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# **“Degenerate ‘Art’ ”: Public Aesthetics and the Simulation of Censorship in Postliberal Los Angeles and Berlin**

*Richard Burt*

## **Madonna Meets the Nazis**

Just before the release of Madonna's backstage/performance movie *Truth or Dare* in May 1991, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an interview with the superstar that began at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) exhibition entitled “Degenerate Art”: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany.<sup>1</sup> The LACMA exhibition documented and reconstructed the 1937 exhibition of some 625 modernist paintings the Nazis called “degenerate ‘art,’” which they auctioned off, burned, or kept in storage after the exhibition. The agenda of the LACMA exhibition, reiterated in the guidebook, catalog, related events guide, and first room of the exhibition, was twofold: to suggest first that the 1937 exhibition was, so to speak, a bad day for art and second that there is a disturbing parallel between the Nazi assault on modern art and the recent controversy over National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding of avant-garde artists.<sup>2</sup>

During a seventy-minute tour of the Los Angeles exhibition, curator Stephanie Barron explained to Madonna that the Nazis vilified the paintings as “degenerate trash.” Madonna responded, “Degenerate trash, huh? I know what you mean. Just like ‘A Current Affair’ and ‘Hard Copy.’”<sup>3</sup> Toward the end of the interview, Madonna drew a parallel between the exhibition and her own experience with censorship:

Look at this Rev. Donald Wildmon character and all his Moral Majority people. They're obsessed with me—and there's hostility to that obses-

sion. They have a hatred for the power and fame and freedom that I have. For them to go around banning records and books and trying to get people arrested, it's a pretty clear statement about their own obsessions. Obviously I've tapped into something in their unconscious that they're very ashamed of. And since they can't deal with it, they tell everyone it's shameful. I was really reminded of that in the “Degenerate Art” exhibit. It's like Hitler—they want to purify your thoughts.<sup>4</sup>

The reporter condescendingly notes that Madonna is an astute if untrained art critic, and indeed it is clear from her remarks that she grasped perfectly the exhibition's twofold agenda. (Of course Madonna characteristically draws the parallel between past and present in terms of her own experience with censorship.)

From a modern point of view, a *Los Angeles Times* interview promoting Madonna's *Truth or Dare* that begins as this one did might seem puzzling, even scandalous. Apart from considerations of the parallel artistic status of the paintings and film clips on display in the exhibition and Madonna's music videos (between, say, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Madonna's rewriting of it in “Express Yourself”), one might note that reception of their works differs markedly: while the works of German avant-garde artists were confiscated and many of the artists emigrated, “censorship” of Madonna's music videos has only affirmed her cultural centrality and made her more successful commercially.<sup>5</sup> When MTV announced that it had “declined” to air “Justify My Love,” for example, the video aired that same evening on “Nightline,” and Madonna immediately sold the video as a single, a move unprecedented in the video industry. Madonna is, as it were, “like a victim.”<sup>6</sup> One might wonder too why the curator of an exhibition funded by the NEA at a publicly funded museum arranged a private after-hours tour for a Hollywood celebrity.

Yet to be scandalized by Madonna's private tour would be to position oneself as the Warren Beatty of cultural studies. From a post-modern perspective, Madonna's presence at the museum is an instance of the implosion of high and low culture that has generally been regarded as both the end of a modernist aesthetic and its displacement and sublimation by a postmodern, multicultural aesthetic based on identity politics, oriented toward performance. Los Angeles has increasingly been regarded as the central, productive site of this aesthetic both by post-Marxists like Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard and by neo-Marxists from Theodor Adorno to

Edward Soja to Fredric Jameson and, most recently, Mike Davis.<sup>7</sup> In his provocative book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*, Davis suggests that Los Angeles has become central to Marxist accounts of administered culture because it is now a stand-in for late capitalism in general.<sup>8</sup> Davis argues that Los Angeles has historically offered two takes on capitalism, a utopian or “sunshine” view and a dystopian or “noir” view. His present assessment of what he terms “postliberal” Los Angeles is noir. In his view, a band of émigré critics, filmmakers, and artists who fled Nazi Germany and central Europe in the 1940s (including Adorno, who, while he lived in Los Angeles, wrote *Minima Moralia* and, along with Horkheimer, the famous critique of the culture industry in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*)<sup>9</sup> developed a critical, expressionist-inflected film noir take on capitalism. According to Davis, their critique has been replaced by a group of mercenary boosters who have furthered a remarkably repressive capitalist development epitomized by Los Angeles. What Davis terms the “university-museum megacomplex,” now part of the culture industry itself, is central to the legitimization of this repressive development project.<sup>10</sup>

From a postmodern perspective—what I will henceforth call a noir perspective—that Los Angeles should be the location of an exhibition of avant-garde paintings that documented the reception of those works in a Nazi exhibition and that Madonna’s presence at that exhibition should have been covered in the *Los Angeles Times* makes perfect sense: the LACMA exhibition and Madonna’s tour of it register the extent to which Los Angeles now represents the total implosion of high and low culture, the triumph of the culture industry and of administered aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> One might even say it is predictable that Los Angeles should be the site of an exhibition on degenerate art when *Art News* featured as its November 1991 lead story “Hollywood Collects,” with photos of “collector” Jack Nicholson on the cover and of Madonna on the first page of the story; when *Art in America* featured as its January 1992 lead story “LA: The New Patronage”; when *Art and Auction* featured “LA Story” on its January 1992 cover; when the price of expressionist paintings is going up and when those paintings are collected in Hollywood (works by George Grosz, for example, are owned by Hollywood producer Gerald Kamitaki).<sup>12</sup> Of course Madonna, who has her own personal art adviser (and whose acquisitions have driven up prices),

will show up at the LACMA exhibition.<sup>13</sup> Of course the LACMA curator, whose board includes movie star collectors like Steve Martin (who shot part of his movie *LA Story* in the museum) would lead Madonna on a private tour, especially given that private lenders (Madonna owns coveted works by Frida Kahlo and Tamara de Lempika) are crucial to the success of major museum exhibitions.

While I will adopt a noir perspective to illuminate certain features of the LACMA "Degenerate Art" exhibition, I have begun this essay by focusing on Madonna's reception of it in the context of her own experience with censorship in order both to reinforce the usual terms by which noir critique is conducted and to complicate them. On the one hand, a noir critique helps to account in significant ways for the LACMA exhibition and for the way the exhibition began with oversized photographs and brief quotations from émigrés from Nazi Germany who went to Los Angeles more or less directly and ended with Thomas Mann's 1938 comments on what he took to be a shift of the center of European culture to America. The museum installation was designed by Frank Gehry, a regional architect who has now had global success and who, according to Mike Davis, has been crucial to the development of the carceral city Davis calls "Fortress LA."<sup>14</sup> With its economic focus, the noir critique could also account for the emphasis on museum acquisition and on auctions (two chapters of the catalog are devoted to the Nazi art auction) and for the way the market value of the paintings is constructed as an index of their artistic value. It could also help illuminate the technology of reproduction used in the exhibition itself, the way the LACMA exhibition was produced as a megaspectacle.

The noir critique is problematic, however, when it comes to accounting for a central feature of the LACMA exhibition, namely, censorship. My interest in the LACMA and Nazi exhibitions lies largely in way they call into question the traditional modern understanding of censorship as pure repression, the Nazis being perhaps *the* central trope for the modern censor. What remains open to question within the traditional (one might say "party") line on nazism and modernism and on Nazi art policy adopted by LACMA is why the Nazi Degenerate "Art" exhibitions ever took place, and why, more broadly, the Nazis took such a deep interest in the arts. Why did the Nazis exhibit instead of burn the art they hated, if in fact they did burn it? Given that it had a low market value, why did they

auction it off? And why did the Nazis document the Degenerate "Art" exhibitions so extensively that it is possible to reconstruct them now in such detail? To address these questions, we need to redefine censorship and, by extension, revise a traditional understanding of the Nazis' relation both to modernity and to modernism. I will contend that censorship operates not only in repressive terms (as in the confiscation and destruction of art, say), but also as a complex network of productive discursive practices that legitimate and delegitimize the production and reception of the aesthetic in general and of the avant-garde in particular. Acts of seemingly literal repression such as Nazi book burnings (shown on a video in the LACMA exhibition) were always publicly staged, filmed to reach the widest possible audience. The burnings were less about blocking access to particular books than they were about purifying the blood of the *Volk* from corrupting influences. Even at its most destructive, then, censorship is always simulated, always paradoxically staged as a legitimating and delegitimizing performance.

In addition to making available a critique of the LACMA reproduction, redefining censorship as a set of strategies staged for the purposes of cultural legitimation and delegitimation enables a larger critique of the present postliberal so-called new world order. The LACMA exhibition staged a "liberal" opposition between modern art and fascism in a neoconservative, postliberal way, putting a "spin" on the Nazi reception of modernism that effectively suppressed the modernist aspects of the Nazi exhibition, itself a performance of censorship, and ignored the left's contradictory reception of modern art, particularly expressionism, in Weimar Germany. The LACMA exhibition provided its American audiences with the illusion that they are safe from censorship, that only a few neofascist Americans favor censorship of the arts.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in its Berlin installation, the exhibition reinforced the illusion that a newly reunified Germany had consolidated the triumph of parliamentary democracy over fascism in the midst of postliberal developments. Yet redefining censorship as simulation also complicates noir critique insofar as it calls into question recent narratives of Los Angeles (particularly Hollywood and Disneyland) as either the paradisaical or the degraded destination of Western culture. Redefining censorship as a simulated performance undermines as well many of the oppositions (between freedom and repression, aestheticizing politics and politicizing aes-

thetics, simulated and Historical) that have been central to leftist critiques of fascism. I take up these complications in the concluding section of this essay.

### Modernist Reactions

I want to begin my critique of the LACMA exhibition by focusing on a central, glaring contradiction in its reproduction of the Nazi exhibition: on the one hand, there is a will to reproduce the original Nazi exhibition; on the other, there is a will not to reproduce it exactly. LACMA studiously departed from the Nazi original in several ways: the floor plan of the installation was different; the paintings were hung differently (figs. 1 and 2); and the "graffiti" was not always translated—in some cases, the German was not even reproduced legibly (fig. 3).<sup>16</sup> These changes served to set up a distinction between the Nazis' defamation of art and LACMA's "dignified" treatment of it.



