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Robert Rauschenberg and Modernism's (other) Masculinity

Trepess, Harry

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University of Plymouth

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Robert Rauschenberg and Modernism's (other) Masculinity

By

Harry Trepess

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Abstract

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Harry Trepess

My project is concerned with understanding and identifying the possibility of self-censorship, within a queer theory framework, in Robert Rauschenberg's series of Combine works. Starting out by understanding ideas and theoretical concepts behind censorship (specifically Self-censorship, whether subliminal or acknowledged), through the work of previous scholars. Helping to differentiate the various forms censorship can take, to better establish a definition of what it means to self-censor. Which is vital for the ability of identifying the possible presence of this within Rauschenberg's practice during the period he created the Combines. Previous iconographical readings, within a queer theory framework, should form a foundation to work from, to identify different elements within the work. Simultaneously creating an understanding of those elements identified as potential queer signifiers contained in the works. The deconstruction of the combines seeks to comprehend those elements that might constitute Self-censorship, queer signifiers and historical or narrative changes which may have resulted from personal development or, more importantly, attacks on or suggestions of homosexuality levelled at Rauschenberg. After the deconstructions have been performed, combined with the data collected and appropriate analysis, identification of the changes which may have occurred can begin. These trends will then be examined and explicated via North American socio-historical sexual research and through a queer theoretical framework. After which, I shall attempt to draw out those elements that correspond to Self-censorship within Rauschenberg's art. It is hypothesised the self-censorship elements will be more prominent in his later works, when Rauschenberg attempts to conform to societal expectations. The potential implications of this will be discussed.

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Introduction

The theme for this thesis arose from previous research which was mainly concerned with Black Mountain College and their philosophy of teaching interdisciplinary art. I began to study the life and works of one of their many famous students, Robert Milton Ernest Rauschenberg. Whilst continuing my study, I became aware of conflicting references concerning his sexuality. It was a topic, I found, many early scholars would not cover or were willing to engage with this consideration (when) in reading his works.

This thesis will be focused on the idea of censorship and the (possibility) possibly of it being implemented into or onto, Rauschenberg's work. More specifically, it will be concerned with examining his Combine period, lasting a decade, from 1954 until 1964. The combines were assemblages or ready made, consisting of found objects, expressive painting, and collage to form the overall body of work. The phenomenon of censorship will also be examined and deconstructed in order to fully understand and identify its presence. My initial reasoning in picking this period, came from noticing changes over the decade he produced the works. These changes can be seen by a shift in mediums as well as an overall aesthetical appearance over the duration of this period.

In approaching the core literature to this thesis, it will be important to separate them into three themes. Initially by writings relevant about comments on the artist's practice in art history. This will be followed by writings concerned with reading the Combines by previous scholars. Following this, social history of the post-war era and the pressures placed against an outward expression of homosexuality will be explored.

The book titled, Robert Rauschenberg, is a compilation of critical essays on Rauschenberg, mainly featuring scholars, Rosalind Krauss, and Leo Steinberg. It provides great insight into two art historians who look into his artistic practice through the lens of formalism, without considering ideas of sexuality. Instead, they, like the artists of this time, were wrestling with the aging ideas of Modernism and the artistic importance of new artists, in relation to it. Both

take opposing sides to the argument in legitimising (or not) Rauschenberg's work as being high art. Both art historians take up a formalistic approach concerned by visual style, meaning and function. Working around the parameters that had been earlier consolidated by Clement Greenberg. The series of essays written by the two scholars, give insight into Rauschenberg's initial struggle, attempting to emerge against the gain of the macho era of Abstract Expressionism.

In *Materialized Image*, Krauss makes issue with Rauschenberg's visual style. Sticking to her formalistic approach, she attacks the found objects which are a major element to the combines, as "theoretically" undermining "the work's stature as a unique object".¹ Here Krauss is trying to point out the Greenbergian idea of keeping art separate from the everyday. It is problematic to Krauss in the sense of distraction, these everyday elements, to her, lead away from the work being able to justify itself as unique object. Unable to ignore their referential sign posting to the everyday. As well as her angst with his use of collage, being nothing more but a continuation or repetition from Kurt Schwitters, the proclaimed genius of the style. Where she accuses the "collage elements" of baring "little relation to their earlier use in the work of Schwitters or the cubists. But it was collage nonetheless".² Acknowledging Rauschenberg's attempt to change the meaning and function but still failing to shake the repetition of the earlier geniuses of the practice.

In response to Krauss's criticism, Leo Steinberg forms his own arguments to legitimise the combines in a formalist sense. In *Reflections on the state of Criticism (1972)*, he points out the importance of the new picture plane created by Rauschenberg, the flat bed picture plane. He argues that this plane gives "symbolic allusions to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts bulletin boards"³ as well as 'billboards' and 'projection screens.

¹ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Branden Wayne. Joseph. *Robert Rauschenberg (October files; 4)*. MIT Press, 2002. (Rosalind Krauss – *Rauschenberg and the Materialized image* 1974) P.40

² Rauschenberg, Robert, and Branden Wayne. Joseph. *Robert Rauschenberg (October files; 4)*. MIT Press, 2002. (Rosalind Krauss – *Rauschenberg and the Materialized image* 1974) P.40

³ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Branden Wayne. Joseph. *Robert Rauschenberg (October files; 4)*. MIT Press, 2002. (Rosalind Krauss – *Rauschenberg and the Materialized image* 1974) P.28

Highlighting the fluidity and ever-changing appearance these surfaces exhibit or, as he puts it “any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed and impressed – whether coherently or in confusion”.⁴ He then justifies further, that the horizontal acts as a staple of the everyday, and so utilising this helps act as the bridge between the everyday life and art. In doing so this provides a legitimacy for the found objects to be refunctioned away from their original value. The objects and pictures, he states, “kept referring back to the horizontals on which we walk and sit, work and sleep”.⁵ This was in reference to a reading of the Pilgrim Combine. Between the two scholars, whose writings were created closer to the creations of Rauschenberg works we can see how they both address the use of the picture plane and the authenticity or originality of his stylistic practice. They also delve into the idea of Rauschenberg’s use of the everyday and its legitimacy in art history. As opposed to Greenberg’s, and ultimately abstract expressionism’s, complete separation from it.

Art Since 1900 is another book that looks into Rauschenberg, Hal Foster refers to William Rubin’s thought on Rauschenberg’s importance or legacy. Foster claims that “Rubin saw Dada in part through the prism of the objects and assemblages that emerged in the Rauschenberg- Johns moment”.⁶ Similarly, to Krauss, the issue of originality is questioned however considering its more contemporary creation, in comparison to the essays of Krauss and Steinberg. Rauschenberg’s legitimacy seems almost assumed when referenced for his impact onto fine art by art historian in this literature. More comments on his legacy came from Hal Foster, speaking on *Commodity Sculpture*, where he expresses how Rauschenberg’s assemblages had “provided a sculptural licence to the deployment of

⁴Rauschenberg, Robert, and Branden Wayne. Joseph. *Robert Rauschenberg (October files; 4)*. MIT Press, 2002. (Rosalind Krauss – *Rauschenberg and the Materialized image* 1974) P.29

⁵ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Branden Wayne. Joseph. *Robert Rauschenberg (October files; 4)*. MIT Press, 2002. (Rosalind Krauss – *Rauschenberg and the Materialized image* 1974) P.28

⁶Foster, Hal. 2004. *Art since 1900: modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*. London: Thames & Hudson.p383

photography as counterfigures to theory of plasticity".⁷ Pointing out how influential Rauschenberg was in transgressing away from a focus on perfect 3d forms that existed within sculpture before him.

The book does briefly refer to Rauschenberg and his first known male partner, Cy Twombly.

This is more in relation to the relationship and impact of their Black Mountain College teacher Josef Albers, who, Rauschenberg states "I consider Albers the most important teacher I've ever had, and I'm sure he considered me one of his poorest students".⁸ The

passage also notes down how influential Black Mountain College was to American art.

Calling it 'the Crucible where a constructionist impulse, modernist focused on vision, material

form, and structure, was combined with a Dadaist impulse or an avant-gardist pledge to

transgress play, in a way triggered many significant artists of the fifties and sixties'.⁹ This

amalgamation alludes to Rauschenberg's practice, the Dadaist, and his transgressions on

traditionalism, are both elements that encapsulate his early practice and importance to art

history. A comparison between Rauschenberg and the Abstract Expressionists is made

within the book. The passage takes a look into mark making. Utilising an interview by Emile

de Antono with Rauschenberg. He exclaims that "the Abstract Expressionists and myself,

what we had in common was touch".¹⁰ Going on to separate himself from their 'pessimism'

and 'editorializing' as he characterises them as having to feel sorry for themselves in order to

be good at their practice. Not only does this source provide commentary from various

important art historians it also gives first-hand evidence from Rauschenberg and therefore

insight into not only his thought process but understanding of the art world and history.

⁷ Foster, Hal. 2004. *Art since 1900: modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*. London: Thames & Hudson. P.792

⁸ Foster, Hal. 2004. *Art since 1900: modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*. London: Thames & Hudson. P.402

⁹ Foster, Hal. 2004. *Art since 1900: modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*. London: Thames & Hudson. P.402

¹⁰ Foster, Hal. 2004. *Art since 1900: modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*. London: Thames & Hudson. P.947

The Combines have been widely read and deconstructed since their creation, by many art historians. Initial readings took on a formalist read, being the almost default approach in reading modernist works, it was not necessarily the best paradigm to decipher the self-assemblage Combine works. As a result of moving into the post-modernist era.

Iconographical approaches have arguably become the most important and widely used method in trying to undercover these highly referential works.

One contemporary art historian who uses a purely iconographical method is Catherine Craft. In her recent book, *Essay. In Robert Rauschenberg - Phaidon Focus*. She applies an iconographical read to, 'Untitled' (1954), sometimes referred to as Plymouth Rock. She applies the technique to pick out, 'A mirror's placement at a right angle to the bottom edge of the young man's image' to which she puts forward, it 'playfully suggests Narcissus at the pool'.¹¹ Although she doesn't delve deeper into why Rauschenberg is suggesting Narcissus. Just by linking the mythical story, she herself is hinting at the works auto-biographical function of Rauschenberg staring into his reflection. She further pushes this auto-biographical idea by reading into a letter from his then young son, that is collaged into the Combine. She writes that this provides 'a glimpse into a personal diary'¹² of the artist, adding weight to the argument.

Another example of a purely iconographical and again fairly contemporary read is by Robert Hughes, whilst reading the work *Monogram* (1959) for the *Gaudian* newspaper, reads secondary messages via iconography, that the goat and tyre, both central objects in the work. Explain that 'Goats are the oldest metaphors of priapic energy. This one, with its paint-smutched thrusting head and its body stuck halfway through the encircling tyre, is of male homosexual love in modern culture: The Satyr in the Sphincter'.¹³ Whilst Hughes' work was not concerned by seeking out Rauschenberg's sexuality but more of a biographical read of

¹¹Craft, Catherine, and Robert Rauschenberg. 2013. *Robert Rauschenberg*. London; New York : Phaidon, 2013. P48

¹² Craft, Catherine, and Robert Rauschenberg. 2013. *Robert Rauschenberg*. London; New York : Phaidon, 2013. P.48

¹³ Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New* (1981), New York, 1987. P.335

signposts within his Combines. It is clear that Rauschenberg's expression of sexuality can be read on different level, as other scholarly literature demonstrates.

Adding to the use of Iconography, other art historians have attempted to apply a queer framework over it. Jonathan Katz demonstrates this in his work *Committing the Perfect Crime: Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art*. Katz's idea of the perfect crime, comes from how he sees the Combines as expressing homosexuality, 'the crime'. Something that at the time, was illegal in the United States but also publicly tabooed. How it was 'perfect' was in the method he used to commit it, deploying a coded language, which could be read differently by multiple audiences. The 'general audience, an audience among a circle of friends, and audiences of each other... engage different reading strategies.'¹⁴ He further explains that this 'self-conscious secreting of some highly privatised meanings directed to a very narrow audience, an audience sometimes no larger than one individual'¹⁵. An example Katz gives is of *Miniature*, created around the time John's and Rauschenberg's relation started to form, a traveling set for one of Merce Cunningham's dance show. This would be seen by audiences very openly. Katz believes it hints at their relationship 'in the selection of the comic, which illustrates two male figures...hiding beneath a stage as the panel sets the scene with the headline "and under the stage." One of the male figure's whispers to the other "hey suppose they spot us under here?" And the other reassures him, saying "they won't, they'll all be looking at the zebra"¹⁶. Katz adds weight by pointing out how this is similar to comic strip used to reference Johns in the work *Yoicks(1954)*. In Katz's own words, he explains why the 'Assemblage is the perfect medium for committing the perfect crime, the one where you do not get caught- caught in authoriality,

¹⁴ P53 Katz, Jonathan D. "'Committing the Perfect Crime": Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art." *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (2008): 38-53. Accessed April 19, 2021.

¹⁵ P45 Katz, Jonathan D. "'Committing the Perfect Crime": Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art." *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (2008): 38-53. Accessed April 19, 2021.

¹⁶ P45 Katz, Jonathan D. "'Committing the Perfect Crime": Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art." *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (2008): 38-53. Accessed April 19, 2021.

intentionality, or worse still, self-revelation, not least when the subject in question includes desires actively persecuted under conventional social codes.¹⁷

The overall conclusion that Katz reaches whilst applying a queering of iconography is that 'Rauschenberg's assemblages thus reveal a social historicity even when they seem most random and readerly, for the vision of selfhood they offer is profoundly cold war, which is to say, bifurcated, split between public and private.'¹⁸ What can be gathered from Katz's work is that the Combines contain many complex layers, of which not all can be easily accessed without the correct understanding of its intended audiences. Not to mention, that an understanding of who it's intended audiences were should also be gained.

Further research found an example where this framework had also been applied in conjunction with an iconographical read. Lisa Wainwright wrote an essay, compiled into the work *Not at home: the suppression of domesticity in modern art and architecture*. She read into the fabric work deployed by Rauschenberg as possessing a feminine value historically. Describing these 'decorative fabrics Rauschenberg employed' as bringing 'to light the flip side of modernism, its debased other: the feminine, the commodity, the decorative, the queer... a Depression-era mother who arranges her dress making patterns so tightly on the fabric before her that she was the talk of Port Arthur (his home town)'.¹⁹ Relying on Freudian theory, here she attempts to demonstrate the close relationship between mother and son as an expression of queerness. In another reading of the Satellite Combine (1956) she furthers this Freudian idea, reading that, 'Erotic signs are set against a backdrop of domestic familiarity so that Rauschenberg seems to reveal himself to mother'.²⁰ The reliance on Freud

¹⁷ P45 Katz, Jonathan D. "'Committing the Perfect Crime": Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art." *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (2008): 38-53. Accessed April 19, 2021.

¹⁸ P51 Katz, Jonathan D. "'Committing the Perfect Crime": Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art." *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (2008): 38-53. Accessed April 19, 2021.

¹⁹ Reed, Christopher. *Not at home: the suppression of domesticity in modern art and architecture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996

²⁰ *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010). P348-365

becomes slightly problematic after new ideas on gender and sexuality had arisen, such as Judith Butler's *Gender Troubles* (1990). That used the ideas of Michel Foucault to view gender and sexuality as a performance, put in simple terms.

