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THE ADMINISTRATION OF AESTHETICS

Censorship, Political Criticism, and the Public Sphere

Edited by Richard Burt
(for the Social Text Collective)

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Introduction: The "New" Censorship

Richard Burt

Many intellectuals have been disturbed by what some have termed the "new" censorship of aesthetics in the 1980s and early 1990s, a phenomenon that has been widely interpreted as the fulfillment of the radically conservative Reagan/Bush agenda.[1] Cultural critics have viewed the intense, prolonged assault on high and low modes of aesthetic production, circulation, and consumption beginning in the 1980s in the context of the prosecution elsewhere of a right-wing agenda. Attacks on publicly funded exhibitions of artists like Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano, on MTV videos, on rap music by 2-Live Crew and Ice-T, and on television advertisements as well as the FBI's seizure of works and equipment of photographers like Jock Sturges on the grounds that they are child pornographers—these events in the cultural realm are set against the fallout from political events: the 1989 Supreme Court ruling that flag burning is protected by the First Amendment; the Gulf War; and the regulation of sexuality, particularly the erosion of female reproductive rights and the refusal to legalize gay and lesbian rights.[2] Along similar lines, cultural critics have regarded the privatization of public space and public institutions under Presidents Reagan and Bush as a form of censorship: critics fear, for example, that the recent legal narrowing of what counts as "fair use" of words and images by the public has made commodification into an instrument of censorship. Broad social criticism through the "appropriation" or parody of images is prevented by the impossibility of reproducing privately owned appropriated or parodied images; corporate sponsors of public

museums sponsor only "safe" art, effectively censoring controversial or confrontational art that might hurt sales of the sponsor's products; bookstore chains are concentrated in the hands of a few large corporations, which can censor small publishers by refusing to order their books, even when they sell.[3]

With a Democratic administration now in power in the United States, some critics might breathe a sigh of relief, believing that the culture wars have been lost by the right and that we have now returned to a more enlightened, liberal administration of aesthetics. The contributors to this volume would not want to discount any gains made by a new president, and their essays do not dissent from left analyses of the new censorship (given the prominence of the debate over funding for the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA] and the Public Broadcasting Service [PBS] and the attack on the "cultural elite" in the 1992 presidential campaign, it is hard to see how one *could* dissent).[4] They suggest, however, that it would be mistaken to think that the problem of censorship has disappeared (or that it could).[5] For a salient consequence of the new-censorship debates is that the meaning of censorship has itself been interrogated and contested: while some critics have tried to keep in place a narrow modern definition (censorship as state power) in order to avoid confusing it with other, perhaps less brutal kinds of constraints (say, market censorship), others have argued that in the postmodern present, censorship has been displaced by less visible kinds of domination and control and that the word should be either redefined more broadly or abandoned.[6] Indeed, from one perspective, Bill Clinton's self-advertised competence as a "consensus builder" paradoxically marks him as a participant in the chief mode of censorship in the United States, namely, the manufacture of consent.[7]

The essays included in this book are united in their desire to call attention to some crucial difficulties with using censorship, old or new, as a tool of cultural criticism. Opposing censorship is generally assumed to be a straightforward matter. In responding to the radical right, recent art, criticism, theater, and museum exhibitions have tended to assume 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.[8]

Yet in practice, opposing recent instances of censorship has proven to be more complicated and more contradictory than many cultural critics, artists, art gallery owners, book publishers, and civil liberties lawyers assume. Critics of the new censorship tend to assume that censorship operates ahistorically: all censors and all artists are basically the same.[9] (The new censorship is new only in the limited sense that it marks the return of an old practice once thought to have been vanquished by more enlightened, tolerant, intelligent, progressive members of modern society.) Even when they are reading censorship cases within a historical narrative, cultural critics rely on ahistorical oppositions between unchanging agents and forces: criticism and censorship fight out a battle for social change over public space, setting public art against privatization, corporate sponsorship, and commodification. By defining opposing political camps in the moralistic terms of those who are for censorship and those who are against it, critics unify both camps and make them monolithic: the censors are demonic philistines, the censored ipso facto are clever, noble, and good.

Yet many recent events do not resolve themselves easily into neat conceptual oppositions and identities. What counts as censorship is not always clear. Indeed, it is hard to see how one could call many contemporary cases censorship without either seriously distorting the traditional understanding of the term or redefining it to include so many practices—ranging from institutional regulation of free expression, market censorship, cutbacks in government funding for controversial art, boycotts, lawsuits, and marginalization and exclusion of artists based on their gender or race to "political correctness" in the university and the media—that the term is overwhelmed, even trivialized, its usefulness as a tool of cultural criticism called into question. If one argues, for example, that an opponent or reformer of the NEA who claims he or she is not trying to censor in fact really does want to censor and is dissembling or disavowing his or her true intentions, one implicitly discounts the rather significant difference between going to the gulag for saying something subversive and not getting an NEA grant because one's work is said to lack artistic merit.[10] Moreover, not all cases of the new censorship are easily aligned: Jeff Koons's recent Heaven exhibition, with his kitschy

