TOWARDS A REDEFINITION OF CENSORSHIP

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Any redefinition necessitates an assessment of existing provision. This article analyses contemporary models of censorship and outlines the theoretical antecedents informing the 'new censorship' debate before moving onto a further reorientation of the term. Theorists including Richard Burt, Sue Curry Jansen and Michael Holquist come under consideration in an investigation which highlights the prevalence of theories which maintain that censorship is an omnipresent, structural necessity. The article assesses the influence of Michel Foucault, asking whether the critical preoccupation with constitutive forms of censorship has led to a failure to acknowledge the potential subversion and dysfunction of censorious forces. Whilst defending a strongly inclusive application of the term, 'Towards a Redefinition of Censorship' proposes that we place greater value upon responsiveness to the experience of the censored author or artist. Without such consideration, we risk perpetuating procedures of exclusion.

Any analysis of censorship will eventually come up against the difficult question of what the term 'censorship' actually signifies. This article engages with contemporary debates over the definition of censorship, and discusses the implications of an increasingly wide application of the term. I interrogate the suppositions of the 'new censorship' debate, arguing that attempts to define the slippery concept of censorship often fail to acknowledge the experience of those who consider themselves censored.

I propose an inclusive definition that responds to the diverse experiences of censorship, and which reflects the socio-historical specificity of instances of control, conditioning or silencing. This definition acknowledges that censorship is a process, realised through the relationships between censorious agents, rather than a series of actions carried out by a discrete or isolated authority. In order to reflect the ethical complexity of speaking for the silenced, this definition of censorship is directed by the inclusive logic of 'both/and', rather than preserving the censorious modality of 'either/or'.
Questioning Convention

Many recent analyses of censorship contrast contemporary definitions of censorship with traditional models. Within the last fifteen years, the contention that conventional approaches to censorship have concentrated on institutional acts of prohibition to the detriment of a more sophisticated or subtle understanding of censorship has become commonplace.

Critics such as Richard Burt, Judith Butler, Annette Kuhn and Michael Holquist have noted that this conventional conception of censorship focuses upon the external silencing of a resistant subject's speech or expression, which is understood to be 'free', or hitherto uncensored. Within this model, censorious intervention is generally assumed to take place after the act of expression. Curiously, none of these critics provide close readings of (or indeed any references to) examples of the application of this model, raising the suspicion that it is difficult to locate a definition of censorship which is quite as naive as they imply. However, what is of concern here is the question of redefinition, and below I summarise the alternative models they propose in opposition to this faceless orthodoxy.

Annette Kuhn frames her study of early twentieth century film censorship (produced in 1988) with a rejection of convention. She states that models which concentrate upon institutional prohibition serve to inhibit appreciation of the complexity of censorship, noting that they tend to reify the censored object, placing it in a position of inert passivity in which it is subordinated to institutional practices. Kuhn alleges that within this framework, censored films "can be seen only in terms of their absences, of what has been actively denied expression in them."¹ Her redefinition aims to problematise the notion that censorship is always a matter of repression, arguing that we should take greater account of its productivity. She also remarks that it occurs through the interaction of different censorious forces, concluding that it is "a process, not an object."

Censorship is not reducible to a circumscribed and predefined set of institutions and institutional activities, but is produced within an array of constantly shifting discourses, practices and apparatuses. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as either fixed or monolithic.

¹ Kuhn, Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, p.4.
This emphasis upon a multiplicity of different discourses and practices is reiterated in Sue Curry Jansen's work *Censorship: The Knot that Binds Knowledge and Power*, which was published in 1991. She puts forward her alternative definition of censorship:

My definition of the term encompasses all socially structured proscriptions or prescriptions which inhibit or prohibit dissemination of ideas, information, images, and other messages through a society's channels of communication whether these obstructions are secured by political, economic, religious, or other systems of authority. It includes both overt and covert proscriptions and prescriptions.³

Jansen draws attention to the power of *constitutive* (as compared to regulative) censorship, citing the significance of the taboos and mores of the community, and the underlying construction of psychic and social forces. She proposes that we analyse the *implicit* structures of censorship rather than the more obvious operations of communicational and cultural control, which criticism has tended to focus upon in the past.

