpretation would relate to Johns' sculpture *The Critic Smiles, 1959* and *The Critic Sees*, 1961. (76)

No reworked in 1961 to add imprint of Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf*, which Johns probably acquired in Paris in 1961. (76)

Water Freezes (1961), like *No*, is "a concise and direct statement of icy hostility" (77).

Painting Bitten by a Man (1961) conveys similar feelings. (78)

"From 1961 on, Johns used forks, spoons and knives in several paintings. Their meaning is always purposefully ambiguous…" (81)

In Memory of My Feelings marks a turning point in Johns' work. In it, he acknowledges the necessity of dealing with his feelings in his art…" Johns and Frank O'Hara. (82) See also **Notes**, p. 116-7)

Studies for Skin, I-IV (1962) – technique used (85-86)

The Artist's Studio
Johns and Wittgenstein (92-4)

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Other artists who have used handprints, but only in isolated examples: Picasso, Miro, Man Ray, Duchamp, Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock. (98)

Field Painting (1963-64) (99-100)

"It is during the twentieth century, in the art of Picasso and Matisse, that the studio theme first becomes a major subject…Johns, however, presents the studio theme in a new way, by using real objects or marks made by objects and suggesting a fragment of a studio…" (102)

Diver and Related Works

"These works are related in several ways. First, they are similar stylistically. Johns uses more open and expressionistic brushstrokes than before and the structure of his compositions is looser. The pictorial elements often seem to float at random, breaking away from the expected order. As a result, the spatial atmosphere of these paintings is generally more turbulent than in previous works. Second, variations on the same motif are found…the scraped 'device-circle,' the primary color names, silverware held by wires, and body imprints. Third, these paintings generate similar emotional responses, suggesting isolation, struggle, even death…his imagery more obviously suggests personal and emotional symbols and metaphors." (101)

In *Diver*, both painting and drawing, "Johns has shown a three-dimensional figure moving through space, using only flat elements – body imprints, arrows, and lines. Although we see only traces of the diver and diagrammatic indications of the figure's movements, we are given enough information to follow the motions of the swan dive." (108)

"Johns' diver is similar in mood and close thematically to Cezanne's solitary male bathers…figures…shown isolated, awkwardly posed and absorbed in tension-provoking thoughts. Johns' *Diver* like Cezanne's *Bathers*, has an autobiographical quality and both artists' works can be considered, in part, self-portraits.

"On another level, Johns' diver could be a reference to Hart Crane, who committed suicide in 1932 by jumping into the ocean from a ship…" (109)

Arrive-Depart with dominant image of a scull at lower right. "The theme of death pervades the entire painting…" Note on scull from "Sketchbook Notes." (111) Direct link to Cezanne, who painted several still lifes with sculls. (111)

"In the paintings discussed in this chapter, Johns developed a more elusive and poetic symbolism to express themes of isolation, struggle, and death." (112)

According to What?

Was planned in "Sketchbook Notes" at same time as *Watchman* and *Souvenir* paintings. All were painted in 1964, the latter in Japan in early summer, *What* in New York in summer and fall. This was soon after Johns' retrospective at Jewish Museum, in spring 1964. (113)

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Self-portraits in Japan paintings are close in sensibility to Duchamp's in *Wanted/$2000 Reward*, 1923, and *Monte Carlo Bond*, 1924. (115)

The mirror as a *vanitas* symbol (116)

"Because *What* is a summary of Johns' artistic development, done soon after his first major retrospective, it seems a particularly appropriate context for him to question his own, as well as the viewer's, artistic standards." (119)

Hinged canvas, when unhooked and opened, reveals a small canvas with a variation of Duchamp's *Self-Portrait in Profile*, his initials 'M.D.,' and a sprayed 'impact-drip.'" Many other references to Duchamp in the painting. "Duchamp's spirit pervades the entire work, as if he were its co-author…" (119)

Works From 1966-1974
Decoy, Harlem Light, Voice 1 and 2, Untitled 1972, Corpse and Mirror, Scent.

"…*Scent* is intended to be a reference to Jackson Pollock's final painting of the same title." (139)

Notes
1961 – "the year after his first retrospective exhibition at the Columbia Museum in South Carolina; the year he got his studio on Edisto Island, South Carolina; and the year his close friendship with Rauschenberg drifts apart. What is important about the works from this period, however, does not revolve around the specific details of Johns' life, but rather the shift to incorporating intense feelings as a subject in his art." (226-7)

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"Jasper Johns: Numbers"
(Roberta Bernstein and Carter E. Foster, 2003 – Cleveland Museum show)

Bernstein essay:

"His literal renderings of commonplace things were seen to drain subjectivity from subject matter and blatantly reject the viability of abstraction." But, compared to Pop and Minimal, "Johns' 'sign paintings' were handmade objects crafted from art materials. Their subjects were not drawn from the topical mass media but were intrinsic to culture and deeply ingrained in human consciousness. Their uncertain status, hovering between art work and the thing itself, focused attention in the process of perception…" (12)

"When Johns first encountered the writings of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1961, he found a thinker whose ruminations on language and meaning struck a chord with his own ideas about art and reality." (12)

Numbers "can be objective and formulaic or subjective and mystical." (12)

"Johns restricted himself to the ten Arabic numerals." (13)

His variations on numbers "are rendered in nearly every medium and technique he used, including encaustic, oil, collage, Sculpmetal, aluminum, bronze, lead, charcoal, pastel, graphite wash, metallic powder, watercolor, gouache, lithography, intaglio, and ~~mexied~~ mixed media." (13)

Carter Foster – makes connection between Cezanne's solitary male bathers and John's use of single numerals, which he calls "figures." (39)

Foirades, Fizzles

"I would like to demonstrate that the deepest and most universal meanings in Johns's art arise from his use of language, his ways of working, and his habits of mind…" – Richard S. Field, p. 100)

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Johns Catalog (MOMA)

Varnedoe - Introduction

"...an art so densely armored and internally complex" (15) Complexity of the work (14-15) - contrasts & contradictions - "a sense of virtuosity, sometimes called erotic in its appeal" (15) - "a willful impersonality" (15) - "Johns' use of found images (15) - often arrived at thru chance encounters or dreams (16) - the relations between thought and sight (16) - "I think that one wants from painting a sense of life... a surprise..." (17) - "not just one relationship or even a number of them, but constantly changing and shifting relationships to things in terms of focus" (18)* - kinship to Duchamp, who places "the viewer where he is, not elsewhere" (19) - Johns' love of ambiguity (20) - "I am concerned with a thing's not being what it was..." (20) - since 1982 his work has been full of references to his own early memories (21) - using art to keep mind from going dead (21) - misconception of Johns as cerebral strategist who knows exactly what he's doing (21) - like Seurat's science of painter's practice (22) - not didactic (22) (dependent on the reading) - sense of life in his art comes from "unexpected linkages" and nonverbal language of space, scale, line, color, and materials (22) - "the qualities that interest me - literalness, spectativeness, an obsessive quality, order with disorder and the sense of a complete lack of meaning" (25) - his most persistent motif is the body, esp the skin (29) - skin relates to canvas (30) - a refusal of meaning (31) - the dangers of explicating Johns (31-32)

* "the changing focus of the eye" - applied to Duchamp, 1948

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9

Roberta Bernstein

Johns' use of images "inspired" by response to other artists (Leonardo, Grünewald, Holbein, Picasso, Cezanne, Munch, Picasso, Duchamp, Majutto, Newman) – (p. 39) – not only great art (40) – 1959 JJ quote (41) – JJ on Duchamp's Large Glass (43) – diff. between JJ + MTS (44) (46) – abrupt change in JJ work in early 1960s (44) – origin of cross-hatchings and flag/ton patterns (47) – Munch + Clock + Bird pts (50) – Grünewald altarpiece (52-53) – Ventriloquist suggests increasing importance of motifs taken from other art (55) – The Seasons (57) – Picasso's Woman in Straw Hat (59) – explicit reference to JJ's childhood began 1989 (60) – Duchamp's Bride as source of untitled drawings in 1988, also Picasso's Woman in Straw Hat (61-62) – rectangular image whose antecedent is still unknown (62) – JJ quote on "play between the possible and the necessary" (64) Spiral Galaxy image (65) – Blueprint of his grandfather's house (66) – summary of his use of found images (68)

"I have attempted to develop my thinking in such a way that the work I've done is not me." (69)

II. Other Artists

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Vaneedoe (Johns's influence on artists)

Ab Ex idea was to discover self in act of painting; Johns restored conscious control (Marden, p. 96) - Rauschenberg & Johns: AA more subversive; "horizontal scanner" vs "vertical scanner" (Baldessari, p. 97) - "a door into Duchamp," but with physicality (Klauman, p. 97) - Johns's realism, the "image becoming a thing" - (~~Morris~~ Marden, p. ~~100~~ 99) - a "release in making" that was very different from Judd (Serra, p. 102) - his ability to combine thought, craft, and a visceral feel for materials appealed to new, college-trained generation of artists (103)

Johns's turn toward illusionistic imagery in early 1980s stymied many (106)(109) - theme of the body highly relevant in age of AIDS (110) - sex-obsessed art of 1990s can't match Johns's skin-rubbings of 1960s (Bochner, p. 111) - his ~~anonymity~~ ambiguity! ~~the most public of painters~~, whose work remains the most private (Marden, p. 111) -

Vaneedoe's rehanging MoMA coll. juxtaposes Duchamp and Picasso works of 1913 (p. 113)

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"Fire" Essay in MOMA I
(Varnedoe on JJ's influence on other artists)

The Ab-Ex idea was to discover yourself in the act of painting. Johns changed that.