sculptures and "pornographic" paintings of himself and his then wife Ilona Staller, porn star and Italian parliamentarian, differs from exhibitions of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe or Andres Serrano, which in turn differ from the performances of the self-proclaimed "post post-porn modernist" Annie Sprinkle.[11] To be sure, one could try to discriminate between cases of real censorship and censorship that is merely staged, as when a Madonna video is censored by MTV and consequently sells extremely well (access denied in one place multiplies access elsewhere). Similarly, one could discriminate between victims of censorship in terms of their centrality or marginality (and hence inclusion or exclusion) in relation to centers of cultural and political power. One might argue, for example, that Madonna benefited from being censored whereas NEA artists have not, the latter being further from the center of the culture industry.[12] Yet how would one account for NEA artists who profit from the controversy over their works, as have Andres Serrano and Jock Sturges, whose prices have risen astronomically in the wake of the attention they received? How different are they from Madonna? And given that the call for censorship is always publicly dramatized, can one so easily differentiate real from staged censorship? Similarly, if one wants to argue that censorship must be redefined to mean marginalization, what kind of regulation or exclusion might not count as censorship?[13] Is exclusion the same thing as stopping production or blocking access? How would censorship differ from ideological subjection?

Opposing censorship, whether it is broadly or narrowly defined, is similarly problematic. Is it possible for avowedly political critics to oppose censorship without contradicting their arguments and aesthetic or critical practices? While many artists and critics have argued that art, knowledge, and sexuality are political, often criticizing modern liberal institutions and values as modes of domination, and while many have attacked specifically modernist assumptions about aesthetics and subjectivity such as self-expression, genius, originality, and individual creativity, they invoke precisely these assumptions when they defend freedom of artistic expression from censorship or attempt to legitimate "moral rights" for artists.[14] Similarly, in defending controversial artists who have been awarded or refused NEA grants, artists and critics maintain that the work funded is art, not pornography or child pornography: they oppose artistic merit to

mere politics and patronage.[15] And while artists defend the critical practice of appropriation of words and images in the name of fair use, they appeal to copyright law and literary property to prosecute right-wing appropriations of erotic or avowedly political art as mutilations and distortions.[16]

Perhaps even more crucially, opposing censorship *tout court* is difficult because of the complexity of the present political landscape. Any clear division between a progressive anticensorship politics and a procensorship neoconservative or reactionary politics is muddied by the fact 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. It is difficult to sort out true claims and charges from false, since who "really" has at heart the values on which a progressive politics is generally assumed to depend (diversity, healthy debate, and so on) and who can best defend them will always be contested.

The essays in *The Administration of Aesthetics* intervene in discussions of censorship new and old by shifting the focus of critical inquiry from the present discourse of diversity in which they have been framed (a discourse in which diversity counters repressive controls of discourse) to what I would call a discourse of legitimation (in which the diversity of a given discursive field will always be limited by the delegitimation, either conscious or unconscious, of particular discourses). In making this shift, this volume aims to open up the possibility of substantive political realignments among those who are disenchanted with both the stereotypical right-wing criticisms of political critics and aesthetics and the stereotypical left-wing defenses of political criticism and aesthetics. The point is not simply that the word *censorship* is often misused in current discussions; more crucially, it is that censorship never operated in the modern terms in which it is generally thought to have operated—as negative, repressive exercises of power such as destroying materials, blocking access to them, limiting their distribution and circulation, and assigning penalties for collecting and consuming forbidden materials. By adopting the word *administration* to embrace the essays, I want to call attention to the way they disturb the assumptions—widely shared by the cultural left and the cultural right—that there are stable oppositions between criticism and censorship, be-

tween centralized, dominant groups and marginalized, subordinate groups. By *administration* I mean the locus of different, dispersed kinds of regulation.[17] Focusing on a range of historical eras from early modern to postmodern and covering cases of print and visual media in Europe and the United States, the essays in this volume make problematic the traditional understanding of the terms *censorship*, *criticism*, and *public sphere* and the conceptual and historiographical identities and oppositions on which a traditional understanding of these terms depends. This volume prompts one to wonder whether regulating aesthetic production (state censorship) and regulating aesthetic consumption (criticism) can be opposed, how radically prepublication censorship differs from postpublication censure.[18]

In this introduction, I wish to articulate how the essays in this volume intervene in current discussions of censorship, making explicit the contributors' broadly shared assumptions about the practices of censorship and criticism and the institution of the public sphere, and to clarify new points of view and possibilities for contemporary cultural criticism. I will begin by elaborating the shared assumptions about censorship, criticism, and public sphere in turn. In varied but complementary ways, the essays extend and complicate the idea that censorship involves a negative exercise of power. First, censorship operates negatively in more than one way, not unidirectionally along a binary axis of the repressed and the free but, more crucially, by delimiting what can be legitimately debated. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, discourse is divided not only between the realms of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but also between the realms of the disputed (which includes both orthodox and heterodox discourses) and the undisputed.[19] Heterodox discourses are opposed not only to orthodox discourses, but to doxa (what is taken for granted and hence beyond dispute) as well.