Fig. 1. Room three of the 1991 LACMA "Degenerate Art" exhibition



Fig. 2 Room three of the 1937 Munich Degenerate "Art" exhibition. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

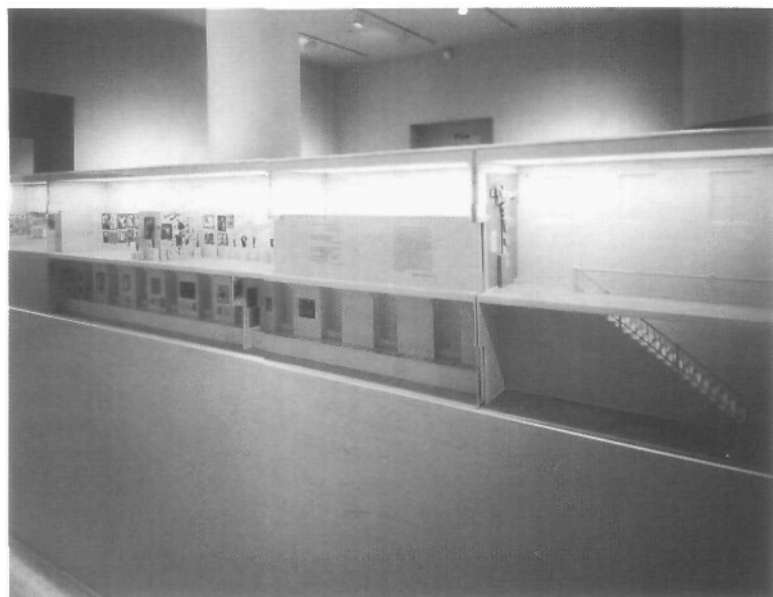


Fig. 3. LACMA scale model reproduction of the 1937 Munich exhibition



This contradictory will to reproduce the original and yet not reproduce it registers the curators' fear that an exact reproduction of the Munich exhibition would void a critique of its original politics—that it would be received as the Nazis wanted their exhibition to be received. Although mounting a critique of the Nazi exhibition is an admirable and timely project, LACMA's commitment to a modern definition of censorship paradoxically implicated its reproduction in the disturbing delegitimizing features of the Nazi exhibition it wished to criticize. The Nazi exhibition was itself a total work of art used to legitimate censorship of modern art, and the Nazis paradoxically imitated the avant-garde, particularly the dadaists, in doing so; similarly, the LACMA reproduction legitimated modern art by delegitimizing would-be censors (in the past and present), as pointed references to the Mapplethorpe case made clear, and imitated the techniques in the 1937 Munich exhibition to do so. Just as the Nazis' attempt to delegitimize modern art was inextricably bound up with avant-garde techniques, so too the LACMA exhibition legitimated the avant-garde and modern art in general by adopting techniques the Nazis used to delegitimize it. Though the LACMA and Nazi exhibitions had opposite aims, they both used the institution of the museum to regulate the reception of the avant-garde through the display of delegitimizing tactics. In failing to recognize how the Nazi exhibition was already itself avant-garde, the LACMA exhibition was at once both more avant-garde and more nazified than the Nazi original it claimed to have "partially" reproduced.<sup>17</sup>

A concrete, close examination of the LACMA exhibition makes clear how it replicated many features of the Nazi exhibition it criticized. The guidebooks for both exhibitions, for example, do versions of the same thing: the Nazis put the word *art* in quotation marks, which the LACMA catalog notes as evidence of the Nazi wish to defame avant-garde art, yet the LACMA guidebook uses quotation marks around *degenerate art* in order to "dignify" the art as art (figs. 4 and 5). It thus ironically did to the Nazi exhibition what the Nazis did to the art they exhibited. Moreover, the LACMA guidebook imitates a Nazi aesthetic. On the cover is a colorized version of a black and white photo taken by the Nazis of the 1937 exhibition. The color scheme for the program (and the cover of the catalog) is that of the Nazi brownshirts: khaki brown, red, and black (colors carried through in the guidebook's display of the installation and floor plan).

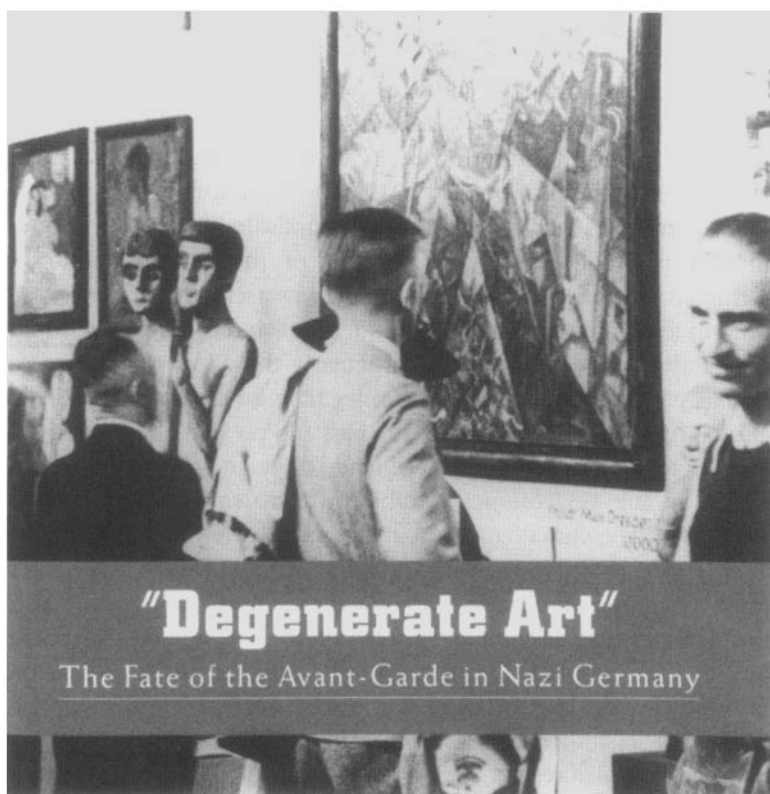


Fig. 4. Guidebook for the LACMA exhibition. Cover designed by Jim Drobka. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The LACMA exhibition was itself a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art, a multimedia spectacle.<sup>18</sup> It followed the megaspectacle exhibitions of the 1980s in using a unified spectacle to override critical analysis available through attention to the exhibition's otherwise heterogeneous elements.<sup>19</sup> Significantly in this regard, Wagner's *Tannhäuser* overture was the unannounced and uncredited sound track on the videos in the first and third rooms documenting the history of Nazi art policy.<sup>20</sup> (We may give thanks, I suppose, that LACMA didn't use the "Ride of the Valkyries" from *Die Walküre* or the "Rhine Journey" from *Götterdämmerung*.) The LACMA exhibition adopted a postmodern multimedia apparatus, even if its message was high modernist. There were four continu-

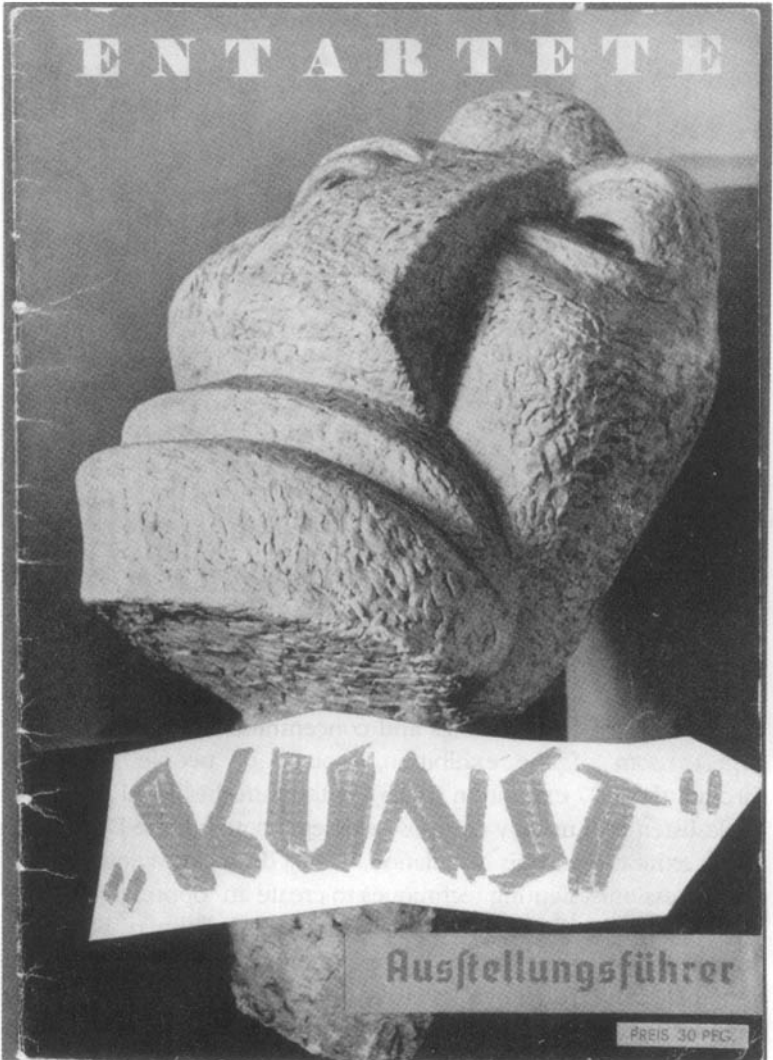


Fig. 5. Guidebook for the Munich exhibition. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

ously running videos: in the first of three historical rooms (documenting Nazi art policy and exhibitions), a video that documented Hitler's art and his official parades and another that showed clips from films banned by the Nazis; in the second historical room, a



Fig. 6. Room six of the LACMA exhibition. The video in this room was footage of spectators at the Munich exhibition.

video of Nazi book burnings and concentration camps; and in the largest room of the exhibition, footage of people wandering through the 1937 exhibition (fig. 6). In the third historical room, one could listen to music by composers delegitimated in the Degenerate Music exhibition. In his installation, Gehry drew, knowingly or not, on expressionist lighting techniques to create an “oppressive” atmosphere.<sup>21</sup> After walking down a narrow, well-lit hallway with windows on one’s right and oversized photographs of émigrés positioned slightly above eye level on one’s left, one walked into the dimly lit historical rooms; in the first of them hung a large, intentionally corroded metal sign that said “Degenerate Art” (fig. 7). One then moved into the well-lit rooms where the paintings were on display. And, of course, there were the usual audiotape guides.

As a multimedia, total work of art, the LACMA exhibition clearly reinforced the “didactic walls” in the installation itself and the traffic patterns of the audience.<sup>22</sup> One had to pass through the historical rooms before viewing the art. Near the entry to the first historical room, a metal bar with a “no entry” sign and a guard standing beside



Fig. 7. The first historical room of the LACMA exhibition

it blocked direct entry to the paintings (in the sixth reconstructed room). The LACMA exhibition regulated documentation of itself. Photography of the exhibition was not allowed for “security” reasons. Moreover, the LACMA exhibition never examined the extent to which its documentation of history depended on photography.<sup>23</sup> By these diverse means, audience reception was carefully regulated (one might say guided) so that any criticism of the art effectively aligned the critic with the Nazis. (The LACMA guidebook clearly equates critics with the young man on the cover, who apparently has turned away, scoffing [see fig. 4].) Criticism of the LACMA exhibition and the works in it was, in short, delegitimated in advance. The LACMA exhibition gave its viewers, as a *New York Times* reviewer put it, a tour de force.<sup>24</sup>

Whether this is good or bad art was not open to debate, nor were the criteria for determining good art open for discussion. In closing down debate, LACMA ironically opened up a critique of the educational function on which its NEA funding depends, one that replicated the critique of the Nazi exhibition announced in the second chapter of the LACMA catalog, “An ‘Educational’ Exhibition.”<sup>25</sup> LACMA

criticized the Nazis for controlling rather than educating public opinion, yet LACMA's "educational" function may be similarly put in quotation marks. To receive federal funding, public museums must have "permanent facilities open to the public on a regularly scheduled basis and their tax exempt status depends on providing educational experiences to the public."<sup>26</sup> Education is generally defined as "promoting public awareness of art."<sup>27</sup> But in the LACMA exhibition, education depended on excluding debate over what counts as art. This raises two issues: how was LACMA's predetermined "education" (viewers had to agree that they were seeing great art) different from Nazi propaganda, and who needed to come to the LACMA exhibition to be "educated"? LACMA clearly excluded from its public those who are arguably most in need of being educated—namely, the neo-Nazis of Los Angeles, who might have contested its view of the art—and did so, paradoxically, in order to legitimate the exhibition. The neo-Nazis might not have been educated by it; more precisely, to have invited them to see the exhibition would also have been to allow them to contest the judgment of the curators. Even without any direct contestation, a problem remained: for the very means of regulating the reception of museumgoers (to prevent them from sympathizing with Hitler's position) disturbed the differences between them and those who saw the Nazi exhibition, a disturbance felt acutely at the LACMA exhibition in the uncanny moment when one looked at video footage of people in the 1937 exhibition and then looked around at the people in the LACMA exhibition. I, for one, could see no difference between the way the two groups responded to the two exhibitions (fig. 6).