Ed Ruscha – on seeing a reproduction of *Target with Four Faces*: "It was the atom bomb of my education." (96)

Bruce Nauman – "I loved de Kooning's work, but Johns was the first artist to put some intellectual distance between himself and his physical activity of making paintings." (96)
"A door into Duchamp, but with physicality." (97)

John Baldassari – Rauschenberg was a "horizontal scanner" and Johns a "vertical scanner." (97)

Robert Morris – "Johns took painting further toward a state of non-depiction than anyone else…What was previously neutral became actual, while what was previously an image became a thing." (99)

Brice Marden – What struck Marden was that "Johns made the thing he was presenting – not himself, or his actions – seem of primary importance." (100, quoting Varnedoe).

"Both Marden and Close…liked Johns' work for what was held back – for its intense feelings of reticence, denial or repression. They saw this energy of exclusions and self-imposed prohibitions as ultimately positive…In the political and social climate of the 1960s, where rules seemed to be dissolving, such discipline apparently seemed salutary, even liberating, for artists in their twenties." (102)

Richard Serra – (who often looked at Johns' *White Flag* at Yale, where it was on extended loan then) "For me, the *White Flag* was enormous; it just forced you to look at it forever." (102) Seen across the years, Johns is "a feast," a font of "colliding thoughts, a huge, continual, revolving process…and evolution that like Brancusi can go back to the same problem twenty years later, a person who hasn't closed the sequence." (111)

Johns' "ability to combine sophisticated thought, intent craft, and a visceral feel for the erotics of materials, held a powerful appeal for the college-trained, self-consciously intellectual crop of art workers…" (103)

Elizabeth Murray – saw him as "a deep doubter" who "raised questions on every level," yet at the same time his work was "so utterly beautiful, and physical, to explore." His "melding of the idea of the mental with the physical" was deeply impressive. (103-4)

In the late sixties, Johns' intense doubt, nihilism, and negative energy appealed to **Mel Bochner** and others. "At a moment when not just the idealism of modern painting, but individualism and materialism more generally, were under severe critique, this aura of deeply guarded emotive and intellectual concentration gave his individual touch and his investment in the physicality of materials its saving, impressive authority." (104)

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"…Johns' return to figuration, and the explicitly cartoonlike rendering that appears frequently from the *Tantric Detail* pictures of 1980 onwards, seems connected to a previous apostate from abstraction, Philip Guston…Guston's later imagery also has an element of self-lacerating pain and melancholia that may be truer to the spirit of Johns' 'bathtub' imagery of the 1980s." (107) **Elizabeth Murray** called these bath scenes among the "saddest images I've ever seen," with their implication of the artist lying in the tub alone and naked, "reviewing everything about fears and hopes and failures." (107)

David Salle – (p.108)

"…the theme of the body offers one key point of connection between Johns' work and specifically contemporary concerns." Gober, Kiki Smith, etc. **Bochner** suggests that "little that has been produced in the ostensibly sex-obsessed art of the 1990s appears to have transcended the combination of directness and disturbing fleshiness" of the "skin" drawings in the early 1960s. (111)

Julian Lethbridge – admiration for the way Johns has remained "indifferent to the expectations or appetites" of a public." **Marden** – Johns is "the most public of painters, whose work remains the most private." (111)

Chuck Close – "More than any single artist, Jasper Johns is the model for me of how you function as an artist and have a career…the search is still on; he's still moving." (112)

Frank Stella – "The literal is very compelling, but without some illusion it's dead. Illusionism defines pictoriality; it's a physical thing that generates power and presence; the literal is just a structure." Johns "is the one who has leaned hardest on this problem." (112) Rauschenberg offered "a lot of ideas about the outside world." Johns' ideas were "more about making art in the studio." (114)

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National Gallery Catalog

John Elderfield

"The artist, we know, has become very impatient with critics who want to look under the surface. His impatience is with those who build narratives around imagery that I didn't believe they could see until after they had been told to see it. But, by having declared that he was an artist of conscious mystification by telling people how to decipher his cryptic images, he decided to stop telling – but not, of course, to stop painting enigmatic pictures. Indeed, he then revealed that he was an artist of mystification by creating a new cryptic image, a 'green angel,' and 'wasn't going to say what it was or where it had come from.'" (19-20)

Robert Morris

"…that breathtaking ride of complexity, intricate thought, and aesthetic glory that the works deliver." (3)

"The suffering of which the art speaks arises from isolation and loneliness." (3)

"Nothing is ever simple, immediate, singular, straightforward, innocent, undisguised, or undisplaced in Johns' early work. Logic is always burdened with contradiction, language and image remain adversarial, puns abound, origins are hidden, ambivalence reigns and the allegorical is seldom out of sight." (6-7)

"Of all the 20th century American artists, Johns has been the least American (the flag notwithstanding)." (8)

Diver – "The drawing generates a wake formed by the plunge into the terrors of the self." (18)

"Never was a body of work further from the modernist utopian impulse to 're-enchant the world." (19)

"No other artist of the 20th century carried more weight than Johns. No other artist possessed the necessary cruelty, resentment, arrogance and thirst for revenge…No other artist changed the course of art as much as Johns did…And no other artist moved so relentlessly toward hermetic self-sufficiency, which, as the years passed, turned from an increasingly grim external world, toward an increasingly melancholy inner one." (27-28)

"Whatever else these works may be about they loom as monuments of melancholy and mourning." (37)

"The depth of negativity in the work should be acknowledged. That this is disguised by the exquisite aesthetic touch of the artist as he skates over the surface of the abyss…can lead us astray." (38)

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Kathryn A. Tuma

"Cezanne was clear: 'The man must remain obscure'…Where Johns will state plainly that 'I am interested in things which suggest the world rather than suggest personality. I'm interested in things which suggest things which *are*.' his critics have tended to fixate on his reticence as a kind of hermetic furtiveness…"(1)

"From the earliest days of Johns' artistic career Cezanne was a touchstone figure." (2)

"…Johns' formidable grays in early canvases…can be seen as successors to Cezanne's inimitable blue-grisaille – a baffling and complex color that appears as if lit from within…(3)

Johns visited the Cezanne retrospective at the Met in 1952. (4)

Only two references to Cezanne in Johns writings, etc (6)

"Johns…seems invested in retrieving the figure of Cezanne as a painter tirelessly committed to 'studying' nature, as the artist unstintingly exhorted younger painters to do." (8-9)

Cezanne letter to his son, sitting by the river as the motifs multiply - "I could occupy myself for months without changing my place, simply leaning myself a little more to the right, a little more to the left." Sets this alongside Johns' statement, "At every point in nature there is something to see. My work contains similar possibilities for the changing focus of the eye." (9)

Johns: "So that what we call 'thing' becomes very elusive and very flexible…and it also involves the arrangement of our senses at the time of encountering this thing. It involves the way we focus, what we are willing to accept as being there. In the process of working on a painting, all of these things interest me." (11)

Alan Solomon: "What Johns does…is to raise a very serious problem about what we might call the identity of objects. He makes us wonder seriously about whether things are actually what they seem to be…" (12)

Johns was interested in "…the complexity of a pictorial and perceptual arena in which thought and vision inescapably act upon one another." (12)

One of the things he admired in Duchamp was that he "brings into focus the shifting weights of things, the instability of our definitions and measurements." (14)

Cezanne's characteristic brush stroke is similar to Johns'. (15)

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Barbara Rose on the moral implications in Johns's work – painting as "the exemplar of his understanding of right human conduct…an effort at picturing the way things are." (16)

"Following the deaths of Pablo Picasso and Henry Moore, Jasper Johns may be the last living artist to own one of Cezanne's Bathers…a small but exquisite canvas, Cezanne's Bather with Outstretched Arms (1883-1885)." (17) Roberta Bernstein suggests that Johns considered copying MOMA's Great Bather (c.1885) around the time he conceived Diver, the masterwork of his early career. He didn't copy it, "not [wanting] to sit in the museum and work in front of the picture." (17)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro

Johns to David Sylvester, 1965: "I like what I see to be real, or to be my idea of what is real. And I think I have a kind of resentment against illusion when I can recognize it. Also, a large part of my work has been involved with painting as an object, as a real thing in itself. And in the face of that 'tragedy,' so far my general development, it seems to me, have moved in the direction of using real things as painting. That is to say I find it more interesting to use a real fork as painting than it is to use painting as a real fork." (22)

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Weiss catalog essay

"…the work presented itself from the start as a fully formed antisystem of its own, utterly certain of its uncertainty and its entitlement to philosophical doubt." (1)

In *NO*, "A second imprint, at the upper left, which was made from heating the base of a bronze object-sculpture by Marcel Duchamp called *Female Fig Leaf*…" (5)

Kozloff: Johns (in *NO*) "demotes paint to the status of a mere covering, and yet deposits it so caressingly as to make one think that the canvas was once some vast erogenous zone." (7)

The four motifs of the exhibition: target, "device," the naming of colors, and the imprint of the body." Tracked through ten years of work, "the four motifs are seen to be inextricably linked: the fullest meaning of each derives from its relationship to the others." (7)