Thus, for Bourdieu, there are two distinct kinds of censorship, a manifest censorship and a deeper, "secondary" or structural censorship that it masks:

> The manifest censorship imposed by orthodox discourse, the official way of speaking and thinking about the world, conceals another, more radical censorship: the overt opposition between "right" opinion and "left" or "wrong" opinion, which delimits the universe of possible discourse, be it legitimate or illegitimate, euphemistic or blasphemous,

masks in its turn the fundamental opposition between the universe of things that can be stated, and hence thought, and the universe of that which is taken for granted.[20]

What Bourdieu terms a "secondary censorship" complicates a standard view of censorship as that which marks the opposition between heterodox and orthodox discourses, since this secondary or structural censorship cannot be dispensed with:

> Censorship [as] the structure of the field itself ... governs expression, and not [only] some legal proceeding which has been specially adapted to designate and repress the transgression of a linguistic code. This structural censorship is exercised through the medium of the sanctions of the field ..., imposed on all producers of symbolic goods, including the authorized spokesperson ... and it condemns the occupants of dominated positions either to silence or to shocking outspokenness.[21]

Censorship may be seen, then, not only in terms of repressed and free discourses but also in terms of the receivable and the unreceivable—what cannot be heard or spoken without risk of being delegitimated as beyond the pale of discourse, doxa.

Regarding censorship in this manner introduces a further complication of the traditional negative view of censorship, for there is a dynamic dialectic in the struggle between heterodoxy and orthodoxy: heterodox discourses are simply discourses that would circulate freely were it not for censorship of the traditional sort. In Bourdieu's terms, the important political struggle will necessarily be over what can circulate within the realm of the debatable, not over a particular debate:

> The subordinate classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of *doxa* or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, *orthodoxy*.[22]

Heterodoxy works both to expand the realm of the debatable and to shrink the orthodoxy, delegitimate it as completely as possible; heterodoxy will engage in delegitimating tactics in the process of legitimating itself.

Furthermore, the essays in this volume view censorship as a positive exercise of power, not just an institutional practice that delegiti-

mates discourses by blocking access to them. Censorship not only legitimates discourses by allowing them to circulate, but is itself part of a performance, a simulation in which censorship can function as a trope to be put on show. Even burning books is not the simple, negative exercise of power it at first appears to be: public book burnings are less about blocking access to forbidden books than they are about staging an opposition between corrupting and purifying forces and agencies (represented synecdochically by the books and by their destruction).

As one of the contributors, Jiřina Šmejkalová-Strickland, puts it, getting rid of the censor does not get rid of the problem of censorship.[23] An end to censorship across the board is never an option. Censorship regulates who is in and who is out of the critical conversation. Opposition to censorship serves not to guarantee a diversity free of censorship, but to regulate membership in the critical community by appealing to the notion of diversity as a criterion of inclusion and exclusion. Calling someone a censor is a means of excluding that person from dialogue. Thus, diversity (or free speech) cannot rightly be completely opposed to censorship, since diversity will always be regulated (exclusions are necessarily built in). Whatever or whoever threatens this diversity will be delegitimated (Jesse Helms et al.). To be sure, delegitimation does not amount to censorship as it is traditionally understood, since it involves distortions and displacements rather than outright destruction. But it is not wholly distinct, either. As a negative exercise of power, delegitimation cannot be radically differentiated from more direct means of control such as stopping production of forbidden materials or blocking access to them.

In complicating the modern understanding of censorship as a repressive, self-identical practice, this collection of essays has necessarily also complicated a central assumption about criticism, namely, that it is opposed to censorship, providing an antidote to the evils of censorship by allowing for rational debate about diverse points of view. Viewed historically, the institution of criticism is usually regarded as part of what Jürgen Habermas has termed the modern public sphere, a discursive sphere he says emerged in the eighteenth century after the demise of state censorship.[24] Underlying this historiography is a series of interlocking conceptual and historiographical oppositions between criticism (or art) and censorship; state censor-

ship externally imposed and self-censorship; public access and privatization (corporate commodification versus fair use); a repressive early modern state censorship and an enlightened modern public sphere (which emerged with the institution of fine arts and literary criticism).[25] The essays here suggest, however, that criticism is not radically opposed to censorship; rather, these practices are on a continuum. Critical dialogue is often regarded as the solution to conflicts. But who would be allowed into it? On what basis? How would a dialogue be regulated? How do you tell authentic or critical dialogue from its co-opted, simulated, or dissembled forms?

Along similar lines, this collection questions Habermas's notion that the public sphere is a space of discursive circulation opposed to censorship, thereby allowing ideally for undistorted communication. The public sphere constitutes a censored and censoring space, the contributors maintain, not a critical space opposed to state censorship. The present proliferation of boycotts from the left and the right within the public sphere does not mark a decline in a postmodern phase (with would-be censors emerging in relation to a fragmenting identity politics), but extends earlier ways in which the public sphere regulated, excluded, and censored discourses. Moreover, in the public sphere, communication cannot be reduced to a direct line between the producing subject and the produced object at one end, and the consuming subject and the consumed object at the other. The produced object, for example, is transfigured by its circulation and consumption in the public sphere: literacy limitations and modes of reproduction and consumption (mass versus individual) mean that the produced object will be altered (some might say distorted) in transmission and reception. This transfiguration of the object complicates recent attempts to control reception, attempts that grant artists the right not to have their work mutilated or distorted after they sell it.[26] Whether transfiguration itself is a form of artistic appropriation or whether the reporting of the debate on political correctness by the press is accurate or distorted will necessarily be determined by the negotiations and regulations of particular interpretive (legal and art world) communities.

