

Pat Steir

The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style), oil, 1982-84, Kunstmuseum, Bern.

Autumn: The Wave after Courbet as though Painted by Turner with the Chinese in Mind, oil, 1985, collection Eric Franck.

Winter: The Wave after Courbet as though painted by an Italian Baroque Artist, oil, 1985, collection John Pappajohn, Des Moines.

Summer: The Wave after Courbet as though Painted by Monet, oil, 1986, Jacksonville Art Museum, Florida.

Spring: The Wave after Courbet as though Painted by Ensor, oil, 1986, collection Paula and Richard Cohen, Boston.

Last Wave Painting (Wave Becoming a Waterfall), oil, 1987-8, collection the artist.

Monk Toyu Meditating Waterfall, oil, 1991, private collection.

Yellow and Blue One-Stroke Waterfall, oil, 1992, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Looking for the Mountain, oil, crayon, pencil and ink, 1971, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Cellar Door, oil, crayon, pencil and ink, 1972, collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kaye, New York.

Circadia, oil, crayon and pencil, 1973, Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland.

Waterfall Painted with the Chinese in Mind, oil, 1987-8, collection Alvin Olin, New Rochelle, New York.

The Tree, oil, 1982, collection Jean-Paul Jungo, Morges, Switzerland.

Mark Tobey

Modal Tide, oil, 1940, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.

The Middle West, oil, 1929, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.

Leonardo da Vinci, *Studies in Hydrodynamic Turbulence*, pen and ink, c. 1508-9, Royal Library, Windsor.

Towards Illustration Theory: Harold Rosenberg, Robert Weaver, and the "Action Illustrator"?

Jaleen Grove

It is quite contrived to match Harold Rosenberg's art criticism with the work of illustrator Robert Weaver, whom Rosenberg never mentioned and perhaps never even knew of. Yet doing so affords two opportunities: to critique Rosenberg's art criticism, and to bring illustration scholarship into the arena of art criticism on its own terms, rather than allowing it to exist merely as a punching bag for fine art's vanity. The forced companionship may well turn out to be a failure, but in failing, at least the question of whether the criticism of a major theorist of the "high" arts can or ought to be useful in understanding the "low" will be partly answered. Perhaps this attempt may find meaningful insights and new strategies for interpreting the creative practices of both critics and illustrators. Revisiting and appropriating the thought of critics such as Rosenberg is an attempt to redress a critical neglect of illustration in the past. It also tests the current belief that the split between high and low art has collapsed – a conclusion that has been perhaps prematurely reached, since despite Robert Weaver's work being hailed in the 1950's as the synthesis of fine art and illustration,¹ illustrators are still credited differently in publications² and excluded from exhibitions, and they continue to express concern over their artistic status.³ If such a dialectic presupposes that some basic premises are held in common, then there ought to be an affinity hidden within the writings of the old adamantly "elitist" critics that can be brought to bear usefully on commercial art practices; one that can be exhumed through a critical reappraisal of their thought from an illustrator's perspective. This paper returns to the year of 1959 to posthumously initiate a scholarly debate on whether illustration could be "legitimate" art; a debate that at that time had excluded illustrators' viewpoints.

Rosenberg and Weaver were not such strange bedfellows as the foregoing implies. Harold Rosenberg popularized the term "action painting," and furthered the careers of Abstract Expressionists, and Robert Weaver was credited with using Abstract Expressionism to revitalize the illustration industry, moving illustration from academicism to conceptualism.⁴ Both men were determined to be misfits (and were) within their respective fields, yet they held some beliefs in common: "genuine" art was a special entity, creativity should

be individualistic, the creator ought to be of his times, and artists had a moral duty to challenge the status quo.⁵ They both deplored what Weaver referred to as "artistic Stalinism:"⁶ institutional determinism largely associated with the formalist doctrines promoted by Rosenberg's nemesis Clement Greenberg. Their primary difference is that Weaver stated, "I see no reason why an illustrator should not think of himself as a serious contemporary painter,"⁷ while Rosenberg asserted, "That genuine art can be created to order in *modern times* has never been demonstrated."⁸ Robert Weaver's illustrations for *Sports Illustrated*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and other mass publications challenge the belief that creativity in mass culture could not be considered art according to Rosenberg's own parameters in the 1950's. This paper uses Weaver's series of illustrations for an 1959 *Esquire* article on John F. Kennedy as a case study to examine whether such work can be considered art.⁹

Weaver is remembered as "the godfather of the new illustration" because of his avant garde innovations.¹⁰ According to Rosenberg, "an indispensable ingredient" of the avant garde "is social dissent. . . . The aim of vanguard art is to build a new kind of life in an epoch in which forms have collapsed or turned into purposeless restrictions."¹¹ The form that illustration was seen to have exhausted, and that Weaver challenged, was the academic realism associated with Westport illustrators in the vein of Norman Rockwell and Al Parker. As for social dissent, in 1965 he said he "would like to bring the artist's eye to bear upon more dangerous and volatile aspects of our time."¹² He sarcastically observed in 1959, "A true *avant-garde* might today proclaim the return of *subject matter*!"¹³