Cage describes Johns painting (11)

Diver began, uncharacteristically, as a study for the painting, but was completed after the painting. (19)

Painting Bitten by a Man, "Johns' most startling work" described (20)

Duchamp's *To Be Looked At...*" with its targetlike form – MD notes in Green Box for a "target" (26)

Johns and Raushenberg, shared concerns but utterly different art (31-32)

Johns, on destroying his work prior to 1954: "…it was an attempt to destroy some idea about myself." Quoted by Mark Stevens and Cathleen McGuigan in *Newsweek*, 10/24/77) (66-67)

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17

Picasso and American Art (Whitney Museum)

Chapter Five – Johns and Picasso

John didn't really engage with Picasso until ten years after his death in 1973, when his own career was fully developed. But he became acutely aware of Picasso from the early 1960s, seeing his work frequently at the apartment of Victor and Sally Ganz. (280) The Ganzes had acquired some of Picasso's works during the war years and after, very bleak paintings like *Still Life with Blood Sausage, Reclining Nude, Cock and Knife, Winter Landscape*, and the bleak Johns paintings that the Ganzes bought in the 1960s (*Watchman, Tennyson, Diver)* have similarities to these in their "somber tonalities, rigorous structures, and heavily worked surfaces." (285)

Johns's contribution to a portfolio honoring Picasso's birthday on Oct. 15, 1971 was *Cups 2 Picasso or Cups 4 Picasso*, partial silhouettes of P. as a goblet. He said he wouldn't do it, then "stayed awake all night thinking if I were to do it, I would do it this way." Invokes Duchamp's *Self-Portrait in Profile*. (287)

The cross-hatch image "resembles the sets of short parallel lines that Picasso wove through…the final version of *Women of Algiers,* which Johns had seen at the Ganzes'. (287)

David Douglas Duncan's *Picasso's Picassos* set him off on his Picasso series in 1984-85. Many previously undocumented paintings, including *Woman in a Straw Hat with Blue Leaves, Minotaur Moving,* and *The Shadow*. (pp. 287-314)

"In a sense, Johns brought Picasso into his art in the company of an older Master, Grunewald, and as part of a wide-ranging dialogue that he has conducted with past art during the last quarter century. Both Grunewald's writhing, pustule-covered demon and Picasso's ballooning woman are among the most extreme representations of physical transformation ever devised." (298)

"Johns continued to draw on *Woman in a Straw Hat with Blue Leaves* for a decade." (289)

Johns's *After Picasso* (293) is a direct re-working of P. (293)

"When Johns became interested in *Minotaur Moving*, he was in the process of building a house on Saint Martin…so he may have responded to its portrayal of domestic chaos." (299)

The Shadow and its use in Johns's *Summer* (301)

"By the late 1990s, Johns had delved into Picasso's imagery for fifteen years, and during those years he had salted his art with more references to Picasso than to any other artist except perhaps Grunewald. Within the tremendous diversity of Picasso's art, Johns has

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mined a vein of harsh realism about mortality and human suffering that runs throughout the older artist's oeuvre but surfaces most strongly in the dark wartime work, which Johns had seen at the Ganzes' apartment, and in the final, brutally frank self-portraits. These themes had never been far from the surface in Johns' own art, and are paramount in works such as *Liar* (1961), *Periscope (Hart Crane)*, and *Tantric Detail* (1980). Both Grunewald and Picasso must have reinforced Johns' skepticism about the human condition." (314)

Johns' most recent responses to P. relate to *Harlequin* (1915, Museum of Modern Art). The diamond-shape patterns in *Pyre* and *Pyre 2* (both 2003). In these, "…it is impossible to avoid picturing a body laid on a bonfire." (315)

Dodie Rauschenberg is lending 17 works to the show, several of which have never been shown (his copy of P's reclining woman; Pyre and Pyre II (re P's 1917 Harlequin) (9)

Warhol: "Picasso must have heard of me by now." (16)

Picasso + Johns both concerned with the sense of a career, and the end of a career. P's late self-portraits as confrontation with his own death. Pyre + Pyre II also? (21)

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"Dancers on a Plane"
(Cage – Cunningham – Johns)

"This combination of attention to the everyday, and a profound meditation on the mystery of it, offers almost certainly the richest source of connection between the work of all three artists." (27)

Johns on collaboration with Merce: [The] idea of making something that would distract from the dance never interested me and I never thought of enrichment – that I could make it more complex. I just tried to do something that would not interfere with what was happening…to try to get the work done but not to appear in it." (29)

"As Cage put it, 'not self-expression but self-alteration." (31)

"This notion of a multiplicity of centers could be called a Zen concept…it is also clearly analogous to the organization of the pictorial space in much contemporary painting. Cunningham himself says that where he found confirmation was in Einstein's statement, 'There are no fixed points in space.'" (82)

"It is clear that Cunningham has long since abandoned the usual principles governing dance structure: cause and effect, conflict and resolution, building to a climax…Yet in recent years many observers have detected a 'new' narrative element in Cunningham's work…" (84)

"Above all Johns depends on the involvement of the spectator who, in effect, 'completes the work. Johns' various and devious inclusions and plays on the nature of art are designed for the delectation and confusion of the observer…" (119)

Johns' perceptual games: double images, after images, hidden images, words at odds with meanings (colors in *False Start*) – all invite viewer-involvement. *Tango* and its toy piano: sound. (121; 123ff)

"…a better statement of his intentions might have been the occasion on which he said that at that period he preferred to 'hide my personality, my psychological state, my emotions.'" (127)

"Johns seems to strategize specifically for the purpose of playing with, deceiving, and ultimately outwitting the history of art, historians, critics, and viewers alike. Think once more of his parable of the 'spy' and the 'watchman.' Though they both need each other for the work of art to succeed, Johns, the spy, constantly exploits the watchman's expectations, to such an extent that the latter becomes a kind of opponent." (Mark Rosenthal, 132).

Johns on being artistic advisor: "In the theater, there is something about the setting up and taking down of things that I dislike. But when I thought of the people who might be available to do the work that I was being invited to do, I decided that I might do it in

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ways that would offend me less when I went to see the performance. It was a poor way to make a decision, an arrogant way, but that was my decision." (140)

Johns on getting Warhol to do *Rainforest* (140)

Johns: "Is Merce's work emotion-packed? Well, everything is emotion-packed. Emotion is rarely the subject of his work, but it does seem to be a source of the work…" (141)

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Cage on Johns
("Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas")

"At every point in nature there is something to see. My work contains similar possibilities for the changing focus of the eye." (p. 75)

…Pop Art, if deducted from his work, represents a misunderstanding, if embarked upon as the next step after his, represents a non-sequitur. He is engaged with the endlessly ancient task: the imitation of nature in her manner of operation." (75)

→ "…an atmosphere that is heavy rather than light (something he knows and regrets)

"All flowers delight him…" (83)

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"J.J.: Privileged Information"
(Jill Johnston)

The Seasons – most critics who reviewed show in 1987 were unimpressed, or hostile. Autobiographical references took them by surprise (26). Johns himself had been moving – setting up studio in Saint Martin, moving from Stony Point to East 63rd Street townhouse, moving out of Houston Street bank. (27). Mark Lancaster going back to England, after working with JJ for a decade. JJ's use of Picasso "Monotaur" – "It was the subject matter more than the structure of the painting that interested to me…very odd to see the cart before the horse…How did he have that thought? I wouldn't have that thought." (28-9). In *Spring*, there is shadow form of a child, son of friends and his own godson. (29). The child is Andrew Monk (114)

Also, a mysterious image, which Johnston identifies as "a semihuman creature" with bloated, pock-marked stomach, from the same Grunewald altarpiece as the soldiers in earlier paintings (*Racing Thoughts, Perilous Night*).

Sergeant William Jasper, war hero, and JJ's father, binge alcoholic (44 ff). The American flag as personal icon (71).

Gladys Johns (b.1893), eldest child of W.I.'s four by his first wife, lived at western end of Lake Murray, some sixty miles northwest of Allendale (p.235). JJ spent six years living with Gladys, who had four sons. For his senior year he moved to Sumter to live with his mother and her family. (79)

After JJ won grand prize at 1988 Venice Biennale, Michael Brenson wrote that it was "the blend of European and American art that has enabled Johns to evolve to a degree that no other Pop artist has…the greatest American artist since Jackson Pollock." (104)

Maxine Groffsky: "When you're with Jasper, the ball is always in *your* court." (112)

Cage's "The Perilous Night" – "one of his most personal and expressive statements," which Cage said (to CT) was concerned with "the loneliness and terror that comes to one when love is unhappy…" (118)

Rachel Rosenthal's brief "affair" with JJ (128)

Rauschenberg's newspaper ground, which Johns adopted in *Flag*. (134)

"Early on, Johns made it clear that his subject was painting, or painting about painting…" (139)

False Start (1959) – bought from Leo in 1960 for $3,150 by Robert Scull, who sold it in 1981 to Francois de Menil; in December 1981 it made auction history when Si Newhouse bought it for $17.1 million, a record for contemporary art. (142)

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Hilton Kramer is JJ's only "insistent detractor", "aims to please and confirm the decadent periphery of bourgeois taste" – a homophobic attack (144-5)

Moira Roth on McCarthy period as related to secrecy in Johns' painting (153)

"By 1960 Johns had begun collecting works by Duchamp; a decade later he owned as many as thirteen items…" (193). Johns quote: "I have deliberately taken Duchamp's own work and slightly changed it, and thought to make a kind of play on whose work it is, whether mine or his." (198) *According to What* and *Tu 'm* (202-205)

Family stuff – Riley family – Montez (225-264)

Usuyuki paintings launched in 1977, the year of his Whitney retrospective (265) - the Nepalese 16th century painting of Samvara (270) – JJ looking at Tantric art, "thinking about issues like life and death, whether I could even survive" (272) – Johns and Freud (273) – JJ's affair with Jim Self (280) – his 1984 show at Castelli, with *Racing Thoughts* and *Perilous Night* (282) "I need darkness to work in" – JJ (288)

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"Johns' early paintings signal the moment when art's long-established European and aristocratic cultural model finally began to give way in favor of one that could be persuasively described as distinctly American."