It remains now to clarify the force of this volume as an intervention in contemporary cultural criticism that recasts discussions of both the new and old censorship by locating them in a discourse of legitimation rather than a discourse of diversity. Some readers might

question the wisdom of shifting the terms of critical discussion and disturbing otherwise stable binary oppositions between censorship and criticism, between the public sphere and its corporate privatization. What kind of an intervention is this? If it avoids the kinds of stereotypical criticisms and defenses of political criticism, exactly what kinds of alignments can it free up? What precisely are the gains? And what about the risks? Isn't one gutting a critique of censorship if one gives up a stable definition of it (and, consequently, of stable definitions of opposing terms such as *freedom, liberty, memory,* and so on)? Isn't it better to keep the old terms and oppositions, even if there are serious problems with using them, out of political necessity? Shouldn't the opposition between censorship and criticism be shored up rather than dismantled, so that political opposition can thereby be strengthened?

The essays in this volume interrogate the meanings of the terms *censorship* and *political criticism* to allow for a more ambivalent relation to both the left and the right, not to arrive at a more truly progressive position. By resisting the temptation to side unequivocally with either a liberal, modern tradition or a postmodern, antihumanist critique of that tradition, the authors aim to avoid the predictable, moralistic simplifications that arise from the sense that conceptual and political oppositions and identities are secure. In my view, succumbing to the pressure to strengthen the oppositions and identities that apparently enable a supposedly progressive critical practice would only return us to the problems we have seen arise in abstract debates pitting those who favor censorship against those who oppose it. The desire to maintain critical "opposition" to censorship arises largely from a misrecognition of the politics that fulfilling such a desire would most directly serve. The opposition between right-wing censors and left-wing critics merely differentiates a critic who is legitimate from one who is not; it determines what does and does not count as legitimate criticism.[27]

Given the stake so many critics now have in identity politics and multiculturalism as remedies to censorship, it is worth amplifying this point.[28] In attempting to give subordinate groups greater freedom, identity politics has regularly reproduced the problem of censorship. The activist group Queer Nation led attempts to stop the filming and, when that failed, the exhibition of the movie *Basic Instinct,* attempts that some called censorship and others called a

protest. Similarly, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's call for a boycott of Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* on grounds that it was anti- Semitic and anti-Korean met with criticism that the boycott was a form of censorship. Two controversial cases about Nazi propaganda and revisionist histories of the Holocaust raised similar questions. Robert Faurisson, a historian who claims that the Holocaust never occurred, was convicted in France in 1991 of disputing crimes "beyond dispute." Is it censorship to convict Faurisson of disputing crimes because they cannot now be legally disputed? When Brandeis University bought the rights to *Der ewige Jude* (The eternal Jew), a Nazi propaganda film made in 1942, to prevent it from circulating on video, it generated a similar censorship controversy.[29]

And consider an even more telling case involving identity politics, the administration (in the usual sense) of cultural diversity in higher education, a topic that has been largely unmentioned in the debate about "political correctness." Administrative practices constitute the most obviously political way of remedying perceived forms of institutionalized injustices such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. Yet the administration of diversity can be disturbingly contradictory. The present demands for "diversity" assume that those who represent it have stable identities. Those hired in a particular field are expected to stay in that field. The administration of an abstract "diversity" may thus ultimately suppress many kinds of local diversities.[30]

By situating analysis of censorship, criticism, and the public sphere within a discourse of legitimation, I hope to achieve two ends: first, to legitimate a historicist mode of critical and ideological analysis centered on institutions; and second, to delegitimate certain ways of discussing issues that are misleading and that involve simplified critical and administrative solutions to perceived forms of repression, carried out in the name of a so-called progressive politics. Broadly speaking, the essays in this collection more or less explicitly rethink the terms in which modern and postmodern forms of power are presently distinguished. Distinctions between modernity and postmodernity have rested in large part on distinctions between modes of domination; censorship as it has traditionally been understood has been a key way of differentiating both between early modern and modern modes of domination and between modern and postmodern forms of domination (the latter being externally imposed and the former internally assimilated through commodification

rather than through political power).[31] In calling into question the modern conceptual definitions of censorship and its opposing terms, this collection calls into question the definition of *modernity* and its opposing terms, *early modern* and *postmodern*, as well.[32]

The essays are arranged along historiographical lines in three groups—early modern, modern, and postmodern—in order to examine uncritically held, sometimes ahistorical assumptions about modern forms of censorship by juxtaposing modern with early modern and postmodern forms of censorship. This collection interrogates, then, the notion that there were revolutionary breaks (say, in the English Revolution or in the Velvet Revolution of Czechoslovakia) marking where the past ended and where the present started, that we can oppose "us" who stand against censorship to "them" who stand for it.