Regarding the question of subject matter, Rosenberg's definition of an action painter seemed diametrically opposed to Weaver's definition of an illustrator. While Weaver said, "The illustrator may use the ideas of the contemporary painter; but it is communication that is his ultimate goal,"¹⁴ Rosenberg denied action painters any goals whatsoever:

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act – rather than a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.¹⁵

This method consisted of the artist engaging with the canvas with no subject in mind, each new mark based on inspiration derived from the last, thereby provoking self-knowledge in the artist (or writer-critic); a process that was for Rosenberg a superior state:

The materials I use – words, paint, gesture – become the means for . . . unveiling the unexpected. It is for this reason that a work of art

that carries out an idea conceived by someone else – as in commercial art, or art made under the intellectual prodding of dealers, critics, or cultural managers – is bound to be inferior to art brought into being through a continuous passage between the mind and the hand of a free individual.¹⁶

Rosenberg's reasoning assumed that illustrators always know what they are doing ahead of execution, that conditions for surprises do not exist in their methods, that they are always art directed, that direction, goals, and desiderata necessarily hamper freedom, and that self-knowledge cannot be achieved in commercial work. Robert Weaver, on the other hand, was skeptical of action painting, caustically remarking in 1959:

Today's artist finds himself unattached to society. There is no mutual responsibility. He is 'free'. He likes it that way. Is it not this very freedom that has vitiated and robbed art of its *raison d'être*? I have noticed that abstract expressionism carried to the most reckless extremes no longer has the power to shock and disturb even the most conservative of audiences. Ennui sets in. . . . 'Self-expression' is not a purpose, it is an inevitable by-product of [an extrinsic] purpose. It is at this point that the illustrator-painter should realize his opportunities.¹⁷

Weaver had reason to question assumptions like Rosenberg's because Weaver's assignments from publishers were very loosely defined. Weaver was dispatched to cover a topic—delinquent youth, baseball players, industrial labour, Kennedy's presidential campaign—in any way he chose, as a journalist was. He recalled, "I was known for the kind of work I did. I rarely had to defend it or argue for it. They came to me, and they knew what they were going to get."¹⁸ Visiting actual sites, speaking to real people, sketching on the spot, he developed visual essays as he discovered the subject, not beforehand. Recalling his first cover job for *Fortune* magazine, he said,

[Art director Leo] Lionni trusted the artist, and once he picked the right practitioner, he let him alone. . . . What I did [for the cover] was go to the library and look up all the preceding *Fortune* covers under his direction. I made up my mind there was a certain kind of cover that he wanted, which I then proceeded to copy. . . . which he quickly rejected, saying, "No, no, no, no, do it your way." He looked at my sketchbook and picked out a most unexpected drawing for a cover. I told him it didn't look like a *Fortune* cover, and he said, "I don't want it to look like a *Fortune* cover."¹⁹

The way magazines hoped to benefit from letting artists go wild is conveyed in

an advertisement *Esquire* ran in 1956. Some of Weaver's work was reproduced with copy that read,

Between art and illustration lies the very fine line Robert Weaver captures on canvas today. His work is a startling translation of the literal. . . . It's a first and an imaginative one — and that's why you're bound to find it first in *Esquire*. For *Esquire* is good country for explorers like you. . . . You were the first to step out in the "chukka" boot . . . first with a portable TV. . . . And you'll always find firsts like these in *Esquire* . . . Because *Esquire* is a showcase for tomorrow's mood.²⁰

It is gag-inducing copy like this that set Rosenberg's teeth on edge. But commercial appropriation of "translation" and "imagination" does not negate the fact that those very qualities could have genuinely existed for the illustrator as he made the work, and that they can be reinstated simply by removing the images from the text with a pair of scissors, mental or real.

The crux of Rosenberg's and Weaver's conflict was whether creativity could thrive best within or outside of mainstream culture. Although in 1948 he protested against the idea of the romantically "alienated" artist, Rosenberg still felt the artist was some distance away from the everyday by virtue of his not being a reified worker.²¹ His poor opinion of popular art was strongly manifested in his 1957 essay "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism."²² Here, he wanted to suppress all critical scholarship on "kitsch" (which included illustration), except that which denounced it as propaganda in order to "change the landscape."²³ He worried that studying it ennobled it above its station, imbued it with meaningfulness that he felt was not genuine, and worst of all, that it took precious intellectual attention away from "real" art. There was, however, the annoying fact that fine art and mass art often borrowed from each other. Rosenberg complained that "kitsch" obligated art to retreat to ever more rarified pastures, for if "kitsch" came to resemble art (as Weaver was promoting), then art would become just "a commodity among commodities, kitsch."²⁴ Accusing mass art of "looting" fine art, he jealously defended his pet artists' (Willem De Kooning and Stuart Davis) use of "billboard type and lips that sell rouge" as "a vaccine," to critically point out how "life and kitsch have become inseparable."²⁵ But this chicken-and-egg debate of who-dunnit-first only showed how dividing culture into high and low was ultimately futile. Faced with this obvious conclusion but determined to keep art and mass culture apart nonetheless, Rosenberg then awkwardly denied that art was the "counterconcept" of popular culture:

But if it [art] sharply distinguishes itself . . . it becomes a disturbance, a risk . . . Dissociated from the experience of millions . . .

the best art of our times restricts its appeal to other artists . . . there is no audience for contemporary art and no luxury for artists. Both attention and cash go to kitsch. . . .²⁶

By distancing itself, art was supposed to maintain a non-commercial purity and to avoid collapse with "kitsch," but in practice this theory was an utter failure. Distance reinscribed the dialectic rather than transcending it, which ironically led to its collapse again; the more rarified it became, the more cash value such art was awarded. By 1969 Rosenberg would be forced to acknowledge that, "Action painting does not escape the law of the fetishism of commodities. . . . as in all art there is inherently in Action painting a temptation to chicanery . . . once Action painting had left the seclusion of the studio the old art game was going on as usual."²⁷ Worse, he wanted "genuine" art to have some political resonance (rather than an overt stance) but, as he later admitted, dissociated art risked being inscrutable and therefore ineffectual for political radicalism.²⁸ In fact, art reduced to an artistic statement of "no comment" could have any agenda imposed upon it. This was the fate of "depoliticized" abstract expressionist works, which as Frances Stonor Saunders shows, were embraced by the CIA-friendly Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum of American Art and paraded internationally from 1946 through the 1950's, promoting American cultural and economic hegemony abroad.²⁹ Nevertheless, Rosenberg clung to the ideal of dissociation throughout his career, eventually claiming the artist should be distanced as "a primitive, a naïf", so his art could "set in motion previously uncontrolled, or even undiscovered, powers of the mind."³⁰

Finding the socially disconnected artist and art to be inappropriate vehicles for meaningful engagement with life, Weaver proposed he "would like to show how 'art' and illustration could serve each other." He continued,

How can there be vitality without meaning? A much more intellectually challenging field of painting is that which includes illustration but *is not limited by it*. Illustration is essential to great painting. Abstraction cannot be equated with it; it is merely the grammar [original emphasis].³¹

Weaver was entirely in agreement with Rosenberg that the artist should never be a mere "reflector." Instead, "in an atomic era he should be a reactor." And just as Rosenberg proposed the artist should dissociate, so too did Weaver demand the illustrator "be outside momentary surface illusions, observing."³² Yet how could the aloof observer artist also be a nuclear reactor? Weaver advocated that the observer be completely immersed in the assignment, and like Rosenberg, he advocated that the artist define his creativity—his artistness—on his own terms:³³

Since I am an amateur illustrator as well as a professional one, I commissioned myself to cover 'Our Town' [a theatre production]. . . . One of the first problems in this kind of assignment is to become an accepted, unobtrusive presence. I had to be close to what was going on but not a distraction for the cast. I was able to accomplish this by showing up regularly at rehearsals and sitting around for long hours. The illustrator, too, needs this familiarization. Thus, in a relaxed way, he can draw exactly what he wants to draw.³⁴

"Familiarization," not withdrawal, was the way to artistic empowerment. He continued to emphasize drawing from life as research, making his students at the School of Visual Arts draw in public while saying, "Once the initial shock of *life* wears off the student can begin to discover the magnitude of the world."³⁵ The illustrator was a participant observer, and Weaver called his sketchbook pages "informational notes," not art.³⁶ Rosenberg wrote, "The mass-culture maker, who takes his experience of others, is essentially a reflector of myths, and lacks concrete experiences to communicate."³⁷ Challenging this totalizing proclamation, Weaver said of his journalistic approach,

It was not the kind of mythologizing illustration that you saw in *Cosmopolitan*. Theirs was not attached to the real world, and that's why I liked the journalistic side of it. . . . I did do some *Cosmopolitan* work, a lot of detective stories, which I enjoy doing, but even that kind of fictional illustration grew out of the real. I used *real* data. . . . I based my *Cosmo* work on a lot of sketches of real situations. . . . in the interest of credibility.³⁸

In observing real situations, Weaver synthesized a distinction Rosenberg made between "formulated *common experiences* which are the substance of mass culture and the *common situations* in which human beings find themselves," the latter of which was "the genuine work of art" [original emphasis].³⁹ Rosenberg protested against the concept of the artist becoming the "medium of a common experience," and instead claimed, "For individual experience it is necessary to begin with the individual." In agreement with him in principle, but differing on the score of medium, Weaver stated, "I don't like symbolism. It's very hard to feel emotional about a symbol [in posters]. . . . I'm using real and appropriate symbols. The poster I worked from is *my* poster. That's *my* umbrella. The symbols are appropriate because they effectively represent *my* life."⁴⁰ However, both men's claims were contradicted somewhat by the fact that Weaver loved flags, even if he appreciated their symbolism ironically: in a self-portrait his eccentric jacket is made of the American stars and stripes.⁴¹ In fact, common symbols do not close meaning. Rather, they are points of familiarity people customize and use in defining their identities as simulta-

neously similar and different. The more mass identity is imposed, the more it invites subversion.

