A Model of Textual Control: Misrepresenting Censorship

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A basic theory of textual control is presented, outlining a communicative model that traces the contest at the heart of any case of censorship as a contradiction in representation. Some special relations between literature and textual control are discussed.

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Like many terms in literary theory, "censorship" is notoriously difficult to define. But unlike so many others, its definitions are connected to immediate and political concerns. In many but not all cultures today, acts of textual control can be attacked by labelling them as censorship; and they are often defended in turn by attempts to show that they are not censorship, but something else – an effort to protect youth from obscenity, a correction of erroneous information, a keeping of secrets in the interest of national or personal security, a protection of copyrights, and so forth. Any endeavour to define censorship should incorporate and explain, rather than refute and erase, this haggling about the term and its application, because the disagreements are themselves functional parts of the working of censorship. One defining characteristic of censorship is that it is contested, and contested in at least two ways: by those that feel censored and deny its legitimacy, and by those that appear as censors and deny any illegitimate intent.

What I wish to suggest here is to approach a literary theory of censorship as an interrogation of what might be called the discourse of censorship: legal texts, related propaganda, and juridical and interpretational definitions of prohibited or allowed materials. These texts are themselves similar to texts of literary theory in that they discuss other texts, their typologies and qualities, often by means of paradigmatic cases or in abstract

terms. The discourse of censorship includes texts arguing for as well as against exerting textual control in given contexts. It is here that the contest of defining censorship first takes place. By observing its logic, one might hope to connect the disagreement about censorship with its own inner workings. On the following pages, I first briefly sketch two of the main aporias in the definition of censorship. I then go on to suggest a model of communication as described in the discourse of censorship, and point out how the contest of censorship plays out within that model. Finally, I take a look at the special roles of literature and discuss three ways in which literary texts can relate to the communicative model of censorship.

I

It is especially in the grey areas between explicit and implicit censorship that the term "censorship" becomes vague and problematic in two complementary ways. This is certainly true for liberal democracies, in which censorship is formally outlawed and resurfaces in its strongest form by relegating itself to implicit and informal rules of discourse, where deviance is threatened by societal stigmatization or economic marginalization rather than a positive show of executive power. However, it is also true for explicitly censorious juridical systems in totalitarian regimes, which often seem to exert the most powerful textual control when they do not make the rules of censorship quite clear, never completely describing the limitations on speech and producing an atmosphere in which self-censorship surfaces as a careful attempt to satisfy unspoken regulations. The two problems for defining censorship that I focus on here might be referred to as its *externality* and its *ubiquity*.

First, any observation of censorship is usually bound to a primary distinction of powers and persons inside and outside of a given communication. It is only when a power external to a given communication exerts textual control that censorship becomes recognizable. However, it is not clear whether the externalization of the interfering power actually precedes the observation of its censorious intent, or whether the same observation introduces the exclusion itself. To expand on an example discussed by Frederick Schauer (150–51), the curator of an art museum will decide which paintings to exhibit. If a state-sponsored authority interferes with this decision and removes a painting from the walls of the museum, the curator might protest this as a form of censorship. However, the curator's own authority to remove paintings from the walls of the museum seems to be a legitimate form of control. An artist whose paintings are

not exhibited, however, might consider the curator's decision to be an act of censoring that artist's message; in doing so, the artist redraws the lines around the communication, defining the curator as external to the privileged communication between the artist or his art, and the patrons he wishes to address. At the same time, the state-sponsored authority – say, a ministry of art and education that threatens to withhold funds if the museum does not obey – might well consider its own involvement to be perfectly legitimate if it views itself as an integral part of the communication in question rather than an external power that intrudes with foreign regulations. Discussing the curator vs. the ministry, Schauer concludes that we cannot evade censorship, but can only choose our censors, deciding whom to give power over our communication. However, rather than choosing a censor, it might be more proper to say that we choose to distinguish internal and external players for a communication, and true censorship should be recognized only if the censor is emphatically unchosen; that is, observed as external. Thus, one issue in the contest of censorship is the problematic fixation of externality.