The first group of essays, "Criticism, Censorship, and the Early Modern Public Sphere," contests the notion that the early modern and the modern can be contrasted in terms of an opposition between censorship and an uncensored public sphere.[33] In "*Areopagitica*, Censorship, and the Early Modern Public Sphere," David Norbrook shows that Habermas's public sphere is an early modern rather than a modern formation. Similarly, in "Power and Literature: The Terms of the Exchange 1624–42," Christian Jouhaud draws on Bourdieu to show that the aesthetic and the public sphere emerged earlier. Norbrook and Jouhaud offer not just a redating of the public sphere, but also a dialectical reconsideration of the complex relation between censorship and criticism. Donald Hedrick further counters an ahistorical view of censorship, moving from Shakespeare's flower imagery to Bowdler's expurgations of it in his *Family Shakespeare* edition to Mapplethorpe's uncensorable photographs of flowers. In "Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Policing the Aesthetic from the Left," Dennis Porter calls attention to the historical amnesia about left censorship within the French Revolution. Challenging the traditional narrative of modernity in which the Enlightenment prepared the ground for a revolution that put an end to censorship, Porter locates continuities between the political culture of the Enlightenment and the political cultures of totalitarian states of this century, in which complete visibility was a political ideal.

Part II, "Censorship and Modernity," addresses questions about modernity and subjectivity in relation to literary and artistic mod-

ernism. Though literary modernism was until recently celebrated for landmarks of decensorship (*Ulysses*, *Lolita*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), modernism is now in disrepute, its liberating value marred for many cultural critics by sexism and affiliations with fascism and imperialism. The essays in this section call into question both of these views. Brook Thomas in "*Ulysses* on Trial: Some Supplementary Reading" and Stuart Culver in "Whistler v. Ruskin: The Courts, the Public, and Modern Art" suggest that it is not at all clear that one could ever move beyond the strategies and critical oppositions used to legitimate modernist texts or modern art. Michael Levine's "Freud and the Scene of Censorship" is a critique of the way a modern humanist-centered subject who resists censorship or a posthumanist one who internalizes it dominates present discussions of censorship.

Part III, "The New Censorship and Postmodernity," addresses questions of censorship in the postmodern present, focusing on access, circulation, reproduction, and reception. Jiřina Šmejkalová-Strickland, Timothy Murray, and I attend to censorship as a performance. In "Censoring Canons: Transitions and Prospects of Literary Institutions in Czechoslovakia," Šmejkalová draws on Judith Butler's notion of performance to contrast censorship and canon formation in Czechoslovakia before and after the revolution of 1989. Šmejkalová's local analyses show that the contrast is hardly as simple as is generally assumed. In " 'Degenerate "Art"': Public Aesthetics and the Simulation of Censorship in Postliberal Los Angeles and Berlin," I question present equations of modernism and fascism by examining a recent international exhibition that simulated a Nazi exhibition entitled Degenerate "Art" that attacked modern art; in attempting to criticize the Nazi exhibition, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art inadvertently reproduced many of the Nazis' censorious techniques. Timothy Murray examines the celebration of one of censorship's opposite numbers, namely, liberty. In "The Contrast Hurts: Censoring the Ladies Liberty in Performance," he juxtaposes the NEA's denial of funding to four avant-garde performance artists and the 1986 celebration of the Statue of Liberty. Murray notes the ironies attendant on the regulation of this "command performance": while no one was excluded, no one was excepted from watching it, either.

Rob Wilson and Aamir Mufti look at censorship and criticism in terms of global circulation and reception. In "Cyborg America: Policing the Social Sublime in *Robocop* and *Robocop 2*," Wilson inverts

the usual focus of censorship as repression, examining instead why a particular kind of repression or policing has proven to be so well accepted in recent movies produced in the United States. In "Reading the Rushdie Affair: 'Islam,' Cultural Politics, Form," Mufti too focuses on reception, considering the ways in which Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* was transfigured in an Islamic public sphere, a sphere defined by the relatively low literacy of Islamic audiences and the modes of circulation (press reports, film, and so on) and consumption (mass audiences as opposed to the individual reception a novel traditionally assumes). The Islamic public sphere in this sense is a modern space of contestation.

The volume concludes with an essay that addresses censorship in the context of recent debates over academic freedom. In "Political Correctness: The Revenge of the Liberals," Jeffrey Wallen argues that the academic community supports its claim to be an arena of free and open debate only by denying freedom and openness to some through an assault on the principles of liberalism. The media attention to political correctness, too easily characterized as a right-wing backlash, also marks the revenge of the liberals.

In addressing censorship in such a topical manner, Wallen's essay implicitly raises questions about the volume, which, broadly speaking, makes sense of the topical by placing it in a historical context. Whereas the right sees political correctness as part of a larger problem of cultural elitism, the left sees it as an instance of the conservatives' need for a new official enemy after the end of the cold war. Right-wing attacks on NEA funding of minority, gay, and lesbian artists are no coincidence. However much more sympathetic one may be to the left's view, it is worth pointing out that both the left and the right make sense of political correctness by retrospectively reading it synecdochically as part of a larger cultural trend. In assuming a divide between the topical and the historical, both sides construct a false temporality of conflicts: a local, ephemeral conflict is thought to be succeeded by a larger, more enduring one; that is, the local conflict becomes insignificant, merely topical, the moment it is absorbed and displaced into a broader conflict.