Constitutive censorship is also foregrounded in Michael Holquist's introduction to a special 1994 edition of the *PMLA*, "Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship". Holquist asserts that we should know better than to accept the conventional 'either/or' hypothesis: the popular perception that censorship either exists, or it does not. He notes that censorship may be inescapable, and that the removal of overtly repressive institutions, or the introduction of legislation which promises to deliver 'free speech', are merely palliatives. He states that censorship is:

Still treated through a crude axiology, as an absolute choice between prohibition and freedom. This position denies the reality of interdiction and masks the necessity of choosing between the myriad specific conditions that embody censorship's fatedness. To be for or against censorship as such is to assume a freedom no one has. Censorship *is*. One can only discriminate among its more and less repressive effects.⁴

According to Holquist, the most valuable tool available to those who wish to control cultural activity may be the tendency to characterise censorship as an

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² Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*, p.127.
⁴ Holquist, "Corrupt Originals", p.16.
act of repressive intervention. This conviction leads to the assumption that censorship cannot go unnoticed, thus masking its more obscure operations. His depressing vision defines censorship as omnipresent and inevitable.

Other critics have also explored this concept. Some ten years after Kuhn's publication, Richard Burt's reading of the operations of theatrical censorship in early modern England restates her rejection of long-established definitions. He avers that his "deconstructive" definition of censorship replaces earlier academic emphases upon the fifteenth century English court's repressive activities with an illumination of procedures of dispersal and displacement. He claims that his "more complex and nuanced model" demonstrates that censorship was present among "a variety of regulatory agents and practices; it was productive as well as prohibitive; it involved cultural legitimation as well as delegitimation. Censorship was more than one thing, occurred at more than one place and at more than one time." Burt observes that this approach connects "those terms that the more traditional model wishes to oppose: repression and diversity; production and consumption; censoring and uncensoring; and public and private."\(^5\)

I list these treatments of censorship in order to draw attention to the way in which the moment of redefinition has been repeatedly rehearsed in recent years. These approaches cannot be described as illegitimate, but they are problematic. Kuhn, Holquist and Burt foreground the productivity of censorship by comparing the naivety of popular, or conventional, perceptions of censorship with the theoretical complexity of their own approach. My contribution to this ongoing process of redefinition rejects this tendency to denounce an unsophisticated, or popular, apprehension of censorship. Moreover, I believe that it is important to examine the theoretical foundations underlying this contemporary shift in thinking about censorship. It is to these foundations I now turn.

**Constitutive Censorship**

Whether Kuhn, Holquist, Jansen and Burt acknowledge it or not, it is clear that contemporary definitions of censorship which foreground its diverse, dispersed and productive character are informed by the work of Michel

\(^5\) Burt, "(Un)Censoring in Detail", p.17–18.
Foucault. His influence should not be underestimated. After all, it was Foucault who encouraged us to "escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and State institutions, and instead base our analysis of power on the study of techniques and tactics of domination." Any recent scholarship which highlights censorship's constitutive nature – or draws out the complex interrelationship of censor and censored – owes a considerable debt to his examinations of wide-ranging networks of disciplinary power and discursive practices.

The ontology of censorship and its relation to power is a recurring theme in Foucault's work. In the series *The History of Sexuality*, first published in 1976, he uncouples the link between censorship and constraint, suggesting that we have misunderstood the relationship between sexuality and repression. He contends that histories which characterise the nineteenth century as an era of prudery, modesty, and sexual repressiveness fail to grasp censorship's paradoxical power. He argues that sex became the object of obsessive amounts of attention during this period. This excessive interest produced areas of knowledge around this focus of cultural anxiety, rather than its excision from the discursive agenda. This results in a reconfiguration of censorship as a productive force, which constitutes the discourse surrounding sexuality, just as it defines its boundaries.