Rosenberg's condemnation of kitsch revolved around its supposed adherence to rules:

Mass art is the product of creative talent put into the service of
a) art that has established rules
b) art that has a predictable audience, predictable efforts, predictable rewards
Kitsch is art that follows established rules. . . . Kitsch is thus art produced in obedience to the basic assumptions of the Art of the Ages: the assumption that traditional forms can be put to new uses through technical means; the assumption that these forms retain an intrinsic power to move people. Both these assumptions are correct.⁴²

It is essentially true that avant garde illustration did use new technical means to reiterate traditional forms in order to profit from their ensuing novelty, the very tactic that Rosenberg feared could become propaganda. Weaver did not deny that this possibility existed. He accused illustrators of being unthinking:

That [the illustrator] has not realized [his artistic opportunities] is borne out by the low opinion in which the illustrator is held in the general art world. Many illustrators of today are too little concerned with the actualities of their time. Too often they merely aid and abet the pre-sold illusion of the age. The illustrator who should be outside momentary surface illusions observing, is himself observed as part of the phenomenon by more serious students of the time.⁴³

Weaver's belief that most illustration contributed to "illusion" agreed with Rosenberg's opinion, but Weaver differed from Rosenberg in that he felt the problem could be addressed in commissioned work. Although Rosenberg eventually saw that abstract expressionism found its logical outcome in ennui,⁴⁴ the idea that artists should be "responsible" frightened him. "I should only like to make sure nobody is bullied by the abstract concept of social responsibility into becoming useless to himself and to his fellow men, or even becoming a menace," he said, referring to the producers of mass culture who while attempting to work for the greater good may become totalitarian instead.⁴⁵ Illustration, however, with its "power to move people" and to "be put to new uses through technical means," deserves credit that it might also be used to *positively* change the landscape, both in its own right and as the cattle-driver of fine art;⁴⁶ it is not a foregone conclusion that totalitarianism results from design for mass culture. Weaver, like Rosenberg, pointed out that a "cigarette ad

[or] Soviet social realism . . . don't *really* communicate."⁴⁷ Unlike Rosenberg, he felt illustration did not necessarily equate to propaganda.

Rosenberg would have called Weaver an "Orgman," one who buys into the system he works for.⁴⁸ In contrast to the Orgman, the intellectual, like the artist, "defines himself as an intellectual . . . by the *sole fact of his inner dissociation* from the organizational universe" [original emphasis].⁴⁹ True intellectuals were never contained by their job descriptions, were characterized by philosophical lone wolfism, and could be found in any walk of life,⁵⁰ except apparently as "mass culture makers," whom Rosenberg characterized as a faceless, monolithic lot. In this, he was being hypocritical, since he himself was paradoxically implicated as an Orgman and mass culture producer by his thirty-year career as a radio script-writer and poster campaign planner, then Project Consultant, on the Advertising Council since at least 1945 until 1971.⁵¹ Although the Ad Council promoted itself as a benign entity performing public service duties like the Smoky The Bear campaign, its close financial ties to the CIA in the 1950's and central role in disseminating Cold War propaganda, has been documented by many.⁵² Rosenberg's theory of the intellectual bureaucrat who dissociates is likely derived from his Ad Council day-job, but that he never directly acknowledged his daily toil and paycheck in his critical essays shows a serious gap between his theory and practice. While Rosenberg probably did not know about the CIA involvement at the time,⁵³ there is no way he could not have known about "The People's Capitalism," a piece of propaganda originating with his boss Theodor Repplier that was the template for international visual displays and pamphleteering at home and abroad in South America, Europe, and Asia, starting in 1957.⁵⁴ It promoted the notion that capitalism was directed by workers, who participated by purchasing stocks and insurance plans. It is hard to think of anything further from Rosenberg's personal political beliefs. He was probably as openly critical of this enterprise as he was of another one on the subject of mental health,⁵⁵ given that he derided the kind of centralized global control that The People's Capitalism initiative was representative of. It is not that he relaxed his standards; it is likely he was hired to be as critical as possible. Rather, it suggests that compromise has its positive aspects; he may have believed in other, more positive work the Council was doing, or that he could be a voice of reason within the system. It is unfortunate that he was unable to cut the same slack for other mass culture producers in art that he gave himself in policy-making. The self-directed intellectual who psychologically washes his hands of his day job while remaining materially tied to it participates in furthering hegemony – *but* – this illustrates that there may be no choice *except* to work for freedom within a structure of hegemony. There is no politically effective position that remains entirely outside of popular culture. One must work *consciously* from within, as Weaver asked illustrators to do.