In calling into question the term *censorship*, this volume intends to advance our understanding of the local and global persistence of censorship as something more than its endless topicality. In keeping topical and historical perspectives on censorship in play, the essays

open up a more complex relation between local and historical conflicts and make possible the writing of a less sequential narrative by constructing a dynamic rather than a divide between the topical and the historical. We may read the topical as a local readjustment to, the repercussions of, a still-happening event: the topical and the historical are always both in play at any given moment; they are not sequential. The *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action) relation between topicality and historicality may be likened to an earthquake: it is often difficult to tell whether a given tremor anticipates the "big one" or is an aftershock. The present breakdown of consensus over the meaning of censorship is not limited to the fact that left and right have now apparently changed places, that the left is now for speech codes and political correctness while the right defends free speech. Rather, the breakdown makes manifest that the libertarian or absolutist position on free speech has always been a mirage: standing against censorship, whether it is practiced by the left or by the right, depends on a list of censors so heterogeneous that the term *censorship* becomes meaningless.[34] Instead of attempting to shore up a position that was never really defensible in the first place, the essays in this volume take the politics of the breakdown as their focus, opening up new questions about the relations between conflict and consensus, between censorship and criticism, in the administration of aesthetics.[35]

NOTES

Parts of this introduction were presented to the Modern Language Association in special sessions that I also chaired: "Historicizing the New Censorship" (1990) and "Policing the Aesthetic: Political Criticism and the Public Sphere" (1991). I would like to thank John Michael Archer, Janet Benton, Amy Kaplan, Christine Kravits, Jeff Wallen, and George Yúdice for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this introduction.

1. The phrase "the new censorship" first appeared on the cover of *Art in America* in November 1989. For analyses of censorship of the fine arts as a radical right phenomenon, see Carole S. Vance, "The War on Culture," *Art in America* 77, no. 9 (September 1989): 39-45; Carole S. Vance, "Reagan's Revenge: Restructuring the NEA," *Art in America* 78, no. 11 (November 1990): 49-55; Mary Ann Staniszewski, "Photo Opportunities," *Art and Auction* 11, no. 11 (November 1989): 20-22; and Andrew Ross, "The Fine Art of Regulation," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 257-68. A number of journals and magazines have recently devoted special issues to censorship. See in particular the special issue on censorship *PMLA* 108, no. 1 (January 1994); "The Body in Question," *Aperture* 121 (Fall 1990); Censorship I, ed. Barbara Hoffman and Robert Storr, *Art Journal* 50, no. 3 (Fall 1991); Censorship II, ed. Barbara

Hoffman and Robert Storr, *Art Journal* 50, no. 4 (Winter 1991); "Banned," *New Statesman and Society*, April 19, 1991; "Kultura Kontrol," *Lusitaniana* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1990); and "Censoring the Media," *Felix* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991). For a specific account of sexuality and censorship, see Ian Hunter et al., eds., *On Pornography: Literature, Sexuality, and Obscenity Law* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992). For a broad historical overview, see Paul Hyland and Neil Sammels, eds., *Writing and Censorship in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), and Judith Huggins Balfe, ed., *Paying the Piper: Causes and Consequences of Art Patronage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993). For many of the documents central to the "culture wars," see Richard Bolton, ed., *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1992), and Paul Berman, ed., *Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses* (New York: Bantam, 1992). For narratives of many recent cases, see Stephen C. Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions* (New York: Routledge, 1992), and Edward de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius* (New York: Random House, 1992).

2. In addition to Bolton, *Culture Wars*, and Dubin, *Arresting Images*, see John R. MacArthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); Lisa Jones, "The Signifying Monkees: 2-Live Crew's Nasty-Boy Rap on Trial in South Florida," *Village Voice* 35, no. 45 (November 6, 1990): 43-47; and Carole S. Vance, "Photography, Pornography, and Sexual Politics," *Aperture* 121 (Fall 1990): 52-65.

3. See Martha Buskirk, "Commodification as Censor: Copyrights and Fair Use," *October* 60 (Spring 1992): 82-103, and Herbert Schiller, *Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

4. The 1992 presidential campaigns intensified the issue of arts censorship. *Tongues Untied* (aired on the "P.O.V." public television series) was dropped by a number of affiliates and a documentary critical of Cardinal John O'Connor entitled *Stop the Church* was dropped entirely. Footage from *Tongues Untied* was used in a Pat Buchanan campaign advertisement and ended up forcing then NEA chair John Frohnmayer to resign. In June 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle attacked the "cultural elite"; see Andrew Rosenthal, "Quayle Attacks a 'Cultural Elite' in Speech Invoking Moral Values," *New York Times*, June 10, 1992, A1. At the Republican convention, Pat Buchanan ended his speech by calling on Americans to "take back your culture, take back your country." Later in 1992, an NEA peer panel's recommendation that an exhibition entitled Corporal Politics receive funding was overruled by acting chair Anne-Imelda Radice; on this case, see Barbara Janowitz and Ed DuRante, "NEA Vetoes Unleash Protests, Walkouts," *American Theater* 9, no. 4 (July/August 1992): 47-49. PBS also came under fire in Congress for having a "liberal" bias; see "PBS Tilts Toward Conservatives, Not the Left," *Extra!* 5, no. 6 (June 4, 1992): 15. And in *Rust v. Sullivan* (argued before the Supreme Court in 1992) the Bush administration used the gag ruling on abortion as a justification for content regulation of the arts.