More Contemporary art historians have built on this approach. In particular, Tom Folland's work: *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration*. This source is important as it demonstrates a contemporary examining of the Combines. More crucially, it demonstrates a re-examining of how to approach an application of a queer framework onto an iconographical reading of the Combines.

Folland first investigates previous scholars' readings of the early Combines, he notes that they mostly use an iconographical approach. Noting that Jonathan Katz employs this referential approach, in relation to 'photo graphic reproductions and comic strips', to uncover signposts that "directly allude to his identification as a gay man" in the closeted world of post war America. Folland quickly then points out another scholar, Lisa Wainwright, who similarly followed this iconographical path and who, he claims, was less gainful 'in following this potentially rich trail'. Using an Example of Wainwright putting forward the idea that 'socks were sexual tokens within gay culture'.²¹ Contextualising it by their placement 'against a backdrop of domestic familiarity so that Rauschenberg seems to reveal himself to his mother, broaching the subject of sexuality within the domestic frame'.²² Folland argues, that these approaches whilst using an appropriate paradigm in deconstructing the works, are misled by relying on a 'anachronistic conception of the "gay" closet'²³ in attempting to uncover queer subjectivity within the Combines.

Folland notices a gap in knowledge in the readings of previous scholars. He puts forward that the major element of decorative fabrics has been seemingly ignored. Explaining that this

²¹*Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), P.348-365

²² *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 348-365

²³ *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 348-365

was “Taken up neither by the supporters of gay iconographic readings nor by the postmodernists, these decorative fabrics overwhelm the use of photographs and reproductions in Rauschenberg’s works, the more so that they constituted the major arsenal of his Combine works produced during the period under consideration here (early Combines) - a group of work both small and large in which Rauschenberg first began to plot a sustained use of decorative fabrics in the years from 1953 through 1956”.²⁴ Folland goes on to identify the different appearances of this fabric element over various early Combines. Describing that the ‘1950s would range from shawl paisley and brocaded fabric and lace to doilies, scarves, nylon, and curtain fragments, in some cases incorporating the most cliched still-life imagery of apples or plums woven into the fabric or postcard images and reproduction of photographs showing the detritus of urban life.’²⁵ After highlighting the various forms the fabric work takes, Folland attempts to read these fabric signposts. He does this by pointing out that the very use of them goes against everything that Greenberg’s Modernism encapsulated through the Abstract expressionists. Which, strongly held characteristics of heroic masculinity, whilst remaining completely apolitical and detached from the everyday. The fabrics to Folland, bring ‘to light the flip side of modernism, its debased other: the feminine, the commodity, the decorative, the queer’.²⁶ In other words, the queerness within the works that he is trying to read exists not as a direct reference, but was being expressed through post-war and modernist counterculture by the ‘strategic use of the decorative, decadent’ and ‘feminine’.²⁷

Without Folland’s revisiting of the 1950’s closet (or gay culture of the era) it would have been impossible for these past scholars to have unpicked the queer signposts this major element contains. As their reliance on ideas of the closet, relied upon views constructed around

²⁴ *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 348-365

²⁵ *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 348-365

²⁶ *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 348-365

²⁷ *Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 348-365

writings that emerged in the 60s and not the post-war era.²⁸ It also builds on Katz highlighting the many audiences Rauschenberg was communicated to on various levels. Folland provides a more contextualised view on queer culture during this era.

A major source which best established an art historical investigation into censorship akin to the time period was *The Outlaw Representation, Censorship, and homosexuality in the twentieth-century American art*, by Richard Meyer. In this work Meyer covers the iconic Pop artist, Andy Warhol, amongst others. The research is concerned by the ideas or instances of censored expressions of homosexuality within Warhol's works. This source would help outline already established techniques, in tackling censorship also overlaid with a queered framework in reading the works.

In his book, Meyer first employed the use of social history to look into an incident of possible censorship. The source he employs is an account of Andy Warhol's early rejection from the Tanager Cooperative Gallery, Meyer writes about Philip Pearlstein's (a fellow artist) recollection of this event and his opinion on the cause of Warhol's early rejection of his work. In reference to one of the works, a drawing of a group of boys kissing, he states that "the subject matter was treated too...too aggressively, too importantly, that it should be sort of a matter-of-fact and self-explanatory"²⁹

Meyer points out the issue of social attitudes during this era, and as again described by Pearlstein, it was "totally unacceptable, as far as subject goes...it was embarrassing. The men in the gallery were all macho—you know, De Kooning was the big dog ...it was the end of the era, but it was still very strong."³⁰ Here we can see Pearlstein referring to the lasting influence which the Abstract Expressionist still held in the city and its artworld, even as style was petering out. Whilst being well known for their masculine or 'macho' attitudes towards

²⁸ Robert Rauschenberg's *Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration* Author(s): Tom Folland Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 348-365

²⁹ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.95

³⁰ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.96

art, and life in general, it would appear to leave little to no room, in fashionable desire, for works that contradicted this with expressions of femininity.

Meyers reveals that there was 'no formal explanation for the Tanager's rejection'. Only what was at the time, a private conversation between Warhol and Pearlstein. This has since been heavily relied upon as it entered the public sphere as the only context on the event. Meyer points to the fact that this reliance on one person's memory, creates a fairly unstable anecdotal source to lay a foundation on. As it brings up other questions on the context that Warhol created these in. Not just this but also where he gained the confidence to attempt publicly exhibiting them. This pushes Meyers to look closer at another area of early censorship of Warhol's work. Choosing to examine the 'commercial production of the 1950's, between the art he displayed (or tried to display) in galleries and that which he was paid to create for ad campaigns and department store windows.'³¹ Meyer brings up an argument by Michael Bronski who argued for an idea of "camp talk". This is the idea of homosexual men using coded language to communicate about 'personal or sexual life'³², similar to Katz's work on a queer coded language within the Combines. The example given, is about Gay men whilst in public, implementing women's names or pronouns into a conversation, in place of their own or the man they are referring to. Here Meyer begins to implement a queered framework (or lens) onto his iconographical reading of the chosen works. Meyer demonstrates Warhol's use of this coded practise through utilising a 'figure of a female circus performer to stand as his surrogate'³³. He, through the use of iconography, further investigates the figure. This reveals tattoos of 'consumer trademarks and product designs, into Miss Clairol and Chanel No.5, into Schwepps and Pepsodent'³⁴. This, to Meyer, demonstrates a 'sense of unconventional femininity onto a flyer whose purpose was to

³¹ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.99

³² Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.104

³³ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.104

³⁴ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.104

advertise his professional skills and creative sensibility...Warhol's flyers linked his identity as a commercial illustrator to a campy sense of his own femininity'³⁵. In other words, Meyer, through his reading of the works, helps support this idea of "camp talk". As he is able to unpick the coded language which Warhol has interwoven, to express his 'campy... femininity', through use of iconography overlaid by a queer framework. It has enabled him to identify these signposts that may have otherwise been read for their other more obvious values of consumerism and commodity. Ultimately missing the queer self-expression intended by Warhol.

Contributing to this, another observation made by Meyer, is that Warhol 'consciously suppressed the markings of homosexuality in his early Pop art'³⁶. Admittedly here he, to a point, follows another art historian, Caroline Jones in making this argument. Jones states that Warhol suppressed signs of homosexuality in favour of silence and ambiguity; an effacement and suppression which was not attempted before (his production of Pop art)³⁷. Meyer comments that this early suppression was partial and he, rather, 'smuggled it, all but imperceptibly, into selected paintings'³⁸.

Meyer's work helps give an understanding in the social pressures applied to artists throughout the twentieth century, attempting to openly express homosexuality. The book covers three artists over the century: Paul Cadmus, Andy Warhol, and Robert Mapplethorpe. Andy Warhol, in terms of queer social history, is the most important in investigating Rauschenberg and the Combines as it covers an extremely similar post-war period and environment of New York city.

Coupled with Folland's work, the literature provides a strong template on how to effectively apply a queer theory onto iconography. By forming an understanding of a queer social

³⁵Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.105

³⁶Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.128

³⁷Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.128

³⁸Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.128

history which surrounded the artist and their works of the time. It provides context to the lens of a homosexual man during the post-war period. The lens is important as it enables a better use of iconography, as post-war queer cultural elements can be legitimately identified with this foundation.

In terms of laying out this thesis, these core texts will help support the idea that coded expressions of homosexuality are embedded within the overtly auto-biographical Combines. This in turn will give a glimpse into how both forms of power can function over an artist's practice. In this insistence it will be argued that normalised power has forced acts of self-censorship over Rauschenberg's practice, and that this can be visually, seen over the duration of the Combine period. Where it is highlighted by a shift in established queer elements disappearing from the overall composition of the works.

Chapter 1

Censorship has ultimately existed since civilisation began. In recorded history its application and acknowledgement of it can be traced back to ancient times. As a phenomenon it can serve either side of our contemporary western societal moralities, moulding and shaping consumers of knowledge into ideological parameters, imposed by the censor. This then highlights what we deem intrinsic to the fabric of a culture, either in an attempt to create, conserve, or even to evolve the said culture.

In this thesis, it is important to address the foundation of energy that is a synonymous part of censorship. The phenomenon of censorship ultimately relies upon an underlying directional force, without which censorship could not function, this force is provided by what we know of as power. After identifying this, we should now begin to seek an understanding of what power is, and more significantly, how it interacts, functions and ultimately influences our everyday lives. I believe that providing a clear understanding of power, will place this thesis into an even more transparent position in comprehending censorship. In order to do this, I will put forward and apply the teachings of the majorly influential, postmodernist French philosopher, Paul-Michel Foucault (1926-84). Whilst I will rely on his ideas quite substantially, I will balance this out with other important scholars and their views of power in the twentieth century. From this we can then begin to look back at the earlier historiographical investigation into how and why censorship, was exercised, from Ancient western societies to a more recent time but in line with this thesis' main subject's historical existence. Then, begin to apply Foucault's power structures onto these aforementioned historical events, to similarly see how power functions underneath the actions of censorship. Foucault helped introduce a reimagining of how we view power throughout our lives, in the postmodern era. He put forward a link between power and knowledge, suggesting the source of this knowledge can be found from science.

Foucault's work, *Punishment and Discipline* sets itself out around a significant shift in how

western societies reproached their criminal codes and punishment. Foucault points to the removal of violence and torture from the agenda in punishing societies criminals. With this being replaced by a softer, more virtuous form of punishment, in issuing prison sentences. He argues that this shift had merely mirrored the change in societal rule, rather than follow a liberal narrative of enlightenment or pursuit of a new humanitarian outlook. Western societies had moved on from the absolute power wielded by a monarch, into a state ruled by their bourgeoisie, who possessed differing agendas to their predecessors whilst holding onto the power. Foucault argues that the middle class held successfully held power by creating new a subjectivity, with a two-pronged approach. Firstly, by turning the citizen into a lesser threatening individual whilst being made politically subordinate to the bourgie class. Secondly, by giving the individual an identity or a personhood, dictated by their behaviour and personality in finding a true self. This is whereby he argues, one is trapped under this power through social and institutional definitions of normality. Foucault challenges claims about the self and liberty, that had been previously suggested during the enlightenment and romantic era.³⁹

To expand on the relevance of science as a source of knowledge, we need to consider the historical shifts in western reasoning. The age of enlightenment, which occurred mainly during the eighteenth century, found its initial sparks during the previous century. Two of the majorly notorious thinkers of this era were figures, such as Englishman, Isaac Newton, who sowed the seeds for modern day mechanics, where he provided what we understand today as Newton's laws of motion and that of gravity, all published (in Latin) in his 1687 paper, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, with the English language copy being published during the enlightenment period in 1728. The second thinker was, of course, Frenchman, René Descartes, who, amongst his many accomplishments, famously declared "I Think therefore I am"⁴⁰. This signifies definite evidence for the change in scholars'

³⁹ Schwan, Anne, and Stephen Shapiro. "Overview." In *How to Read Foucault's Discipline and Punish*, 11-13. London: Pluto Press, 2011.

⁴⁰ DESCARTES, RENE. PRINCIPLES OF PHILOSOPHY. SMK Books, 2018.

comprehension of applying a different base of rationality onto how one can view and work within the world. This period in western history dramatically pushed western Europe into a huge cultural shift, undermining the pre-existing and dominating religious institutions of the previous centuries, toppling the churches' monopoly in thinking, both Catholic and Protestant. Therefore, pushing away from the religious reasoning which had previously been considered a bastion of knowledge and a set base for logic, into the dawn of western rational scientific principles that we have become familiar with, in contemporary times.

Foucault suggests that power exists in two categories, these two distinctions are partitioned out as 'repressive' and 'normalised' power. He highlights that the 'repressive' form of power, is the most commonly thought of and seen as being the traditional functioning of power. This type is the most visible of the two as it is exercised on the back of threats of violence.

Anecdotal examples of this can be seen in the judicial system, with a judge sentencing a criminal to jail, as a last resort of punishment for their crime. Historically this power has been exercised via military actions, in conquest or subjugation of another nation or realm, for perhaps access and control over a resource, after failing in other techniques towards achieving this goal. Initially, these may have been under the guise of diplomacy or espionage, for example. Sending in the army would be a last resort for the oppressor to fulfil their will and complete their goal, for a resource. This can be seen for cases of subduing a domestic revolution against the government's philosophy in governance. A contemporary and perhaps a slightly more civil example, lies within a workplace environment, where an employee actively opposes their bosses' instructions on the direction of a project. They would now be subject to the bosses' 'repressive' power over them, whether just or not, by threats of dismissal or just directly enforcing their removal from the company. Still this does not exclude the eventual threat of possible violence towards them, if their will is to stay, they will ultimately face, or be threatened with, physical ejection. An example much closer to home, is that of parental 'repressive' power; that which a parent holds over their children. The child is adamant about having a new toy, but the parent does not mutually feel this way

and so overrides their desire, with further challenges to this authority making way for the eventual threats of punishment and discipline. Ultimately, when this type of power is put in place, its goal is to challenge and block a person's will, so that they completely fall in line with that of the oppressors.⁴¹

As strong and visible as 'repressive' power may seem, it really is the absolute inferior to its counterpart, 'normalised' power, it being employed as a last resort or 'plan b'. Therefore, its prestige is automatically questionable, when, in comparison, we start to look at what Foucault put forward as 'normalised' power. This other form of power, he alludes to, is one that no one person can free themselves from its grip, nor does it discriminate by affecting each person equally. 'Normalised' power helps shape one's will, this mainly occurs from what society has taught us.⁴² Sources for this, in our early lives especially, are most apparent from our parents and schools. This is not to say that it ends after childhood, within our adult lives, for example, universities, hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, the press, and even adverts, all continue to exercise power over us. In other words, it exists everywhere, and these sources are integral in unconsciously helping to construct our desires, beliefs and views. Foucault used this to question how free you really can consider yourself to be. He suggests that if sources of knowledge are helping to construct our will, then our free will is limited to just that, the parameters that have been imposed onto us through 'normalised' power. This, therefore, leaves room for thought about the reality of a completely true you, whilst 'repressive' power belongs to institutions and specific areas of life. More importantly, Foucault tells us that power cannot be separated from science or knowledge⁴³. To expand on how this type of power affects everyone equally, we can revisit an earlier analogy for 'repressive' power, where in the workplace a boss or manager may impose their repressive power onto an employee. Both are subject to 'normalised power', by the way in which society has guided or taught them to perform in relation to their role. The boss believes he is

⁴¹ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

⁴² Schwan, Anne, and Stephen Shapiro. "Overview." In *How to Read Foucault's Discipline and Punish*

⁴³ Schwan, Anne, and Stephen Shapiro. "Overview." In *How to Read Foucault's Discipline and Punish*

functioning in the way a boss should from his societal shaping, and just as his superior does, the employee acts the way in which he perceives an employee should. To put it more clearly, everyone in whatever part of a hierarchical structure, has been given, via society, a belief of how they should function in their role. ⁴⁴

Since establishing an understanding of power, it is now plausible to start stitching back together its relationship to censorship, along the interwoven fabric on which they reside. Moving on from the use of a metaphorical application, it seems logical to apply this framework of viewing power, onto documented real life events. Following this, we can apply this framework to fairly recent and extensively historically recorded sources. This will enable a quicker grasp of the understanding of how power interacts and structures itself firstly through these sources, before we move onto the evidence that is most closely related to the thesis' main topic. Whilst here, for further reference, it is worth noting that although these examples may not be situated in the country that Rauschenberg lived and worked under, and so do not hold an identical structure of ideology and governmental arrangement, they are all coinciding within a similar period of time, to that of his early life, they are also prime examples of the workings of censorship, and of course power, active within two other ideological approaches in the makeup of a civilisation of this time.