Censorship's potential power as a constitutive force is also explored in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. In this text, Foucault describes the disciplinary function of enlightenment institutions such as Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. The architectural principles of this edifice provide a blue-print for the rise of self-censorship. The Panoptic society, which reflects the design of this prison building, is one in which internal codes of control displace external methods of punishment and surveillance. Foucault discusses the operation of these codes, noting that they exist to measure, supervise and correct the "abnormal". He observes that "all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal) [...] to which every individual is subjected." Within the

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6 Curiously, Jansen goes out of her way to disassociate her work from Foucault, despite the suggestive reference of her title. See Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot that Binds*, p.219.
8 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p.15–35.
Panopticon, the subject learns to apply this system of branding to his own behaviour.

The Foucauldian definition of censorship as a productive force may seem counter-intuitive. Indeed, using a model of censorship which implies that processes of exclusion and differentiation are fundamental to our construction of knowledge, and even our identities, necessarily complicates any effort to define censorship. It not only undermines the cherished liberal ideal of free speech, but simultaneously presents us with a theory that is difficult, if not impossible, to evidence. If censorship is constitutive, operating at the most basic level of discourse and comprehension, how are we to assess it? Rejecting the 'either/or' binarism of 'freedom/repression', or refuting the notion that censorship is always external to the subject, clearly requires analysis of the most foundational levels of communication and consciousness.

Pierre Bourdieu's work, *Language and Symbolic Power* (first published in French in 1982) contains just such an analysis. His enquiry into the constitutive role of language proposes that censorship may be an unavoidable structural necessity. In the essay, "Censorship and the Imposition of Form" (in which he examines the relationship between linguistic content and form) he comments: "The censorship exercised by the structure of the field determines the form [...] and, necessarily, the content, which is inseparable from its appropriate expression and therefore literally unthinkable outside of the known forms and recognised norms."10 Bourdieu indicates that this constitutive level of censorship is profoundly compelling. He asserts that the more effective the process of regulation and repression is, the less apparent it becomes, as it begins to appear as the natural 'way of the world'. The need for explicit prohibitions, imposed and sanctioned by an institutionalised authority, diminishes as the mechanisms of internalisation take hold. He reasons that:

Censorship is never quite as perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorised to say [...] he is [...] censored once and for all, through the forms of perception and expression that he has internalised and which impose their form on all his expressions.11

Thus, censorship's success is indicated by its apparent abolition. Some things become impossible to say or, if said, are impossible to take seriously.

Other theorists have capitalised upon the 'linguistic turn' in sociological thought. Stanley Fish's monograph, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*, explores the idea that all texts are generated by a process of exclusion and selection, as he seeks to refute the 'freedom' in 'free speech'. Fish proposes that every statement's coherence lies firmly within the "interpretative community" that receives it. He suggests that free speech "has never been general and has always been understood against the background of an originary exclusion that gives it meaning."\(^1\)\(^2\) There is a certain indisputable logic about this argument. For a sentence to become comprehensible, it must be produced by an operation that realises certain possibilities, and rules out others. Thus, both Fish and Bourdieu observe that censorship is a structural necessity; an economy of choice governed by principles of selection and regulation; internalised through language, and consequently present in every utterance.

The idea of censorship as structural necessity is also fundamental to the teachings of psychoanalysis. The powerful operation of an internalised form of censorship is firmly inscribed in the work of Freud, and latterly, Lacan. Freud intimates that a process of censorious exclusion and differentiation is bound up with our most basic instincts, as it is generated during our early socialisation. At this early stage, the function of judgement is based upon the oldest oral impulses. We function by introjecting everything perceived as 'good', while ejecting everything perceived as 'bad'. Freud claims that we are governed by the logic of statements such as "'I should like to eat this', or 'I should like to spit it out' [...] that is to say: 'It shall be inside me' or 'it shall be outside me'."\(^1\)\(^3\)

This insight was given a greater measure of complexity as Freud developed his concept of depth psychology. His speculative framework, describing the opaque structure of our consciousness, rests upon a system of repression rather than exclusion. His theories propose the internal division of the psyche, in which the shadowy and mysterious area of the subconscious functions as an internal censorship mechanism, suppressing problematic and distressing areas of thought, memory, and experience. Freud maintained that

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\(^1\) Fish, *There's No Such Thing As Free Speech*, p.104.