Robert Weaver also fit the description of an intellectual within an organization, in that he taught at the School of Visual Arts but quit every year.⁵⁶ He also hated the Society of Illustrators, and suggested in his acceptance speech for their Lifetime Achievement Award that they were only giving it to him because they "preferred to have him in the tent pissing out rather than outside pissing in."⁵⁷ Weaver said that in the 1950's he felt illustration was the best way to express himself, and that he could always "find within a manuscript some way of putting myself into the illustration,"⁵⁸ an uncanny echo of Rosenberg's assurance that the intellectual always finds "cracks" in which "to crawl around the obstacles."⁵⁹ Indeed, in that illustration is handmade, it can never be considered in a Marxist paradigm to be *totally* reified labour. Weaver wanted his illustrations to stand alone as art apart from the texts they accompanied.⁶⁰ As such, they undercut the text, allowing the reader to interpret them against the script if desired.

Fighting for the autonomy of the illustrator suggests fine art values drove Weaver's program, and indeed, Weaver had never planned to become an illustrator. In 1953 he got his first contract accidentally when he applied for a designer-consultant position at *Town and Country* magazine, where the art director decided his sketches would look well as illustrations. Said Weaver, "[Illustration] had not appealed to me because of the prevalence of the boy/girl pretty stuff in magazines. No serious artist would ever consider doing illustration!"⁶¹ In light of Weaver's paranoia of being a "mere" illustrator, in order to claim artistic integrity, he had to do more than just copy the brushwork of abstract expressionism. Weaver's innovation was, according to Steven Heller, "to push illustration beyond the single image to the essay form or to a dynamic realm that more closely resembled film than magazine art . . . he rejected literalism and emphasized pure form cut with irony."⁶² It is in his development of *ambiguity* in illustration that Weaver is to be thought of as an innovator. Illustration traditionally clarifies. Weaver spoke strongly of clarity, but insisted in a typically cunning way, "It is possible to be ambiguous *clearly* [like Magritte]."⁶³

Rosenberg always laid responsibility solely on the *artist* to avoid, by artistic spontaneity, "the kind of mental forcing out of which can come only lifeless illustrations of ready-made ideas."⁶⁴ He overlooked that the audience is also responsible for determining the message, and it is in the *viewer's* spontaneity that we can find room for political agency in commercial art. In order for it to be said to have occurred, communication must be *shared*. As a visual communicator, Weaver considered the reader's experience as well as his own. The "action illustrator" is then one who, as a nuclear reactor, provokes the "action" in the reader-viewer. Weaver avoided totalitarian depictions through ambiguous dialectic juxtapositions that cracked open the illusionistic front of illustration and allowed the viewer to engage in free semiosis, what Rosenberg

called "set[ting] in motion previously uncontrolled, or even undiscovered, powers of the mind."⁶⁵ Discussing his 1959 *Esquire* spread on then-Senator John F. Kennedy, Weaver said,

it can be seen that my pictures sometimes might be said to operate on two or more levels of meaning. What is visible to the naked eye in real life does not always tell the "truth;" so it is sometimes necessary to recompose life or juxtapose two widely separated elements in order to make visible and readable a true but invisible meaning or relationship.⁶⁶

Weaver never disclosed what this invisible meaning might be. He had set out to "demonstrate that politics is just as visual and colorful as, say, show business . . . I was especially interested in the people who surround Kennedy. My observations have an even sharper edge among the paintings which were not used in the article." But he didn't approve of preaching morality directly. "As to Kennedy himself, I discovered I could come to no conclusion about the man and so chose not to do so in the paintings. Let the experts conclude; my job was to produce pictures."⁶⁷

It would be fascinating to know whether the "sharper" images had been eliminated by *Esquire* or by Weaver. Marshall Arisman, a longtime friend of Weaver, says Weaver was left of centre, but apolitical.⁶⁸ This perhaps informs the polyvalent readings possible in the Kennedy series, the ambiguity that allows readers to interpret freely. In the title page image, a swarm of candidates holding placards that together portray the White House, can be read as either democracy working collectively for the whole, or as individuals breaking up the whole into pieces.

In the second image, according to the caption, Kennedy is "poised symbolically on the threshold" of the Capitol's Statuary Hall, "with campaign posters representing the rough-and-tumble way into the serenity of accomplishment." The posters outside the door behind Kennedy, framing him, can also stand for profane commercial art versus the sanctified fine art inside this temple, or the inevitable codependence of the two. Kennedy is dwarfed by the Corinthian columns of the hall, and by founding father figures that include the seated socialist-leaning Senator Robert LaFollette. LaFollette, despite popularity and effectiveness, never made it to the top, so he may be read as a benchmark for Kennedy or a warning. Weaver includes on the far left signage announcing SHELTER AREA THIS WAY with an arrow, which may be read two ways. If the arrow is seen to be pointing out of the room and off the page, it is implying that even if Kennedy makes it into the Hall as a celebrated figure, he will find no shelter there. If the arrow is read as an invitation to come further into the room, it implies the opposite.