Delving into the more recent history of the 20th century, two major powers, both of whom held strong ideological and domestic imperium, started during the early to mid-half of the century. They both hold some the clearest of examples of the way in which censorship is commonly thought of in contemporary thinking, both applying similar methodologies in their processes. A common understanding of censorship is thought of as a work being destroyed or edited, post-creation; or colloquially speaking, to take the proverbial black marker pen and redacting information from the source. Therefore, this, by definition, can be viewed as imposed censorship.

⁴⁴ Schwan, Anne, and Stephen Shapiro. "Overview." In *How to Read Foucault's Discipline and Punish*

The Third Deutsches Reich, led by the infamous Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (or the Nazi Party) and their now vilified leader Adolf Hitler, demonstrated their own use of imposed censorship, usually transparent and clear to the extent of its application. The most notorious case for the visual arts lays with 'Entartete Kunst', the Nazi's labelling of works as Degenerate Art.⁴⁵ Generally, these works were viewed as, culturally, anti-Germanic, most of what is today considered Modernist art and the movements that encompassed it throughout this artistic period. This especially included the German-created Dadaists, Expressionists, Die Brücke (The Bridge), Der blaue Reiter (the blue horsemen).⁴⁶ Artists who practised in these, or, and other modernist styles, were forbidden to do so and could only continue their artistic careers down the prescribed route, set by Hitler and Joseph Goebbels. They began their purge of the German art world through reform of museum employees and directors, replacing anyone who did not adhere to their new direction and, of course, anyone of Jewish heritage.

Ironically, even artists who supported the party were not safe from the Nazi's enlightenment of culture. Emil Nolde was one of the early German expressionists, a movement that did have support from the Party in its early years. However, this support faded around 1934, Nolde had over one thousand works removed from view, and he even had his painting taken down from display in Goebbels' own home.⁴⁷ Goebbels was an initial supporter of the movement, which many supported for its mystical Germanic themes and a distortion of reality, accompanied by strong emotion. This may have fitted in well with the Italian Fascists and their Stato d'animo (or Mood). Regardless of this, the German National socialists drifted towards the ideals of the Volkisch movement (emphasising the importance of the native folklore and the romanticism surrounding it). Prussian education minister, Bernhard Rust, also a fan of Nolde, ordered a halt to the printing of a pro-Modernist speech, written by the then director of the Berlin National gallery, Alois Schardt. This later led to an inspection of

⁴⁵ Krell, Jonathan F. "Michel Tournier's "Degenerate Art"." *Dalhousie French Studies* 31 (1995): 139-56

⁴⁶ Barnstone, Deborah Ascher. *Beyond the Bauhaus: Cultural Modernity in Breslau, 1918-33*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016 P.13

⁴⁷ Jones, Derek. *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*. London: Routledge, 2015.

the galleries' 'modern' collection, resulting in Schardt's ordered resignation, courtesy of Rust. Schardt was still relatively new to the position, with his predecessor (Ludwig Justi) being forced out in 1933 by the newly passed laws for the restoration of the professional civil service. It was not only Goebbels who was hesitant in declaring any opposition toward Modern art. Hitler, also, only gradually moved towards his opposition against modernism.⁴⁸ As with my earlier investigation into the Roman empire and in almost all civilisations, Machiavellian-style political infighting was rife within the third Reich. Although Goebbels may have had eminent political currency, being head of the Reich ministry for public enlightenment and propaganda, the party was in a huge debate over Modernism's place in the Reich, with various other prominent figures also using their political currency to fight the debate. One such figure, Herman Goring, known for clashing with Goebbels, ordered on the 11th of April 1933, the search of the Bauhaus on the pretence that the internationally revered modernist institution was a 'Bastion for subversives'⁴⁹. Goebbels too used his ministerial powers to back the NSD-Studentenbund, which was a body of pro-modernist students who wrote articles for newspapers, journals, and newsletters.⁵⁰ The party was ultimately split on the issue with one side, almost figure headed by the self-proclaimed 'party philosopher'⁵¹ Alfred Rosenberg, favouring the Volkisch ideals and so standing against modernist art. Whilst others, like Goebbels, opposed this, he was not alone, with Hitler himself even insulting the Volkisch side as 'Teutonic non-sense'⁵², during one of his grandiose, Nuremberg congress speeches in 1934. Without highlighting every incident of bureaucratic wrangling, that was taken by the likes of Goebbels and Rosenberg to bolster support for each side of the debate, the party eventually steered towards its final agenda against modernist art and, in despite of which side of the debate, these mentioned actions laid within

⁴⁸ Petropoulos, Jonathan. *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*. Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. P.20

⁴⁹ Petropoulos, Jonathan. *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*. P.23

⁵⁰ Petropoulos, Jonathan. *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* P.30

⁵¹ Petropoulos, Jonathan. *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*.P.35

⁵² Petropoulos, Jonathan. *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* P.23

and helped towards it. We can still witness these actions as attempts at imposed censorship, being -for or -against modernism's cultural place in German society at this time. The infighting surrounding this issue was ultimately a struggle for control over how their culture was to be shaped. The extent to which those involved used their political strength to sway this subject suggests that they took the issue seriously enough and so were certainly aware of the power that censorship holds. How much of their own political aspirations were entangled in their stance is not for this thesis to examine but it is worth mentioning, as it helps towards addressing questions as to what could drive someone to employ censorship, in this case, perhaps for selfish political gains.

Nevertheless, the Nazi party ultimately took a stance against modernist art and united, took lengthy actions against it. The pinnacle of this was the curation of what was considered degenerate art, in the *Ausstellung Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate art exhibition) of November 1937. Housed in Munich, at the Institute of Archaeology, situated in the Hofgarten of the city, the exhibition was juxtaposed in location with the recently tailor-made museum (1933), the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* (House of Germany art), now known more humbly as the *Haus der Kunst* (House of art). The building itself was purpose-built as a grandiose, imposing monument to showcase what the Nazi regime deemed as Germanic art. The building was fitted out with tall ceilings, marble runs, white walls and single row hangings. This was an early example of the use of the "white cube" (quote) and the power it held in adding a more commanding value to the works within a neutral or pure surrounding. All this was in stark contrast to the *Ausstellung Entartete Kunst*, with its dark, narrow rooms, and crude slogans scrawled on the walls which attacked different aspects of society that the regime saw as a degenerative problem. Digging deeper, we can see that the exhibition was mainly curated from six hundred and fifty paintings and sculptures which were confiscated from 32

galleries⁵³, adding another, illegal, negative layer of impression against the works and showing the initial action of censorship. An advert to the exhibition smugly claimed that “the works we see in this interesting show were once taken seriously”⁵⁴. The works were given an unforgivingly hostile atmosphere, as a pretence for the viewer to interact with, before they could even begin to experience the, now undermined, modernist works. What we can begin to gather from this social manipulation, is the beginnings of a falsehood, for a call in support of outright censorship of these kinds of works, aiming to leave no doubt in the mind of its visitors, that the regime’s claims were legitimate.

From these earlier examples, we can clearly identify and separate the two types of power being exercised. To start with, there is the example of the Nazis' actions in applying censorship and exercising their repressive power. In the case of Nolde, it demonstrates a clear instance of repressive power, as the state has ordered his works to be physically removed, even against the will of a significant member of the Nazi party. The very real threat of imprisonment and the underlying threat of violence that were readily enforced during the Nazi period, points to how this removal was repressive in nature. Not to mention Rust’s oppressive attempt of censorship, by a halting pro-modernism speech. He also could be noted here as attempting to sow the seeds of a normalising power in discouraging future public support of modernism. We are also given a small glimpse into how the repressive laws, enacted, systematically utilised this second-rate oppressive power in favour of, the new state ideology. Whilst we are well versed on the Nazis’ imprisonment and concentration camp programmes as a final destination from within a highly policed society. One that monitored its citizens, not only through the various state institutions which were either secret

⁵³ Peters, Olaf, Lüttichau Mario, Ines Schlenker, Müller Karsten, Aya Soika, Bernhard Fulda, Karl Stamm, Ernst Ploil, Ruth Heftrig, and Olaf Peters. *Degenerate Art The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany 1937*. München: Prestel, 2014.

⁵⁴ Dickerson, Phoebe. “Review: 'Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937', Neue Galerie, New York.” *Apollo Magazine*, April 7, 2014. <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/degenerate-art-attack-modern-art-nazi-germany-1937-neue-galerie-new-york/>.

or openly operating but also by law abiding citizens. Regardless of the extent they believed in their state ideology, this adds another layer of paranoia towards the threat of arrest, imprisonment and ultimately violence.

Again The Nazi government demonstrated their use of oppressive power over the German art world on many occasions. The notorious Die Ausstellung "Entartete Kunst " exhibition of 1937, saw a curation of works that had been an earlier subject of oppressive confiscation. Not only was this censorship immediately oppressive, but it was later mixed with attempts to again lay the seeds of a normalised way of viewing art according to their state philosophy. Re-exhibiting these works may seem like a step in the wrong direction in halting Germany from engaging with modernist styles. However, as we have already seen, they attempted to subvert the viewers appreciation of it and most crucially control the narrative.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) came to the beginning of its formation following the October 1917 revolution, removing Alexander Kerensky's provisional government which itself had replaced the recently abdicated Tsar Nicholas II. During the Great War, Russia's ill prepared and unmodernised army had been battered to almost breaking point, helping to disillusion Russian civilians with a war that had also left them with major food shortages. All this before a long and divisive civil war that lasted almost five bloody years, eventually leading to Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) and his Bolshevik party to form the USSR, in October 25th, 1922. During this turmoil saw the creation and militarisation of the party, through Leon Trotsky's Red army, which the formation of arguably saved the revolution during 1920. Karl Kraus, a highly regarded Austrian writer of the time, pointed to the irony of this, jokingly stating, 'Who would have expected that of Herr Bronstein from Cafe Central!'⁵⁵, referring to Trotsky's real surname, Bronstein, and his time spent in exile, when he frequented Vienna's Café Central, amongst many other significant, or soon to be,

⁵⁵ Žižek, Slavoj. *Less than Nothing* Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism. London: Verso, 2013. P784

figures in Europe. During this time, he painted the figure of a 'gentile and loquacious'⁵⁶ man... well, for those who were not overly critical of him and his politics. After his transformation it was clear of his military organisational capabilities and that they were effective. However, this efficiency has later been accused of laying an intrinsic base for other political groups to practice their own terror for imperium. Ernst Nolte, a conservative German historian, whose work focused on Fascism and Communism, pointed to the Italian Fascists who, he claims, used the Bolsheviks as a 'school in repressive techniques'⁵⁷. During the 'red terror' of the civil war, the Bolsheviks also modelled their tactics from the French revolution of the 18th century. They sought to suppress any counterrevolutionaries and punish any red army deserters. The establishing of the party's first secret police, the Cheka, was integral to their civil war suppression campaign, through assassination, mass arrests and executions, some being so abhorrent they might as well have been present in Dante's Inferno. British historian Orlando Figes explains some of the Cheka strategies in detail. "Each local Cheka had its speciality. In Kharkov they went in for the 'glove trick' - burning the victim's hands in boiling water until the blistered skin could be peeled off. In Kiev they affixed a cage with rats to the victim's torso and heated it so that the enraged rats ate their way through the victim's body in an effort to escape."⁵⁸ What Figes points out, is not just the extremities of the terror but how casually institutionalised these hellish strategies were implemented. With this, also, came the huge number of arrests and the problem of housing their captives. It can be argued that this is where the first gulags or forced labour camps, in Russia, were created, with the Solovki prison beginning its operation in 1918 and quickly growing to 100,000 prisoners in the following years. This new prison system was legitimised into law, by decree of the All Russian Central Executive Committee, on April 15th and 17th 1919. The first giving power to the Cheka, by way of the organising and running of the camps but with a further

⁵⁶ Brailsford, H. N., Slavoj Zizek, and Leon Trotsky. *Terrorism and Communism: a Reply to Karl Kautsky*. London: Verso, 2007. p14

⁵⁷ Salvadori, Massimo L., and Jon Rothschild. *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 1880-1938*. London: Verso, 1990.p290

⁵⁸ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (Pimlico, 1997), P.642-644.

transfer of these positions to the local NKVD or the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. The latter gave legal power to the Cheka, in setting up camps but did not give the specifics of who should run these camps. Eventually the Cheka ran their camps for three years until 1921.⁵⁹ All of this terror and the reality of brutal imprisonment were for issues as simple as opposing Bolshevik politics. It is important to highlight how, in an atmosphere of oppression, people had little choice other than to self-censor, in a bid for freedom and survival. Artists were certainly not exempt from the judicial system or from the terror of the Cheka.

Germany was not alone, in this period of history, in attempting to radically control art and culture, to fit with their newly establishing ideologies. The Soviet's also enforced and imposed their own control on the arts, whilst at points internally wrestling with the direction of their ideologies. The face of Russian art transformed quite rapidly from the revolution to the reign of Stalin. During the revolution, many styles sprang up in popularity amongst the flow of a new kind of civilisation, Constructivism was a huge part of this new popular Russian Avant Garde, although many of these styles had begun their life before the Russian empire even entered the Great War. Whilst Constructivism gave a pragmatic approach, pushing the scientific approach of functional organisation. Baring its own direct social purpose, it also lent itself to industrial design, aiding in street designs after the October revolution but also serving as a propaganda tool⁶⁰. Most famously the party involved a group ,after three name changes, named UNOVIS (The Champions of the New Art), formed and led by the Russian born Kazimir Severinovich Malevich during 1919 at the Vitebsk Art School.⁶¹ The work 'Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge' (fig1) is probably the most famous of the group's works.