In giving a postliberal "spin" to the Nazi reception of the avant-garde, the LACMA exhibition engaged in a different kind of administrative regulation, one closer to censorship as it has traditionally been understood, which has to do with the historical memory it documented, what LACMA distorted through downplaying, marginalizing, recasting, or omitting.<sup>28</sup> The Nazi interest in the avant-garde was, for example, left unnoted, as was the counterexample of Italian fascism (which embraced the avant-garde). The debates within the left over expressionism in the 1930s were nowhere mentioned, though in defending expressionism against Georg Lukács's charge that it was fascist, Ernst Bloch took as his point of departure the Munich Degenerate "Art" exhibition, and even though Lukács denied in his

rejoinder to Bloch that the Nazi exhibition altered the validity of Lukács's original (1934) analysis.<sup>29</sup> Nor were Bloch's reviews of the Munich exhibition mentioned.<sup>30</sup>

The LACMA curators made similarly problematic selections with regard to the content of the art. Given the homophobia often thought to drive right-wing attacks on the NEA (as in the Mapplethorpe controversy) and the NEA's denials of funding to lesbian and gay performance artists, the understated attention to Nazi persecution of gay and lesbian art and of transgressive sexuality in general seems rather odd.<sup>31</sup> Consider the selection from *Mädchen in Uniform* in a thirty-minute video of clips from movies censored by the Nazis. In this scene, schoolgirls looking at a pornographic book are interrupted by a teacher who confiscates the book. One girl then shows another pin-up photos of male movie stars who, the girls exclaim in English, have "sex appeal." The scene has its charm, but it is arguably the most heterosexist moment in the film. Anyone who had not seen the film would never guess that the girls' crushes on a young female teacher are central to the movie's plot, would have no idea that resistance to the repressive headmistress and her hirelings who run an authoritarian girls' school is figured by a militant and powerfully romanticized lesbian opposition (all of the girls have crushes on a young female teacher).<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in the audiotape that accompanied the exhibition and in the catalog, little or no mention was made of images that seem to call out for comment in this regard. Consider, for example, Otto Dix's 1923 portrait of the jeweler Karl Krall (fig. 8). Krall is posed in campy fashion with hands on hips à la Mae West, and his body is exaggerated accordingly. The painting is reproduced in the catalog, but its obviously homoerotic content is not discussed.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, there is no mention of the Bauhaus, even though the Nazis began their assault on modern art by closing it down in 1933.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the LACMA exhibition distorted the Nazi exhibition by reproducing only one of its two parts. LACMA excluded the Nazi art from the House of German Art exhibition held in conjunction with the Degenerate "Art" exhibition (displaying only video reproductions of some Nazi art in the first historical room, thereby reinforcing the taboo on the display of Nazi art).<sup>35</sup>

Apart from showing the ways in which delegitimizing tactics were deployed in the LACMA spin on nazism and the avant-garde, I want to call attention to a more fundamental censorship in the

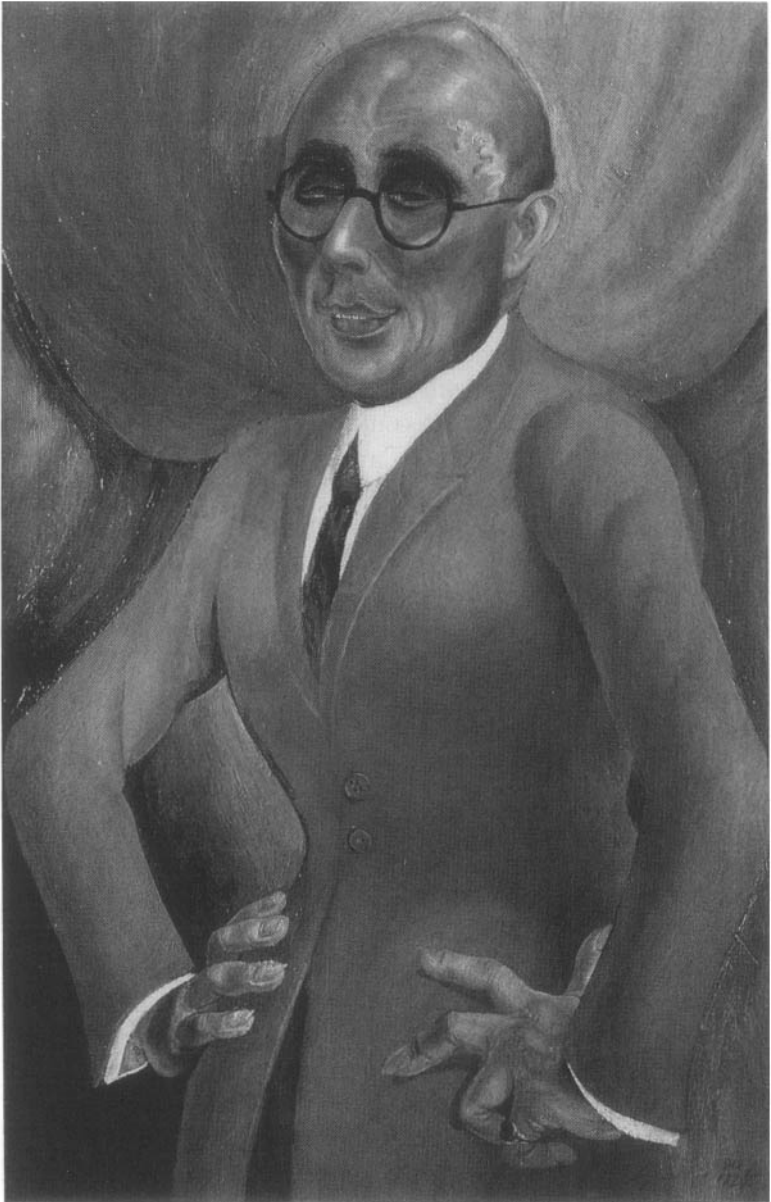


Fig. 8. Otto Dix, *The Jeweller*



LACMA exhibition, one that functioned in terms of a distinction between what was legible and illegible, receivable and unreceivable in the reconstruction of the Nazi exhibition. The forms of selection, suppression, and distortion I have identified in the LACMA exhibition, along with the spectacular technological apparatus, are determined by what is receivable once one has accepted a modern definition of censorship and an unrevised account of nazism. The distinction between what is and is not receivable becomes operative in relation to the account of history and art history adopted by the LACMA curators and by the American public in general (including many academics). In the standard history of art, 1935 marks the triumph of the banal in Nazi art policy.<sup>36</sup> In this account, the Munich Degenerate "Art" exhibition evinced just how aberrant and exceptional the Nazis were; it marked the revenge of the philistines, in the appreciative words of one reviewer of the LACMA exhibition.<sup>37</sup> Thus the title of the exhibition was put in quotation marks to differentiate "dignified" treatment of the art as art from its defamation as "degenerate 'art'"; any similarities between the Nazi exhibition and modern art were regarded as unintended "ambiguities" or "hilarious contradictions."<sup>38</sup>

My analysis of the Nazi exhibition relies on a revised historiography of modern Germany. In suggesting that the LACMA and Nazi exhibitions were equally sophisticated in their simplification of complexity, I follow Hans Syberberg, Jeffrey Herf, Ian Kershaw, Peter Sloterdijk, and Zygmunt Bauman, all of whom have contested the notion that the Nazis were stupid and demonic philistines at war with modernism.<sup>39</sup> Herf in particular argues that the Nazis engaged in a political tradition of a paradoxically reactionary modernism dating back to the Weimar Republic. If we grant the Nazis' interest in modernism and modern technology, the way they imitated modern art in the Munich Degenerate "Art" exhibition even as they differentiated it from officially approved art becomes quite clear. Rather than drive toward the construction of simple, "pure" binary oppositions and unwittingly produce ambiguities and contradictions, the Nazis delegitimated modern art through a sophisticated process in which the imitation of modern art worked to clarify its difference from Nazi art. The Nazi exhibition may be viewed as an exercise in the kind of fascist simplification of complexity articulated by Sloterdijk:

Fascism and its side currents were after all—viewed philosophically—in large part movements of simplification. But that precisely the town criers of the new simplicity (good-evil, friend-foe, “front,” “identity,” “bond”) for their part had gone through the modern nihilist school of artfulness, bluff, and deception—that was to become clear to the masses too late. The “solution” that sounds so simple, “positiveness,” the new stability, the new essentialness and security: They are but structures that, under the surface, are even more complicated than the complicatedness of modern life against which they resist. For they are defensive, reactive formations—composed of modern experiences and denials of the same. Antimodernity is possibly more modern and complex than what it rejects; in any case, it is gloomier, blunter, more brutal, and more cynical.<sup>40</sup>

As a total work of art, the Nazi exhibition was itself already a post-modern performance: its politics were negotiated as the audience moved through it, determining what and why certain kinds of “art” are degenerate. From this perspective, the Nazi exhibition may be regarded as itself avant-garde rather than as the antithesis to avant-garde. One might go so far as to say that the Nazis outstripped the avant-garde in mounting a postmodern performative exhibition. If regulation of the arts made the Nazi state exceptional among totalitarian regimes, this may evince less its aberrant character than its advanced status relative to other cultural administrations.