Secondly, structuralist and poststructuralist, and not least psychoanalytic, theories of language have emphasized that communication is always already subject to control. The image of a completely free discourse on the inside of a given act of communication, recognizably opposed to control that hails from outside, is difficult to sustain. All communication comes with a set of regulations in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pragmatic conditions of felicity, and so on. Acquiring a voice in communication entails learning and accepting these rules. To choose a simple but central example, the parent that tells the child that it should not use the third person when speaking about itself, the parent that tells the child that it should not use foul language, and the parent that tells the child that it should not speak about private matters to strangers are not easily distinguished along the lines of merely grammatical as opposed to fully censorious control. In each of these cases, the regulations are tautological: The third person is nothing but the grammatical form for referring to other people, foul language is nothing but the language that a parent forbids, and privacy consists in nothing but the exclusion of strangers. Each of these categories is essentially about textual control. But if control is ubiquitous in language, one will still want to refrain from saying that censorship is everywhere (cf. Freshwater). In order to observe censorship in any emphatic and meaningful sense of the word, one has to distinguish control from control; censorship then is one of many kinds of textual control, and at the same time one of many kinds of communication. Therefore if the first problem in defining censorship is the externalization of an authority in order to label

its interference intrusive, the second problem lies in the fact that the inside of communication is itself an implicitly controlled space.

However, these two problems of externality and ubiquity are not only reflected in the discourse of censorship. It can be shown that they are the very powers that tie the discourse of censorship into censorship proper – and, vice versa, it is the very nature of censorship that affixes these two aporias to any discourse of censorship. In the same way, it is the potentiality of censorship's self-representation in a discourse of censorship that allows the aporias of censorship to accompany and drive censorship.

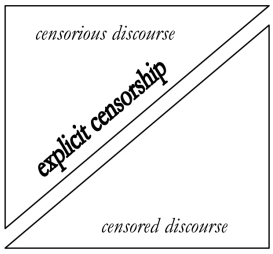

Diagram I
Explicit Censorship

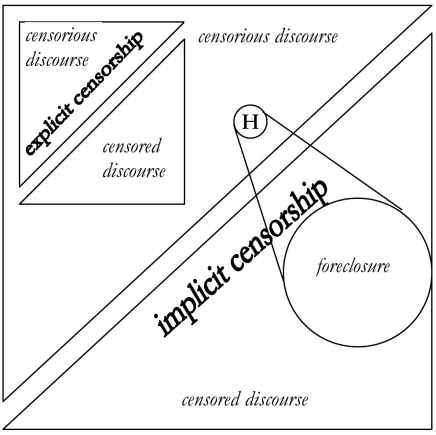

Diagram II
The Discourse of Censorship

II

Consider the comparatively simple and utterly unrealistic case of a purely and completely explicit kind of censorship (Diagram I): The totality of discourse is divided by such explicit regulation into two parts, splitting the censored part from the censorious discourse of allowed speech: an act that represents the vary basic decision to observe externality in its most aporetic form, without any guidance for drawing that distinction. Censorship itself would then be completely contained in the field of allowed, of censorious discourse, and the mechanisms of that censorship would be represented uncensored. However, such a simple constellation hardly ever occurs in reality. In such a world, censorship would take the form of commentary: It would explicitly state all that is forbidden, and react to that statement by marking it as censored. Its form is that of nega-

tion rather then deletion. In this way, an opposing opinion can be marked as false, but not suppressed; a challenging book can be reviled, but not destroyed; a deviant point of view can be denied, but not ignored. In this model, censorship is always external rather than integral, and it is not ubiquitous but by definition limited.

Real forms of censorship go well beyond this. They embed explicit censorship in a larger process of implicit censorship. (Diagram II) This second split contains the unspoken rules of its division on the side of the censored discourse, so that any statement of the rules is itself censored. This introduces a more powerful negation than the explicitly marked and chosen censorship of unwanted material: The implicitly marked void of successfully displaced material. To its cut-off space, the workings of implicit censorship appear truly external, and its censorious power is indeed ubiquitous throughout every explicit utterance. This would again be an impossible fantasy if implicit censorship needed to function on its own; but the embedment of explicit censorship allows the introduction of binary distinctions that bring along suppressed tertiary spaces, which are not subsumed in either of the two positions that make up the explicit contest of censorship. This opens up the possibility of what Judith Butler, in an application of French psychoanalysis, has called *foreclosure* in censorship: Parts of the implicitly censored material can be negated so completely that they are not even known to be false, but are not known at all other than in episodic and quasi-hallucinatory outbreaks (cf. Butler; Lacan).