The Statuary Hall picture is matched with a small image on the facing

page of Kennedy and his rival Nixon eyeing one another in a hallway that stretches beyond them into infinity; they had rather awkwardly been assigned offices across from one another. Isolating them together in this barren setting, Weaver makes them both rivals and brethren. Turning to the next spread, a large image of supporters watching from the steps of the Capitol building is paired with a smaller picture of Kennedy that is positioned on the page so that it appears as if the supporters are looking at him. The latter shows posters on poles depicting his face in sections, that together build a solemn portrait of him, yet they appear to fracture his identity as well. The caption refers to him as "the complex young man who holds [supporters'] hopes" while the pull-quote on the preceding page asks, "Can he get the nomination? Will he be elected? What kind of President would he make?" The shattered portrait can then be read as questioning whether Kennedy's mental complexity is a risk, or else suggesting that his complexity is responsive to the different constituents who presumably hold the poles aloft.

Compared to the caricaturish handling of the figures of people close to Kennedy whom Weaver depicts on the following page, the supporters looking from the steps towards the portrait are imbued with dignity, drawn in naturalistic poses and body proportions, with individuated faces that for the most part avoid exaggeration. In his painting of the people surrounding Kennedy, Weaver has laid identical "toothpaste" grins onto several men, including Kennedy, in bright white paint. Their legs are short and rigid, not convincing, while the floor falls out from under them in forced perspective. It is in this piece that we best see Weaver's negative opinion of the show business of politics, in contrast to his sensitive treatment of the hoi polloi on the steps.

Throughout the series, Weaver draws attention to the role of posters, TV, film, and banners in the campaign, a prescient move given that Kennedy's success was later attributed by many to his deft exploitation of broadcast media. In a small spot-illustration paired with the caricature of his team, Kennedy is shown inside a car, with a wall of posters outside the window. He is holding a newspaper and it appears he is being escorted by police out of the confines of the posters, one of which prominently spells CIRCUS, possibly circus, lending credence to the idea that Weaver was comparing campaigning to show business.

On the last page, Weaver showed Kennedy on a movie set, with a false window behind him and studio paraphernalia in the foreground, exposing the fakery of it all. This small spot was paired with a half-page bleed of a theatre screening a film on Kennedy's life. The film still shows men in suits, the second one bearing a passing resemblance to Hitler, with the words THE END ominously dominating. This also acted as a reference to the series itself, since it was the last illustration in the sequence. Overall, the loose handling of the brush in sketches where the perspective stayed relatively classical implied

that what he captured was objective, while the more contrived compositions with flattened space and more awkward figures inserted a feeling of self-conscious subjectivity. The interplay of objectivity and subjectivity created something approximating Rosenberg's "unique psychic tension" that he held out for genuine, critical art,⁶⁹ a tension that could allow the reader to question both the "truth" and "interpretation" proposed by the illustrations.

Weaver sounded certain that illustration could be art in 1959, but was no longer sure by 1965: "It is quite possible that illustration and art might one day merge, at some vanishing point in history, but for the moment their aims and purposes are quite different," he claimed.⁷⁰ In 1986, Weaver explained, "I don't feel [that illustration can be art] now, but in the early days, yes, I felt that everything I needed to say could be said in illustrations. . . . Now illustration has become very constricting."⁷¹ The constrictions were both in the industry and within himself. He remarked:

Illustration is a younger man's art form. I think one eventually gets tired of that kind of illustration where you have to make up solutions to stories that essentially are simplistic. If you really have an interest in art or ideas, you need some way of letting that come out, and you can't do it in illustration alone, unless you're given a lot of paper and a lot of time and freedom.⁷²

The Kennedy assignment was hardly simplistic, but such jobs are not everyday work. After he had mostly stopped taking contracts, in 1979 he argued that illustration was not yet art because illustrators had not retained control as art directors and designers: "For a work to be judged as art there must be an artist in full command of the medium. Only when he has pushed it as far as it can go can he be tested fairly by the same critical standards applied to other artists."⁷³ He defined the medium as "ink, mechanically printed on both sides of the bound pages of a magazine," and said, "I think it is possible to extend the definition of the medium to include an appreciation of the possibilities for narrative that reside uniquely in the structure of the book."⁷⁴ He devoted his last decades to these "two-story" or "split-level" books, in which the pages were divided with different narratives (one could say like text and subtext) carrying on independently in each section. They invited the reader to synthesize a third meaning, a clear progression from the ambiguity of his earlier work in magazines. Famously, fulfilling Rosenberg's ideal, he refused to exhibit or sell them at all, and he gave away extremely few. Yet he still did not consider himself an artist, because he did not feel he had of anything of importance to say.⁷⁵