Christopher Knight,
Artforum, Sept. 1996

J. had "drained the artist's expressive self from the core of his pictures." The image was not a stand-in for something real - it was "something in its own right."

But his late pics "are like bulletin boards" on which assorted items of personal interest have been pinned (see list) ... "his expressive self, so long repressed, was making a triumphant appearance at center stage."

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Leo Steinberg on Johns

From "Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public":

"The pictures of de Kooning and Kline, it seemed to me, were suddenly tossed into one pot with Rembrandt and Giotto. All alike became painters of illusion…But here, in this picture by Jasper Johns, one felt the end of illusion…It looked to me like the death of painting, a rude stop, the end of the track." (13)

"…a solitude more intense than anything I had seen in pictures of mere desolation…" (13)

"And then it dawned on me that Jasper Johns's pictures conveyed a sense of desolate waiting…of human absence from a man-made environment." (14)

"I can see that these pictures don't necessarily look like art…I am left in a state of anxious uncertainty." (15)

From "Jasper Johns: the First Seven Years of His Art":

"…Johns's characteristic dense veil of graded gray strokes: paint that denotes nothing but paint" (17 – re "LIAR").

"The subject matter he displayed in January 1958 was different enough to precipitate a crisis in criticism." (21)

"For Johns's pictures are situations wherein the subjects are constantly found and lost, submerged and recovered." (25)

"The means and the meaning, the visible and the known, are so much one and the same, that a distinction between content and form is either not yet or no longer intelligible. (26)

"For no likeness or image of a 5 is paintable, only the thing itself." (28)

"What Johns loves in his objects is that they are nobody's preference; not even his own." (30)

"Have you noticed how his paint is laid on? The brushstrokes don't blend; each dab is a short shape, distinct in tone from its neighbor. This is the way Cezanne used to paint, in broken planes composed of adjacent values; imparting flatness to things which the mind knows to be atmospheric and spatial…Johns…does the reverse: allowing an atmospheric suggestion to things which the mind knows to be flat." (43)

His various techniques as a painter (44)

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"It is part of the fascination of Johns's work that many of his inventions are interpretable as meditations on the nature of painting…" (48)

"…tokens of human absence from a man-made environment." (54)

"…Johns puts two flinty things in a picture and makes them work against one another so hard that the mind is sparked. Seeing them becomes thinking." (54)

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Leo Steinberg
(2/22/06)

"I think what I said was that ultimately, abstract art would be perceived as a starvation diet. Because the rationale for it, the justification for it, I remember it only too well, was that all representational art was just an imitation of appearances. That was how Clement Greenberg talked, and so on. But I would say to them, don't you dream?... So much imagination is involved. I could tell that abstract painters, with their love for movies and photography, needed something else. That art was no longer satisfying. Do you follow me? I knew, when I heard Adolph Gottlieb saying we now have abstract act for a thousand years, and I thought that sounds like Hitler's thousand-year empire. I wrote it somewhere, that it will come back in some other way, because that's our life. We inhabit bodies, and we interact with bodies. And so when a new art, like pop art came up, Clement Greenberg gave a talk at the Guggenheim Museum, he called it 'After Pop Art.' And he said, 'After pop art, which is just a little wrinkle in the history of taste, not really art – after pop art we'll have more color field painting and go back to the real thing…I sat there in the audience, and thought, boy, is he way off."

Tells of a woman who had been to a show of Donald Judd. He asked, what does this do for you? She said, well, it modifies space. And he said, so do you.

"I respect Mondrian deeply. But the works of Mondrian that move me most are the early ones, the trees sequence, when you see the tree turning into abstraction but you still sense the tree. And then the plus and minus pictures – you still get a vague sense of the receding surface of water, endlessly. By the time he reaches the classic phase, I tend to lose interest. Mondrian himself realized it at the end, when he got into Broadway Boogie-Woogie and all that stuff. He realized that he had starved the eye. So it's a starvation diet, and their comeuppance was the next generation of artists, all around the world. That doesn't mean that the phase of abstract art hasn't produced wonderful things – it has. The abstractions of de Kooning are immensely exciting. *Excavation* and others. But even there, the lingering sense of a human curve that you get in a lot of de Kooning is what holds the interest."

[He goes on to complain about my misrepresentation of him in the Rauschenberg piece – it always happens to Steinberg, etc etc.]

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Michael Kimmelman on Johns' later work –

"There is about the recent works – for all the variety and easy mastery he brings, especially to his drawings – a personal mythologizing. The richness of associations he could elicit from even the most banal image, like a flag, has given way to a language of allegory and symbol. There was a lively, open-ended, even-handed discourse between viewer and artist in Johns's earlier efforts. His current drawings and paintings seem increasingly based on a code that demands to be broken but to which he alone holds the key." - NYT, March 1, 1991 – review of show at Castelli, with illustration of the poster that shows the "bison in a blanket." (see text in "Jasper Johns – 35 Years" catalog)

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Chronology

1930-1958 -
See MOMA I catalog, pp. 118 ff. for early years. He lived with his grandfather from 1932, when parents divorced, until about 1937. Then for a year or so with his uncle and aunt, then back to his grandfather until 1939, when grandfather dies at age 71. Then goes to Columbia for a year to live with his mother and stepfather, and attends A.C. Moore Elementary School. From 1940 until 1946 at the Corner with his aunt Gladys Johns Shealy. Moves to his mother's ~~again~~ in Sumter, S.C. for senior year in high school. After graduation in June 1947, lives alone in Columbia, enters Univ. of South Carolina. Art courses with Catharine Phillips Rembert and others (see her quote on his constant sketching, p. 120. Also his quote, "I started drawings when I was three, and I've never stopped." (119). Quits college before graduating, in December 1948, and moves to New York. Sees first Picasso (120). Quits Parsons, after turning down scholarship (121). Drafted into the army in 1951. After training at Fort Jackson, is sent to Sendai, Japan. Discharged in May, 1953.

Moves back to NYC, East 83rd Street. Enrolls at Hunter but quits after first day of classes. Works at Marboro Books on West 57th Street. Meets Rauschenberg in late fall or early January, 1954. Moves to East 8th Street and Avenue C. Meets Cage, Cunningham, Rachel Rosenthal. Uses cast of Rosenthal's face to make *Untitled*, first cast body fragment. In summer 1954, moves to 278 Pearl Street, one floor below Rosenthal. RR's loft on Front Street is a block away. Johns leaves Marboro to devote self to painting – supports himself by working with RR on window displays. That fall, destroys his early work. In late fall 1954, prompted by a dream, he paints *Flag* (completed in January 1955). Also *Target with Plaster Casts, Target with Four Faces, Green Target, Tango* and first paintings of numbers. By then RR has moved into loft vacated by Rosenthal, and over the next six years RR and Johns see each other daily. (See Cage quote on "the Southern Renaisssance," and the climate of their relationship, p. 125).

Many paintings in 1956-58: *White Flag, Drawer, Target, Flag on Orange Field, The, Drawer, Book, Tennyson,* numbers, etc. Jewish Museum show organized by Alan Solomon in March, 1957 – the incident with Horace Richter (p./127). Castellis visit studio. Donald and Harriet Peters give JJ a copy of Duchamp's *Box in a Valise*. First solo show at Castelli in January, 1958, Barr buys three works, JJ picks up Catharine Rembert for dinner "and danced her around the room" etc. (128) The 25-Year Retrospective Concert for Cage in May, 1958. JJ's *Grey Numbers* wins prize at Carnegie International in December, 1958.

1959-1960
After debut show at Castelli, JJ's work changes radically. Splashy, "expressionist" color replaces deadpan reticence. "The self-containment and fixed structure of his earlier work were replaced by compositions that suggest incompleteness and a breakdown of order." (Roberta Bernstein, p.163). *Device Circle* (1959) shows process of its making. *Painting*

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with Two Balls, False Start, Painted Bronze, Light Bulb, Out the Window, Highway, Thermometer, Figure 5, 0Through 9.

In January, 1959, Nicolas Calas brings Duchamp to visit Johns' and Rauschenberg's studios. JJ reads Lebel monograph on MD, begins his own "Sketchbook Notes." JJ on the relatively few times they met (p.164). Christmas dinner with Duchamp and Teeny in 1959, and Duchamp's comment about stopping painting (167). In late 1960 JJ writes review of the GH Hamilton-Richard Hamilton translation of the *Green Box* notes, and buys a *Green Box* from Duchamp, who inscribes it "To Jasper Johns, Sybille des cibles."

Sixteen Americans show at MOMA (Dec.16,1959-Feb.17,1960).