⁵⁹ *Origins of The Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917-1934* By Michael Jakobson P.45

⁶⁰ Gough, Maria. *Artist as Producer, The : Russian Constructivism in Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Accessed August 11, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central. P61-73

⁶¹ Stanska, ByZuzanna. "El Lissitzky - Beat The Whites With The Red Wedge." *DailyArtMagazine.com - Art History Stories*, July 20, 2018. <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/beat-the-whites-with-the-red-wedge>

The title quite literally describes their support for the Bolshevik 'Reds', depicted mainly as penetrative, sharp triangles. The biggest, most imposing was itself not only a cutting figure, but aided by its naturally dominant colour, the viewer cannot but help engage with its strong presence and dismiss the white where it is beaten into the background, trailing in the war. They were progressive in inspiring hope and although abstract, a visual future for the building of a new mobilised and industrial Russia, utilising their geometric shapes as a signpost to the base of humanity. Russian Avant Garde featured multiple other styles too, but it was Constructivism that really gave a pro-revolutionary stance. This was opposed to Malevich's style, Suprematism⁶², which did not embody the humanist or utilitarianism approach that fitted with the Bolsheviks' politics, whereas Constructivism did, the only similitude laying in the aesthetics of geometric shapes.

Just like the German National Socialists after them, the Bolshevik leaders also realised the importance of art as a cultural shaper and driving force. Art, similarly, became a divisive issue for their party in how art should fit within Soviet politics. Lenin helped create two art institutions which took on the Russian Avant Garde philosophies. In Moscow, the Higher Art and Technical Institute, and the Institute of Artistic Culture were established. Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky both taught there amongst other figures⁶³. It was here that discussions on artist theory and philosophy were debated, giving rise to criticism of the Avant Garde, drawing a line for debate of its contemporary worth. As stated previously, the pro viewpoint saw that it embodied a progressive force, aiding the construction of their communist dream, both practically and for the psyche of vision and hope. More importantly, from an art historical point of view, it was a foundation for the changing of the guard, from bourgeois to proletariat control over art production. The contrary view was the line of thought that this umbrella of styles, which predates 1917, was a flashback to the previous bourgeois aesthetic

⁶² Gough, Maria. 2005. *Artist as Producer, The : Russian Constructivism in Revolution*. P21

⁶³ Kachurin, Pamela. *Making Modernism Soviet: The Russian Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era, 1918-1928*. EVANSTON, ILLINOIS: Northwestern University Press, 2013 p37-70

and control. That also had already demonstrated its anti-Marxist, individualistic, properties. Additionally, it was by, arguably the first self-identifying Russian Marx theorist, Georgi Plekhanov, that the "l'art pour l'art" which Avant Garde possessed, materialises due to 'the artist is at odds with his social environment'⁶⁴. He further put to the sword that, 'the extreme individualism of the era of bourgeois decay cuts off artists from all sources of inspiration... condemns them to sterile preoccupation with personal emotional experiences without significance and with the fantasies of morbid imagination.'⁶⁵ This consideration was demonstrated as a seriously taken point, in November 1931- February 1932, at the Art of the Capitalist state exhibition, in the State Tretyakov gallery, Moscow, in which Malevich found his 1928 work, Hay Making was displayed amongst other, earlier created works. For instance, Nadezhda Udaltsova's self-portrait (1915) and Vladimir Tatlin's Fishmonger (1911), all of whom belonged to the Avant Garde, found their works hung under a slogan that read: "Any attempt to objectify the artistic method is doomed to failure, as bourgeois art is individualistic through and through"⁶⁶. This was added by the curator Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov. Similarly, with our previous exploration of the Entartete Kunst exhibition (only five years later), these bigoted slogans accompanied an outré grouping of crowded works crudely hung together. Again, the obvious goal of this technique is to make the viewer question the legitimacy of the works' ideological place within their society, with the hope that the artificially negative atmosphere would lead to the viewer concluding along the same lines as the pushed agenda.

Following the growing rejection of the Russian Avant Garde, as being inaccessible and elitist, Soviet realism became the front runner for the arts during Stalin's reign as leader; a form of art that lays in a grey area, of trying to depict a relatable reality whilst also conveying an artificial message of hope for the future. During the power struggle that followed Lenin's

⁶⁴ Schapiro, Leonard, T. H. Rigby, Archie Brown, and Peter Reddaway. *Authority, Power, and Policy in the USSR: Essays Dedicated to Leonard Schapiro*. London: Macmillan, 1983. p60

⁶⁵ Rigby, T. H., *Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR: Essays dedicated to Leonard Schapiro*, p61

⁶⁶ *Utopian Reality: Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond* edited by Christina Lodder, Maria Kokkori, Maria Mileeva p141

premature death, on July 1st, 1925, many of the original October 1917 Bolshevik figures found themselves being exiled and, or, executed, because of Stalin's bid to take and consolidate power. Just as the old guard had to be removed for Stalin's mafioso-style power move so did the art and culture that became akin to them. Lenin's eventual successor too, recognised the importance of art within the USSR. Stalin (unoriginally) laid bare his regard for the arts, in a speech he delivered in the home of Maxim Gorky in 1932, an influential writer commended for founding Soviet Realism.

"The production of souls is more important than the production of tanks... And therefore, I raise my glass to you, writers, the engineers of the human soul".⁶⁷

This is the year we see imposed soviet censorship in full flight, with the Central Committee already attempting to shape literature in advising that, "communist criticism must ban any tone of commandism"⁶⁸, in other words that the arts should steer away from big-head individualism. The Committee then, in 1932, made a decree which demanded the dissolution of any organisation or group who did not fall in line with Soviet Realism. This was backed up with the actions of Stalin who shut down the State institute of artistic culture, of which Malevich was a director. Artists were now living with the real threat of arrest and exhibit closure. As shared earlier, the threat of imprisonment was much more realistic and a much more sinister prospect, following the establishment of the gulags and the accepted brutalisation of prisoners. Especially those seen as against soviet politics, accumulatively, leading to artists, such as Chagall and Kandinsky to place themselves in exile. The slight artistic freedom that Lenin's leadership had provided was gone. Although it is worth a brief mention that, politically he held Chernyshevsky's view of 'the content of art is the social aspect of life', it was obviously at odds with the belief of art for art's sake, proclaiming that 'art must be popular, that it must elevate the masses, teach them and strengthen them'⁶⁹.

⁶⁷Ma, Veronica. "Propaganda and Censorship: Adapting to the Modern Age." *Harvard International Review* 37, no. 2 (2016):P.46-50.

⁶⁸ Woods, Alan. "Marxism and Art: Introduction to Trotsky's Writings on Art and Culture." In *Defence of Marxism*. In *Defence of Marxism*, December 14, 2000. <https://www.marxist.com/marxism-art-trotsky.htm>.

⁶⁹ Williams, Beryl. *Lenin*. Oxon: Routledge, 2014.p 147

Lenin, it can be argued, laid the seeds towards state control over the arts, famously exclaiming, 'down with non-party writers. Down with the writer superman... Publishing houses, reading rooms, libraries- all of these must come under party control.'⁷⁰ Whether he would have taken Stalin's path or not, will forever remain unknown. What is clear is the definite imposed state censorship, which was legally imposed over artistic freedom during Stalin's reign. It is also worth mentioning that whilst Trotsky found himself expelled and exiled from the party, and state, he continued to pursue his permanent and international revolution, or what we know as Trotskyism, in contrast to the solitary ,state totalitarian communism Stalin was implementing. Strategically helping to prop up this new discourse, was Soviet Realism, just as the Avant Garde had done during the year of the revolution. As commentary on the change in the Russian art scene, Dominate, Formalist, 1950s American art critic, Clement Greenberg, an adamant defender of the belief in Art for art's sake, claims that anti Stalinist art 'started out more or less as Trotskyism'⁷¹. More clearly we can see (although not rife with comparisons, to the earlier investigated, German National Socialist) what is similar, is the nuances of smaller philosophical beliefs, under the same political banner, did lead to infighting over the shape and direction that ultimately art should roam, within their state, guiding it into a state of harshly imposed censorship and abhorrent repercussions that could follow going against the grain.

Even since the foundation of the USSR. Gulags or mass labour camps were emerging as a morbid final destination for those who sat outside the law, against Bolshevik ideology. Referring back to how Foucault's normalised power is derived from knowledge, the debates within the intellectually legitimate artistic institutions, set up by could be seen as exercising this normalised power. Whichever way these debates on art swung, generally against the

⁷⁰ Todorov, Vladislav. *Red Square, Black Square: Organon for Revolutionary Imagination*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995. P102

⁷¹ Greenberg, Clement. *The Collected Essays and Criticism; Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Avant Garde, a new “truer” knowledge was being created by those who were at the forefront of the recognised artistic intellect, in the USSR, bolstering this new knowledge’s legitimacy for application. We can see these debates as the roots to normalised power, generating the knowledge which can blossom into a normalised thought process, after its application. For a greater look at an attempt to create a normalised power we can recall the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow, where ‘Malevich had his 1928 work, Hay Making was displayed amongst other, earlier created works. For instance, Nadezhda Udaltsova’s self-portrait (1915) and Vladimir Tatlin’s Fishmonger (1911), all of whom belonged to the Avant Garde.’ It is worth remembering that these works were not curated via confiscation or any oppressive methods. However, they hung around the slogan, “Any attempt to objectify the artistic method is doomed to failure, as bourgeois art is individualistic through and through”. Adding to this statement, is the background of who wrote it. Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov was an art scholar, who is most known for his attack of soviet galleries, who he accused of fetishism of their art objects. His writing, ‘The Principles of Building Art Museums’ (1929) ,published in Pechat’ i Revolyutsiya (Press and Revolution), put forward a guide for them to reform this anti-Marxist fetishism, aiming to straighten out these institutions, into educational centres to function for the needs of a good socialist society.⁷² This text or reinforced knowledge was of course not there for decoration, it was an attempt at the beginnings of implementing normalised power against the Russian Avant Garde movement. Backed up not only by Fedorov-Davydov’s scholarly credentials but also from the results of intellectual discussions at institutes such as the Higher Art and Technical Institute and the Institute of Artistic Culture which helped cement this piece of knowledge's legitimacy. Although there was an obvious attempt at establishing a normalising power here, its effectiveness can be called into question, for instance, after Stalin had consolidated his power over the leadership of the Soviets. His style of governance in parts arguably relied on a lot more of oppressive and repressive methods towards art, than that of Lenin’s, although it was still mixed in and employed both types of

⁷² Utopian Reality: *Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond* edited by Christina Lodder, Maria Kokkori, Maria Mileeva p135

power. To start with the utilisation of the law to implement their normalised way of thinking around art, the Central Committee enforced their influence by attempting to steer literature, by advising that, "communist criticism must ban any tone of commandism". This follows in support of Fedorov-Davydov's views, steering artistic thinking away from arrogant individualism and the subsequent fetishism that was applied on to the objects, by galleries, collectors and dealers. Although this was an advisory statement this was later backed up with through repressive power, making clear the result of violence that could follow such a move against the state. During 1932, the Committee made a decree, that demanded the dissolution of any organisation or groups who would not only embrace Soviet Realism. Any doubt to this threat was thrown out when Stalin had the State Institute of Artistic Culture shut down, leaving the director, Malevich to eventually having his works confiscated, ultimately leaving him banned from curating and exhibiting his established style of work. The state's oppression of Malevich did not end there, even before their decrees and actions on his art, he was imprisoned in 1930 for suspected espionage for Poland, furthering his growing negative reputation within the Soviet Union. If we take Malevich's repression from Russian art at face value, we can see how the state used oppressive power over him and his artistic style directly but also how attempts of normalising power were being enforced around him, in society from various angles, not just the state.

This mixture of utilising oppressive and normalised power with the aim of controlling the narrative which surround a work, a movement or style, was important to the Soviet regime. Just as we also saw for the German National Socialists, they made use of either dynamic in favour of moving art in line with their state philosophy,

An insistence of artistic censorship within the United States, during a similar time. Can be identified through artist Paul Cadmus. He was a realist painter who utilised an egg tempura medium. His works feature a focus of the male nude, with many figures taking on a camp appearance. He was once quoted by Life Magazine in 1937 as 'typically' emphasising 'the

play of muscles and the stretch of skin above them'⁷³. Meyers comments that, 'Cadmus held artistic allegiances both to the satire of American life and to the erotic idealization of the male body.'⁷⁴ Adding that 'Cadmus alternately defied and accommodated the prohibitions imposed on his work in the 1930s'⁷⁵. What was important about Cadmus' practice was he ability to depict homoerotic relations of men during a time when almost no other north American paint was.⁷⁶

The work which was subject to a direct action of censorship was *The Fleet's In!*. After the Washington Evening Star, printed a story covering the painting. It received a highly outraged reception by one ex-navy admiral, Hugh Rodman. Through his connections, the assistant secretary of the navy also second cousin of President Roosevelt, Henry Latrobe Roosevelt. Personally, confiscated the painting.⁷⁷ As a result of the press given to the work, in response to its removal. It ironically gave *The Fleet's In!* a wider audience than it originally may have received. By printing a black and white copy of the work, within the articles, now people from across the country were able to experience the painting. Rather than spark outrage over the camp and homoerotic nature of the male figures. Most public outcry came by way of questioning the of behaviour the country's sailors, on leave from their duty. A debate, Rodman had been desperately trying to avoid. Meyers points out that Cadmus' work helps reveal the social anxieties towards the sexual activities of the navy's sailors during this time. Leaving its audience, seeing the work more as social satyr, rather than be disgusted by an artistic depiction of homosexuality⁷⁸. In other words, the works earlier censorship was not directly due to its overtly homosexual expressions. As the questions brought to the surface,

⁷³ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.33

⁷⁴Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.34

⁷⁵Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.27

⁷⁶Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P.34

⁷⁷ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018.P.39

⁷⁸Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018.P.39

show the public already saw the sailors in this light, and so it could be said, this distracted the audience from being able to feel disturbed or offended purely from the depiction of homoeroticism within the work.

Whilst Cadmus gives us an example of direct, repressive power functioning over American art during the 30s. Other sources reveal attempts at pushing normalised power onto art in the United States although during a slightly later period than those of previously covered nations. The major force behind this push was art critic Clement Greenberg. Like in Post-revolutionary Russia and Nazi Germany, Greenberg makes a stand against the Avant-Garde using the academic realm to legitimise his case against it.