\(^2\) Freud, quoted in *The Freud Reader*, p.668.
repression was essential for the formation of subjectivity, proposing that the operations of repression and the beginnings of self-awareness are simultaneous.\textsuperscript{14} It is important to note that this is \textit{repression}, rather than exclusion (in contrast to his earlier analysis). Derrida notes that the Freudian psyche "neither repels, nor flees, nor excludes an exterior force; it contains an interior representation, laying out within itself a space of repression."\textsuperscript{15}

Both Freud's groundbreaking project and Lacan's reworking of psychoanalytic theory ponder the dependence of the psyche upon the material it attempts to repress or exclude. Their work encourages acknowledgement of the constitutive role of exclusion and demarcation, implying that censorship is not primarily experienced as external pressure, but is generated from within. Furthermore, the way in which psychoanalytic concepts are caught up in the traditions of semiotic thought is made explicit in Lacan's reassessment of Freudian theory. His writings indicate that our subjectivity is created by language's sign system: our identity is formed through language and linguistic structure, as it comes to reflect a symbolic order which is dependent upon margins, limits, borders and boundaries. Just as the denotation of any given term rests upon that which it excludes, identity is also constructed through relation to an exterior or outside. Our entry into language, which Lacan describes as the transition from the 'Imaginary' to the 'Symbolic' phase, constitutes the entry into a cultural order that forms the infant's identity.

Contemplating Foucauldian discourse theory alongside psychoanalytic interpretations of internalised censorship is a disquieting experience. Whilst they represent very different intellectual traditions, both theoretical approaches seem to undermine any faith in the possibility of free expression. Both psychoanalytic and Foucauldian subjects seem to be complicit, caught within an ineluctable web of power. Oppositional discourse is therefore contained within, and indeed produced by, the very terms it seeks to challenge. Foucault indicates that the normative cultural sphere is heavily reliant upon a realm of obscenity that it seeks to exclude from its own operation, while psychoanalysis emphasises the formative presence of processes of repression at the most foundational levels of our consciousness. Both approaches appear to lead to the fatalistic conclusion that censorship is

\textsuperscript{14} Freud, quoted in \textit{The Freud Reader}, p.569.

\textsuperscript{15} Freud, quoted in Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, p.196.
Indeed omnipresent. Awareness of constitutive forms of censorship only seems to reinforce our belief in their inescapability.

**Instances of Incompletion**

While emphasis upon the constitutive, productive power of censorship may seem to be imbued with a certain theoretical rigor, it does not reflect the experience of censorship as the unwelcome imposition of external constraint. The essentialising language of psychoanalysis may often seem to empty censorship of its socio-historical specificity, just as the Foucauldian focus upon the complicitous subject does not always appear to do justice to a history of ideological conflict and confrontation. This is not to deny the power of constitutive censorship or the pressure exerted by societal norms. However, it is important to remember that these norms are not fixed, but are instead subject to constant change. There may be no such thing as an uncensored text, but this fact does not rule out the possibility that further external constraints can be imposed upon it, or that the text may find ways of challenging such censorious interventions.

Indeed, it seems that constitutive censorship itself may contain a measure of such subversion. Michael Levine addresses the question of authorial self-censorship in his monograph, *Writing Through Repression*, foregrounding the way in which an awareness of censorship simultaneously inhibits and provokes the writer. He infers that work which anticipates or negotiates censorship begins to take on a style which addresses these limitations, commenting that censorship can be figured both "as a debilitating impediment and [...] as an impetus to stylistic innovation."\(^{16}\) Levine notes that the use of the unspoken as a stylistic device by authors is illuminated by Freud's characterisation of the repressed as a continually developing set of processes.

Freud describes the series of distortions repressed items undergo before they can resurface in the conscious mind, transformed by condensation, displacement and symbolism. According to Levine, these psychoanalytic processes are reflected in the stylistic innovations and strategies of dissimulation employed by writers under the threat of silencing.