While Weaver's art for magazines may be seen as satisfying even Harold Rosenberg's criteria for art, Weaver's abandonment of it for non-commercial studio practice suggests Rosenberg's position holds weight. Indeed,

the Illustrators Partnership of America and other industry representatives are still fighting for illustrators to be recognized as equal to the creative demands of the early design stages of the projects they are called upon to illustrate.⁷⁶ We must conclude then, that Rosenberg's insistence that the mass production of culture conflicts with individual creative input is correct. However, it does not follow that individual artistic expression is not to be found in illustration. Art cannot be limited by medium, method, or even message. The question is not whether "painting" or "illustration" is valid, but whether the practitioner is achieving what is important to him or her, be it self-realization or social participation. Weaver himself, even when he denied most illustration was art, still allowed that "the best practitioners may one day be remembered as artists."⁷⁷

Despite, or because of, ruffling feathers, Weaver is considered among illustrators one of the most important of the twentieth century.⁷⁸ The landscape Weaver contributed to changing was that of how illustrators think of their working relationships. As illustrator Leif Peng put it, "I suspect that what Robert Weaver did by leaping into mid-air was show others that it could and should be done. Someone must take the daring plunge – and survive – to give others the courage to follow."⁷⁹ Weaver showed that base and superstructure are not in a deterministic relationship so much as a dialectic one, and that the commercial artist is uniquely positioned to play both sides.

Notes:

- ¹ Sterling McIlhany, "The Realism of Robert Weaver," *American Artist*, (Sept. 1959): 65.
- ² Debate has occurred in the *New York Times Magazine* offices over whether gallery artists ought to be credited as "Artwork by . . ." or "Illustration by . . ." (conversation between *Times* art directors and attendees of ICON5, The Illustration Conference, July, 2008).
- ³ For example, a cover of *Varoom* magazine (July 2008) by Brad Holland, is filled with handwriting complaining that "Actors are artists, musicians are artists . . . it seems the only people who are not artists are illustrators."
- ⁴ Steven Heller, "The End of Illustration?," *Illustrators' Partnership*, 2003, http://www.illustratorspartnership.org/01_topics/article.php?searchterm=00073 (accessed Nov. 23, 2008).
- ⁵ I shall retain the use of "he" throughout my discussion of Rosenberg and Weaver's art and writing, since I am primarily discussing a period when women were invisible in art. This is not to reinscribe their marginalization but to expose it.
- ⁶ Weaver in McIlhany, 66.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Harold Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," *Discovering the Present* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), 26. Rosenberg's italics were due to his allowing that high art was made to order in antiquity.
- ⁹ In Richard H. Rovere, "Kennedy's Last Chance to be President," *Esquire Maga-*

- zine (April, 1959): 63-70. According to Doug B. Dowd, the location of the original art for these reproductions is unknown.
- ¹⁰ Steven Heller, "The Godfather," *Seeing is Not Believing* (Norman Rockwell Museum, 1997), unpaginated.
- ¹¹ Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," 223, 227.
- ¹² Weaver in Walt Reed, *The Illustrator in America, 1900-1960's* (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1967): 268.
- ¹³ Weaver in McIhlany, 67. Original italics.
- ¹⁴ Weaver in Reed, 267.
- ¹⁵ Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," [1953] in *Tradition of the New* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965): 25.
- ¹⁶ Harold Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," in *Artworks and Packages* (New York: Horizon Press, 1969): 222.
- ¹⁷ Weaver in McIhlany, 66.
- ¹⁸ Weaver in Steven Heller, *Innovators of American Illustration* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1986) 16.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ *Esquire Magazine*, "You saw it First in *Esquire*," Display ad 217, *New York Times* (Nov. 14, 1956): 49.
- ²¹ Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 16.
- ²² Rosenberg, "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism," in *Tradition of the New*, 259.
- ²³ Ibid., 265.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 267.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 264, 265.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 267.
- ²⁷ Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," in *Artworks and Packages*, 224.
- ²⁸ Rosenberg, "Art of Bad Conscience," in *Artworks and Packages*, 159.
- ²⁹ Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999), 257-278.
- ³⁰ Rosenberg, "Art and Its Double," in *Artworks and Packages*, 20-23.
- ³¹ Weaver in, McIhlany, 66.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ "An artist is a person who has invented an artist. . . . Artists are people who tamper with what makes them artists." Rosenberg, "Themes," in *Discovering the Present*, 214.
- ³⁴ Weaver in McIhlany, 34.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 67.
- ³⁶ Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 18.
- ³⁷ Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 28.
- ³⁸ Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 16.
- ³⁹ Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 18.
- ⁴⁰ Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 18.
- ⁴¹ *Self-portrait*, circa 1960, reproduced in *Seeing is Not Believing: The Art of Robert Weaver*, [exhibition catalogue for The Norman Rockwell Museum and the School of Visual Arts] (New York and Stockbridge: Visual Arts Press 1997): unpaginated. The location of the original art is unknown.
- ⁴² Rosenberg, "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism," in *Tradition of the New*, 266.