1961-1963

New emotional tone in his work – bleak, bitter, dark. In 1963 interview he concedes that the new paintings are "more related to feeling…or emotional or erotic content." (191). Influence of Duchamp may be visible in works with hinged sections, signs, labels. Johns makes the body an explicit subject by imprinting his hands, arms, face, and feet in several works. Morbidity and sensuality. *No, Liar, In Memory of My Feelings – Frank O'Hara, Fool's House, Painting Bitten by a Man, Study for Skin* drawings, *Diver* (both painting and drawing, *Land's End, Periscope (Hart Crane)*. Also the three large map paintings, the last of which, done in 1963, was signed "JOHNS '63 HELL." (191)

In winter 1961, Rauschenberg moves to ~~128 Front Street~~ Broadway 5th floor, and Johns buys house in Edisto Beach, S.C., where he will spend spring and fall until 1966. First trip to Europe in June, for show of his work at Galerie Rive Droite. Acquires Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf* there, from bronze edition issued by Galerie Rive Droite, and whose imprint he will later use in *No* (1961), *Field Painting* (1963-4), and *Arrive/Depart* (1963-4). Breaks up with RR in late summer of 1961, at Connecticut College, where they go to attend performances by Cunningham company. The next year, RR paints *Trophy V (For Jasper Johns)*."

Study for Skin drawings in May, 1962, for a work that was never realized; JJ used Jim Dine as model – they see each other a lot that summer (196).

In August or September, 1963, he moves to a penthouse at 340 Riverside Drive (106th Street), where he lives and works when in NY through the 1960s.

1964-1971

Completes *Arrive/Depart,* in 1964, begun the year before – first to use silkscreen technique, and first use of skull image. Also *Field Painting*, with red neon letter R.

Jewish Museum retrospective from February to March, 1964. His sculpmetal *Numbers* installed at Lincoln Center, NY State Theater. Trip to Hawaii with Cage and Lois Long, then to Japan for May and June – works in studio on Ginza, makes *Watchmen*, the two *Souvenir* paintings. Returns to Tokyo in fall of 1966 for exhibition "Two Decades of American Painting" at National Museum of Modern Art. While he's there, his house in Edisto burns down, with loss of works by Johns and others (230).

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In August, 1964, starts work on *According to What*, his largest painting to date, in homage to Duchamp (and a re-reading of *Tu 'm*, see Rosenthal p.25).

David Whitney starts working as his assistant, 1966-1968. Begins printing with Tatyana Grosman in 1965. Becomes artistic advisor of Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1967.("Merce is my favorite artist in any field…" p. 231). Meets Roberta Bernstein, who starts cataloguing his prints.

Early fall, paints *Harlem Light* at Canal Street studio, introducing flagstone image (see p. 233 for Johns' explanation).

Moves to Chelsea Hotel while Houston Street "bank" (formerly Provident Loan Society bldg) is being renovated. Works in David Whitney's loft on Canal Street. Moves into 225 East Houston in Feb. or March, 1968. Does set for Cunningham's *Walkaround Time*, which premieres in March at State University College in Buffalo – see p. 234 for Bernstein notes on Duchamp's visit to set. Duchamp dies in October, age 81; Johns' obituary notice, p. 235.

First two visits to Saint Martin in 1969. Visits Barnes Collection in Sept., 1969, with Roberta Bernstein. Also visits Philadelphia Museum, where Anne d'Harnoncourt takes him to see Duchamp's *Etant Donees…"* Revisits Barnes in May, 1970, with Bernstein, mentions to her that one of his favorites is Cezanne's *Boy with Skull.*"

In 1971 he completes *Map (Based on Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Air Ocean World), 1967-1971,* and *Voice 2*. Tatyana Grosman suggests collaboration with Samuel Beckett. Other works in this period include *The Critic Sees, High School Days, Passage I and II, Pinion, Voice, Screen Piece, Decoy, Voice II.*

1972-1978

Untitled, 1972 a point of departure. First body casts in years on right (fragmentary, at least two different bodies, male and female); in the middle are two panels of flagstone pattern; new motif of colored hatch marks on left. Effect is radically disjunctive, bolder but more cerebral. The cross-hatch pattern, which he will use for the next ten years, had "all the qualities that interested me – literalness, repetitiveness, an obsessive quality, order with dumbness and the possibility of a complete lack of meaning." (269). Varnedoe on cross-hatch as abstraction (269). Johns on origin of the motif (270). *Scent* is first all-over cross-hatch painting (271).

Acquires a house on Saint Martin in 1972. Moves to converted farmhouse near Cage's in Stony Point. Mark Lancaster becomes his assistant.

Working on Becket collaboration in 1974. (273)

Visits Grunewald's Isenheim altarpiece in Colmar, France, in 1976 (275) Acquires galvanized plaster *Female Fig Leaf* from Mary Sisler Collection in 1977. "Cezanne: The Late Work" at MOMA in 1977-78, where he sees *Bathers*, 1900-1906 – will use a

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postcard of this to make a drawing called *Tracing*, his first tracing of another artist's work. In 1978 he will make another *Tracing* from Jacques Villon's 1930 etching of Duchamp's 1912 *Bride.*

Johns retrospective at Whitney Museum, curated by David Whitney, Oct.1977-January 1978. Johns asks Michael Crichton to write the catalog essay (277). Whitney buys *Three Flags*, 1958, in 1980, for $1 million.

Usuyuki paintings – derivation of title (277). Reading Celine (278). Other works include *Corpse and Mirror, The Dutch Wives, Weeping Women, The Barber's Tree.*

1979-1981

Imagery returns – forks, knives and spoons in *Dancers on a Plane* -- skull and genitals in *Tantric Detail paintings.* Johns' gloomy mood, "thinking about issues like life and death, and whether I could even survive." (301). References to Edvard Munch. Sex and death, decay and renewal.

~~Sees~~ Picasso retrospective at MOMA in 1980, where he sees *Woman in Straw Hat, Crucifuxion.* Dealer Wolfgang Wittrock in Dusseldorf send him copy of reproductions from Grunewald altarpiece that summer, and Johns begins to use tracings of certain images in his paintings. (see his quote, p.304).

Cicada, two *Dancers on a Plane, Between the Clock and the Bed, Tantric Details.*

1982-1984

Proliferation of new representational motifs: planks, faucets, clothing, ceramics, as well as cast body parts – arm casts are of a child. Illusion and perspective. Trompe l'oeil details (nails, wood grain). Images from other art works: Mona Lisa, Grunewald details, Barnett Newman. "The paradoxes of identity and disjunction in those former works were now to be replaced… by themes of ambiguity and illusion" (KV, 319). …a new sense of evolution and growth" (319).

"Bathtub's eye" paintings, from perspective of someone in tub.

Trick images from perceptual psychology. The 1915 illustration by W.E. Hill, which JJ calls "My wife and my mother-in-law." The duck-rabbit image from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations."

In *Untitled*, 1984, the first use of cartoon-like image of a rectangular face, with eyes and mouth dispersed to the edges, which he ascribes to Picasso's *Woman in Straw Hat.* Other works include *Perilous Night, Racing Thoughts, Ventriloquist, In the Studio* (with "melting" cross-hatch pattern).

1985-1989

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Picasso becomes an important presence, as Duchamp was in work of 1960s. The disjointed face from *Woman in Straw Hat*, in which the eyes are displaced to the edges of breast-like forms. Centerpiece of this period is *The Seasons*, 1985-1986, with shadow image from Picasso's *The Shadow*, and other images that reflect *Minotaur Moves His House.* These are dense with images, but the new face motif "gave rise to some of the sparest and most open paintings Johns has made," with a simplicity that "evoked children's drawings." (337) See *Montez Singing*, p. 357, a memory of childhood. Autobiographical references.

Summer was first of the Seasons, and Johns didn't know there would be a series then. (338). He had just moved into his new house on Saint Martin in 1985. In March, 1987 he moved from Houston Street studio to a brownstone on East 63rd Street, which had once belonged to Gypsy Rose Lee.

Wins Grand Prize at Venice Biennial in 1988 –see Brenson piece in NYT, on JJ as greatest American artist since Jackson Pollock (342).

1990-1995

Johns' coup d'age when he turned sixty, his "second childhood." (359). Works of early 1990s have new surfaces toughened by sand, an enriched palette, complex layering, and "more evidently personal themes of memory." Ink drawings on plastic. The mystery image in *Green Angel*, and why it's undisclosed. (359, 360). The blueprint of his grandfather's house, used in several *Untitled* paintings, 1992-95.

John Cage dies in 1992, age 79. Cage quote on Johns, p. 363, "How lucky to be alive the same time he is! It could have been otherwise."

Wins Praemium Imperiale from Japan Art Assn. in 1993.

Acquires house in Sharon, Conn., Sept. 1994.

Reading Paul Celan (364)

Use of child's drawing of mother's face from Bruno Bettelheim, which he first saw in 1952 (361). Used in *Untitled* paintings (3), 1991.

Spiral galazy image in *Mirror's Edge*. Tracings after Cezanne, 1994. *Nothing At All Richard Dadd,* 1992, with stick figure from Picasso.

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Jasper Johns - 3/17/78 lunch

On becoming an artist: Always knew that's what he wanted to be. Grandmother painted. "People would say I was talented. I knew it was good to use one's talents, but I also knew I couldn't do that where I was - there weren't any artists there. So it was also a form of escape..."