5. This mistake is made by Elizabeth Hess in "Indecent Exposure," *Village Voice* 38, no. 2 (January 12, 1993): 83-84. For other optimistic assessments of Bill Clinton, see Robert Cimbalest, "Clinton and the Arts: He Never Stops Learning," *Art News* 92, no. 1 (January 1993): 122-25, and Maurice Bergman in cooperation with Ronald Felman, "The Future of the NEA," *Art Forum* 31, no. 5 (January 1993): 72-73. On Clinton's stated position, see Jack Rosenberger, "Clinton's Culture Plank," *Art in America* 80, no. 7 (July 1992): 27.

6. For a traditional definition of censorship, see Annabel Patterson, "Censorship," in *The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, ed. Matthew Coyle et al. (London: Routledge, 1990), 901-14. For arguments in favor of a narrow definition of censorship, see John Leo,

"The Words of the Culture War," *U.S. News and World Report*, October 28, 1991, 31, and Kathleen M. Sullivan, "The First Amendment Wars," *New Republic*, September 28, 1992, 39. For arguments in favor of a broad definition, see Sue Curry Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot That Binds Power and Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Robert Atkins, "A Censorship Time Line," *Art Journal* 50, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 33; Allan Parichini, "Speakeasy," *New Art Examiner* 20, no. 4 (December 1992): 10-11; and Carol Jacobsen, "Redefining Censorship: A Feminist View," *Art Journal* 50, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 44-53. Andrew Ross maintains that the term *censorship* should be abandoned in discussions of contemporary contests over culture. See his essay "The Fine Art of Regulation," 257.

7. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1989). A more skeptical critic might argue that Clinton is not much of a friend of political artists. To show that he was not an agent of special interests and "bean counters," Clinton made a controversial criticism of rapper Sister Souljah during the 1992 campaign. See Gwen Ifill, "Clinton, in Need of a Lift, Plays Racial Card," *New York Times*, June 16, 1992, A12, A9, and Gwen Ifill, "Clinton Won't Back Down in Tiff with Jackson over a Rap Singer," *New York Times*, June 20, 1992, A1, A9. The right will continue to make the arts an issue; see, for example, Roger Kimball's negative review of the 1992 meeting of the Modern Language Association, "Heterotextuality and Other Literary Matters," *Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 1992, A12. Moreover, the Justice Department is seeking to uphold *Rust v. Sullivan*. I am inclined to take this more skeptical position. I want to make it clear, however, that my skepticism is rooted in my sense that what counts as censorship will always be contested, not in a belief that an authentic Democratic liberalism (or cultural diversity) would be an antidote to censorship.

8. For examples of this kind of opposition, see chapter 9 in this volume.

9. Cultural critics tend to distinguish principled opponents of censorship (who resign from the NEA or who refuse an NEA grant in protest of the NEA's refusal to fund particular artists) from complicit collaborators, demanding consistency from "waffling" bureaucrats like former NEA chair John Frohnmayer and museum curators like Christina Orr-Cahal (who refused to show Mapplethorpe at the Corcoran in 1989) and Elisabeth Broun (who attempted to block Sol le Witt's contribution to the Smithsonian exhibition on Eadweard Muybridge). (See Michael Kimmelman, "Peeping into Peepholes and Finding Politics," *New York Times*, July 21, 1991, E1, E29.) Yet one might ask whether refusing an NEA grant is the right thing to do. Might it not be better to sign a pledge, take the money, and then do whatever one wants with it?

10. Similarly, critics, artists, and museum and gallery exhibitions have drawn exaggerated, distorted parallels between Hitler's "kultur kampf" and present-day right-wing opponents of the arts. See Patrick Buchanan, "In the New Kultur Kampf, the First Battles Are Being Fought," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, June 19, 1989, and Howardena Pindell, "Breaking the Silence," *New Art Examiner* 18, no. 2 (October 1990): 22-23.

11. For useful discussions of these and other cases, see Amy Adler, "Postmodern Art and the Obscenity Law," *Yale Law Journal* 99 (1990): 1359-79, and de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back*. See also "The Obscene Body," *Drama Review* 33, no. 1 (Fall 1989); the interviews with Annie Sprinkle and Karen Finley in *Angry Women*, ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale (San Francisco: Research Publications, 1991); and Lauren Berlant's forthcoming *Live Sex Acts*.

12. On Madonna's proximity to her "censors," see Ernest Larsen, "In the Realm of the Censors," *Transition* 53 (1991): 105-15.

13. Howardena Pindell speaks of de facto censorship of artists of color in "Breaking the

Silence." See also Carol Jacobsen, "Redefining Censorship," 51; the October 1990 cover of *New Art Examiner* (a reproduction of their poster: "Relax Senator Helms, the Art World *Is* Your Kind of Place!"); and C.Carr, "Guerrilla Girls: Combat in the Art Zone," *Mirabella*, July 1992, 32-35.