In his 1939 essay titled *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*. Greenberg sets out the argument that art should follow a natural path. He argues that as society progresses, it is unable to 'justify its particular forms'⁷⁹. During its breakdown, the artist is there for unable to depend on established notions, of which they use to communicate to their audience. 'Religion, authority, tradition, style, are thrown into question'⁸⁰, historically being resolved by Alexandrianism⁸¹ via the academicism. After Marx, however artists used historicism to place themselves in opposition to the bourgeoisie or ruling class. Following his building of this foundation, Greenberg then goes onto argue that the Avant-Garde belonged to the ruling classes. In his own words, he claims that 'In seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism, a part of Western bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore: -avant-garde culture. A superior consciousness of history...a new kind of criticism of society...This criticism has not confronted our present society with timeless utopias, but has soberly examined in the terms of history and of cause and effect the antecedents, justifications and functions of the forms that lie at the heart of every society'⁸². What Greenberg is concerned by here is the

⁷⁹Greenberg, C (1972). In *Art and culture: Critical essays*. essay, Beacon Press. P.3

⁸⁰ Greenberg, C (1972). In *Art and culture: Critical essays*. essay, Beacon Press. P.3

⁸¹Greenberg, C (1972). In *Art and culture: Critical essays*. essay, Beacon Press. P.3

⁸² Greenberg, C (1972). In *Art and culture: Critical essays*. essay, Beacon Press. P.4

abandoning of 'Art for art's sake' and the inability of the Avant-Garde being able to justify itself on its own terms, unlike Modernism. This also a similar argument to how Constructivism was deemed counter revolutionary as its roots were seen to belong to the pre-revolution Russian bourgeois. He saw it as a practice that imitated the imitation, something that ignored the natural formation of technique but instead attempted to copy the method unnaturally.⁸³It is clear that Greenberg's attempt at employing normalised power over American art in order to put an end to Avant-Garde, worked briefly. As seen by the major success of the Abstract Expressionist who upheld his formalism and modernism itself. What becomes apparent in comparing the art worlds of these three major powers, around this early to mid-19th century. Is how the Avant-Garde was facing an almost worldwide attack on its existence. With both forms of power, actively, being exercised over it. The movement faced the most serious hostility outside of America. Where in both Germany and Russia, artists faced the threat of confiscations, censorship, and ultimately violence and imprisonment. However, in the United States, attacks on the Avant-Garde were not backed by repressive power but took on a more academic condemnation. Which stood until the post-war period after the previous success of the Abstract expressionists. It was not until artists such as Rauschenberg, where these Avant-Grade ideas and practices began to be reclaimed into the mainstream.

⁸³Greenberg, C (1972). In Art and culture: Critical essays. essay, Beacon Press. P.6

Chapter 2

The importance of re-exploring these sources with the added framework of Foucault's power structures, is that we can now attempt to make a link between the types of power that surround us and the types of censorship. One could now make links between oppressive power with direct censorship and so normalised power with self-censorship. In essence, the power is a precursor in order for either type of censorship to be performed. Without exercising oppressive power, backed with the ultimate threat of violence, direct censorship could not be carried out. Similarly, in the case of normalising power being enacted into a society, self-censorship is the natural outcome, or end goal, to its successful placement. As we understand, power transcends all societies, civilisations and cultures, throughout the world, and therefore, the appearance of either form of censorship is almost guaranteed. Since exploring two other major societies of the time, of which, both encompassed different ideologies and styles of governance, one can see a demonstration of the transcendence of power and censorship. To focus further into the main topic of this thesis, I will be visiting the United States of America and its society of the time. Another civilisation that contained a wildly different form of governance with a prominent capitalist ideology. It is important to mention that Robert (originally Milton) Rauschenberg was born October 22, 1925. This falls in line with the time period of the two previously investigated civilisations, and it all fits in well with the subsequent period of American history into which Rauschenberg was born and that I will next investigate. Shifting my focus slightly, regarding society's attitudes towards homosexual males in the United States surrounding his birth, up until the creation of the Combine series. With help from the previous sources in lifting out examples of the workings of both types of censorship within a society, this should help one gauge the atmosphere that helped influence Rauschenberg's views and behaviour towards his life and ultimately works.

Milton (Robert) Ernest Rauschenberg was born and raised in Port Arthur, Texas, a mainly working-class oil refining town. He was born into a Protestant family, his father, Ernest (his

middle namesake) was a hardworking, a traditionally masculine man who provided for his family, working at the Gulf State Utilities power company.⁸⁴ His mother, Dora, was a devout Christian Fundamentalist, one thing that was said to have embarrassed Rauschenberg as a child, was from his mother's tendency to thriftily make use of old fabric scraps, to create clothes for the family. This reference to his mother and childhood, can be seen in some of his Combines with the presence of fabric work of his own⁸⁵(this is something that will be further visited later on in this thesis). Although, one profound influence on his life came from within; the religious presence that surrounded Rauschenberg and his family. So profound an influence was it, that, until the age of thirteen years old, he planned on becoming a Protestant minister. Although this was to be short lived, when, in one incident, his church claimed dancing to be a sin, turning him away from his pursuit of becoming part of the clergy⁸⁶. One can see here the beginnings of his first retaliation or reaction, against an attempted censorship (of dance) by an institution, which at the time, he seemingly held in high regard, considering his ambition to join. Whilst dance was seen as sinful, homosexuality was almost certainly seen as an absolute sin, and not just from within the Protestant denominations either, but also across the whole spectrum of Christianity. Religion almost certainly played a part in the social consciousness that surrounded Rauschenberg in his early life. It would not be until much later, that the emergence of gay-supporting religious denominations would make a push into the United States. From groups such as the Metropolitan Community Church (1968), a Protestant group led by Troy Perry, who made a significant outreach to the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) community at the time.⁸⁷ This then would have had little relevance to Rauschenberg's early encounters with his Christian Fundamentalist upbringing. Scholars, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby saw that Fundamentalism had grown out of, in part, a reaction to modernity but they believed this reaction to be more

⁸⁴ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Catherine Craft. *Robert Rauschenberg*. London: Phaidon, 2013.

⁸⁵ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Catherine Craft. *Robert Rauschenberg*. 2013.

⁸⁶ Cummings, Scott, *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SIT Company* p 166

⁸⁷ Thumma, Scott, and Edward R. Gray. *Gay Religion*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005.

political than religious in nature. Seeking to uphold the traditional or the fundamental beliefs of Christianity that had been undergoing an overhaul in modernity, forced by the rise of scientific understanding, which led to what the fundamentalist saw as the obligatory pillars of Christianity becoming misinterpreted and ignored. This leads many to view fundamentalist readings of the Bible as far too literal and conservative.⁸⁸

With religion already having demonstrated a dismissal of one form of art (dance) directly to Rauschenberg, as a whole, religion certainly held prominent power within American culture. Religious institutions still held sway, beyond Rauschenberg's Combine era. Robert Mapplethorpe, also a gay artist, felt the still heavy societal power of American Christianity, in 1989, an incident in which a campaign, by the Reverend Pat Robertson was created. To have Mapplethorpe's works removed and in an ultimate act of censorship. Robertson sent out letters from his newly founded (only one year prior) conservative organisation, the Christian Coalition. The letters began...

*"Dear , the enclosed red envelope contains graphic descriptions of homosexual erotic photographs that were funded by your tax dollars. I'd never send you the photos, but I did want you to know about the vile contents of your tax funded material. You'll be as outraged as I am when you open the envelope."*⁸⁹

What we can see, from the language of the letter, is the apparent outrage and disgust at how tax money could be used to fund art that contains imagery contrary to Robertson's moral Christian beliefs. He hinges his argument, for persuasion, on the assumption that the Federal government are turning their backs on Christian values by allowing the expenditure of taxpayers' money on "Photographs too vulgar to print"⁹⁰. In doing so, he is appealing to those from a Christian background whilst adding extra weight to his words from his influential

⁸⁸ Thumma, Scott, and Edward R. Gray. *Gay Religion*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005.

⁸⁹ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media, 2018. P3

⁹⁰ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. 2018. P3

title of Reverend.

The letter does not list Mapplethorpe as the artist behind his outrage but in its entirety it almost is completely compiled of his works, with a few concerning photos, never having been attributed to him, or his style of work, nor any federally-funded works. The impact of the letter is apparent from the eventual cancelation of Mapplethorpe's retrospective, 'The Perfect Moment', at the Corcoran Gallery. Whilst again, this does not fit within the time period of Rauschenberg's birth to the completion of the Combines, it is extremely important in seeing how, even so long after the Combines were created, the presence of work, overtly homosexual, a theme that Mapplethorpe was known for, could create such a hostile atmosphere that it would lead to a closure of an exhibition. It also demonstrates how those who held sway and influence within the public sector, possibly held homophobic views, or were afraid of the repercussions from those who did, perhaps trying to cling onto their electorate, for example.

Closer to Rauschenberg's time was a state law that had been passed a few decades before his arrival. It had started with a play in New York City, called '*The Captive*'. Controversy came when in 1926 they produced a still for a publication poster which depicted two women kissing. As tensions rose around its use, a year later the New York City police raided, and arrested the cast and producers⁹¹. Leading to a legislative effort by New York State law makers to prohibit this kind of publication. They passed a state law that did just this, stating that theatrical work "depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex perversion"⁹² was now unlawful. Whilst Rauschenberg obviously didn't live in New York City at this time, being only a one year old. The law itself, remained in place until 1967.

Spanning the length of his Combine series. As we know from his workings with Cunningham and Cage, Rauschenberg was involved with theatre, with some of his first Combines being

⁹¹ Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. P288

⁹² ⁹² Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* P228

created as set designs for their shows. So, it likely he would be aware of this incidence and law. Other implication of this law give more reasoning to the dangers of being publicly open on sexuality and the possible legal ramifications of publicising artwork containing such.

As Rauschenberg 's High School days ended, he joined the University of Texas, Austin to study, where, whilst also having to struggle with his Dyslexia⁹³ , he refused to dissect a frog in one of his biology classes and, after a brief time⁹⁴ , he left. Afterwards, only to be called up to the Navy, in 1944, for the Second World War, in which, again, he made his refusal to kill even more apparent, and so was assigned to a San Diego hospital working as a neuropsychiatric technician, treating those returning from war, mostly suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Neuropsychiatry itself seems to be a broad medical term, for mental disorders that originate from a brain malfunction and so Neuropsychiatry was a specialty that combined organic neurological and psychological aspects of illness.⁹⁵ Later the discipline has split into two different specialisms , psychiatry and neurology. Some of the illnesses the discipline was concerned with ranged from Depression to Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

Havelock Ellis disagreed with Freudian teachings concerning homosexuality and placed the causation on a person in possessing feelings of inadequacy, being born into fearing failure or even being afraid of relations with women.⁹⁶ This helped to associate homosexuality with a disorder, that has been developed from various factors. Whilst both Freud and Ellis had relaxed, and eventually, fairly liberal views on homosexuality and concluded that there was

⁹³ Gobbo, Ken. "Dyslexia and Creativity: The Education and Work of Robert Rauschenberg." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 3/4 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v30i3/4.1268>.

⁹⁴ Yakush, Mary, and Robert Rauschenberg. *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange: Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art*, 1991.

⁹⁵ The Department of Neuropsychiatry at Washington University, St. Louis." *Science* 87, no. 2269 (1938)

⁹⁶ McLaren, Angus. "Contraception and Its Discontents: Sigmund Freud and Birth Control." *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 4 (1979): 513-29. Accessed Jan 01, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/3787363.

no treatment. Their work still arguably helped set the basis on which the American Psychiatric Association, who also saw homosexuality as something treatable, later listed homosexuality as a mental health disorder in 1952, although this was removed after an overwhelming vote in 1973. During Rauschenberg's time working in this role, although as a technician, I think it is plausible to say that some of these attitudes and thoughts on mental health would have surrounded his everyday working environment and subsequently picked up a certain level of knowledge in this area. This would perhaps have given more reinforcement for him to hold back any openness of his homosexuality, on top of his Christian Fundamentalist upbringing.

Adding to Rauschenberg's growing list, as to the reasons why demonstrating any homosexuality openly could have a negative impact on his life, was the more real threat of a blue ticket discharge from the military. Introduced in 1916, the blue ticket discharge was to be used for purging homosexuals from military ranks and active service. Although the recipient was not dishonourably discharged, they were given a neutral dismissal but this was accompanied by the complete loss of any of the benefits that had been outlined in the G.I. bill.⁹⁷ The navy issued 4,000 'blue tickets' during the period it was implemented (1916-1947). Given that Rauschenberg utilised the GI bill to pay for art classes at Kansas State University 1947, this again backs up why being openly gay, for him, would not have been a safe decision, besides facing religious and social condemnation, but also possible financial disruption.

The blue ticket discharge was not the only hostile policy facing any homosexual person during this time, the 'red scare' added further problems for any social acceptability for those who were openly gay. Whilst Communism as an ideology had been around a fair time before even the start of the Second World War, it is also worth mentioning that this was the second 'red scare' to occur during America's history; the first appearing alongside the Bolshevik

⁹⁷ Bérubé Allan, John D'Emilio, and Estelle B. Freedman. *Coming out under Fire: the History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. P232

Revolution around 1917-1920, escalating the worries with the discovery of a bomb plot, which involved thirty six mail bombs that were to be sent to members of the economic and political establishment, and subsequently, months later eight were successfully detonated. However, the perpetrators turned out to be Italian-American Anarchists, not Communists, although they are loosely linked by the spectrum of the leftist politics.⁹⁸ Echoes of this period were surely remembered, when decades later, the threat of the USSR, this time now as a rival superpower, which had grown out of their joint victory over the Axis powers, at the end of the Second World War. The USSR had gained a vast sphere of influence over much of Europe, Asia and the Middle East as a result of this, far more than it had previously enjoyed. It goes without saying that from then on, the spread of Communism had moved up to a rapid pace and was now the rival ideology to America's capitalism but also to their sphere of influence.

The then Senator, Joe McCarthy, raised awareness of what he saw a major threat to the United States whilst taking a harsh stance against it, resulting in the then President Dwight Eisenhower outlawing the employment of homosexuals within federal jobs, in 1953. To put this into context, McCarthy had placed homosexuals alongside the Communists, making them comparable as both 'moral failures capable of seducing and enervating the body politic.'⁹⁹ Labelling them "Sex perverts", he declared them to be a threat to domestic security. After such encouragement and pushing of his concern, eventually Congress and the president gave authorization to the FBI, directed by John E Hoover, to start the Sexual Deviants program in 1950. Investigation into discovering Soviet spies had begun long before this as a result of the Venona project, a code-breaking operation against the Soviets that led to the realisation and confirmation that there were active Communist spies in the States.¹⁰⁰ The consequences of 'red scare' saw more homosexuals lose federal jobs than domestic

⁹⁸ *Bomb Threats*. Washington: U.S. Dept. of Defense, Dept. of the Army, 1975.

⁹⁹ Chadwick, Whitney, and Isabelle De Courtivron. *Significant Others: Creativity & Intimate Partnership*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2018. P189

¹⁰⁰ Frazier, Paul. "The Venona Project and Cold War Espionage." *OAH Magazine of History* 24, no. 4 (2010): 35-39. Accessed 01 Jan, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/23210199.

Communists, adding weight to the argument against the employment of homosexuals in federal jobs, was the problem of blackmail. They were considered the most vulnerable group to be at risk from this common espionage tactic, albeit this vulnerability was only as a result of heightened social taboos levelled against them in American society during this time.¹⁰¹

The Second World War proved useful in helping to bring many LGBT citizens together, enabling them to discover each other's existence, meeting across state lines, and networking with people, who previously may have been isolated from those similar to them, or from any sense of a gay community. As a consequence of this nationwide networking, the seeds were sown for the sprouting of wide reaching LGBT rights groups or homophile groups in the United States. One of this unity was a group that became one of the first major gay rights movements in America, the Mattachine Society was formed by Harry Hay in 1950. The organisation sought to educate and dispel stereotypes about gay people, this also included camp or queen stereotypes. They took on a subversive image to back this up, blending into society visually, in suits, but also shying away from confrontational protests.¹⁰² However, one major problem for their public image lay with their structure being modelled on that of the Communist Party, who were ordered via a hierarchical pyramid of five "chapters", with those who rose up the pyramid gaining higher levels of responsibility. When membership had extensively increased these chapters were eventually to form sub-divided cells with the fifth chapter, mainly consisting of founding members, being the centralised power of governance. It was no coincidence that Hay, and the other founding members chose this system as they were themselves Marxists. Another modus operandi that the group followed was to conduct their meetings with staggered arrival times, to keep suspicion and possible FBI surveillance off their backs.¹⁰³ These methods of operation, especially those inspired by the Communists,

¹⁰¹ (John D'emilo, sexual politics, sexual communities: The Making of a Homosexual minority in the United States, 1940-1970(Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1983) P.40-53.