I will return to the topic of these outbreaks. For now, note only that the censorious discourse of the second distinction includes a complete primary and explicit distinction, which entails all the possibilities of traditional (and logical) negation, and that the discourse connected to this primary distinction speaks of the total form of distinction, allowing for the rise of a displacement of material that does not allow for negation. In this way, explicit censorship is implicit censorship's integral self-representation, because it externalizes the function of the censor; in its binarity, it conceals but references the effective, implicit deletion of censorship. Embedded in implicit censorship, the language of explicit censorship becomes the discourse of censorship itself.

Although the structure of this argument follows Butler in that it is lifted from psychoanalysis, and the analogy extends to the shape of the two diagrams given above (both of which copy Jacques Lacan's "schema L"), it is not necessary to equate the space of the entire discourse with a psychic apparatus. The basic elements of a double distinction in self-representation follow from the logic of any system that communicatively controls its separation from an environment (cf. Baecker). The designs apply to a subject of discourse rather than an individual epistemological

subject; in the spirit of Foucault's concept of a non-subjective "formation," it contains technical knowledge of censorship without detailing the conscious knowledge of a censor or a censored individual.

Perhaps the most complete illustration of this model is the *praeteritio* problem of censorship. In a naive view of censorship, it is almost impossible to successfully censor information. Any act of control would first point out the data that is to be suppressed, and then negate it, essentially performing the rhetorical figure that feigns omission while naming the omitted fact: When Bidle's "Twelve Arguments drawn out of Scripture wherein the Commonly Received Opinion touching the Deity of the Holy Spirit is Clearly and Fully refuted" was burned by the hangman on the orders of the House of Commons in 1647 England, and even though the author was repeatedly imprisoned for his writings, the book achieved a second and third printing almost immediately, the act of censorship advertising rather than crossing out the disputed treatise; this explicit censorship did not erase Bidle's thesis, but served only to mark the controversy (cf. Baets and Green). Attempts to explicitly control information often take on a conscious or unintended humour, such as the papal bull condemning Kepler's work and noting that "to … even read the works denounced or the passages condemned is to risk persecution in this world and damnation in the next." In a similar manner, the revolutionary pamphlet "Der Hessische Landbote" in 1834 Germany ironically advises readers that, if they fail to hide the paper from the police, at least they will be innocent as long as they have not read its contents.

However, even by its explicit risking of ridicule, such a censorious discourse does succeed in implicitly banning other positions that would fall into a third space: Kepler's and Galileo's ideas about the placing of celestial bodies are attacked or defended for their content; the real contest of their treatise, which concerns the nonreligious, empirical source of their discoveries and the danger it poses for an ecclesiastical claim to knowledge, is relegated to the realm of implicitly censored material, which is not even discussed by way of negation. The established retelling of that conflict as summarized in the famous "Eppur si muove!" (And yet it moves!) conspicuously continues that displacement of the essential conflict, and probably serves not just religion, but equally promotes an affirmative stance towards scientific progress that denies any inherent opposition to traditional religion. "Der Hessische Landbote" points out the real contest of power behind the assumed contest of worldviews by making fun of this very strategy. Similarly, a heated contest between political parties about the correct representation of current events can serve to exclude other, more radically deviant opinions: The impression that a topic has been

dealt with when two avidly opposing spokespersons of the political right and left have both been heard might be said to structure large parts of political arguments as presented in Western news media in the post-9/11 discourse. Political comedy formats such as TV's *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* draw material from unmasking this very aspect of the dominant discourse. (Also cf. Thomas.)

This divergence, then, traces the essential contest of censorship as its own misrepresentation: Not just that material is suppressed, outlawed or defended, but that the quality for which it is advocated or denied is itself redoubled, split into one quality that is discussed in explicit censorship, and another that implicitly controls the censorship of displacement. To better understand this separation, it might be useful to outline a model of communication as referenced in the discourse of censorship. Let me emphasize that this construct (Diagram III) is not intended to be a good model of actual communication, neither by linguistic standards nor by those of literary criticism; it is solely presented here as an attempt to summarize the views of communication that seem prevalent in laws, juridical texts, propaganda, free speech pledges, and other texts that make up the secondary theory of literature that is explicit censorship. Most of the claims in these texts reference one or more of five broadly outlined aspects of communication, each of which reflects one possible interdiction as a facet of textual control.