Several examples might be used as evidence of the Munich exhibition’s sophisticated simplification of complexity. Consider the similarity between a poster for the Nazi exhibition and one for a 1923 Bauhaus exhibition (fig. 9) or the obvious imitation of expressionist woodcuts in another Nazi poster (fig. 10). The strongest example of this simplification is the so-called “dada wall,” on which both the Nazis and the LACMA curators had a clear fixation (fig. 11); it appears on the cover of the LACMA catalog (and in magazine articles covering the exhibition). In the LACMA account, this wall was a typical example of the Nazis’ attempt to defame modern art by surrounding it with “graffiti.” This account fails to note, however, that the so-called graffiti are from a 1920 dada exhibition held in Berlin (fig. 12). The phrase “Nehmen Sie DADA ernst, es lohnt sich” (Take dada seriously! It’s worth it) was written on a placard in the dada exhibition above Otto Dix’s *Kriegskrüppel* (*War Cripples*). The dada exhibition played with the relation between text and image in a



Fig. 9. Nazi Degenerate "Art" exhibition poster indebted to a Bauhaus poster designed by Kandinsky

way that was echoed by the Nazi exhibition as a whole and by the dada wall in particular.<sup>41</sup> The Munich exhibition resembled dada in its very organization as well. The dada exhibition, according to Hanne Bergius, had a disconcerting diversity created not only "by



Fig. 10. Nazi Degenerate “Art” exhibition poster indebted to German expressionist woodcuts

the crowding of the walls, but also by the variety and contrast of the various materials employed.”<sup>42</sup> The exhibition was, according to Odo Marquard, a “negative direct *Gesamtkunstwerk*.”<sup>43</sup> One might try to differentiate between dada’s desire to turn art into politics and the Nazis’ attempt to aestheticize politics. Dada seeks to break down bourgeois institutions of art and thus might be seen as the radical antithesis of the Nazis.<sup>44</sup> Yet the cards with the slogans “DADA ist politisch” (dada is political) and “Kultur ist Tod” (culture is dead) might be said to call forth an imitative fascist counterresponse.

LACMA’s failure to recognize how the Nazis imitated the avant-garde is remarkable given that the LACMA catalog notes that Otto Dix’s *War Cripples* was exhibited in the dada fair. Moreover, the LACMA chapter on the exhibition shows that Dix’s painting was in the Nazi guidebook and in room three of the Munich exhibition. The LACMA curators’ unwillingness or inability to account for data that called their own interpretation of the Nazi exhibition into question is not so much a question of incompetence or knowing suppression as of their political unconscious, their inability to receive that data. The data just don’t make sense to them; in Thomas Kuhn’s



Fig. 11. The dada wall of the 1937 Munich exhibition. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Fig. 12. 1920 Berlin dada exhibition

terms, the data are anomalous and hence either recognized and discounted or just misrecognized.<sup>45</sup>

## You Are Leaving the American Sector

If LACMA's misrecognition of the Nazi exhibition is a symptom of LACMA's spin on nazism and the avant-garde, a symptom of its ideological will to legitimate a simplistic notion of modern art (and by extension all art), it remains to be considered how the simplifications and suppressions of this spin advance a postliberal agenda. Within art world debates, curator Stephanie Barron implicitly aligned the exhibition with a neoconservative account of modernism (advanced by Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball) against a postmodern account of it (advanced by Hans Haacke, Douglas Crimp, and Rosalind Kraus).<sup>46</sup> Barron's identification of expressionism with the avant-garde rather than dada (ignoring the dadaist critique of expressionism as the death of German art) registers her personal stake as a curator in a positive evaluation of the paintings. (Barron is married to Robert F. Rifkind, a collector of expressionist paintings and founder of the Robert F. Rifkind Center at LACMA, which Barron heads.)<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Christoff Stolz's interest in bringing the LACMA show to Berlin's German Historical Museum, which he directs, is linked to his interest in putting presently warehoused Nazi "art" in his museum.<sup>48</sup>

These art world curatorial politics intersect with more directly political interests in legitimating postwar Germany's place in the new world order, and it is worth noting that members of Parliament intervened to have the LACMA exhibition shown in Berlin.<sup>49</sup> The move from the Los Angeles *art* museum to the Berlin *historical* museum reinforced a distinction between history and art already built into the exhibition, making it potentially easier to invert the Nazi view of degenerate "art" by putting Nazi "art" in quotation marks and thereby heightening a contrast between an authoritarian Nazi Germany and a postwar denazified liberal Germany. Since the late 1980s there has been an explicit interest in resolving the embarrassment posed to Germany by Nazi art.<sup>50</sup> The LACMA exhibition helped German museum administrators to manage a series of problems brought up in the debate over whether the art should be shown and, if so, where and how. Thus far, no solution has proven

acceptable, and Nazi art remains a double embarrassment: no art museum will show it for fear of legitimating it, yet to keep it out of sight makes museums look like censors. The proposals for displaying the art thus far recycle in inverted form the tactics the Nazis are said to have used on modern art and disclose the possibility that German artistic tastes have not been denazified after all. One member of Parliament, Antje Vollmer, argued that if they were shown, the Nazi paintings would be revealed in "all their triteness and the laughter will help clear away the ghosts of the Nazi period," precisely the aim—ridicule—of the 1937 Munich exhibition.<sup>51</sup> More skeptically, Claudia Siede, another member of Parliament, said that "there is still uncertainty in dealing with official Nazi art because the so-called 'beautiful art' which in those days was intended to reflect the 'healthy taste of the people' is closer to the taste of the broad majority of the public even today than the so-called modern art."<sup>52</sup> Siede suggested that the Nazi art be de-demonized by exhibiting it side by side with works denounced by Hitler. In an effort to educate people, Seide proposed an inversion of the twin 1937 Nazi exhibitions of official and degenerate art.

Though the LACMA catalog omits any mention of this controversy over displaying Nazi art, as Emily Braun notes, the exhibition helped to resolve it by putting the question of Nazi art and Nazi art policy within a historical category.<sup>53</sup> The Nazi "art" can then be shown (rather than censored), but displayed relatively comfortably as historical artifacts, as documents (precisely because it has been politicized) rather than as art; liberal regimes can be set against totalitarian ones (in which politics and art are identified). The Berlin installation implicitly positioned the United States as the instructor of Germans (in line with the United States as an instrument of denazification). The show was, so to speak, "good for Germans," a form of criticism and compliment; as a reviewer maintained, the art displayed was true German art (as opposed to the historical documents of Nazi Germany left by Hitler's "artists"), evidence that there were "resistance heroes" in the Third Reich.<sup>54</sup>

More broadly, the LACMA exhibition's installation in Berlin was an instance of a cultural exchange between Los Angeles and Berlin that is increasingly central to a broader exchange of power between a post-Gulf War United States and a reunified Germany, an exchange already well under way. (Witness the opening of the Muse-

um of Tolerance in Los Angeles, with its reproduction of 1930s Berlin, and the fragments of the Berlin Wall in the Nixon and Reagan presidential libraries in Yorba Linda and Simi Valley, respectively [fig. 13].<sup>55</sup> The reception of the LACMA exhibition in the (previously West) German press suggested that this cultural exchange between Los Angeles and Berlin aimed, undoubtedly without recognizing that it did so, to reinforce the doctrine of American exceptionalism with regard to imperialism and the doctrine of Nazi exceptionalism with regard to German nationalism. Just as the United States did not dominate Iraq but liberated Kuwait, so the Third Reich marked an aberration in an otherwise democratic German national character. Los Angeles and Berlin now serve as metropolitan centers that enable cultural exchanges that to a degree stabilize differences between self-identical terms: art and nonart; art and history; Germans and Americans; censorship and free expression; simulation and History.

The German press's response to the LACMA exhibition and its relation to the Gulf War depended on simulated censorship and simulated opposition. In an essay on the LACMA exhibition in *Die Zeit*, Petra Von Kipphoff noted that many lenders were worried about sending their paintings to a country engaged in censorship of the arts and involved in a "clean and sober" war.<sup>56</sup> Lenders were apparently satisfied by token opposition to the war: a single radio station in Los Angeles regularly aired an antiwar show. The LACMA reconstruction was reviewed in the German press as superior to the 1987 version in Germany because the "courageous LACMA curator" connected the original exhibition to topical issues in the United States.<sup>57</sup> In Germany, the original Los Angeles venue was regarded as an ironic revenge of sorts: the painters and artists exiled by Hitler were part of an exhibition that showed the history of how they got there.

At the same time, the management of this cultural exchange will only serve to expose, in a noir fashion, the administrative corruption and severely repressive "censorship" on which the staged stability of the new world order depends. It is difficult to manufacture a consensus about liberalism within a postliberal society. In fact, the terms that determine reception—*Nazi*, *censorship*, *fascist*, and so on—are extremely volatile; rather than cement a consensus between the LACMA curators and the NEA over the right-wing attacks on the arts, an exhibition on Nazi censorship threatened to explode it. The





Fig. 13. Fragment of the Berlin Wall in the Richard Nixon presidential library. Photo courtesy of the Richard M. Nixon Library and Birthplace.

history of the exhibition's funding was itself troubled. Though the LACMA exhibition paid deliberate homage to the NEA in the foreword to the catalog and in a large display card in the first historical room (both acknowledged NEA funding), the NEA in fact withdrew funding in 1990 during the Helms hearings on the renewal of NEA funding; moreover, the Smithsonian, originally one of three museums scheduled to show the exhibition, withdrew on the grounds that it did not have room. NEA representatives asked that the words *Nazi* and *censorship* be struck from the catalog. The LACMA curators complied and retitled the exhibition *1937: A Crucial Year in Art History*. Sometime in 1990 after the hearings, the funding was restored, apparently because the NEA thought it better to risk holding a controversial exhibition than to face almost certain controversy over not funding one, as in the case of the 1989 Witness show at Artists Space. (After withdrawing funding for the exhibition, NEA head John Frohnmayer restored it, but not for the catalog.)<sup>58</sup> The LACMA curators then restored the censored words. (It is difficult to tell this censored or cover-up story with exact dates because one would need to use the Freedom of Information Act to get access to the original applications and NEA responses.)<sup>59</sup>

Similar contradictions obtain in Germany. A socialist perspective on fascism, for example, has been wiped out in formerly East Berlin museums (now closed), and formerly East German universities have faced wholesale firings of professors and researchers.<sup>60</sup> In 1990, masses of East German books ended up in a garbage dump.<sup>61</sup> Even as the socialist version of German history has been censored (the East Berlin Historical Museum was closed in 1990), East German censorship has been put on show.<sup>62</sup> Which East German art will be exhibited, if any, is now the subject of fierce dispute, and the market value of the avant-garde escalates.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, recent exhibitions of avant-garde artists like Otto Dix and photographers like John Heartfield have already proven controversial on grounds that they depoliticize their work in the name of representing its diversity.<sup>64</sup> The reception of the 1992 Otto Dix exhibition at the Tate Gallery did not square with the aims of the LACMA "Degenerate Art" exhibition. Either Dix was seen unfavorably or the exhibition was an occasion to rethink the relation between Hitler and modernism and claim that Hitler saved modernism by opposing it. The way that the Weimar Republic has served equally well (and with increasing fre-

quency) as an analogy both to present-day Germany and to the United States is perhaps the clearest register of their postliberal contradictions.