14. Martha Buskirk, "Moral Rights: First Step or False Start?" *Art in America* 79, no. 7 (November 1991): 37-45.

15. See, for example, Carole S. Vance, "Misunderstanding Obscenity," *Art in America* 78, no. 5 (May 1990): 49-52.

16. On Jeff Koons, see *Jeff Koons* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1992), especially Brian Wallis, "We Don't Need Another Hero: Aspects of the Critical Reception of the Work of Jeff Koons," 27-33, and Martha Buskirk, "Commodification as Censor: Copyrights and Fair Use," *October* 60 (Spring 1992): 82-103.

17. I take the term *administration* from Theodor Adorno not to endorse his positions but to suggest that the 1930s debates over expressionism and socialist realism have not been transcended by postmodern political criticism. See Theodor Adorno, "Against Administered Art," in *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 355, and the essays "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" and "Culture and Administration," in J. M. Bernstein, ed., *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 85-92 and 93-114.

18. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). See also the essays in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992). On literary criticism and the public sphere, see Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), and Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984). For a critique of the way Habermas and his followers oppose literary criticism to censorship, see Richard Burt, *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourses of Censorship* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 26-77.

19. Pierre Bourdieu, "Censorship and the Imposition of Form," in *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 137-59. On the inevitability of displacement and distortion in censoring and uncensoring, see Richard Burt, "(Un)Censoring in Detail: Thomas Middleton, Fetishism, and the Regulation of Dramatic Discourse," forthcoming in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion Volume*, ed. Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), and Burt, "Baroque Down: The Trauma of Censorship in Psychoanalysis and Queer Film Revisions of Shakespeare and Marlowe," in *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, ed. Michael Hattaway et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1994).

20. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 169-70.

21. Bourdieu, "Censorship," 138.

22. Bourdieu, *Outline*, 169 (Bourdieu's emphasis).

23. Jiřina Šmejkalová-Strickland, in this volume (chapter 8).

24. See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*.

25. For recent work on the "public sphere," see chapter 1 in this volume; W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Robbins, ed., *Phantom Public Sphere*.

26. See chapter 12 in this volume.

27. Politicizing the aesthetic, often thought to be an antidote to neoconservative and liberal attempts to falsely divide politics and aesthetics, is equally implicated in censorship. It is now a commonplace that art and criticism are political, that there are no built-in consequences. For the left, however, some of the consequences are now regressive. Consider the following example: because art is political, conservatives like Bruce Fein argue, it ought to be regulated.

28. For a powerful defense of identity politics, see George Yúdice, "For a Practical Aesthetic," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 129-45, and "We Are *Not* the World," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 202-17. For an equally powerful critique, see Joan Scott, "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity," *October* 61 (Summer 1992): 12-18. For a discussion of the way that multiculturalism has played itself out in the public sphere, see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

29. See also Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality," *Boundary 2* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 149-80, and Mari J. Matsuda et al., *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993). For the cited examples of the ways in which the left has split over issues of censorship, see Kathy Holub, "Ballistic Instinct," *Premiere*, August 1991, 80-84, 104; "Censors on the Street," *Time*, May 13, 1991, 70; Laurent Greilsamer, "Holocaust Historian Awaits Judgement of Paris," *Guardian Weekly*, May 12, 1991, 12; Laurent Greilsamer, "Pour 'Contestation de crimes contre l'humanité' M. Robert Faurisson est condamné a 100 000 francs d'amende avec susis," *Le Monde*, April 20, 1991, 11; Rebecca Lieb, "Nazi Hate Movies Continue to Ignite Fierce Passions," *New York Times*, August 4, 1991, 16; Chuck Philips, "Wiesenthal Center Denounces Ice Cube's Album," *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1991, F3; and John Pareles, "Should Ice Cube's Voice Be Chilled?" *New York Times*, December 8, 1991, H30.

30. My account of university administration is largely a paraphrase of Jeffrey Wallen's brilliant unpublished essay "Academic Freedom and Diversity: Congruence or Conflict?"

31. See especially Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (New York: Methuen, 1984).

32. In arranging the essays in these terms, I mean to disturb rigid differentiations between early modern, modern, and postmodern rather than cement walls between them. Indeed, some of the essays in the postmodern section discuss postmodern cases and some discuss modern cases. I want to call attention to the porous state of each of these terms in order to head off any attempt to historicize differences in the formation of what Bourdieu terms the "literary field," contextualizing different kinds of censorship or performances across time. The problem with this kind of contextualization is that it inevitably reinscribes a unified discursive space beyond regulation or censorship. I argue this point more closely in *Licensed by Authority*, 22-25.

33. On the importance of early modern censorship to an understanding of postmodern censorship, see chapter 1 in this volume and Burt, *Licensed by Authority*, 150-68. See also Stanley Fish, "There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing Too," in Berman, *Debating P.C.*

34. See Sullivan, "First Amendment Wars"; Allan Parichini, "Speakeasy," *New Art Examiner* 20, no. 4 (December 1992): 10-11; *Artistic Freedom under Attack*, 1991 Report by People for the American Way; and Nat Hentoff, *Free Speech for Me—But Not For Thee: How the Left and Right Censor Each Other* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

35. For more on the politics of the breakdown, see my essay "Baroque Down."