Censorship's model of Communication		1	2	3	4	5
1) Connotation: Don't do that when you speak!	1	a	b	c	d	e
2) Content: Don't say that!	2	f	g	h	i	j
3) Text: Don't speak like that!	3	k	l	m	n	o
4) Genres/Media: Don't speak like that here!	4	p	q	r	s	t
5) Enunciation: Don't you speak like that!	5	u	v	w	x	y

Diagram III

The category of content (*2*) features greatly in these texts but, as we have seen, it is next to impossible to textually control content as such without falling back to simple and harmless negation – the directive not to say X is in itself quite powerless. Instead, content will be presented as worthy of censorship, or will be defended as worthy of communication, by combination with one of at least four other domains, setting a standard (top row) that may or may not be fulfilled in each case (left row). Those other restraints will often deal with the text itself (*3*), by focusing on a specific vocabulary or structure, as is the case in controls against foul lan-

guage. In other cases, textual control can proscribe content in conjunction with a certain genre or medium (*4*), most typically because the venue chosen is reserved for a special kind of communication. Some media or genres are expected to target young audiences, for instance, and adult topics can lead to censure (where, again, the definition of adult topics tautologically refers back to those that shall not be a part of underage communication). In these cases, the discourse of censorship becomes most like that of literary criticism, designing a regulatory poetics by describing perfection for various literary forms. The same perspective can be taken more directly by controlling texts in conjunction with the dimension of enunciation (*5*), examining whether the speaker or the recipient are authorized to engage in a given exchange. Copyright conflicts focus on this area. However, the fact that there is a real divide between genre and enunciation becomes obvious in decisions such as the punishment of comic author Mike Diana, who was the first to be convicted on a charge of "obscenity" in the U.S. Aside from imposing a fine and community work, the court forbade Diana not only to sell or distribute, but to draw any further comics – even in the privacy of his own home and for his own eyes (cf. Packard). The contents of Diana's work were deemed unsuitable for the artform as a whole. Finally, there is the wide field of ulterior motive, of the various connotations (*1*) that can be seen to be connected to a given utterance.

Because censorship is by its very nature contested, there is usually a contradiction in the representation of the conflict involved in every case. Rarely is blasphemy (*3*) defended as blasphemy (*3: m*), or an astronomical treatise (*2*) condemned for its astronomy (*2: g*). Instead, Kepler and Galileo were guilty of presenting a content concerning celestial bodies (*2*) without reference to the proper authority (*5: v*). Diana was convicted for the shape of his works (*3*) in a graphic genre (*4: n*). Bidle's heresy (*2*) was to be read and discussed, but not approved (*1: b*). Explicit censorship, then, couples two of the five categories, which yields an array of 25 possible combinations referenced in censorious discourse (Diagram III). The divergence between explicit and implicit censorship again redoubles the combinations, leaving us with 625 possible constellations, marked from *aa* to *yy*. However, the intention of this model is not, of course, to apply this grid to the world and sort each case of censorship into its appropriate rectangle, but to clearly outline the process suggested by this model and to consider the kinds of displacements that it explains.

The problematic concepts of externality and ubiquity thus turn into each others' answers, tying explicit and implicit textual control together. The externality of censorship lies in the distinction of the two domains of communication involved in the self-representation of a case in terms

of its explicit censorship; that censorship in turn draws its truly displacing power from the additional reduplication of categories in the second, implicit distinction, the deletion of displaced material being as ubiquitous as its application to the case is specific. Censorship, so I claim, does not exist because a curator does or does not control what pictures adorn the walls of his museum, but because a discourse emerges that pits one communication between an artist's intended message (*1*) and targeted audience (*5: u*) against another communication in which an official (*5*) exercises an assumed expertise for the art form (*4: t*). The two divides (*u* and *t*) suggest different externalities and integral areas of communication, and their rivalry allows for an implicit extrusion, with one of the two conflicts being played as if it were universal, and thus displacing the other even from the explicit contest of censorship. By arguing the case as if the artist's message were hindered from reaching his audience, the question of the curator's competence is circumnavigated (*ut*); or, if the topicalization concerns only the question of a curator overstepping or exerting his competence, the question of the interrupted or encouraged communication between the art and the museum's patrons turns into the displaced other (*tu*). Either way, the discourse is reduced to describing itself as part of one simple system with an inside and an outside, and with rules that govern with ubiquity. Likewise, a parent's grammatical admonitions might be considered as purely lingual (*3*) corrections of speech (*3: m*), or as an intrusion of the great other (*5*) into the child's freedom to express itself (*2: f*). Either way, any conscious recognition of the disconcerting interlacement of these two systems, and with it the very basis that ties together language and family structure, is displaced.