What is the status of these contradictions? Can they be turned against the postliberal order as it is presently administered in the United States and Germany? More narrowly, we might ask whether there is an alternative to the LACMA reproduction that could undo a repressive postliberal order. The usual affirmative answer to this question would reverse the tendency to divide art from history and aestheticize politics, and instead show how art is historical and aesthetics are political. A progressive alternative reproduction might advance the agenda of critics from Peter Bürger to Rosalind Krauss, who have distinguished the emancipatory goal of the avant-garde's attack (the avant-garde being identified with dada), namely, the conflation of artistic and everyday praxis from a simulated reconciliation of the ideological split between them, a conflation institutionalized through an oppressive culture industry.<sup>65</sup>

In my view, however, a reproduction of the Nazi exhibition that politicized aesthetics would not be an antidote to the problems I have identified in the LACMA exhibition. To be sure, one could imagine a counterexhibition on degenerate art, one with a countermemory more ample or more radical than the one supplied by LACMA, one that included a greater diversity of viewpoints and staged the conflicts between them, one that highlighted the politics of exhibition and the institution of the museum, one that called into question the auratic status of painting. Two critics suggested that the LACMA exhibition should have included more history or more forms of censored media such as photography. Similarly, the exhibition of Nazi art could have been problematized. The role of the curator could have been foregrounded, particularly her decision to exhibit the paintings as she did, so as to call attention to the politics of the art on show and the politics of museum exhibition.<sup>66</sup> The issue of censorship could have been brought forward so that it became clear that censorship is a performance. The point of the exhibition would have been to raise questions such as: What is art? How is it legitimated? What is the relation between word and image? When are wall texts coercive, when informative? Just what is censorship?

Yet a progressive alternative to LACMA could not transcend the kinds of problems I pointed to in the LACMA exhibition, however

much more inclusive and diverse its historical contextualization, however much it foregrounded conflicts within the history of reception or the politics of museum display or the curator's role. For any exhibition would inevitably regulate reception so as to legitimate certain perspectives and delegitimize others. Undoing the repressive effects of the LACMA spin on Nazi art policy, returning the repressed, would itself involve the deployment of similar kinds of delegitimizing tactics, similar kinds of simulation, the production of a counterspin. A politicized version would be just as programmatic as an apolitical one: questions about the relation between art and politics would be largely rhetorical, since it would be assumed that art is political. Moreover, it is hard to see how an alternative exhibition would not aestheticize politics in an effort to politicize aesthetics. In showing that historical documentation (both then and now) is political, a progressive reproduction of the Nazi exhibition would presumably highlight even more than LACMA's the way that documentation itself was and is part of an aesthetic performance; similarly, to show that art is political would necessarily involve aestheticizing its display (one would have to call attention to the art of political exhibition).<sup>67</sup>

Similar problems would no doubt have arisen if an alternative exhibition had been shown in Berlin. It would presumably have made clear how denazification has always depended on censorship, as the recent calls to ban German neo-Nazi rock and attempts to ban discussions of topics like euthanasia confirm.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, reunification has unsettled the former landscape of East German literary culture. Younger critics have asked whether writers like Christa Wolf, who claimed to be a victim of the East German regime and its secret police apparatus, the Stasi, was really a collaborator.<sup>69</sup> In displaying how modernism linked destruction to creation, culture to barbarism, a politicized exhibition might also have complicated current attempts to memorialize the Holocaust in Germany. As it was, an exhibition that ran concurrently at the Martin Gropius Bau entitled *Patterns of Jewish Life*, which included religious items, seemed uncannily like the realization of Hitler's planned museum of Jewish artifacts.<sup>70</sup>

That the problems of censorship in the LACMA reproduction cannot be entirely corrected may be seen if we consider briefly three anticensorship exhibitions. A topical exhibition entitled *Scandal*,

Outrage, and Censorship: Controversy in Modern Art, held in December 1991 at the Galerie St. Etienne in New York, juxtaposed works by German avant-garde artists from the 1930s (some of them in the Nazi Degenerate "Art" exhibition) with paintings and etchings by contemporary American avant-garde artists like Sue Coe.<sup>71</sup> The force of the juxtaposition, however, was to affirm only the predictable moralistic and ahistorical parallels between Nazi Germany and the Reagan/Bush United States. Another topical anticensorship exhibition, *Too Shocking to Show*, sponsored by the Brooklyn Museum and Franklin Furnace, ran performances of four artists who were denied funding by the NEA. The title quoted Pat Buchanan's ad, which used footage from Marlon Riggs's documentary on gay black males, *Tongues Untied*. The same imitative, antagonistic dynamic as in the 1937 and 1991 "Degenerate 'Art'" exhibitions was at work here.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the clearest illustration of the impossibility of mounting an exhibition opposed to censorship is *The Play of the Unmentionable*, shown at the Brooklyn Museum in 1990.<sup>73</sup> Organized and curated by the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, this exhibition directly addressed the NEA controversy while also departing from the conventions that govern museum exhibitions. The installation gathered censored works from the museum's permanent collection and displayed them in relation to quotations from politicians (including Hitler and Goebbels) and artifacts including Bauhaus furniture (fig. 14). Like the Berlin dadaists, Kosuth mounted a critique of the museum as institution, politicizing the relation between text and image, questioning how a work (and what kind of work) is displayed. At the same time, Kosuth explicitly opposed his political art to that of "unambiguous" work of artists like Hans Haacke. For Kosuth, according to David Freedberg, "the whole of art became the questioning of art. A truly political art, he realized, would not content itself with the message alone; it would—it had to—engage the viewer in a questioning of the nature and process of art itself."<sup>74</sup> Yet Kosuth's political art in fact resembled the 1937 Nazi exhibition in two respects: first, it had a clear agenda (in this case, anticensorship and proplay); second, in advancing this anticensorship agenda, the playful displays of text and artworks was arguably indebted more to the Nazi dada room (fig. 11) than it was to the more purely negative Berlin dada exhibition of 1920 (fig. 12).



Fig. 14. Joseph Kosuth's *Play of the Unmentionable* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. Photo courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

Ambiguity and play functioned unambiguously as antidotes to a censorship supposedly opposed to play.

The misrecognition and panic evinced in the LACMA exhibition cannot be “corrected,” in short, by an exhibition that would politicize aesthetics, for the very pervasiveness and complexity of censorship contaminate any corrective critique of the LACMA exhibition: if LACMA’s deployment of complex, diverse, and pervasive forms of delegitimation called into question the conventional terms of “liberal” accounts of Nazi history (so that *liberal* and *censorship* have to be put in quotation marks), so too does any “left” critique. If censorship is part of a panic discourse, then so too is any criticism of censorship. Every term one would use to historicize the Nazi exhibition (from any given political perspective) must be put in quotation marks as its self-identity, its difference from its opposite, is called into question: “art”; “history”; “education”; “graffiti”; “guidebook”; even “conservation” (as opposed to censorship) and “collection” (as opposed to confiscation).<sup>75</sup> Museum administrators, the NEA, and its critics, whether they are for or against censorship of the arts, participate in a common panic discourse of denunciation in the public

sphere: each calls the other "fascist" and "philistine"; each accuses the other of being "hysterical" or "panicked"; each adopts the same moralistic language of "decency," "healthy debate," "virulent attack," "barbarism," "decadence," and so on.<sup>76</sup> The Hitler analogy was applied by the left to Jesse Helms, Pat Buchanan, and Ronald Reagan, while the right applied it to Saddam Hussein.<sup>77</sup>

The current widespread panic and hysteria over censorship arise precisely because censorship cannot be limited to a recognizable state censorship apparatus. Censorship can be "found" everywhere—in the practices of curators, lenders, the NEA, magazine editors, journalists, art historians, historians, cultural critics—and it can be found by everyone—neoconservatives, the religious right, liberals, and the "radical" left. What counts as censorship will always be contested precisely because censorship is simulated; display and visibility cannot in and of themselves be antidotes to repression and invisibility since censorship involves not simply destruction but also displacement, transvaluation, and distortion.<sup>78</sup>

### Eurotrash: The Nazis Meet Mickey Mouse

In arguing that censorship cannot be corrected precisely because it is a simulated performance, I want to suggest that the left's interest in politicizing aesthetics and cultural reproduction might be rethought in terms of the politics of the cultural migration of Europe to virtually the furthest point west in the United States, namely, Los Angeles. This means complicating two familiar accounts of Los Angeles, what Mike Davis terms "sunshine" and "noir." In the noir account, Los Angeles typifies the most decadent tendencies of capitalism, fulfilling a post-Nazi threat to European culture. As Mike Davis remarks, "Even as the walls come down in Eastern Europe, they are being erected all over Los Angeles."<sup>79</sup>

Twentieth-century critique of ideology in general is driven by the sense that the aestheticization of politics leads to fascism and war, and that accounts of fascism regularly link nazism and Hollywood; that is, fascism is generally defined as the desire to collapse the difference between the world and art, between the real and a simulated reality. In *Hitler, A Film from Germany*, Hans Jürgen Syberberg

takes the collapse of the real and the false to be the Nazis' understanding of art:

Hitler understood the significance of film. Now we are just as used to regarding his interest in film pejoratively, as if he had only wished to use it for propaganda purposes. We might even wonder whether he did not merely organize the Nuremberg rallies for Leni Riefenstahl, as certain elements might lead us to suppose, and, taking the argument a little further, whether the whole of the Second World War was not indeed constructed as a big budget war film, solely put on so it could be projected as newsreel each evening in his bunker. . . . The artistic organization of these mass ceremonies, recorded on celluloid, and even the organization of the final collapse, were part of the overall programme of the movement. Hitler saw the war and its newsreel footage as his heroic epic.<sup>80</sup>

As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe points out, Syberberg has in mind here the production of a "Hollywood aesthetic" in Nazi Germany itself.<sup>81</sup>

Los Angeles has been for these critics the future of nazism, a more advanced form of fascism. The Gulf War, known commonly as the video war for a number of reasons, only appeared to provide further confirmation of this view of fascism. The attention paid by Mike Davis and others to Los Angeles focuses in part on the way Hollywood manufactures the collapse between the real and the simulated in the public sphere of the United States. (Coincidentally, a week after the LACMA exhibition closed, parades celebrating the Gulf War victory were held in Hollywood.) In left critiques of the video war, Hollywood figured centrally. Consider a *Nation* editorial on a commemorative fireworks display just before the Fourth of July, 1991:

The bizarre aerial ballet was the climax of a fireworks display in honor of the warriors of Desert Storm that had opened with strains of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*—better known to most Americans as the theme from the movie *2001* (and, appropriately, written by Richard Strauss, one of the Nazis' favorite composers). An observer remembered how Ronald Reagan, who fought World War II exclusively in Hollywood, had told Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that he had served as photographer with the troops liberating the Nazi death camps. Now all New York City had moved into Reagan's mind: The distinction between movies and life, fantasy and reality, had blurred and vanished.<sup>82</sup>

The Gulf War and George Bush's new world order for many marked the installation of a *homo Reaganus* unconcerned with the



difference between the real and the simulated image. It is indeed only too easy to imagine a commercial that would have followed the logic of the Superbowl celebration that began the patriotic, jingoistic celebration of the Gulf War: the all too appropriately named General Schwarzkopf (in full military regalia, of course) comes out of a battle scene full of burning tanks and responds to a voice-over question, "General, what are you going to do now?" by exclaiming with a broad smile, "I'm going to Disneyland!"