¹⁰² Meeker, Martin. "Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 1 (2001): P.78-116

¹⁰³ "Vito Russo Interviews Harry Hay and Barbara Gittings ." Accessed January 1, 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSO5Y8fGac4>. - This is a primary source, containing a video interview with the founder of the Mattachine Society, Harry Hay.

only played into the hands of McCarthy, serving as justification and giving sufficient support to his alignment of homosexuals and communists. Whilst the Mattachine society sought to dispel stereotypes, such as being a 'queen', and demonstrated how homosexual people are just like the average person, they took on a new stereotype by embracing communism. This alignment would undoubtedly be a problem in gathering support for the group, as the image that was cast, to support them, was no different to the communists. This alienated those who may have been gay but did not necessarily support or want to be associated with a hard-left political stance, arguably it was safer and more politically neutral to again 'stay in the closet', for many.

Being born and raised into a Christian fundamentalist family, and area, would have arguably had an immense impact in normalising Rauschenberg to hide his sexuality, considering that from his birth, he was exposed to the ideals and the mores of fundamentalism, which expresses absolutely that homosexuality is a sin, and even viewing dancing as a sinful activity. The impact of this on Rauschenberg would have undoubtedly led to the normalisation of the view that homosexuality was sinful and therefore a shameful behaviour, being only provided with this singular view during the development of his early life. As said earlier, it was apparent from an early age that he had desires to become a minister of his church, this could indicate that he took these teachings seriously enough in his childhood, perhaps. This dramatic change in aspiration, indicates that he was or at least had begun questioning, some of the teachings that his religion offered. Not just this, but also that he felt safe enough to do so. Additionally, it gives us a glimpse into the level of just how much these teachings had been normalised into Rauschenberg's everyday behaviour. In other words, it shows an ability to fight against an attempt of self-censorship, to a degree, from an early age in his life.

Rauschenberg had moved to New York City in 1949, initially with his then wife, Susan Weil, who he later divorced following his relationship with Cy Twombly during his stays at Black

Mountain College and who he later travelled to Europe with, in particular Italy, where they exhibited.¹⁰⁴ It is during the period after his travels with Cy Twombly, leading up to the beginnings of his Combine series, that Rauschenberg found himself within. Many of the abstract expressionist, or Abstract Expressionist, artists lived or frequented the city during this period of time. Many of them were patrons of the Cedar Bar, located on the eastern side of the Green Village, New York City. Their presence and interaction certainly had an influence on Rauschenberg although this impact was to create more push than a pull, away from their artistic Abstract Expressionist philosophy. During his visits to the Abstract Expressionist bar, Rauschenberg described this push claiming, "I found a lot of artists at the Cedar Bar were difficult for me to talk to. It almost seems that there were many more of them sharing some common idea than there was of me"¹⁰⁵. It is no surprise that he felt a major disconnection from the many Abstract Expressionist artists there, who were known for their 'macho' lifestyle. They were also known for their 'drunken brawls, fights over women, (and) vain boasting' in a 'wild west' type lifestyle, all of which were not limited to within the walls of the Cedar Bar¹⁰⁶. Looking back at the biggest two instances of Rauschenberg's pacifism, one refusal to dissect a frog and the other refusal to kill during his military draft, makes evident, that the violent side, at least, of the 'macho' lifestyle the Abstract Expressionist's supposedly led was definitely not going to fit in well with Rauschenberg's passiveness. Another abrasive factor that Rauschenberg struggled to fit in with was their use of language towards their paintings. He explained that "There was a whole language that I could never make function for my self - words like 'tortured', 'Struggle' and 'Pain' ...I could never see these qualities in paint"¹⁰⁷. As he points out, the medium of paint, which was intrinsic to Abstract Expressionist artists, was not something he felt functioned well for him by portraying these emotive words. This is apparent within his Combine series in which he makes use of a

¹⁰⁴ Craft, Catherine. Essay. In *Robert Rauschenberg*. P7

¹⁰⁵ Chadwick, Whitney, and Isabelle De Courtivron. *Significant Others: Creativity & Intimate Partnership*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2018. "(Tomkins, unpublished notes quoted in Feinstein, "Random Order's P.152)

¹⁰⁶ Chadwick, Whitney, and Isabelle De Courtivron. *Significant Others: Creativity & Intimate Partnership*. P.188

¹⁰⁷ Chadwick, Whitney, and Isabelle De Courtivron. *Significant Others: Creativity & Intimate Partnership*. P. 90

combination of many mediums to portray emotive themes. His rebellious tendencies away from the Abstract Expressionist's style was epitomised by his work Erased de Kooning (1952), making use of his connections from the Cedar Bar, he was given a drawing from De Kooning, of which he went around erasing visually from the paper.¹⁰⁸ It would be fair to say that this is yet another example of Rauschenberg being strong in character, and aware enough to go against the popular flow, questioning the status quo that surrounded him, as a minority. This gives weight to the argument of his ability of resistance to self-censorship, by not becoming a copy, or clone, of his direct predecessors' artistic style, although acknowledging it through being a reactionary to them.

¹⁰⁸ Cohen-Solal, Annie. *Leo and His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.P.238

Chapter 3

Pushing forward with identifying an occurrence of censorship within the realms of Rauschenberg's works, this thesis will focus on one period of his artistic legacy, the Combine series, that ran from 1954 until 1964. In order to identify change, it will be important to prise out the elements which majorly feature in the colleges and gauge the importance of their presence. After which the levels of their presences, over this period, can be visually tracked from reading a selection of the works. As there has been extensive postmodernist readings of Rauschenberg's Combines, this thesis will attempt to apply a queer framework, in approaching the elements contained, as some previous scholars have attempted to read the presence of homosexual signifiers in the Combines through an iconographical approach. I will look to them for a foundation on which to track these elements and their presence. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick pinned a definition to what it means to be queer. She attempted to steer this definition away from the traditionally binary outlook on sexuality, such as being seen only as either heterosexual or homosexual. She saw sexuality as possessing a fluidity or a continuity, which is not easily bound by labels. She exclaims that to be queer is "a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant... (This being) the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality are not made (or cannot be made) to signify monolithically"¹⁰⁹. Tom Folland points out that this definition acts both "in opposition to and in alliance" with previous attempts, in applying the art historical paradigm of iconography in order to read Rauschenberg's Combines. He explains that the previous readings sought to attribute, some of the elements contained in the Combines, with a 'gay identity'. He points out that this falls contradictory to Sedgwick's idea of sexuality containing a fluidity or resistance to categorisation. With regard to iconography's importance, he points to a statement made by Richard Meyer, who tries to support the necessity of an

¹⁰⁹ McIlvenny, Paul. *Talking Gender and Sexuality*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002. P8

iconographic approach, in reference to postmodernist readings, put forward that “far from flattening art into a set of coherent narratives or easily recognizable themes, iconography at its most ambitious returns us again and again, to the destiny and difficulty of visual form.”¹¹⁰ Folland reads this as Meyers highlighting his concern about any attempt to contextualise the works, via a “framework of gay cultural politics identity”, leaving a protentional reading susceptible to being ‘thrown out’¹¹¹.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Folland also puts forward the argument that previous postmodernist scholars overlook, “identity in the context of post-war anxiety over masculinity and its relation to high culture” in their readings of the Combines, who confined Rauschenberg’s works to just an act of transgression away from the formalistic, non-commodity and macho philosophy that surrounded the Abstract Expressionist’s, and also the New York school’s ‘hegemonic formulations’.

Johnathan Katz, one of these previous scholars, tackled an iconographic reading of Rauschenberg's Combines. He identified that from the various elements infused within the works, that some “directly allude to his identification as a gay man”¹¹². Katz looked to the comic strips and photographic reproductions contained, as gay signifiers for this identification. Folland groups; Katz, Caroline Jones and Kenneth Silver by the way they all argue, for the narrative of Rauschenberg’s Combines, standing as an embodiment of postmodernist resistance to ‘heroic masculinity’. Fitting with Sedgwick’s queer definition, Jones claims this resistance to Abstract Expressionist as “complex, discursively constructed and ever-shifting interpellation”¹¹³, with this description of fluidity, it left Jones to conclude in favour of the rigid and not so fluid idea of a “Homosexual aesthetic”. After outlining the role these early iconographic scholars played in prising out the presence of Rauschenberg’s

¹¹⁰ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): P.348-65

¹¹¹ Wainwright, Lisa. 1993. *Reading junk : Thematic imagery in the art of Robert Rauschenberg from 1952 to 1964*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

¹¹² Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010) p359

¹¹³ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010) p359

homosexual identity, Folland then points to Lisa Wainwright, who he claims, forced this use of iconography even further, to see the Combine Satellite(1956) as ‘ the staging for a coming out’¹¹⁴ . A step too far for Folland, Wainwright plays into his issue with relying on the narrative of a homosexual closet. She reads the socks, present in Satellite, as having an intrinsic connection to gay culture, serving as a token within the culture. Wainwright does also carry on the reference to domesticity acting as a gay signpost, however she claims this to be “him revealing himself to (his mother)”¹¹⁵. Perhaps this Freudian inference of Rauschenberg appearing to identify with his mother, made by Wainwright as she reads back into Rauschenberg’s childhood, also demonstrates an extreme view to what Folland sees as the incorrect reliance of the closet.

Rather than a complete overhaul of the previous iconographical scholars that Folland refers to, he also explains that they did not employ a correct understanding of the closet and that his argument does not stand in opposition but in ‘parallel’ with his re-understanding of post-war gay identity. What is outlined in his paper to justify his argument is, he exclaims “There was no gay closet in the 1950s, homosexuality was spoken of through references to behaviours that were coded as deviant, immoral or pathological”¹¹⁶. This idea of a lude referential language between gay men during the 1950s is the exact cultural insight, that Folland claims, to have been missed by previous scholars, who’s iconographical readings, relied upon a later established metaphor of the closet. With the term itself not being notably used before the 1960s, within “the records of the gay movement or in the novels, diaries or letters of gay men and lesbians” ¹¹⁷.

Folland explains with the understanding of the closet, other terms and behaviours were not thought of, or communicated as, in the same way that contemporary thoughts are. What is

¹¹⁴ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): 348-65.

¹¹⁵ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010) P348-65

¹¹⁶ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): P.348-65.

¹¹⁷ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010) P.348-65

also a notable point of the era, is that gay men perhaps did not live as openly as we have come to embrace in our post-modernist society but were open and aware enough of their sexuality. To not be stuck or repressed, in a private 'closet', as they actively sought communication with other homosexuals although from a societal perspective, they could be considered socially closeted, by not actively expressing themselves for fear of legal and social repercussions. With the homosexual community existing in vague secrecy, on an 'in the know' basis, which was communicated mainly through referential language, as they aesthetically assimilated with society. Without losing focus on Folland's inferences, on how to read iconographically, Rauschenberg's Combines. He also points out another issue with the elements that were picked out and deciphered by previous scholars. The problem being that most of the previous readings give a preferential examination of media imagery and the photographic elements over all other elements contained in the works. As they function, strongly, as a "window into gay subcultural world of 1950s America"¹¹⁸, Folland makes the claim that the presence of fabric, as a result of this, is largely ignored in relation to these readings. However, he highlights how some scholars have pointed out Rauschenberg's strong use of the material, within his Combine series. One such commentator referred to by Folland, was Art Historian Charles Stuckey. He is quoted as saying, in the essay, "textiles woven with fabrics and images are probably Rauschenberg's favourite collage material after photographs"¹¹⁹. It appears to be a theme that was not entirely overlooked by previous scholars, but acknowledging its value as a gay signifier, arguably has been. According to his own words, Folland concluded that this major component was,

"Taken up neither by the supporters of gay iconographic readings nor by the postmodernists, these decorative fabrics overwhelm the use of photographs and reproductions in Rauschenberg's works, the more so that they constituted the major arsenal of his Combine works produced during the period under consideration here (early Combines) - a group of

¹¹⁸ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010):P.348-65.

¹¹⁹ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): P.348-65

*work both small and large in which Rauschenberg first began to plot a sustained use of decorative fabrics in the years from 1953 through 1956”*¹²⁰

The fabrics he refers to vary in appearance amongst the early Combines, ranging from; lace doilies, scarves , nylon , curtain fragments , paisley shawls, brocaded fabric and ‘cliché-ed still lives woven into fabric’. From this new outlining, provided by Folland, into previously unexplored territory, he identifies other gay signifiers¹²¹. Folland is attempting to resuscitate an iconographic approach by reading the Combines under a reimagined ‘queered’ framework, with a more historically insightful understanding of the closet. It is with this more contemporary approach, which I will examine the trajectory or even flux of these elements, during his Combine period (1954-1964).

If domestic decorative fabrics and materials dominated his early works, aesthetically. This would show them to be presenting a feminine theme. The later switching-out of the feminine for the more masculine associations, epitomise the later Combines as they begin to be characterised by the presence of rough industrial elements. The scope of this thesis is not large enough, for a comprehensive breakdown of all elements present in every accessible or known Combine work. Ideally this could have numerically mapped the extent of their individual consistency and strength of presence, over this period, more precisely. Regarding the limitation of this thesis, an alternative for approaching the task of demonstrating any change. Which I have found from my research, and to confirm claims by scholars like Folland who also sought to read a further presence of queer elements. I will present a historiography of a selection of Combines, spanning the period that I feel best demonstrate or possibly refutes this initial observation.

¹²⁰ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): P.348-65

¹²¹ Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): P.348-65.

The first of this selection is a miniseries within the overall period, the 'Trophy' works, to me best embrace the flight of change in the elements that are contained in the works, over time. Admittedly, the creation of the Trophy works, began in 1959, appear during the midway point (1959) of his Combine period and progress towards the end, with the final work Trophy V in 1962.

Starting with a visual breakdown of the first Trophy work of 1959 (fig2), we can see that the elements which make up the work consist of; oil, graphite, metallic paint, paper, fabric, wood, metal, newspaper, printed reproductions and photos¹²².