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\(^{16}\) Levine, *Writing Through Repression*, p.2.
Besides, repression is not a single event, but a series of acts that demand a constant expenditure of force. Perhaps the anxieties betrayed in censorship are so pervasively present because they have to be continually imagined. Whether we accept this notion or not, it is apparent that repression requires reiteration and therefore must be open to a level of renegotiation. Consequently, the censorious process of repression only functions as a dysfunctional and self-subversive operation.

Similar dysfunction and self-subversion can be found in regulative forms of censorship. Judith Butler identifies a parallel to the repetition inherent in the psychoanalytic process of repression in the performative contradiction enacted by overt censorship. She indicates that censorship contains within itself a repetition of censored material, noting that the official censor finds him or herself in a classic 'Catch 22' situation. She suggests that censors are compelled to re-stage the very utterances they seek to banish from public life: "The regulation that states what it does not want stated thwarts its own desire, conducting a performative contradiction."

Nonetheless, this indisputable, if unpredictable, side-effect of censorship can only be the product of public statements. This form of performative contradiction will only be realised by censorship which attracts attention in the public realm.

So, it seems that both constitutive and regulative forms of censorship are vulnerable to a measure of destabilisation. These instances of censorious incompleteness become most apparent upon consideration of the reception of censored material. If overt censorship heightens awareness of excluded material, it may also generate sophisticated and complicit audiences who are aware of the dual structure of the censored text. For these spectators, comprehension of the simultaneous existence of manifest and latent levels of meaning opens the censored text to an entirely new mode of reception: they become accustomed to listening for the hidden significances which lurk between the lines.

The potential for any text to produce an unstoppable proliferation of interpretation poses problems for all systems of censorship. Michael Holquist suggests that censors are haunted by a "monologic terror of indeterminacy";

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17 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p.130. Holquist reads this dependency as a positive sign of censorship's permeability: "That censorship necessarily includes the other it seeks to exclude is taken as a hopeful sign that any set of prohibitions, no matter how stringent, has loopholes." "Corrupt Originals", p.15.
that they are motivated by a desire to fix meaning, expunge ambiguity, and to fill the vacuum into which interpretation rushes. Holquist uncovers the fundamental instability at the foundations of the censorial edifice, proposing that, in attempting to cement interpretation,

Censors intend to construct rather than prohibit. What they wish to make is a certain kind of text, one that can be read in only one way: its grammatical (or logical) form will be seamlessly coterminous with all its rhetorical (or semiotic) implications.\(^{18}\)

However, this desire for absolute textual fixity is destined to remain unsatisfied. Consideration of censorship's Latin base, *censere*, which means "to estimate, rate, assess, to be of opinion" reveals the difficult issues of interpretation and moral relativity which any good censor seeks to elide.\(^{19}\)

**Reading Between the Lines**

These insights are reflected in the proliferation of critical theories which place particular emphasis upon moments of textual contradiction, denial and unwitting self-subversion. Marxists such as Althusser have recommended "symptomatic reading" of capital and its cultural representatives, while Derrida advocates a similar approach in *Of Grammatology*. He advises that deconstructive reading

must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language that he uses. This relationship is [...] a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce* [that is, a] production [which] attempts to make the not-seen accessible to sight.\(^{20}\)

Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* also demands a critical awareness of the volubility of silence and moments of displacement. He proposes that these instances of contradiction and silence can be interrogated by shifting attention to the ideological intertext where the "unspoken" speaks. He observes:

\(^{18}\) Holquist, "Corrupt Originals", p.22.  
\(^{19}\) Cited by Tribe, *Questions of Censorship*, p.36.  
\(^{20}\) Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.158,163.
The book [...] circles about the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return. [...] It] bears in its material substance the imprint of a determinate absence which is also the principle of its identity.\textsuperscript{21}

Ultimately, the potential of speech to contain many levels of meaning, both spoken and unspoken, points to the very essence of censorship's failure.