Indeed, Disneyland, even more than Hollywood, has stood for hypersimulation of a specifically American cultural politics. As Baudrillard writes:

In fact, the cinema here [in the United States] is not where you think it is. It certainly is not to be found in the studios the tourists flock to—Universal, Paramount, etc., those subdivisions of Disneyland. If you believe that the whole of the Western world is hypostasized in America, the whole of America in California, and California in Disneyland, then this is the microcosm of the West.<sup>83</sup>

In his essay "What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts," Adorno presciently anticipates Disneyland's simulation of Europe. He closes by citing a "last danger" to European culture, namely, that it may be "theme-parked":

I may call it the danger of the transformation of European culture into a kind of National Park, a realm tolerated and even admired, but mainly in terms of its quaintness, its being different from the general standards of technological manipulation of European culture. We have to be equally on our guard against an artificial preservation, its being put on exhibition, its being enjoyed for the sake of its uniqueness rather than for any inherent qualities. What happened to certain artists of the Boulevard Montparnasse, whose colorful appearance made them lovely to look at, but at the same time gave them the stigma of being fools, may happen to European culture as a whole. It may share the fate of European style furniture or of European titles.<sup>84</sup>

From Adorno's perspective, one could argue that the LACMA exhibition resembled less a *Gesamtkunswerk* than a kitschy ride in Disney's Fantasyland. That is to say, the exhibition followed out a trajectory from Adorno's "National Park of Culture" to what Louis Marin and Umberto Eco have termed the "degenerate utopia" of Disneyland.<sup>85</sup> In this trajectory, Disneyland comes to figure the degener-

acy not only of Los Angeles but also of American culture as a whole, degeneracy being defined in part as the replacement of a political party system with apolitical house parties. The struggle over human rights is thereby reduced to struggle over the right to party; historical understanding is reduced to the ahistorical slogan of *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (set in San Dimas, California)—“Be excellent. Party on!”<sup>86</sup> The disastrously homogenizing effects of Disney on European culture have been noted by a critic who asserted that EuroDisney is a “cultural Chernobyl.”<sup>87</sup>

In the “sunshine” left account, Los Angeles and kitsch in general provide an oppositional space, some kind of liberatory potential in an avant-garde postparty politics of the hangover. Mickey Mouse was at the center of the debate between Adorno and Benjamin over popular culture and high culture (in which new technologies of reproduction that make up mass culture are regarded either as liberating or as constraining and homogenizing).<sup>88</sup> (In the first version of his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin had a section entitled “Mickey Maus.” Adorno discussed Mickey Mouse critically in a critique of the sadomasochism of American jazz.)<sup>89</sup> Benjamin celebrated Mickey Mouse along with Charlie Chaplin and dada as examples of the progressive shock effect of avant-garde mechanically reproduced culture, namely, photography and cinema. Adorno saw Benjamin’s attempt to defend “kitsch” as undialectical, “out-and-out romanticization.”<sup>90</sup>

Benjamin’s celebration of Mickey Mouse and Adorno’s critique of his celebration were both anticipated by the Nazis, who were of course extremely interested in kitsch, and it is worth pointing out that by the 1920s, German art criticism had connected the topics of kitsch and degeneration.<sup>91</sup> The Nazis’ ambivalent attitude toward Disney products mirrors the ambivalence in Benjamin and Adorno. On the one hand, the Nazis were fond of Mickey Mouse, putting him on everything from bomber airplanes to coffee cups.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, they condemned films like *Fantasia* as a grotesque American “Verkitschung” (kitschification) of high German culture, objecting in particular to the “hot jazz” sequence in the middle of *Fantasia*. Confiscated copies of Disney’s animated feature films were nevertheless unofficially shown to Nazi elites (many turned up in Hitler’s bunker).<sup>93</sup> A distinction between a neoconservative (supposedly apolitical) auratic art and a progressive, antifascist,

mechanically reproduced, kitschy "Kunstpolitik" is hence a non-starter. As Adorno said in a letter to Benjamin, "When you mention Mickey Mouse, things get complicated."<sup>94</sup>

One might want to argue that both the sunshine and the noir left accounts of the migration of European culture to Los Angeles are irrelevant given the present status of Europe. Reduced to "Eurotrash," Europe no longer provides an alternative place from which one could criticize the decadent, degenerate developments of the United States. The classic ideal of the city that has informed critiques of Los Angeles has fallen apart as Europe itself has suffered cultural deterioration. As André Corboz points out in his *Looking for a City in America*, Europe now bears a paradoxical resemblance to what it claims to despise in the United States.<sup>95</sup>

In my view, the problem with the sunshine and noir accounts of Los Angeles is not so much their irrelevance as that Eurotrash—understood not simply in a pejorative sense but dialectically, as a tension between civilization and its destruction, deterioration, and ruin—has always been both the origin and the telos of European culture. Cultural transmission has always meant cultural reproduction, and reproduction in turn has always meant displacement and distortion. Viewed as Eurotrash, Nazi art and art administration look deeply paradoxical, and this paradox is precisely what present "oppositional" stances toward nazism and neonazism fail to address.<sup>96</sup> A revised understanding of nazism might help us to contextualize rather differently what many on the left and right see as a return in the United States and in Germany to the cultural and political crisis of the Weimar Republic. For however barbaric the Nazis were (and I take it that this point is not in dispute in academic circles), the very charge of barbarism typically complicates the ethical drive to remember the Nazi past by inculcating a stupefaction at its horror/banality: nazism was an aberration, the Nazi account of world history was an aberration, the Nazi account of art was an aberration in a world march toward modernism; hence, nazism is exceptional and unworthy of sustained attention. Yet any museum exhibition (or critical analysis) that assumes stable differences between the Nazis and the avant-garde (or, more broadly, modernism), that simply demonizes the Nazis, will paradoxically make that exhibition less historically and aesthetically significant and introduce in turn a comic irony that allows one to laugh the Nazis

off. The Nazi case is thus intelligible only as a particularly acute instance of a long battle between censorship and artistic expression.

Rather than see (neo)nazism, fascism, censorship, and Hollywood hypersimulation as something to overcome, with Los Angeles representing either the disastrous eclipse of Western civilization or its displacement and preservation in a more liberal environment, we might see in the Nazis' dialectical relation to modernity a paradigm of the extreme contradictions of Western civilization, in which culture and barbarism have always met, as Walter Benjamin famously pointed out, though not always in the same way or for the same reasons.<sup>97</sup> Instead of being horrified at the cultural destruction of European culture (or the European destruction of other cultures), we might consider regarding the Nazis as a paradoxically reactionary—dare one say it? *avant-garde*—instance of European culture: for Eurotrash, understood dialectically, has arguably always already been the destination of Western culture.

#### NOTES

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1. The LACMA exhibition opened in Los Angeles (February 17 to May 12, 1991), then traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago (June 22 to September 8), the Smithsonian (Octo-

ber 16 to January 12), and the Akademie der Kunst, Berlin Altes Museum (March 3 to May 31, 1992). A documentary on the exhibition and its tour aired on PBS stations April 11, 1993. For the catalog, see Stephanie Barron et al, eds, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Museum Associates, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991).

2. Stephanie Barron spells out this agenda at the close of her introductory essay to the catalog: "Newspaper articles on public support of the arts and the situation facing the National Endowment for the Arts emphasize an uncomfortable parallel between these issues and those raised by the 1937 exhibition, between the enemies of artistic freedom today and those responsible for organizing the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition" ("1937: Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany," in *"Degenerate Art,"* 24).

3. Patrick Goldstein, "It's Not Easy Being Notorious... Unless You're Madonna," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1991, C1.

4. *Ibid.*, C7.

5. I would argue for the sophistication of Madonna's video "Express Yourself" on two grounds: director David Fincher's brilliant editing and his inclusion of Grosz's boxing imagery in the last sequence. See John Willet, *The Weimar Years A Culture Cut Short* (New York: Abbeville, 1984), 106-7.

6. Consider Madonna's MTV commercials for *Truth or Dare* just after it was released. They focused on the attempted censorship of "Like a Virgin"; in the second version, the word *masturbation* was bleeped out. The second version broadcasts an undecidable definition of censorship: one could read the commercial as a self-conscious joke about censorship (MTV makes fun of failed censors) or as an invitation to take seriously attempts to censor Madonna.

7. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1989); Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: New Left Books, 1971); Harvey Gross, "Adorno in Los Angeles: The Intellectual in Emigration," *Humanities in Society* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 339-52; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); Edward W. Soja, "Inside Exopolis: Scenes from Orange County," in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Noonday, 1992), 94-122. See also Jean-François Lyotard, *Pacific Wall*, trans. Bruce Boone (Venice, Calif.: Lapis, 1989), and Jacques Derrida, "Faxitexture," in *Anywhere*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 18-33.

8. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1991), 18. See also Mike Davis, "Hollywood et Los Angeles: un mariage difficile," in *Hollywood 1927-1941: La propagande par les rêves ou le triomphe du modèle américain*, ed. Alain Masson (Paris: Autremets, 1991), 16-30. On the L.A. riots, see Mike Davis, "Burning All Illusions in L.A.," in *Inside the L.A. Riots* (New York: Institute for Alternative Journalism, 1992), 96-100.

9. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1969), 120-67. Even when they were not writing cultural criticism in Los Angeles, the city dominated the imagination of these cultural critics. See Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar en exil* vol. 2, *Exil en Amérique* (Paris: Payot, 1988).

10. Davis, *City of Quartz*, 20.

11. The terms of Mike Davis's critique of Los Angeles, *sunshine* and *noir*, echo a long tra-

dition of cultural criticism of Adorno's "pessimistic" account of administered culture, a criticism first made by Adorno himself. See Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 85-92; Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993); Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); and Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984).

12. Cathy Curtis, "Hollywood Collects," *Art News* 90, no. 9 (November 1991): 102-7; G. Luther Whittington, "L.A.'s New Look," *Art and Auction* 14, no. 6 (January 1992): 82-85; Eleanor Hartney, "The New Patronage," *Art in America* 80, no. 1 (January 1992): 72-79. The photo of Madonna at a gallery opening is in Curtis, "Hollywood Collects," 103.

13. Michael M. Thomas, "Architectural Digest Visits Madonna," *Architectural Digest*, November 1991, 198-209. It is noteworthy that Kahlo in the 1920s and 1930s was on the left (married to Diego Rivera) while de Lempika was on the right (she painted Italian fascist nobility). Both artists had exhibitions in Paris during the 1920s. Madonna is considering making a movie of Kahlo's life (Goldstein, "It's Not Easy Being Notorious," C7), and she adapts paintings by de Lempika in her video "Open Your Heart," for which she subsequently ran into censorship difficulties with de Lempika's estate. (See Walter Robinson, "Tamara v. Madonna," *Art in America* 80, no. 11 [November 1992]: 37.) One could regard Madonna's interest in these painters as another instance of her implosion of opposites. What unites Madonna and the two artists, apart from gender, however, is their common interest in publicity. On Madonna's art collection, see Susan Kandel, "Madonnarama," *Art-space* 16, no. 6 (December 1992): 42-43. Kandel compares Madonna's artistic practices to those of Cindy Sherman and Jeff Koons. For another favorable assessment that tries to save Madonna for feminism (in this case by linking her to Kahlo), see Janice Bergman-Carton, "Like an Artist," *Art in America* 81, no. 1 (January 1993): 35-39.

14. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 236-40. Davis's assessment of Gehry is confirmed by Gehry's work for Disney. See Mark Swed, "Pacific Overtures," *Connoisseur*, February 1992, 16-19, 92-94.

15. For a similar point, see Steven Kasher, "The Art of Hitler," *October* 59 (1992): 81.

16. As Peter Selz points out, LACMA reproduced the Nazi exhibition in "minute detail," so minute, in fact, that many details are effectively censored (Peter Selz, "Degenerate Art Reconstructed," *Arts Magazine* [September 1991]: 59). The model did not translate the quotations from Hitler and Goebbels, and other wall texts were not even written in German (only a kind of scrawl was visible). Similarly, the "graffiti" under the statues and paintings was so small as to be unreadable. Thus, even if one knew German, one could not have overcome the censorship here, although one could turn to the LACMA catalog, which did reprint the graffiti legibly. (Conversely, the German "Entartete Kunst" rather than "Degenerate Art" was used throughout the LACMA exhibition to mark it as other.) The small scale prevented one from seeing that the paintings were hung in an expressionist manner (by one string rather than the customary two) so that they all look distorted and off-kilter. The minute reproduction of the Munich exhibition seemed designed to reduce it to insignificance. This strategy, undoubtedly unconscious, seemed to be furthered by the reproductions in the LACMA exhibition of the original Munich exhibition on black and white display cards. By contrast, the LACMA display cards of the paintings bought by German museums between the end of the nineteenth century and the Nazis' rise to power reproduce the artworks in color. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of the typography in the Nazi exhibition deflected attention from the monolithic typography in the

LACMA exhibition. The Nazis institutionalized typography pioneered by the Bauhaus because the old German script was too difficult for many Germans to read.

17. The modifier *partially* is used inconsistently by the LACMA curators to describe the reconstruction. In many cases, it is dropped (as in the catalog dust jacket copy).

18. On the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and mass culture, see Annette Michelson, "Where Is Your Rupture?: Mass Culture and Gesamtkunstwerk," *October* 56 (1991): 43-63.

19. Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, and Counter-Memory," *October* 50 (1989): 97-107.

20. In addition to the overture to Wagner's *Tannhauser*, the overture to Wagner's *Rienzi*, which deeply influenced Hitler, also played—also uncredited—on a continuously running video in the first room.

21. LACMA *Degenerate Art Exhibition Guidebook*, 4.

22. The phrase "didactic walls" was used by Eric Pauls, coordinator of twentieth-century art at LACMA, in our telephone conversations.

23. Bertold Hinz, "Degenerate Art," in *Art in the Third Reich*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 173-86; Benjamin H. D. Buloch, "From Faktura to Factography," in *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986*, ed. Annette Michelson et al. (Cambridge, Mass, and London: MIT Press, 1989), 76-113.

24. Michael Kimmelman, "Examining Works by Artists the Nazis Hounded and Scorned," *New York Times*, February 25, 1991, B1.

25. Christopher Zuschlag, "An 'Educational' Exhibition: The Precursors of *Entartete Kunst* and Its Individual Venues," in Barron, "*Degenerate Art*," 83-104.

26. Andrea Fraser, "Notes on the Museum's Publicity," *Lusitania: A Journal of Reflection and Oceanography* 1 (Fall 1990): 49. See also Andrea Fraser, "Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk," *October* 57 (1991): 103-22.

27. Fraser, "Notes on the Museum's Publicity," 53.

28. My notion of censorship operating positively as spin is indebted to Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), xiv-xv. My account of censorship differs only in that I think the alternative to a given spin is another spin, not "the Truth."

29. For the Bloch and Lukács debate, see Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism," in *Aesthetics and Politics, Debates between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno*, ed. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1977), 16-27; Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 28-59; and Georg Lukács, "Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline," in *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone and David Fernbach (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1980), 76-113. See also Georg Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism," in *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

30. For Bloch's reviews, see "Jugglers' Fair Beneath the Gallows" and "Expressionism, Seen Now," in *The Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Steven Plaice (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 75-80, 234-50.

31. Barbara Harrington and Elizabeth Hess, "Editor's Introduction to 'NEA Offensive Plays: A Special Supplement,'" *Drama Review* 35 (Fall 1991): 128-30; David Wojnarowicz, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing* (New York: Artists Space, 1989); *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, ed. Barry Blinderman (New York: Art Publishers, 1990). See also Joe Jarrel, "God Is in the Details: Wojnarowicz Is in the Courts," *High Performance* 51 (Fall 1990): 20-21.

32. For a discussion of this film in the context of Weimar culture, see Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 7-47.

33. The LACMA catalog does address the question of homosexuality. See George L. Mosse's essay, "Beauty without Sensuality/The Exhibition *Entartete Kunst*," in Barron, *Degenerate Art*, 25-32. The audiotope mentioned the "homosexual theme" in relation to two paintings by Karl Hofer entitled *Friends* (one is of two lesbians, the other of two gay men).

34. Perhaps LACMA excluded the Bauhaus because it compromised with the Nazis. Mies van der Rohe expelled a socialist director, introduced new student disciplinary measures, and forbade discussion of political topics. See Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 192-96.

35. For recent attempts to question this taboo on displaying Nazi art, see Steven Kasher, "Art of Hitler," and Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Abrams, 1992).

36. Hinz, "Degenerate Art"; Jens Malte Fischer, "'Entartete Kunst,'" *Merkur* 38, no. 33 (April 1984): 46-52; George Bussman, "'Degenerate Art'—A Look at a Useful Myth," in *German Art in the Twentieth Century: Painting and Sculpture 1905-1985*, ed. Christos M. Joachimides et al. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1985), 113-24; Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 102-10; Frank Whitford, "The Triumph of the Banal: Art in Nazi Germany," in *Visions and Blueprints: Avant-Garde Culture and Radical Politics in Early Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Edward Timms and Peter Collier (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 239-69; Selz, "Degenerate Art Reconstructed," 58-60. For a view with which I am in sympathy, see Fred Dewey, "Fascinating Fascism," *New Statesman and Society* (May 1991): 10, 30-32. For a more modest but nonetheless powerful critique of the limited historical context for relating fascism and modernism, see Emily Braun, "The Return of the Repressed," *Art in America* 79, no. 10 (October 1991): 116-23, 174.

37. Peter Clothier, "'Degenerate Art' Redux," *Art Space* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 86-87.

38. Robert Darnton, "The Fall of the House of Art: Hitler's Blitzkrieg against Modern Art," *New Republic*, May 6, 1991, 33; Frank Whitford, "The Triumph of the Banal," 248.

39. I have drawn on the following writers: Hans Jürgen Syberberg, *Hitler: A Film from Germany*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Ian Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); and Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989).

40. Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*.

41. The connection is made in the 1987 Munich catalog. See Peter-Klaus Schuster, "München—das Verhängnis einer Kunststadt," in *Die "Kunststadt" München 1937: Nationalsozialismus und "Entartete Kunst"*, ed. Peter-Klaus Schuster (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1987), 30-31. A photo of the dada exhibition appears in virtually every history of Weimar and dada. See, for example, Marc Dachy, *The Dada Movement 1915-1923* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 106, where the parallels between the dada and Nazi exhibitions are noted. The parallels are also noted by Peter Adam in his *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Abrams, 1992), 123.

42. Hanne Bergius, "Berlin, the Dada Metropolis," in *The 1920s: Age of the Metropolis*, ed. Jean Clair (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1991), 262-63.



43. Cited by Bergius, *ibid.*, 263.

44. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 53-57. Partly what is at stake in a reading of the dada wall is a reading of the politics of avant-garde and modernism, particularly the way the avant-garde often embraced fascism. On this point, see Raymond Williams, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde," in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1988), 49-64, and Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

45. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

46. Associated with *New Criterion* and *October*, respectively, the two groups have engaged in a long feud over art and politics. Crimp attacks Kramer at length, for example, in "The Art of Exhibition" (see note 11). See Hilton Kramer, "Hitler and the War against Modernism," *New Criterion* 10, no. 1 (September 1991): 1-3.

47. Bernhard Schulz, "Portraiet: Kalifornischer Kunstverstand," *Der Tagesspiegel*, March 21, 1992, 4.

48. Serge Schmemmann, "West Germans Debate Disposition of Nazi Art," *New York Times*, May 23, 1988, C13.

49. Stephen Kinzer, "Nazi Show of 'Bad' Art Reopens in Berlin," *New York Times*, March 5, 1992, C15.

50. In addition to Schmemmann, "West Germans Debate," see Titus Arn, "Aus dem Depot ins Museum?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (January 17, 1991): 18; Klaus Staek, "Nazi Kunst in Museum?" *Die Zeit* (overseas) no. 40-3 (October 1987), 14; Karl-Heinz Jansen, "Sonder-auftrag Linz," *Die Zeit* (overseas) no. 2-9 (January 1987): 11-12.

51. Schmemmann, "West Germans Debate."

52. *Ibid.*

53. Emily Braun, "The Return of the Repressed," 116-23, 174.

54. On the Berlin installation, see Matthew Collings, "Resistance Heroes of Art," *Guardian Weekly*, May 31, 1992, 13; Suzanne Muchnic, "'Degenerate Art' Attracts Berliners," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1992, F14; Kinzer, "Nazi Show of 'Bad' Art Reopens," C15, C19.

55. The Museum of Tolerance opened February 9, 1993. See "Near Riot's Ashes, a Museum Based on Tolerance," *New York Times*, February 10, 1993. On the fragment of the wall behind the Reagan Library, see Maud Lavin, "Berlin after the Wall," *Art in America* 78, no. 2 (February 1990): 69-73. The fragment that was dedicated at the Nixon Library on August 13, 1992, "matched pound for pound the chunk at the Reagan Library a few miles to the north" (Seth Mydans, "Painting of Heroic Size Shows Nixon to Match," *New York Times* [August 13, 1992]: A16). The paradoxical way that the Museum of Tolerance terminates intolerance was made concrete in a CBS-TV "Good Morning America" interview with Arnold Schwarzenegger at the Museum of Tolerance on February 8, 1993. Bizarrely, Paula Zahn ended the interview by congratulating Schwarzenegger on *Terminator 3*. For a fine critical analysis of this museum, see James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 306-9.

56. Petra Von Kipphoff, "Schöne Rekonstruktion des Schrecklichen," *Die Zeit*, no. 9 (February 22, 1991): 63.

57. For an opposite take on the exhibition (that it was not topical enough) when it appeared in Chicago, see Susan Snodgrass, "Ambiguous Politics," *Dialogue* 14, no. 5 (September/October 1991): 11.

58. On this case, see Stephen C. Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 205-17.

59. My account here is based on interviews with William Moritz, who helped construct the historical room devoted to film in the LACMA exhibition, July 26 and 28, 1991.

60. Peter Marcuse, "Purging the Professoriat," *Linguafranca* 2, no. 2 (December 1991): 32-36. See also Marshall Tyler, "New Wall Goes Up in Germany," *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1992, A1, A18-19.