The first thing you notice, in terms of appearance is the number of collaged images, and the, almost dirty, black washes swiped over them. With a stormy appearance at both the top and bottom sections caused by the black wash coupled with moody brown shades beneath. Four brown wooden panels form the middle section with a well weathered street sign adhered to left hand side. Past the black washes and brown blocks, various grey shades sit gently in the small remaining spaces with a cloud like calm, almost causing the surrounding collages to float. The grey also gifts the wooden boards a more prominent shadow, emphasising their three-dimensional presence. Any attempt at forming a block colour to form has been squandered by the frantic washes and collage, except for the centre of the work where a hole appears as a result of Rauschenberg using the boards to patch together the top and bottom halves. This gap give the feeling of peering through a fence. Small traces of blue can be seen but it is mainly found within the middle, maybe in an attempt to draw the eye, as the colour cuts through the greys, blacks and browns. There is a small and distorted used of numbers and letters, throughout the piece, however only the street sign is really legible as the others are singular but also majorly distorted. It is hard to concentrate on one particular section as the fluidity of the work, pushes the eye into the neighbouring space. The work

¹²² "Combine (1954–64)." Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, November 21, 2016. <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/series/combine>.

possesses a more rectangular frame, despite the top and bottom section being held together by the wooden boards. It is much less sculptural than other Combines although the middle section of boards and the sign still hint at a sculptural element. The sign itself appears to be a reference to the horizontal, reminding you to 'Watch your step' in a cautionary red colour.

Unpicking the elements that have been previously identified as queer signifiers, such as photos and fabric, as one starts to look at the photographs contained in this piece, the first is of a dancer, mid pose. This dancer is Merce Cunningham and was taken from a previously untitled print (Merce 3 1953) which is fitting for the 'for Merce' label. Another image shows a street scene of a mounted policeman, during the moment his horse had fallen during an event, possibly taken from a newspaper. Alongside these are small images of neo-classical buildings and part of the street they stand on and part of a map.

Within Trophy II (for Teeny and Marcel Duchamp) ,fig3, overall the major presence of grey is quite neutral. The grey is really made up of chrome and with white washes which have had the underlying colour bleed through. There are eleven panels which make up the work, most are fastened together with nails or screw but two on either flank are not. On the left flank, a loose chain which is attached to the handle of a metal spoon. Itself, placed inside a drinking glass that sits upon a protruding wooden shelf, this chain is then linked to the main body of panels. The far left panel similar to the top of the first Trophy has a black brushing of colour with a few distorted letters, words and an exclamation hiding beneath washes. The main body of middle panels are a lot more chaotic. Various reds mainly feature and draw the eye to the fast strokes they were applied with. Again a few letters appear but sink within the surround red blocks. A decorative tie sits alone , almost central with a sway to it as if the wind had just caught it. Small patches of blue and orange also feature to the right of the tie. On the right flank the top chrome panel completely untouched by paint or collage. With an object embedded within it the panel is bent, leaving the light to shine smoothly off it, adding a

three-dimensional look. You can almost feel the moment of impact. Overall the lay out of the panels remind me of an alter peace, the Ghent altarpiece for example.

A closer examination, shows only three images have been worked in, in the top left hand corner sit two cuttings of Dinosaur skeletons, joining, almost centrally in the work, is a nautical scene of a stormy sea above of which is the obscured image of a boat with its unclear occupant. It is not until the final work, Trophy V (for Jasper Johns 1962), fig6, in which a worked image appears again. However they are not photographs but a drawing of a shell faintly appearing from a tanned patch of paint, the other being a stencil of the USA's main body of land. Whilst the worked photographic element is so prevalent in his early Combine works, including his first two 'Trophy' pieces, it became less apparent. His use of fabric in the Trophy works does not disappear at all, remaining a constant throughout. What arguably is not a constant though, is the everyday occupation the chosen fabric holds. At the top of Trophy, I, you can see one male's black shirt sleeve. This does not hint of decorative or domestic themes as with his earlier Combines, which have been extensively examined by previous scholars. Trophy II (fig3), however, holds a tie which is not plain but has been subject to a collage of images incorporated onto it, horizons and sea, fitting the other nautical images to its right. This is certainly decorative although the tie possesses too much of a masculine association, especially during this time, to link back to a feminine domesticity like earlier Combines, such as Miniature or Bed.

In general, this work is a lot more sculptural than the previous two. It gives off a feeling that you are present in a rented bedroom. With a fireplace framing the work it is filled at the top by bed springs crudely cut into a smaller shape and fasten to the fireplace. Lashed across the centre of the work is a what appears to be a white bed sheet, loosely hanging by a tied knot drooping to the middle. To its right is a ladder that stands upright but not large enough in height to reach the entirety of the fireplace. Again, a chain makes an appearance, it could be off an old toilet or possibly even a light switch with the grip on the end. The chain appears to be fixed to what looks like a crudely made train signal. The colour use in this work is fairly

dark and doesn't to have been changed by Rauschenberg. There are not drastic washes or drippings of paint, collaged pictures nor are there any letters or numbers. The closest to his are the decorative carving on the top section of the fireplace. The work is very raw and rustic in appearance, you can really see all the items being salvaged from someone's junk.

The fabric in the third work, Trophy III (fig 4) appears to be a tied white sheet, possibly a bedsheet as it sits under exposed bed springs. If so, it would show a stronger link to domesticity, a more intimate one at that. Again, pushing away from any decorative or domestic theme.

Trophy IV (fig5) only holds a singular black leather work boot. In appearance it is very rough, well-worn with an industrial connotation, both of which hint at masculinity. The boot also appears to be in motion as it touches the ground as if someone was on the balls of their feet. Above which parts of what could be broken tools encapsulate it. Like the third Trophy Combine it is completely sculptural, with all the objects being quite obviously rubbish. Dark colours, of reddy browns, blacks and greys make up the overall appearance with a small block of blue fabric. This fabric to reminds me slightly to how fabric was fastened to old ironing boards. Wood planks form the base which hold half a grey pole to its left. It looks like the bottom half of a street sign pole, next to it is another chain which connects to a poorly repaired torch.

The final work contains no distinct fabric, just a mesh on the window which is more than likely a bug repellent screen. Trophy V (for Jasper Johns), fig6, moves back into more of a flat picture plane, away from the previous two works' sculptural approach. It also seems to present itself in a neutral way, as lighter white and grey shades dominate the work, in stark contrast to the first Trophy Combine, that is engulfed by much darker shards and reddy brown colours. Washes and dripping dominate this work more so than the other's in series and from their messiness, give the work a fluid feel when trying to concentrate on a section. Black, seems to add to a stormy fluidity although it is slight dulled out by the dominance of the grey and white washes. Wood has been changed for sheet metal; printed images and

newspaper clippings have been replaced by painted images that are fewer in number. A painting of Traffic light placed on its side can be seen on the right side, near a block of orange hiding an image of a shell. The only other distinctive image is a blue stencil of the US on the far-left hand side. The most eye-catching part is the chrome window fixed near the top left. It again gives the work a sculptural element still attempting to sit in a rectangular frame. We can see clearly from these miniseries that Rauschenberg's style, and approach, in creating these Trophy Combines certainly changed over the period he produced them.

One issue, however, in using this mini-series as an embodiment of an overall stylistic change in the production of his Combines, is that these works were made for certain acquaintances in Rauschenberg's life, lending them to hold more personal qualities, narrating more so around his direct relationship with the subject. This differs in aspect to that of his other earlier works, that are arguably more biographical and have been read as so by previous scholars¹²³, including his stage prop Combines, such as Miniature¹²⁴. In order to address this concern, I will next compare works from outside of these ministries, to gauge change in the elements that make up the Combines. To start with, I have chosen an early work that has been previously analysed, mostly ichnographically, by critics and academics, labelled Untitled (1954), or sometimes known as Plymouth Rock(fig7). To begin with, just like the Trophy series, I will focus on three main elements where change is most apparent.

These three consist mainly of the types of materials Rauschenberg deployed, like worked pictures, fabric and found objects. All of whose subjectivity arguably changes over his Combines period.

For instance, in Plymouth Rock (fig7), a more sculptural Combine, has a large number of worked imagery within it. Most of which depict people, a man with a disappointed palm covering his downward staring face, a woman lovely kissing her child and soldiers

¹²³ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Catherine Craft. *Robert Rauschenberg*. 2013.

¹²⁴ "Minutiae." Rauschenberg, Robert, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow. *Robert Rauschenberg: combines*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.

embracing. These all demonstrate an emotional scene, coupled with a letter from his then young son, Christopher, that reads 'I hope that you still like me Bob because I love you. Please write back to me back love Christopher'.¹²⁵ It was this emotive link that help lead scholar Craft, to declare the work as being 'a glimpse into a personal diary'¹²⁶ of Rauschenberg. She continued the claim of the Combine's overall subjectivity being biographical with a read of the image of a smartly dressed man in a white suit which sits within the bottom left box of the work, looming over a mirror below it, as a reference to the mythological character, Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection. In her words the 'mirror's placement at a right angle to the bottom edge of the young man's image playfully suggests Narcissus at the pool'.¹²⁷ This further suggests slightly hidden personal expression overall, in this Combine, running with a biographical theme. Another early work, Bantam (1955) shows less worked imagery, containing only three. One of the pictures is an autographed portrait of Judy Garland, considered a gay icon of the era. Whilst the other two are not emotionally charged, compared to Plymouth Rock's, they do show a feminine image of a nude Victorian lady, posing across a chaise, mirror in hand. This is contrasted to a very masculine New York Yankees team photo and the Combines title, referring to a lighter male fighter's weight division.¹²⁸ This is also in juxtaposition to the decorative, feminine fabrics also worked into the Combine. If we take into account, two later Combines, First Jump Landing and Gold Standard (1964), we can clearly see the use of imagery change, not only from a aesthetical point, but as stated earlier, it is apparent that the covertly queer subjectivity has been removed or replaced. In the case of Gold Standard, the only work having imagery of Japanese writing, clocks, a measured diagram of what appears to be parts of furniture and a cardboard Sony box. All are found objects that help portray

¹²⁵ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Catherine Craft. Robert Rauschenberg. 2013 P.48

¹²⁶ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Catherine Craft. Robert Rauschenberg. 2013 P.48

¹²⁷ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Catherine Craft. Robert Rauschenberg. 2013 P.48

¹²⁸ Reed, Christopher. 2011. *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 5 fig 5.7

Rauschenberg's touristic experience of Tokyo¹²⁹.

Similar to the later three Trophy Combines, First Jump Landing contains no worked images.

Aside from this, but still along a similar track of changing subjectivity, the types of fabric used in the later Combines changes. In First Jump Landing there are no signs of the decorative.

The 'lace doilies, scarves, nylon, curtain fragments, paisley shawl, brocaded fabric and 'cliché-ed still lives woven into fabric' as pointed out by Folland, in reference to the early Combines.¹³⁰ The fabric we see in the work is plainer and masculine in appearance as black leather dominates the top half of the work whilst a painted over shirt sits in the bottom left.

The fabric in Gold Standard follows a similar theme, as it contains leather work boots and gloves, again more masculine in appearance but also signifying a more industrial link, which is fitting to the city junk used in the Combine. As stated earlier, the appearance and, more importantly, the subjectivity surrounds the kind of fabric used in the later Combines, fades from the domestic to the industrial. From the feminine to the masculine, going off the associations of the era.

One final element that is worth mentioning in reference to overall elemental change in the Combines, is the inclusion of light fittings. Carolyn Lanchner suggests that First Jump Landing was 'The first time (that a work) incorporated wiring as a visual element' as she was describing Rauschenberg's rejection of the flatbed picture frame, and his attempts to play with the work's surrounding environment. She describes the "tie between the floor and work is the electric cord." supply power to the blue light bulb inside the tin can hanging from the licence plate"¹³¹. During an interview with Barbara Rose, Rauschenberg explains his use of the lights.

BR- *"What are the most inventive things you've done?"*

RR- *"I don't know - screwing a light bulb into a painting maybe. Adding luminosity from the*

¹²⁹ Ikegami, Hiroko. 2010. *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art*. MIT Press. p196

¹³⁰Folland, Tom. "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): 348-65.

¹³¹ Lanchner, Carolyn. 2009. *Robert Rauschenberg*. Vol. 2. The Museum of Modern Art P.38

painting to match the environment. That was the first evidence I had of wanting the work to be the room itself."

We can see from his response that not only is he engaging with the surroundings of his works, in an attempt to further break down the barriers that usually separate the work from its environment, Rauschenberg forces its environment into communicating and subsequently being part of the work itself. What his answer also suggests is how aware he was of the results, the inclusion of an element, may have on his works. This helps us to further conclude that possible signifiers contained in works were not random acts but more likely to be well thought out and deliberately implemented by Rauschenberg.

Chapter 4

We can clearly see that from these comparisons, taken from a selection of the Combines and supported by scholar Folland. There is certainly a change in the style and subjectivity of the works over this period. The earlier Combines (up until around 1956) focus mainly around biographical themes which arguably, include majorly hidden or veiled signposts to Rauschenberg's sexuality, with the later works, shedding any hint of domesticity or queer culture. This observation has begun to demonstrate a divide in the Combine period. As this thesis is mainly concerned with censorship, and more deeply self-censorship, applying this earlier understanding of the phenomenon, as a possible factor for this change in Rauschenberg's Combines, will be the final step.

One could now utilise Foucault's metaphor concerning power and discipline, as he discussed the panopticon prison where its centralised, over watching towers left prisoners with the paranoia of feeling that they were being observed every second of their day. Considering Rauschenberg's situation, for example, to be openly gay for him would have left him vulnerable on some essential fronts. Although he was drafted into the Navy, the potential loss of his military income and also the later awarded GI bill containing privileges, that ranged from low interest mortgages to educational grants, this sudden loss would have been disastrous for anyone to concede. This very real threat could quite easily create a sense of paranoia for anyone, against demonstrating any homosexual behaviours. Given the huge amount of socialising and human contact that would have been a part of everyday life for Rauschenberg, working in a military hospital, anyone could be watching for this. The blue ticket discharge, although giving the recipient a neutral discharge, would still leave a mark by one's name and also be known to the federal government. This brings in the second set of eyes, watching over one from the panopticon's tower. Couple this with the emergence of the

second red scare, and the lavender scare¹³² that brought together the beginnings of politicians aligning homosexuals and communism, resulting in the use of the American domestic security services to participate in programmes that were specifically created in order to purge homosexuals from federal employment. This mark left by the blue ticket discharge could cause further employment problems in the public sector but could also leave one inescapably associated with two major social stigmas of the time, homosexuality and communism. In terms of thinking around Rauschenberg's life, he would have missed the government's witch hunt as it arrived in the late 40s and early 50s, as, by 1947, he was already making use of the GI bill, utilising it by enrolling at Kansas City Art Institute. So, the impact of the government's pressure on him to normalise his closeted behaviour or face unemployment would not have been that much of a major threat to his livelihood. However, this does not mean pressure would not have pushed down into other areas, from the government. The pre-existent social stigmas around homosexuality had only been exacerbated by the government's red scare, fusing another major stigma to it, as now you were considered a communist too, who at the time were the embodiment of the complete enemy of the United States. This however may have impacted Rauschenberg to close his sexuality because of possibly facing social backlash. One last factor that the government brought to the table, in helping to normalise any closeting homosexual behaviour, was the fact that sodomy laws, federally, were only removed in 1962. Facing the prospect of being labelled a criminal and if convicted the threat of imprisonment and violence, this would have made a considerably higher impact on Rauschenberg's decision to closet his homosexuality. Adding further weight to this paranoia, Rauschenberg's home state, Texas, have only repealed their state sodomy laws as a result of the 2003 Lawrence vs Texas case and, also held off on legislation on same sex marriage until 2015.¹³³ Growing up with this knowledge

¹³² "These People Are Frightened to Death." National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed January 1, 2020.