The expressive potential of the unspoken has proved to be a valuable area of enquiry for queer theory. It is invoked by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in \textit{The Epistemology of the Closet}, in which she examines the literary heritage of homosexuality, and demonstrates the importance of 'closeting' to gay culture. Whilst anatomising the connection between linguistic performativity and same-sex desire, she draws upon Foucauldian theory, which bears witness to the articulacy of silent speech acts:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things. [...] There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.\textsuperscript{22}

For those who oppose censorship, this is the positive side of Foucault's formulation of power's productivity.

Foucault's assertion that censorious power circulates amongst different agents, rather than residing in a single institution or central authority, initially appears to reassure. Resistance is not only possible, but it is built into this model of power. Foucault's well-known essay, "A Preface to Transgression" expands this idea to disturbing effect. He demands that we contemplate the possibility that we may be complicit in the maintenance of censorious institutions, even as we tell ourselves that we are resistant to them. Uncompromising contemplation of our part in perpetuating regulative forms of censorious control is an uncomfortable exercise. It seems that the terms 'censorship' or, alternatively 'free speech', may actually serve to obscure the complex interaction of different agencies at work in this cultural sphere.

"A Preface to Transgression" provides an eloquent theoretical elucidation of this curious situation. Foucault comments upon the way in

\textsuperscript{21} Macherey, \textit{A Theory of Literary Production}, p.80.
\textsuperscript{22} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, p.27.
which shocking, controversial, or challenging art work is necessarily dependent upon the existence of a set of pre-existing conventions. His essay does not only explore the interdependence of the censor and the censored, but also effectively severs transgression's traditional association with liberation or progression. Foucault observes that transgression does not eliminate the frontiers it crosses, nor does it represent a release from censorious constraints. He comments: "transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being."23

**Disavowal and Disassociation**

Evidence that authors and artists may occasionally exploit the condemnation of the authorities (or indeed even trade upon it) presents a healthy challenge to the moralising discourse which often surrounds discussion of censorship. Unsurprisingly, the academic inspection of instances of censorship is generally produced by those who deplore social coercion, exclusion and oppression. Consequently, these analyses are predisposed towards critique and condemnation, rather than defence or justification. Generally (if somewhat reductively) speaking, the political affiliations of this liberal community have perpetuated an approach which applies the ideological mantra: 'censorship bad, free speech good'.

Some critics have observed that it has become all but impossible to discuss censorship in anything other than pejorative terms. Frederick Schauer comments that today, "to praise an act of censorship is to verge on committing a linguistic mistake",24 while Jean-Jacques Pauvert eloquently outlines the generalised condemnation of censorship in the west:

> Censorship is one of those convenient words which are widely used today because they allow people to seem, with a minimum of effort, decent and right-thinking, the same as everyone else these days. The Left, the Right and the Centre all agree that one should be anti-censorship, anti-war, anti-racism, pro-human rights or freedom of expression.25

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23 Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression", p.28.
24 Schauer, "The Ontology of Censorship", p.147.
25 Pauvert concludes that "these are impressive convictions, which don't last five minutes when they are put to the test." See Pauvert, *Nouveaux (Et Moins Nouveaux) Visages de la Censure*, p.7. (Translation in Harrison, *Circles of Censorship*, p.1.)
This tendency, outlined by Schauer and Pauvert, has even been described as an "anti-censorial prejudice".\textsuperscript{26}

If evidence of this prejudice is needed, it can be easily found in the widespread rejection of the title of censor. Institutions that currently perform an overtly censorious role in the west are careful to describe themselves as licencing authorities or classificatory bodies. The label of 'censor' is applied, it is never claimed: which inevitably frustrates any attempt to define censorship. Sue Curry Jansen describes this mendacity as the "Good Lie". She observes that this process of dissociation and disavowal first appeared during the enlightenment, when overt methods of social control and coercion began to be replaced by constitutive forms. She proposes that the "Good Lie" is still in circulation, working to hide the operations of the censor.

This anti-censorial bias is accompanied by a concomitant celebration of free speech, or the 'constitutional liberty' enshrined in North American discourse. The domination of this polarised rhetoric (the either/or binarism of freedom/repression identified by Michael Holquist) not only blinds the critic to the omnipresence of a certain level of constitutive censorship, it also belies the possibility that the censored may be complicit in the censorious system, and serves to conceal the qualities of the material which finds itself subject to censorious constraint.