61. Katie Hafner, "A Nation of Readers Dumps Its Writers," *New York Times Magazine*, January 10, 1993, 22-26, 46-47.

62. Christian Caryl, "DDR Censorship on Show," *Times Literary Supplement*, May 31, 1991, 14. For the catalog, see Ernest and Herbert Wiesner, *Zensur in der DDR. Geschichte, Praxis, und Aesthetik der Behinderung von Literatur, Ausstellungen Buch* (Berlin: Literaturhaus Berlin, 1991).

63. Ferdinand Protzman, "Is East German Art Really Art?" *International Herald Tribune*, January 5-6 1991, 6; Maud Lavin, "Berlin after the Wall," *Art in America* 78, no. 2 (February 1990): 69-73; Giulia Ajmone Marsan, "Reunited Germany: The Painful Westernizing of the 751 Museums Once Behind the Wall," *Art Newspaper*, no. 13 (December 1991): 5; Michael Z. Wise, "Berlin Struggles to Unite Museum Landscape," *Journal of Art* 4, no. 8 (October 1991): 18; David Galloway, "The New Berlin: 'I Want My Wall Back,'" *Art in America* 79, no. 9 (September 1991): 98-103.

64. "The National Socialists pronounced Otto Dix's work Degenerate Art, but nowadays his paintings are worth millions. Four hundred million marks is the sum for which the latest [1992 Tate Gallery] Dix exhibition is insured" (*Scala: The Magazine from Germany*, no. 4 [August/September 1991]: 44). On the Dix exhibition at the Tate, see Nicholas Serota, ed., *Otto Dix, 1891-1969* (London: Tate Gallery, 1992) and Neal Acherson, "The Fuhrer's Freak Show," (London) *Independent, Sunday Review*, February 1992: 12-13. On the Heartfield exhibition, which began in Berlin and ended in Los Angeles, see Susanne Schreiber, "Shooting to Kill: The Camera as Weapon: John Heartfield, Ambassador for Dada to Berlin, and Agit-Prop Artist Extraordinaire," *Art Newspaper*, no. 12 (November 1991): 7, and William Wilson's review of the LACMA installation (which opened October 22, 1993, and closed January 2, 1994), "Heartfield's Powerful Attack on Elitism, Society's Ills," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1993, F17.

65. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*; Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987). See also Christa Bürger, "The Disappearance of Art: The Postmodernism Debate in the U.S.," *Telos*, no. 68 (Summer 1986): 93-106, and Peter and Christa Bürger, *The Institutions of Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

66. According to William Moritz, LACMA did consider alternative ways of constructing the exhibition. In one proposal, the graffiti would have been written on a glass wall placed two to three feet from the paintings; museumgoers would have been able to look at the paintings in front of the glass and through the glass.

67. I allude here to Douglas Crimp's essay "The Art of Exhibition" in *On the Museum's Ruins*, 236-81. That any counter-Nazi exhibition would in this sense inevitably be implicated in fascist strategies is clear from the problems of reproducing Nazi art. Steven Kasher says that an exhibition of Hitler's art would politicize aesthetics and counter contemporary fascism ("Art of Hitler," 81). But it is not that straightforward. Peter Adam's *Art of the Third Reich*, for example, has been criticized for taking pleasure in the art it criticizes: "What is disturbing about *Art of the Third Reich* is that, like the art it discusses, it too

seems designed to please a popular audience. . . . There is a curious ambiguity to the book. Though Adam's text includes the necessary critical and political disclaimers, the layout and format pander to a widespread fascination with Nazi memorabilia, attractively displaying the kind of 'forbidden' art that will hopefully sell books." See Brooks Adams, "Art for the Fuhrer," *Art in America* 80, no. 9 (October 1992): 50. The reproduction of Nazi art, in short, is just as complex as the reproduction of modern art.

68. On censorship of neo-Nazi rock music, see Ferdinand Protzman, "Music of Hate Raises the Volume in Germany," *New York Times*, December 2, 1992, A1, A10. On euthanasia, see Peter Singer, "On Being Silenced in Germany," *New York Review of Books* 38, no. 14 (August 15, 1991): 36-42. On neo-Nazis, see "Racism's Back," *Economist*, November 16-22, 1991, 12-13; Frederick Kempe, "Neonazi Menace: Germans Try to Stem Right Wing Attacks on Foreigners," *Wall Street Journal*, December 4, 1991, A1, A13; Thomas Kielinger, "Why the Neonazis Pose a Threat to the New United Germany," *European*, October 11-13, 1991, 10; and Stephen Kinzer, "Klan Seizes on Germany's Wave of Racist Violence," *New York Times*, November 3, 1991, 15.

69. Hafner, "A Nation of Readers," 26. On Wolf's collaboration with the Stasi, see "Die Angsliche Margarete," *Der Spiegel*, no. 4/47 (January 25, 1993): 158-65.

70. For the catalog, see *Jewish Thought and Beliefs: Life and Work within the Cultures of the World* (Berlin: Argon, 1992).

71. On the cover of the invitation to the opening at the Galerie St. Etienne was a Sue Coe graphic of Anita Hill being burned as a witch in front of U.S. senators, ahistorically implying an equivalence between Hill's status as a "victim" and prisoners killed in Nazi concentration camps. My thanks to my colleague James Young for calling my attention to this exhibition.

72. See Maurice Berger, "Too Shocking to Show?" *Art in America* 80, no. 7 (July 1992): 37-41.

73. David Freedberg, *The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: New Press in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1992). See also Grace Glueck, "At Brooklyn Museum, Artist Surveys the Ojectionable," *New York Times*, December 17, 1990, C11, C14; Roberta Smith, "Unmentionable Art Through the Ages," *New York Times*, November 11, 1990, 39, 43; and Ken Johnson, "Forbidden Sights," *Art in America* 79, no. 1 (January 1991): 106-09.

74. David Freedberg, "Joseph Kosuth and the Play of the Unmentionable," in *Play of the Unmentionable*, 45.

75. For attempts to fuse Baudrillard with Freud through the use of terms like *panic* and *hysteria*, see Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), and Arthur Kroker, ed., *The Panic Encyclopedia* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989). It is tempting, of course, to think that there is a distinction between those who panic and those who do not. Though it is probably impossible to resist making such a distinction in practice, I would argue that it can only be made through a significant degree of self-repression and misrecognition.

76. See Kasher, "Art of Hitler," 82, 84.

77. For an example of the collapse of the distinction between conservation and censorship, one might consider Frank Gehry's display of books burned or approved by the Nazis. According to Gehry, "this installation is all about fragility—and about censorship and conservation" (LACMA guidebook, 2). The viewer could sit on a bench to look at the books but not read the books since they were enclosed in glass cases. The difference between conservation and censorship (in terms of public as opposed to scholarly access)

was called into question. The hyperaestheticism of the display itself (the bookcases and the benches were made of beautiful red wood) attempted to negate this question. One might also note puns on "collecting" that the exhibition unintentionally admitted. The exhibition called into question the notion of collecting oneself in relation to the collection of works one puts on display. Furthermore, it called into question the relation between an art collection and historical recollection.

78. I take up the issues of invisibility, distortion, and displacement at length in my essays "Baroque Down: The Trauma of Censorship in Psychoanalysis and Queer Film Revisions of Shakespeare and Marlowe," forthcoming in *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, ed. Michael Hattaway et al. (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press), and "(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).

79. Davis, *City of Quartz*, 226.

80. Syberberg, *Hitler, A Film from Germany*, 63.

81. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, trans. Chris Turner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). See also Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989).

82. "The Video War Comes Home," *Nation*, July 1, 1991, 558. See also Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan: The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

83. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, 55.

84. Theodor Adorno, "What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts," in *Theodor W. Adorno Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 20: 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp Verlag, 1984), 428.

85. Louis Marin, "Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia," *Glyph*, no. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 50-66; Umberto Eco, "Travels in Hyperreality," in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 1-58.

86. Some might want to see Disney censorship as further evidence of this degeneration. See "Disney v. Oppenheim," *Art in America* 80, no. 12 (December 1992): 25; "Cable Networks Censor Toon Characters' Foibles," *Frighten the Horses*, no. 10 (1992): 52; and Gail Lane Cox, "Don't Mess with the Mouse," *National Law Journal*, July 31, 1989, 1-26.

87. Henri Haget, "Qui a peur de Mickey Mouse?" *L'Express*, March 27, 1992, 35.

88. For the primary texts of the debate, see Livingstone, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 100-141.

89. Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 1, no. 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp Verlag, 1974), 431-70 (first version); 471-508 (second version). Benjamin also discusses Mickey Mouse in "Zu Mickey Maus," *Schriften* vol. 6: 44-45; and *Schriften* vol. 2: 3, 962-63. For Adorno's own account of Mickey Mouse in an essay he saw as a reply to Benjamin's, see "Über Jazz," in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 17: 105.

90. Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin," in Livingstone, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 122, 123.

91. The images and products are reproduced in *Im Reiche der Mickey Maus. Walt Disney in Deutschland 1927-1945: Eine Dokumentation zur Ausstellung im Filmmuseum Potsdam* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1991) and Carsten Laqua, *Wie Mickey Unter die Nazis Fiel: Walt Disney und Deutschland* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991). According to my informant, Rolf Flor, who unsuccessfully attempted to purchase a copy of *Im Reiche* for me in Berlin in May 1993, the book is no longer available because of

"copyright" violations. The editor of the book and curator of the exhibition was in prison at the time. For a provocative take on similarities between the Frankfurt school and the Nazis, see Laurence Rickels, "Mickey Marx," *Luisitiana*, 1992: 205-15; and Laurence Rickels, *The Case of California* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). On Disney war propaganda, see also "Donald in Uniform," *Stern*, June 4, 1992, 204-6.

92. Laqua, *Wie Mickey*, 104-5, 108.

93. Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin," in Livingstone, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 122.

94. See Fritz Karpfen, *Der Kitsch: Eine Studie über die Entartung der Kunst* (Hamburg: Weltbund-Verlag, 1925), Rolf Steinberg, ed., *Nazi-Kitsch* (Darmstadt, 1975), and Udo Pini, *Liebeskult und Liebeskitsch: Erotik im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1993). Adorno's writings on kitsch include "Zum Anbruch: Expose," *Schriften* 19: 601-02 and "Kitsch," *Schriften* 18: 791-94. *Anbruch*, the journal Adorno edited and in which he published, appeared in the Nazi "Degenerate Music" exhibition.

95. André Corboz, *Looking for a City in America: Down These Streets a Man Must Go*, trans. Denise Bratton (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1992), 58.

96. Christopher Phillips, "Berlin Museum Staffers Organize to Protest Right-Wing Violence," *Art in America* 81, no. 1 (January 1993): 23

97. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 256. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe points out in *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, Walter Benjamin's alternative to the fascist aestheticization of politics, namely, politicizing aesthetics, is itself a totalitarian aesthetic insofar as it conflates politics and aesthetics; put more pointedly, Benjamin's assumptions about art and politics are not the opposite but the symmetrical counterpart of Goebbels's. See Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, 61-70. For an account of the Russian avant-garde and Stalinism that complements my account of nazism, see Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).