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html>.

¹³³ It is also worth noting that in 1968 hate crime laws only referred to as 'wilfully injures, intimidates or interferes with, or attempts to injure, intimidate or interfere with ... any person because of his race, colour, religion or national origin'.

would have had somewhat of a normalised impact but he did move away during the start of his adult life, eventually living in more liberal places such as Paris and New York. If we group all of the areas in which the government applied pressure on a gay American men, then we can see that it would have been fairly inescapable during this time that to be openly gay would mean having face some sort of backlash from society, some of which could be a fairly serious threat to one's existence.

To say that censorship played a part in the development of the Combines certainly is not implausible. Early in his career many critics referred to Rauschenberg as a 'joker', a later Sunday Telegraph (1964) article titled "Not just a Joker"¹³⁴ demonstrates this, his earlier dismissal from the serious art world. Amongst much of the negativity, Clement Greenberg was the spearhead in the early scholarly rejection of Rauschenberg, with Rosalind Krauss' continuation of upholding the Greenbergian ideas, such as keeping the separation between art and the everyday, of which Rauschenberg's Combines attempted to blur. Krauss claimed, in reference to the found objects within the Combines, that '*Common junk objects in the Combine paintings or the procedures to draw their imagery from a source that would theoretically undermine the work's stature as a unique object of value is only symptomatic of a more general effort to readjust the sense.*'¹³⁵ Concerned with formalist ideas, she viewed the inclusion of found objects a distraction from the work holding any value as a unique art object, but instead resulting in it holding value as decoration. On top of scholars and critics debating Rauschenberg's validity in the art world, he also struggled with his popularity in the art market, during his early career. One account of an interaction with prominent New York art dealer Leo Castelli, who had previously been left excited with his Red show in 1955 and would later become his dealer, expresses the level of Rauschenberg's demand in the New York art scene.

¹³⁴ Mullins, Edwin. "Not Just a Joker." Sunday Telegraph (London), Feb. 9, 1964, P.11.

¹³⁵ Rauschenberg, Robert, and Branden Wayne. Joseph. *Robert Rauschenberg* (October files; 4). MIT Press, 2002. (Rosalind Krauss – Rauschenberg and the Materialized image 1974)

Rauschenberg offered his visitors a drink, with or without ice. "with!" Castelli answered.

*"Then I'll be back in just a moment because my neighbour Jasper Johns owns the common fridge!" "Did you say Jasper Johns?" Castelli perked up. "The one whose green painting is at the Jewish Museum? May I come with you?"*¹³⁶

This was not the only ignorance Rauschenberg experienced during this time in his early career, in New York City. In another account, it is explained that when he and Jasper Johns hosted a small dinner party for 'uptown people'. These people included collectors, Conde Nast editors and a gallerist Martha Jackson, who is said to have "fell asleep, drink in hand, nodding and snoring quietly as a Combine went by"¹³⁷. Although it is debatable as to whether Jackson was unenthused by the Combines or just simply overcome by drink. It does serve as a slightly humorous metaphor for Rauschenberg's demand in the art scene at the time.

Popularity and reputation certainly may have been a driving factor for the change in style of his Combines. Perhaps the change was his attempt to push the works away from the awkwardness of critics who were avoiding any engagement with the gay signifiers contained in the earlier works. A turning point in the demand for his work only really became significantly higher after 1961, following a successful exhibition in Paris. This gave him his first solo exhibition in France with Daniel Cordier. On display were twelve Combines and several drawings. The title of the show highlighted Rauschenberg's artistic situation in New York City, succeeding the Abstract Expressionists and competing with the likes of his then partner Jasper Johns. It was named, "Un 'Misfit' de la peinture new-yorkaise se con-fesse" (A "Misfit" in contemporary New York painting reveals himself). The show gained great publicity after an interview (on the 10th of May 1961) with André Parinaud (1924– 2006), was transcribed into *Les Arts*, where he was linked with the Dadaists and Surrealism, both with long-established roots in European art¹³⁸. In the same year his dealer, Castelli, was

¹³⁶ Cohen-Solal, Annie. *Leo and his circle: the life of Leo Castelli*. New York: Knopf, 2010.

¹³⁷ Cohen-Solal, Annie. *Leo and his circle: the life of Leo Castelli*. New York: Knopf, 2010.

¹³⁸ . Smith, Graham. "Bruno Alfieri, Leo Castelli and Robert Rauschenberg: Metro and the Introduction of Rauschenberg into Italy." *Visual Resources* 33, no. 3-4 (2017)

recommending him, Johns and Frank Stella, to Bruno Alfieri, the writer of Zodiac magazine, who was creating an edition whose aim was to “provide the reader with a living image of the United States”. What greater way to market Rauschenberg than have him represent the United States in Europe, where he had already had success in the old centre of the art world, over a month before Zodiac 8 was released (25th June 1961). It was this drive into Europe that saw Rauschenberg rapidly grow in popularity. Only three years later, he was the youngest artist ever to represent the United States, in the 1964 Venice Biennale, at the age of 38. Other signs of his growth in popularity can be seen from the perspective of demand for his work on the art market. In a 1989 interview, with Castelli for the New York Times, he discloses that

“Very few people were buying Rauschenberg’s at that time,” said Castelli in an interview that was published in The New York Times (1989) ... (At the time of his first one-man Castelli exhibition 1958-59) The Combine painting Small Rebus was listed at \$400, for instance, Coca-Cola Planet \$500, Construction with J. J. Flag at \$1000, Odalisque at \$1500 and Kick back at \$1200. Two years later, Giuseppe Panza di Biumo (1923–2010), a renowned Italian collector of contemporary art, complained that \$3500—the amount that Castelli had asked for the Combine Winter Pool—was too much. ...“The demand for Rauschenberg's paintings is very great,” he wrote, “because, with Jasper Johns, he is now considered the best painter of the younger generation.”¹³⁹

From this we can see Rauschenberg’s demand in the art market had significantly increased, and so justifying Castelli’s substantial price increase. Pinning this down as a reason for the shift in Rauschenberg’s use of overtly queer elements is not viable. If he was trying to appeal to critics, with this shift. Other, similar reasons arise alongside this, for instance trying to lose

¹³⁹ Smith, Graham. "Bruno Alfieri, Leo Castelli and Robert Rauschenberg: Metro and the Introduction of Rauschenberg into Italy." Visual Resources 33, no. 3-4 (2017)

his dismissive label as a 'joker'¹⁴⁰ and Neo-Dadaist were more so problematic to his artistic legitimacy. Nevertheless, it is critical to the aims of this thesis to identify the presence of self-censorship. From investigating Rauschenberg's upbringing, with him being born into a deeply religious community which preached openly, against homosexuality. Into his early adult life, as he was drafted into the Navy, an institution that imposed homophobic policies such as a Blue ticket discharge, onto their employees. This is also with concentration to Federal and State laws which outlawed homosexuality for a huge part of his early life, Federally, it was repealed earlier, in 1962, meaning that for the majority of his combine period, homosexuality was illegal as well as being a socially tabooed. These imposing rules and societal taboos were practically inescapable for him. What they more importantly demonstrate is the workings of normalising power, commanding Rauschenberg into closeting his sexuality in the social realm or in other words self-censoring himself. Although this did not stop him from engaging in homosexual relationships albeit in relative secrecy.

The findings that came out of chapter one, began with an important understanding of Foucault's concepts of power and the relationship it has with and censorship is exercised over a subject, after they have carried out or created what has been deemed unfit to experience. This helped form a base to begin identifying occurrences where different censorship dynamics have played out historically. I thought it would be useful to investigate, two major civilizations which fairly co-exist, in existence, with relation to Rauschenberg's early life. Although both states differ majorly in styles of governing and ideology, to the United States. It formed a better starting point to unpick more blatant and extreme instances of the phenomenon, in a relatively similar time period. From the findings it was clear that both regimes had utilised both forms of censorship over their populous. Differing by the German, National Socialists, initially using oppressive censorship to confiscate and ban forms of art. That they had, eventually, viewed as hostile to their then recently embraced Volkish philosophy. Later we can see their attempts to begin normalising their angst against

¹⁴⁰ Mullins, Edwin. "Not Just a Joker." Feb. 9, 1964, P.11.

art, deemed 'degenerate', via the '*Die Ausstellung Entartete Kunst*' exhibition. Granting their citizens, the liberty to still view the works, although distorted by various negative gallerist techniques. Another example was uncovered by their purge and replacement of leading figures within artistic institutions, in favour of those who fell in line, ideologically. Whilst the Soviets mainly held off on any oppressive censorship until Stalin's consolidation of power, pushing them into Soviet realism. It was clear they too attempted to utilise normalised power over art for a hopeful outcome of self-censorship but in a opposite discourse to the National Socialists. Starting out with normalising approach which turned to outright oppression. Making use of a strangely similar exhibition (although 8 years earlier) which actively discredited certain art works, and forms. It was useful investigating these two states, as it captured more deliberate occurrences, of both dynamics, being implemented at a fair early stage. Both states being in relative infancy, was slightly problematic whilst in comparison to the older United States but gave a foundation to begin a social investigation into Rauschenberg's environment before and during his Combine period.

Using the lessons and skills learned from the previous chapter, it was vital to get a complete overview of Rauschenberg's social history. With the goal to discover and highlight incidence of normalised power that had been exercised over him in order to find evidence of any resulting self-censorship. From my research a few avenues of possible influences over him arose. One being from his association with the fundamentalist protestant church during his early life. It is here that deep rooted values of traditional gender roles and associations would have held influence and a normalising grasp during his upbringing. Here homosexuality would have been certainly a major socially tabooed issue and may have formed the begins of his distancing away from any overt sexual expression later on in his life. Another avenue appears here, through his young adult life, being conscripted into the Navy and working in a Neuropsychiatry ward. It's clear here, that military policies would have again reinforced, that any desire to show an expression of homosexuality would be a risky move. Dangerous, because any reward gained as result in serving, outlined in the GI's bill, would have been taken away. Possibly ruining his livelihood and also social reputation, as leaving without an

honourable discharge from the military during a major war certainly would be taboo. These rewards helped pay for his initial artistic education without which he may have never pursued a career in the arts to become the artist we know today. This passage also touches on his interaction with the Abstract Expressionists, demonstrating their strongly masculine lifestyles which is later important when making distinctions between his work and that of his predecessors. Briefly, from a practice point of view, evidence of his Mother's 'thrifty' pastimes helps link elements in his earlier Combines and further strengthen claims of the works autobiographical subjectivity. Knowledge on his Father's background also aids in this, as his job at the oil refinery helps give reasoning to the use of tyres in many Combines. For understanding the presence of queer elements and the presence of censorship and tracking the trends in the elements used by Rauschenberg was a key point to this chapter. I was able to see the change over his combine period by the gradual introduction and reduction in certain materials he used. As the early combines made use of much more decorative and feminine fabrics. I was able to demonstrate their decline, being replaced by more industrial fabrics in his later Combines. Another observation, which had also been mentioned by Folland, was the decline of his use of photographs. Not just this but also the lesser use of newspaper and other cuttings. One final thing that became apparent, was the introduction of electronics, this being mostly working light bulbs. The new element was an attempt to change or extend the picture frame, beyond the work into its environment. It was clear he was attempting to add even more fluidity to the works, than his earlier referencing to the horizontal, or flatbed picture frame, had managed. This shift in materials could be read as artistic progression of his practice, perhaps in an attempt to move on, into different subjectivity. This shift leads to another question, whether separating this period is necessary due to the huge difference in materials and the signposts they contain. Visually, he is able to completely switch the attached gender just simple by the use of fabric.

What the part four looked further into was why there was a shift in the elements, which had been demonstrated in the previous chapter, was there a cause for this? Firstly, I looked to

label the change as an almost artistic maturing, away from his earlier works looking to not become repetitive in his practice, perhaps. However, while looking into research that delved into the role that his art dealer, Castelli, played in helping Rauschenberg's career. I looked into the timing of the rise in success (measured here in rise in demand and subsequent price of his works) and prominence that started to occur for him, against the early noted shift in elements. Giving rise to newer questions, asking, was this a factor in for the change in materials. During, the early period, his time in New York City and partnership with Johns, he was largely ignored by collectors and dealers, as seen here. Even whilst he experienced close interactions with them as they worked with Johns. Critics too, were dismissive of him, being labelled a joker. Adding to this we saw critics and writers of the time not reading, perhaps avoiding, the queer elements contained in his earlier Combines. This led to more questions of the possibly that he began a stylistic change in order to become more desirable within the art world. This could be caused to further investigate, as apart of another project, this as being an incidence of self-censorship in order bend to the what the art world wanted. Though completely challenging this idea, was the disgusted paper. Which explored Castelli's, influence and old-world connections art connections, arguably forming a stronger factor for understanding Rauschenberg's burst of success in Europe and then America. Winning the Venice Biennale in 1964 and dramatic rise in the pricing of his works.

Whilst Folland is looking to re-examine and further pull out the presence of queer elements within the early Combine works. This project acknowledges their existence but is more concerned by the overarching subject matter of why they are, and have been, so concealed from those attempting to read them. Rather than to focus completely on them, the work looked into a reasoning for this concealment. From an understanding of censorship and demonstrating its working over art within different societies of the period. I was able to take a different approach in trying to understand this. It became apparent from several factors during social historical research into him. That normalised power had been presence and more than likely an influence over Rauschenberg's ability to openly expressing his sexuality

during his lifetime. Following a line of argument that suggests these works were autobiographical. I believe this project can begin to put forward a case, that the early Combines also present an overall expression of self-censorship, whilst in relation to the queer elements. Rather than a coming out, they act as a diary entry, a complete reflection of his life as if you were in a conversation with him at that precise moment in time.

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Appendix.

- Fig 1 – Beat the Whites With the Red Wedge

[Stanska, ByZuzanna. "El Lissitzky - Beat The Whites With The Red Wedge." DailyArtMagazine.com - Art History Stories, July 20, 2018. <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/beat-the-whites-with-the-red-wedge>]

- Fig 2 - Trophy I (for Merce Cunningham) 1959

["Trophy I (for Merce Cunningham) Rauschenberg, Robert, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow. Robert Rauschenberg: combines. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.

- Fig 3 - Trophy II (for Teeny and Marcel Duchamp

["Trophy II (for Teeny and Marcel Duchamp). Rauschenberg, Robert, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow. Robert Rauschenberg: combines. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.

- Fig 4- Trophy III (for Jean Tinguely)

[Trophy III (for Jean Tinguely) Rauschenberg, Robert, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow. Robert Rauschenberg: combines. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.

- Fig 5 - Trophy IV (for John Cage)

Trophy IV (for John Cage) Rauschenberg, Robert, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow. Robert Rauschenberg: combines. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.]

- Fig 6 - "Trophy V (for Jasper Johns)

[Trophy V (for Jasper Johns)_Rauschenberg, Robert, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow. Robert Rauschenberg: combines. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.

- Fig 7 – Untitled (Plymouth rock)

(Untitled)Rauschenberg, Robert, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow. Robert Rauschenberg: combines. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.

Fig 1



Fig2



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6



Fig 7