Nicholas Harrison provides an eloquent critique of the discourse of counter-censorship in his work \textit{Circles of Censorship}, which analyses the history of literary censorship in France. He traces unquestioning valorisations of free speech back to the psychoanalytic commitment to uncovering repressed material in the psyche of the analysand. Harrison comments:

\begin{quote}
Psychoanalysis […] aims to uncover that which has been censored, and the idea that that which is censored is more important, more \textit{fundamental}, than the social conventions which marginalise, distort, and hide it, is both a starting hypothesis and a conclusion of this process.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Harrison infers that the psychoanalytic procedures of "\textit{tout dire}" are supposed to overturn mundane truths and expose their superficiality. This logic intimates that saying what the censor has declared unsayable has an intrinsic value: a quality which is inherently beneficial and liberatory. But Harrison problematises the notion that there is any such value in "\textit{tout dire}".

\textsuperscript{26} Murray, \textit{Drama Trauma}, p.219.  
He suggests that we should remember that censorship has no fundamental relation to truth: censored material does not possess an essential or transcendent value, nor does it share a universal quality. He maintains that we should cease presenting cultural confrontations over censorship as a matter of ongoing conflict between the forces of oppression and the forces of liberation, as he uses a reading of the politics of pornography to disassociate censored material from subversion. Unquestioning support for the censored is soon undermined, exposing the contingency of our judgements and the mutability of the standards we use to measure such representations.

If presuppositions about the value of the object of censorship require such destabilisation, then traditional assumptions about the political affiliation of the censor also demand interrogation. Richard Burt observes that, until recently, it has been accepted that:

Censorship clearly divides right and left: the right is for it, the left is against it; the right acts as an agent of censorship, the left is its victim; the right is for ‘safe’ or ornamental art without sexual content, the left accepts confrontational public art with graphic sexual images; the right is for artistic decency, the left is for artistic diversity.28

In fact, the 'new censorship' debates reveal that it is no longer possible to conflate political affiliation with a stance on censorship. Today, calls for the restraint of representation or silencing of expression are just as likely to come from the left as the right, as race activists support the regulation of hate speech and feminists attempt to ban pornography.29 On the other hand, heralds of free speech have begun to sound from the right of the political spectrum.30

It is plain that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between progressive anti-censorship and reactionary pro-censorship lobbies.

28 Burt, The Administration of Aesthetics, p.xii.
29 See hooks, Outlaw Culture, 1994). For a discussion of the debate on pornography, see Robertson / Wilson, Pornography and Feminism; Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women; and Dworkin, In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings.
30 The revisionist historian David Irving preaches in The Search for Truth in History: "Freedom of speech is like one of those ancient, medieval rights, like a right of way, like a right of passage across a farmer's field… These ancient rights, like freedom of speech, need to be asserted… I will walk this path of freedom of speech because, if we do not walk it, then ugly forces come to the fore and dictate and ordain and restrict, and we then see emerge the kind of society that liberal politicians all claim we were trying to prevent in the World Wars, which saw the sacrifice
Burt asserts that "those on the left and the right occupy the same discursive terrain: both sides adopt the same rhetoric; both sides say they are against censorship and for diversity; each side accuses the other of trying to exercise censorship."\(^{31}\) It seems that the new hegemony is governed by this rhetoric of diversity. Controversially, Burt hypothesises that this newly dominant discourse of diversity maybe just as oppressive as traditional regulative practices. He postulates that it reinscribes a censorious logic, operating according to a procedure of exclusion.