Met Bob while we he was working for Marboro bookshop on 57th Street between 6th and 7th. He worked the late shift, until midnight closing. One night he was walking east -- he lived way east on 83rd Street -- and ran into a group on corner of Madison and 57th. Kenneth Heuer, an editor at Viking (check); Suzi Gablik; Arthur Gregor, a poet; and Bob. The three of them had been at Yaddo together, he thinks, and party may have had to do with that, or with someone's birthday. Anyway Jasper knew all but Bob. Later he met him again at Sari Dienes. Sari had a beautiful studio in a bldg that no longer exists, corner 57th and 6th, and she gave big parties. She was about like she is now, only more beautiful; she was making rubbings of manholes and other street things, late at night. "And as always trying to make a buck."

~~Rochelle~~ Rachel Rosenthal (who later married a man named Moody and changed her name to Rachel Rosenthal Moody). She was the daughter of a man who was once considered the pearl king of Europe. He was the one who found out and revealed that Mikimoto was flooding the market with cultured pearls - picked up a bag of pearls one day, thought it felt light, cut one open and found stone. He was very rich, and lived in Paris. When the war came they moved to Brasil, where his wife once gave a large dinner party and decorated the table with bananas of all kinds and colors -- afterwards a Brazilian dame came up and said, 'My dear, no one uses bananas on the table here. We use apples.' Eventually Rosenthal came to NYC and became a dealer in cultured pearls a la Mikimoto. Had a big apartment on Central Park West. When I met Rochelle she was studying with Merce, and also working for him in some capacity -- booking engagements. And she painted, and she was starting to do sculpture. She had just bought a piece of Bob's, a "music box" from the Stable show, with nails pointing in and a couple of rocks so if you turned it the rocks fell down and made a noise. She also bought a couple of things of Sari's. Incidentally, I remember Sari being amused and also angered because Rothko had liked her work until he found out how it was made - the rubbings.

"At that period I had a friend who lived in an apartment on 8th Street and Avenue A, for only $13 a month. I was paying $25 a month on 83rd Street, and his sounded like a real bargain, so when he moved out I took it. It was up five flights of stairs, and it had one of those bathtubs that you cover over when you're not using it to make a table -- except that the wall it stood against wasn't there any more. There had been a fire. You took your bath looking out at the people in the next building. It was while I was living there that I first helped Bob on a job for Gene Moore.

"I got a loft because Rochelle Rosenthal had decided to become a sculptor. She said why don't we get places together - if I find a place will you take one too? I said yes. She called me a few days later and said she'd found two lofts on Pearl Street-- it was amusing for us because of her father's business. And that was about two and a half blocks from Bob's place on Fulton Street. Then Rochelle's father died in California, and she had to go out, and then she decided to live out there, and Bob decided to take her loft. It was after that that I began to work with him regularly on the department store displays."

Jasper did his potato drawings when he lived on 8th Street. He destroyed them.

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On Bob's work

"That's hard to answer. My interest was much more in Bob as a person.

"What I saw first were the white paintings. I thought they were like new fences I'd seen in the south, one board going up after another. Then he did those exotic paintings that seemed to have something to do with history, with a kind of sentiment that you associate with history. They had a patina, an age, as opposed to the white pictures. Some were made of dirt, and some of old rocks in their natural state -- things which had been used, bits of things that had had other uses, often treated in some way that suggested some sort of ritual -- they were wrapped, or tied...

"They were not especially interesting to me at the time. Bob's work really became interesting to me with the red paintings. On a couple of occasions I watched him working on them, and that was very interesting."

Personal side -- "I felt kin to him." "To me he seemed amazingly naive, but he functioned in ways that I couldn't. He assumed that other people would support what he did. I assumed that I would have to do it in spite of other people. Intellectually, he's incredibly imaginative. He could go to Walter Gutman and people like that, and get money to buy art materials with, with the understanding that they would get a painting in return. And they actually gave him money. Why? Probably because that kind of presumption is very appealing."

Two Years on Pearl Street

"Ellie Poindexter wrote a letter to Bob that was simply amazing. She said she was taking over the gallery, and that she would really like to show his work but that it was too expensive to bring it uptown. After that, there were a couple of years when Bob did want to have a show, but we were just surviving on the work we did for Gene Moore. We did some work for Merce, of course, and there was some social activity. But for a couple of years we were mainly living on Pearl Street and working, and our world was very limited. I think we were very dependent on one another. There was that business of triggering energies. Other people fed into that, but it was basically a two-way operation.

"Bob was sort of an outcast for a couple of years. We were sure no one else was interested in what we were doing. And then Leo appeared on the scene, and something happened that looks like a beginning -- the connections to what went before are too subtle."

The Dinner at Bob's

It was not a dinner. The way Jap remembers: "Paul Brach was a very good friend of Leo's. My recollection is that Mortie Feldman called Bob to tell him that Leo wanted to come down and see his pictures. There was a great sense of 'face' in those days. There was no money involved, so every gesture had a value. Bob felt he couldn't call up a dealer, for example, in case the dealer said no. Anyway, it was arranged that Leo would come. And at a certain point Bob came down to my place to get some ice -- the only refrigerator was in my loft -- and he said that Leo would like very much to meet me, so I came up. Leo told me he'd seen my green painting at the Jewish Museum show, and could he see my other work? I said of course, call me any time. Leo asked if he couldn't come now. That seemed to me somewhat improper, but I was very flattered. So Leo came downstairs. When he was leaving, Leo said 'I think I might like to give you a show - why don't you come and look at the gallery?' Leo and Ileana and

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Ilse Getz left. Mortie stayed on, and we went to the local Childs for dinner -- that's why I know it wasn't a dinner party -- over on Broadway. Mortie said to Bob, 'What did Castelli say to you?' Bob said, 'Nothing.' Then Mortie asked what Leo had said to me, and I said he'd said he might like to give me a show."

Was there tension over this? Not at all. Jasper remembers a party at Ilse Getz's apartment that spring, at which he passed Ileana on the stairway and she gave him a check to pay for the picture she had bought - a small figure One. "I won't even tell you how much the check was for, but it was my first really official sale to a gallery." At that same party, Leo came up and said he wanted to give me a show. I said, 'What about Bob?' Leo said, "I want to do as much for Bob as I can." 'Does that mean a show?' I asked. 'We'll see,' said Leo.

"I also remembef Leo calling up after that next summer, and asking me if I thought Bob could be ready for a show very quickly. I said I thought he could be ready in the morning. And after that his show was scheduled." (Jasper did't remember whether Bob's had been before his).

Johns's First Castelli Show

Remembers Barr saying to him that they'd decided to buy several, "because there might not be any more like them." Then he said something about there being a problem of their not lasting, but that they would probably last as long as we would. Frank O' ara wanted the museum to buy the big white flag painting, but Alfred was afraid of trouble with the American Legion and other patriots.

There was never any jealousy expressed on Bob's part. Jasper remembers "one awful incident," when Nico Calas called to say that Bob had won the prize at the Carnegie International in Pittsburg (judges were Duchamp, Calas, and Vincent Price!). This was during period when Bob and Jap had one 'phone, and Jasper took the call. They celebrated that night, and shortly thereafter learned that it was Jasper who had won. "It was the clumsiest thing of that kind that ever occurred, but Bob was not even fazed. I was horrified. But I was cheered somewhat when I learned that the award was for "realistic or semi-realistic painting."

At Bob's Jewish Museum show, Barr came to Jasper and said they wanted to buy something for the Museum, and what did he recommend. Jasper recommended Rebus. But Barr got Johnson to buy First Landing Jump instead.

Working Together

"I did a couple of gold leaf paintings of his, and one work in the style of Rebus. I thought I understood what went into his pictures, so that I could do one. But my work wasn't convincing."

Exchanging ideas -- "The beer cans he gave me -- he told me that story about Leo and de Kooning. He'd had the idea for a long time to do a series of small objects that had meaning for him; one was going to be the two beer cans that deKooning talked about, bent in half so that they clasped one another. I was working on my first sculptures then. I said, 'You shouldn't do that at all, I should.' And he agreed. Later, I told him to do the goat the way he did it. I said why not let the picture be on the floor, and the goat be in it? But it was like something he was already trying to do.

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What He Likes and Dislikes in Bob's work:

"His work is so complex, that's a difficult question. (After silence). But I'll try. One important characteristic of his work -- within the work, there is a constant recognition of what things are. A giving to things of their own quality. A drip is recognized as a drip in itself; but also recognized as part of another structure or gesture. There's a constant regard for the thing in itself. He's the first person I knew who could do that. It was very important to me. No special quality was given to things, and that was very destructive to any sort of configuration of qualities. This kind of thought creates an atmosphere where you feel the possibilities that exist. You don't just move toward what must be done - you have all those choices. I think that kind of sensibility, that way of working, that kind of action was very important to me, and I don't think it was current before (Bob). He suggested that there was a huge array of possibilities. So one ends up not feeling a victim of one's uniqueness. I don't know if I'd go along with any of this now, but at the time it was very striking."

Dislikes? "There was npthing that bothered me. Certain works of Bob for me are not surpassed anywhere else. They had a kindof excitement for me, as eye-openers. At that period, the difference in our work contributed a kind of conversation, but that's not a war!