- ⁴³ Weaver in McIhlany, 66.
- ⁴⁴ Rosenberg, "Virtuosos of Boredom," in *Discovering the Present*, 120-121.
- ⁴⁵ Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 28.
- ⁴⁶ A reference to Rosenberg's assertion that mass culture forces fine art to constantly retreat to more rarified realms, cited above.
- ⁴⁷ Weaver in Reed, 267.
- ⁴⁸ Rosenberg, "The Orgamerican Phantasy," in *Tradition of the New*, 271.
- ⁴⁹ Rosenberg, "Twilight of the Intellectuals," (1958) in *Defining the Present*, 173.
- ⁵⁰ Rosenberg, "The Intellectual and His Future," [1965] in *Defining the Present*, 194.
- ⁵¹ Eve Mangurten [for the Advertising Council], to Grove by email on Oct. 30, 2008.
- ⁵² E.g., Robert Haddow, "Material Culture and the Cold War: International Trade Fairs and the American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair" (Ph.D diss., University of Minnesota, 1994); Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade Against the Soviet Union* (New York: NYU Press, 1999); Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999).
- ⁵³ Rosenberg, "Stopping Communism," in *Defining the Present*, 310. In this essay he lambasts the dishonesty of the CIA in their dealings with intellectuals.
- ⁵⁴ Haddow, 1994, 44, 52, 54-56, 61, 317.
- ⁵⁵ Archivist's note, Harold Rosenberg Finding Aid, Getty Institute, Los Angeles.
- ⁵⁶ Marshall Arisman, interview with Grove on October 27, 2008.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 16.
- ⁵⁹ Rosenberg, "The Intellectual and His Future," in *Defining the Present*, 194.
- ⁶⁰ Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 17.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Steven Heller, "Robert Weaver 1924-1994," *Print* 48.5 (1994): 130.
- ⁶³ Robert Weaver, "Robert Weaver's Illustration Issue," *Print* (Nov-Dec 1979); reprinted as "Introspectives," in *Print* 48.5 (1994): 116.
- ⁶⁴ Rosenberg, "Art of Bad Conscience," in *Artworks and Packages*, 167-168.
- ⁶⁵ Rosenberg, "Art and Its Double," in *Artworks and Packages*, 20-23.
- ⁶⁶ Weaver in McIhlany, 35.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 35, 65.
- ⁶⁸ Arisman in interview with Grove.
- ⁶⁹ Rosenberg, "Pop culture: Kitsch Criticism," in *Tradition of the New*, 267.
- ⁷⁰ Weaver in Reed, 267.
- ⁷¹ Weaver in Heller, 16.
- ⁷² Ibid., 19.
- ⁷³ Weaver, *Print* (1994): 116.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 117.
- ⁷⁵ Arisman in interview with Grove.
- ⁷⁶ For essays on "the art of illustration," see the Illustrators Partnership of America, http://www.illustratorspartnership.org/01_topics/topics.php?searchtype=topic&Category&searchterm=artofillustration&topicType=category&topicTerm=01.
- ⁷⁷ Weaver, *Print* (1994): 116.
- ⁷⁸ Conversations with Milton Glaser, Marshall Arisman, Steven Heller, and Walt

Reed confirm this, as well as blog testimonials from Doug B. Dowd and Leif Peng. David Apatoff takes a more cautious approach, noting that because Weaver did not always encourage illustration students or honor his peers, his *personal* influence might be exaggerated.

⁷⁹ Leif Peng, "The Incursion of the Avant Garde: Robert Weaver," *Today's Inspiration*, Feb. 26, 2008, <http://todaysinspiration.blogspot.com/2008/02/incursion-of-avant-garde-robert-weaver.html> (accessed Nov. 23, 2008).

From Destructive Infant to Restorative Mother: Tracing the Vulnerable Body in the Work of Louise Bourgeois

Whitney Howell

I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now.

Molloy in *Molloy*, Samuel Beckett.

She objects to the business. . . . She knows the profits of it, but she doesn't appreciate the art of it, and she objects to it. "I do not wish," she writes in her own handwriting, "to regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that bony light."

Mr. Venus, "Preserver of Animals and Birds and Articulator of human bones," on his rejected marriage proposal in *Our Mutual Friend*, Charles Dickens.

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Mr. Venus utters his lament amid the many curiosities of his shop, and the reader, along with Silas Wegg, who is being addressed here, is fain to make out which among these curiosities are human, animal or more foreign parts. One can imagine Louise Bourgeois's studio to be a similarly uncanny environment, full of accumulated objects with previous lives and histories, as well as raw materials waiting for her hands to give them form. Bourgeois's artistic career spans over half a century and encompasses a variety of media; and yet, as many critics have noted,¹ the diverse body of her work is united by its relentless ability to tap the unconscious, to express and evoke the emotional conflicts which characterize childhood and continually inform adult life. Indeed, Bourgeois herself has cited specific events in her childhood as the source of much of her work, and describes her creative process, her sculpture in particular, as an opportunity "to re-experience the fear, to give it a physicality so I am able to hack away at it. Fear becomes a manageable reality. Sculpture allows me to re-experience the past, to see the past in its objective, realistic proportion."² While the shapes and proportions—the means—of manageabil-