**Everywhere? Or Nowhere?**

We seem to have reached the farthest possible point in the definition of censorship. Some critics would say that all choices are ideological, therefore censorship is omnipresent. Or that all speech is censorious, even when it preaches diversity and tolerance. Or that any political stance can be associated with censorship, and consequently any expression of identity is to be mistrusted as exclusrory. Consequently, any critic seeking to redefine censorship has to address some difficult questions. Has censorship been redefined out of existence? Does the critical adoption of the model of dispersal and displacement 'flatten out' the differences between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of control? Might the critical concentration on the constant struggle between competing ideological discourses, removal of subsidy or sponsorship, or the censureship of criticism itself, serve to draw attention away from 'strong' repressive measures?\(^{32}\) Is it advisable to push the definition of censorship any further? \(^{33}\)

The wide application of the term can certainly appear to overwhelm or trivialise its significance. In some parts of the world censorship can be equated, all too literally, with death. Incarceration, death and disappearance possess an unarguable finality: silencing's most absolute incarnation. The existence of *fatwas* against authors such as Salman Rushdie and the murder of so many millions of lives of innocent people.” Quoted in Jackson, *The Case for David Irving*, p.vi.


\(^{32}\) See Post, *Censorship and Silencing*, p.4.

of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1996 prove the accuracy of George Bernard Shaw's dictum: "assassination is the extreme form of censorship."\(^{34}\)

While the term censorship is still used to describe the human rights abuses brought to our attention by organisations such as Amnesty International and catalogued by *Index on Censorship*, it may seem inappropriate to promote a wider application of the term. By interpreting censorship as a constitutive, productive power, there is certainly a danger that we negate any attempt to use the term for political mobilisation. If censorship is everywhere, unavoidable and ineluctable, then it is hard to believe that it is possible to intervene to counter it.

**Towards a Redefinition**

Despite these concerns, it is possible to make a strong argument for the heterogeneity of censorship. It is evident that expression can be controlled and conditioned in many different ways. Today, censorship can still appear in its most traditional guise, such as the intervention of a representative of a repressive institution, directly linked to the state: but it also materialises in the actions and decisions taken by those who administrate charitable foundations and local government, or corporate sponsors and sources of public subsidy. An inclusive model of censorship, which acknowledges these diverse manifestations, is required by the individuals who are subject to such acts of critical exclusion, authoritarian intervention and institutional interference. My research demonstrates that those who are on the receiving end of censorship are well aware that it can take on many different guises.\(^{35}\) The language which such artists and authors use as they discuss the destruction, distortion, or limited dissemination of their work makes it clear that they believe that they have experienced egregious and excessive intervention. To suggest that they did not encounter censorship because their experience does not correspond to a predefined category would represent an untenable reinscription of the original act of exclusion.

\(^{34}\) Quoted in Holquist, "Corrupt Originals", p.15.

\(^{35}\) This research is on theatrical censorship, contained in my thesis, "Shadow Play: The Censorship of the Stage in Twentieth Century Britain". Published articles include "Suppressed Desire" and "Anti-theatrical prejudice and the persistence of performance".
This is a model of diversity, dispersal and displacement, but it is not created through contrast with popular or naive usage of the term. Instead, it responds to its common application. Richard Burt's argument would benefit from acknowledgement that his definition of a 'deconstructive', post-modern definition of censorship reflects quotidian experience, rather than providing a revolutionary rectification of popular misconceptions.

Although this inclusive model of censorship seeks to recognise variety, it does not conflate extreme violations of human rights with the refusal of grant money, or the criticism of a reviewer. Censorious events should be analysed with critical emphasis upon their socio-historical specificity: such an approach foregrounds the differences between different types of censorship and the decisions taken by numerous censorious agencies, as well as their interaction. Conclusions about censorship should surely be provisional, rather than fixed; plural, rather than singular; time and site-specific, rather than universal. Of course, responsiveness to charges of censorship should not obstruct investigation into the possible presence of complicitous relationships between censored individuals and censorious institutions. As Judith Butler proposes, it seems more appropriate to view censorship as a continuum, upon which it is possible to place the brutal extremes of incarceration or murder at one end, and the shadowy operations of constitutive exclusion at the other. Their connection is thus established, without negating their differences. 36

The ethical responsibilities of examining work that has been silenced demand a model of censorship which is inclusive, rather than exclusive. Refusal to acknowledge certain forms of constraint and curtailment because they do not fit into a convenient category effectively reiterates the original act of exclusion. Consequently, I propose that we move towards a redefinition that is based upon a responsiveness to the experience of those who are subject to censorship.

Bibliography