Summerspace
Bob wanted to use flowers on the backcloth. Jasper suggested spots instead. Bob found a large piece of metal on the street, with holes cut out - don't know what it was used for.

Bill Giles
An artist from Florence, S.Carolina, whom Jasper met down there. He came to NYC and lived in Chinatown. Now he's married to Lee Bontecou, but doesn't paint any more. He sprays crops from airplanes.

Duchamp
First heard about him from Rauschenberg. Bob saw the surrealist (1953) show at Janis and talked about it.

"I showed a piece at Leo's; neo-Dada ideas came up; I read Motherwell's book; then Lebel's book came out, and there was the show at Janis. Bob and I went down to Philadelphia to look at the Arensburg collection, to find out about it."

Reaction? "Friendliness toward most of it, except the Large Glass, which felt very distant to me. Now I feel like I'm on the other side of it, looking the other direction. But then I resented what looked like the rigidity of the forms. Bob tried to steal one of the marble cubes out of Why Not Sneeze?. It fell on the floor, and a guard came and said what did he think he was doing? He Bob said he just wanted to see how it felt -- he'd heard it was supposed to look like sugar but was much heavier. The guard said, 'Don't you know you're not supposed to touch this crap?'"

Met Marcel about this time, thru Nico Calas, who brought him down to the Front Street studio. By then Jap had read the Geo. Heard Hamilton translation of the Notes from the Green Box, and he even bought a Box. "My finest memory of Marcel was one Christmas, Bob and I and Tini and Marcel met somewhere downtown, and Tini asked did we celebrate Christmas. We said no. Neither do we, they said - why don't we meet then? We all went to a Chinese restaurant, at which I remember Marcel ate two bites of something -- no more. Then he began to talk. Bob was trying to convince

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Marcel that he was an American artist. One of the things he asked was why Marcel had stopped painting. He said it had been one thing and another, 'But it really wasn't like that," he added. 'It was like you break your leg - you don't mean to do it.'"

John Cage

"John doesn't like opposition. He so stifles the no that...

"At the time I met him in the late fifties, I didn't know anyone who had that concern with different disciplines, and the ability to connect them. He had a lovely quality of not being formalized. And also a great willingness to teach.

"He was incredibly important to the Cunningham company -- not only as musical director but as their driver, their peacemaker, and all sorts of things.

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Bob Rauschenberg on Johns (early interview)

Jasper

"I got to know him gradually. I was working as a janitor at the Stable Gallery then. Having no heat (Fulton Street), I did all my work at night there. One of my only friends was Sari Dienes, who was living at the Carnegie Studios on 57th Street, near the Stable. She was doing street rubbings. She was one of Jasper's only friends too. Both of us also knew Suzi Gablik - I'd known her at Black Mountain. At that time Jasper was painting mostly on weekends. He worked in a bookstore on 57th Street. He was doing figurative drawings and water colors. He did a series of nearly all-black potatoes, they were the first pieces of his I really thought were terrific. I still have them in fact. But I made a mistake. There was a drawing of two potatoes, and I didn't like one of them because the sprout coming out of it looked too real. What bothered me was that it gave it away as a potato, instead of just looking mysterious. They were polished lead drawings, almost abstract, and very beautiful.

"Jasper was soft, beautiful, lean, and poetic. I have photos of him then that would break your heart. He looked almost ill -- I guess that's what I mean by poetic. I was still taking photos then. He really seemed to be a loner.

"I was still so uncritical of my life that except for dire circumstances I felt practically invisible most of the time. He and I were each other's first serious critics. Actually he was the only painter I shared ideas with, and had discussions with about painting. No, not the first -- Cy was the first. But Cy and I were not critical; I did my work and he did his.

"When Rochelle Rosenthal moved out of the loft on Pearl Street, I could afford a higher rent than I was paying -- which meant running water. I had maintained my relationship with Gene Moore, and he would give me the top payment he was allowed to give, in advance - $500, which would last me about three months. That was the place I had my first bathtub. Actually I built a bathtub at Fulton Street, out of a fish crate that I lined with tar, but the water there was always too cold. And you know, when I was on Fulton Street I'm sure there were people who would have helped me if I'd asked, but I had that Puritan thing, I was too proud to ask because I didn't want anybody to know I was that badly off.

"I was still on Fulton Street when Charlie Egan came and looked at my work and decided to take me on. My show came at Christmas, and I thought maybe Mortie Feldman would like to give a concert, which is how that came about. I guess I'm telling you things like this to show how close we all were.

"Jasper and I did window displays under an assumed name because we knew somebody would eventually hold it against us. We had to stop because we were in such demand, it was defeating our purpose which was to give

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us timeto do our own work. We tried to hire all our artist friends who needed money, but very shortly they got bored with having to work so hard. I learned an awful lot doing that, about different techniques, and I'm sure Jasper did too. We used only our own ideas, and we never even separated which was which. When we needed money we'd get together and come up with half a dozen ideas which we'd present to Gene Moore, and he'd pick the ones he liked. Some ideas we even lost money on, because there was no way of measuring from paper to the product. But it kept us alive, and let us do our own work.

"Cy's direction was always so personal that you could only discuss it after the fact. Jasper and I were actually building objects with our own specific directions, but we were always being coupled because our separate directions seemed to be in comparison to the main stream. We had a good time at it, too. We literally traded ideas. He would say some morning, I've got a terrific idea for you, and I'd have to find one for him. It got so we were so familiar with each other's sensibilities... I was envious of his encaustic, I must admit. But too respectful ever to touch it. Except once, he let me. He was painting one of the large flags. It smelled so delicious, and looked so good, all those aromatic bubbling waxes, the colors so bright, and they set so quickly, I just begged him to let me do one stripe. He finally said all right, one. So I decided it might as well be red. I stared at the painting, savoring the moment, and then I dipped a brush in the wax, getting as much on as I could, and made a stroke right in the middle of a white stripe! Ooops! Needless to say I didn't ask again. There was just no way he could think I hadn't done it on purpose.

"No one could write about our work without comparing us, and often even getting us confused. Even socially -- which bothered him more than me. We started seeing less of each other. He started travelling more, and then he got the place on Edisto, and from then on we hardly ever saw each other. But I'm not happy over having lost such a close friend.

"Being as close to his work as I was kept any incident of similarity from happening. But ours were two very different sensibilities. The only reason we were compared was the myth that we were working against the rest of the art world. I'm sure we weren't against it, any more than Ad Reinhardt or Barney Newman were.

"Jasper read a lot, and he wrote poetry. I remember one line, which I won't get right, something like: 'What you see should be as fresh as the meat you eat.' During this time the building on Pearl Street was being torn down -- we found a place on Front Street, over a sandwich shop (Oyvind got it after I moved out). Jasper would read Hart Crane to me. I loved it, I just didn't have the patience to read it myself.

"We did help each other in a search to find other ways to work, but we were not in revolt against anything. Our aesthetic direction was different. We didn't share the feelings that seemed to be the most popular then. Even though neither of us met Duchamp until later, I felt a greater affinity in the humor and the object quality of Duchamp. During that time Duchamp was supposed to be the villain. He was being so successfully neglected -- Art News established some kind of criteria like, good work came from Mondrian, and if they really disliked something the basis was Duchamp.

"Most often Jasper didn't like what I was doing. He was extremely critical.

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I'd do a painting, and he'd say he didn't like it. I'd do six more in the same vein, and I'd hear him refer to the first one as something he'd liked, and what happened? It was my sensual excessiveness that jarred on him. He was always intellectual, and highly critical even of my grammar -- but you don't let a thing like that offend you if you only have two or three friends. He always seemed certain, and I was always exaggerratedly in doubt about my own work -- I would almost end up justifying doing it because I did it. Do you understand what I mean by that?

"Jasper knew everything about a work (of his) except what it ~~looked~~ looked like after he was done. He'd begin a piece very clearly, which is in the nature of his imagery. It was the only way he could do it."

(At Jasper's opening at the Whitney, he took a red silk handkerchief out of Bob's tuxedo jacket. Next day he said he'd been told he'd stolen it, Bob said no, it was a gift. "Maybe that's a token of his mature affection").

"Nothing is left to chance with Jasper."

Jasper Johns

R. had met him before, but got to know him well about 1955. Johns was living with Rochelle Rosenthal, a California girl interested in avant garde theater that was really improvisational theater, and things like that. When they broke up, R. moved into her place on ~~Pearl~~ Street(#).

R. had been told by Rochelle that Jasper was going to paint an American flag. He had seen it in a dream, and waked up with the realization that this was what he wanted to paint.

Their work was totally dissimilar, really, but Johns and R. "gave each other permission to do what we wanted," as R. puts it. The example of the abstract expressionist school was so powerful that to work in a different vein meant "to start out every day moving out from Pollock or deKooning or Kline, and that was sort of a long way to go to start out from." Johns and R. were a long way from the action painters, and working together downtown they were able to give each other a sort of essential encouragement. Not at all like Picasso and Braque's "mountaineers roped together," but each gave the other freedom to go his own way.

Essentially different personalities. Johns is also a strong personality, but logical, dogmatic, absolutely clear, somewhat hard, where R. is open, disorganized, informal (see also Cage inuu)

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Jasper Johns – on RR

R. was far more sophisticated than J. when they met. Johns didn't know any of the painters, could never have gone to deKooning, for instance, to get a drawing. Says his own work "was mainly negative at that time, being concerned with not doing anything that had been done before." But he doesn't see exactly why R. should have said they gave each other freedom to not start out from Kline and deK every morning. "I shouldn't have thought he needed any help that way. After all, he'd been doing very original work for some time."

Says R. got a great deal of encouragement from Cage. "John is not only perceptive, but optimistic and very generous. If he likes what you're doing, it's a great help."

Johns says they had to do a commercial job about once a month on the average. Otherwise, their life centered pretty much around the studio.

Discounts chance as an element of much importance in R. "At least, ~~xxx~~ chance isn't one of the really interesting things in his work." Says (see also Tworkov) that it's always the artist who makes the final decision, and "a Rauschenberg always looks like a Rauschenberg."

R. was never interested in sports as such. "I have no idea where all those images came from " -- the baseball players, etc.

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Cage-Cunningham (cont)

Cap on Bob and Jasper

The abstract expressionist people were always so miserable, so interested in suffering. Bob and Jasper did away with all that/ They also did away with artists owning things -- cross-hatching, or curves (see Harold Rosenberg's piece last week) -- the whole idea of an artist staking a claim to a certain kind of imagery or form.

"When Bob and Jap were together we had such good times there. I remember thinking I didn't need to have any other friends. Their breakup seemed to me a great deprivation."

Jasper was much quieter in those days.

"Comparing their work seems fruitless, because it diminishes each of them. They are so very different."

John cites a comment of Charles Ives with reference to music, applying it to Jasper: "With Jasper, one is obliged to be more intelligent. People who say his large paintings don't work just are just not capable of working that way themselves."

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Rauschenberg and Johns

Johns

When they moved from Pearl to Front Street, Cage offered to help with his microbus. "In transporting his work, Bob's attitude was that if they suffered any change during the move that was just part of the painting's natural life. Jap's attitude was the reverse -- if something happened to one of his paintings, he would have to repair it. It was very characteristic. The whole element of caution was very close to Jap, and the idea of there being no need for caution was close to Bob."

Cage was immediately responsive to Bob's work but not to Jap's. "The image in Jap's was an enormous obstacle for me at first" -- targets, 5's, flags. Cage feels he came to see Johns' work through Bob's, and that this was mainly because Johns was so completely different from any other kind of painting -- very hard to see.

In Cage s thinking about pieces he will write, Johns corresponds to the Indian idea of Summer/, R. to winter. "The meaning of winter in Indian aesthetics is quiescence -- anything can come into it, and anything can come out of it; it had infinite potential, plus the ability to do nothing at all. The meaning of summer is preservation, and also fullness, with no gaps -- I think that ~~character~~ quality ~~of~~ is characteristic of Jap."

R. and Cunningham Co.

R. has "so far" given in to Merce's notion of a repertoire company during tours. But he ~~exerts~~ exerts a strong pull in the direction of spontaneous, Happening-type performances like the recent one at Big Sur on their last tour, somewhat similar to Black Mtn (Merce was not present). Merce is moving toward spontaneous choreography, but as one

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Gene Moore, Display Director for Tiffanys

Rauschenberg came in one day, fresh from Black Mtn, with blueprints. Moore used them for a big display in all windows of Bonwits (was display man there for 16 years, until two years ago ~~xxxx~~ -- now Tiffanys only). This was the first contact. Later, Moore used R. and Johns regularly, and he says it was "an ideal working relationship." They were highly conscientious, always did the work on time, were utterly dependable. Their work was meticulously executed. Mostly highly realistic simulations of natural settings -- rocks, woods, a highway with telephone poles, trees with ice on limbs, and a swamp scene that was "really slimy, with real water" trees coming out of ooze, feeling of snakes etc.

Moore says Johns was the more meticulous, but that they worked wonderfully together and complemented one another. R. extremely fertile with ideas. Moore would tell them what he wanted and let them work it out their own way, with no interference.

Moore put their paintings in the windows at Bonwits occasionally, not because he liked them (he didn't) but because he felt that the purpose of display was not just to show what you liked but what was going on, a kind of reporting. Says he got plenty of complaints about R.'s work, relatively few about Jasper's. "I just didn't dig Bob's stuff, and I used to kid him about it all the time. Once I remember going down to his studio to see about a job, and Bob said Oh, I want you to see my new painting, and he took me over and showed me an absolutely blank canvas. I said, where is it? But we got along wonderfully."

Advertising Work (Case)

Says Bob and Jap took it "as a perfectly serious thing to which they gave their best efforts." No lefthanded efforts. Painting always uppermost, but when they were on a job they would throw themselves into it absolutely.

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Jasper Johns (on RR)
(12/28/04)

(by 'phone from St. Martins)

What was it in Bob's work and Bob's approach that you found useful? "Well, the first thing was that when I met Bob I wanted to be an artist but I wasn't an artist, and Bob was an artist, in my vocabulary. He was like the first real artist that I had any contact with…"

Trading ideas with him - "That's true. That didn't happen frequently, but it happened. He brought me once the equivalent of a mimeographed map of the United States, and simply gave it to me…I took it as something to work with."

Jasper destroyed his early work in the fall of 1954. Did that have anything to do with the influence of Bob? "It had to do with a change of mind about what art meant. What it meant to be an artist. I'm sure it had something to do with [observing Bob's approach and attitude]. It's very hard to separate it from the natural process of maturing. At the time in my life when Bob and I were close, it was just after I was in the Army, so I was probably 24 years old or something. It's hard to know cause and effect. But certainly he was an important example to me, and watching him work. At the same time, I met John and Merce, and they were similarly influential by their conduct."

His saying Bob had invented more than anyone except Picasso - what did he invent? [Laughs] Well, I could give you some examples. I think that when I said that, I was referring to his complex sense of structure, and how form occurred -- how you made something that had form, and his constant re-investigation of the possibilities. You know, he was at that moment working with paint, canvas, real objects -- such things as light bulbs and three-dimensional structures. It was a fantastically prolific conception of what art was, I think. In the context of that time, it was particularly inventive, if that's the word."

Their work being so profoundly different - "It's certainly different, because we're such different personalities. But we were very close and considerate of one another, and actually were the main audience for a number of years, for one another. So each of us developed an idea about the other, however inaccurate it might have been it had a certain degree of accuracy. So we were able to formulate ideas and to trade ideas and to question what we did. I was allowed to question what he did and he was allowed to question what I did. We were relatively isolated at that time, in society."

What was Jasper's early work like? "Well, it had no coherence…In South Carolina I don't think I had ever seen a painting by a major artist."

Were you both aware that you were breaking new ground? "Well, I was aware that I was becoming an artist. I got rid of certain things in my life and made certain decisions that that's what I was doing. But Bob, as I said earlier, certainly already was an artist. Bob had had shows in Europe, and in New York he had shown in important galleries -- Betty

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Parsons and the Stable -- and was very knowledgeable about the New York art scene. He knew most of the people in it. To me that was all news. It was clear to me -- I of course believed that what Bob was doing was of extreme importance, and of course he believed it.[laughs]. That may have helped to convince me! He had a different kind of imagination from me. I remember once, I was reading Stein's autobiography of Alice Toklas to him, reading it out loud in the studio, and he turned and said, 'One day they'll be writing about us like that.' And that kind of thought had never entered my mind."

The Picasso-Braque parallel - "I don't like that comparison. But as far as differences, our work was very different but compared to other work at the time, our work had similarities. We had a relationship to a kind of general picture about what was going on, I think."

He tried to do a couple of Rauschenbergs? "Yes, I did. Two of them." Bob's asking if he could make a mark in encaustic on Jasper's canvas, and then hitting "the wrong thing," was the only case he recalls of RR trying to do a Johns.

The erased de Kooning - "I think I titled it. He had already done it. I think that over the years, the number of erasers he used has increased! I can't believe the paper would hold up under the number…But at any rate, he had done that. So, there was some occasion when…he decided to show it, and was questioning how to do it, how to present it. And I had gotten -- I don't know what it was called, it was a template that allowed you to do very precise lettering. You would put a needle in the template, and then there was an extension with a pen, and the pen would make the letter with great regularity. And I made the little title for it. The matte for the work was cut out, and this little label was put in. I think I suggested that it be called 'Erased de Kooning.' But that's what it was. I've been reading the new de Kooning biography, it's very interesting. There's lots that I didn't know, and I think it's very well written."

The visit from Leo and Ileana to Bob's studio, did that change your relationship with Bob? "I was not aware of it. It was an odd time, and a lot happened, and there are reports of things happening that I don't remember. I don't know what to say. It actually introduced a kind of excitement into our lives, over a period of time, from that visit and through the first couple of shows at Leo's. Leo called one day and asked did I think Bob could be ready for a show in, I don't know, in a month or something, and I said he could be ready now." [He called you to ask that?] "We shared a telephone, and I answered it."

Has he seen any of Bob's recent work? "No. I haven't seen any of Bob's shows." Any contact with Bob? "Only very slight. The last time was a couple of years ago, when Merce was opening in Brooklyn, and he asked ??? to decide the order of something. I saw him there, and at about the same time, who was it? Penn took a photograph of a group of us, and we met at that studio. At the time he was in a wheel chair."

Jasper's upcoming show at the National Gallery - is it a print show? "I hope not. I don't even know that it's definite. I can't really discuss it. Jeffrey has a particular idea, and I'm not entirely certain what it is. I haven't paid that much attention to it. I questioned