III

Given the idea of censorship as its own misrepresentation, what role does literature play in the discourse of textual control?

There are (at least) three different functions in this model that have been applied to literature in different times and contexts, ranging from a relatively harmless inclusion as a specific medium or genre, through a radical exclusion that subverts the distinction of implicit textual control, to a direct confrontation of the discourses of literature and censorship.

In the first case, describing a text as "literature" fixates it firmly to the grid, and subsumes it under category *4*. It is then a kind of expression with specific rules and possibilities; it can be censored for failing to obey those rules, or defended as a means towards those ends. One recent example is

the current fate of Maxim Biller's novel *Esra*, which is supposed to have violated the personal rights of Biller's former girlfriend and her mother. Two characters in the novel are easily recognizable as images of these real persons, and are depicted in a negative manner, prompting attempts to ban the book and receive compensation from the author. In its decision to ultimately uphold the ban, Germany's Supreme Court considers the nature of fictionality in detail, arguing that although the negative depiction and the general recognizability of the characters would not suffice to outweigh the freedom of art, the novel lacked sufficient artistic distance to reality in order to be considered fully fictional. By turning a legal argument into a discussion of literacity and fictionality, this approach to literature and censorship completes the transformation of the juridical discourse into a second literary criticism. If the poetics of fictional storytelling (*4*) were violated by the shape of the work (*3: n*), the court can present its verdict as a description of objective fact, according to which Biller failed to exert proper external control over his text – the court itself does not feature as an intrusive censor. The counter-discourse that would question the court's authority (*5*) to define literary genres (*4: t*) is implicitly denied (*nt*).

Although this inclusive view does not treat literature by a different principle than any other text, it might of course allow for freedoms that exceed those of other genres, as long as those freedoms are still within the defining power of the discourse of censorship. A very different perspective depicts literature by its complete exclusion from the basic distinctions of censorship. In the model paralleling Lacan's psychic apparatus, this function of literature would subvert the second, implicit half of censorship and place content taken from the third space next to the censorious and the censored discourses of explicit censorship, as belonging to neither, evading affirmation as well as negation, but still enjoying full uncensored representation. Literature then becomes tantamount to a "hallucination," in which foreclosed material appears and appears unquestionably, but without any claim to acknowledgement outside of its momentary experience, similar to the unrealistic episodes of paranoid delusion. The aesthetic power of literature (and sometimes other arts) is considered to be a suspension of common order. Its event is one that arrests the ordinary division of allowed and forbidden speech, either because its power can earn a dispensation for what is usually forbidden or because its deviance cannot achieve authorization anyway.

Thomas More's *Utopia* presents its social criticism in this form, repeatedly emphasizing an ironic detachment from its own material that suspends any direct accountability: This is a wonderful but comical invention, we are told, it cannot stand in reality, and therefore its criti-

cism cannot be applied directly to this world. Instead, it is an experience confined to each individual reader, which is undeniable as it occurs, but unrepeatable in court or law. Whether the attempted removal of the work from profane punitive powers ultimately failed or succeeded, it doubtlessly focuses on this argument. While the freedoms this view can afford literature is considerably greater than in the case of inclusion, it ultimately leaves the censorious discourse intact unless it can motivate or drive profane change by its aesthetic impetus. When Max Frisch says: "If I were a dictator, I would have them play Ionesco," he is motivated by this fear that what enjoys the ultimate freedom of literary foreclosure forever remains within its aesthetic confines: Irony remains in the dialogue, cabaret remains on the stage, and rulers can laugh at themselves even as they continue to rule.

Finally, in a third dimension of literary practice, literature can be seen to confront textual control as its direct rival. If the discourse of censorship presents itself as a second literary theory, then of course so does literature itself, marked by a deliberately conscious and reflective self-presentation that details its methods and unique attributes even as it makes use of them. Where literature reflects its own communicative situation, it can wrestle that defining power from censorious discourse. In Bulgakov, this becomes most conspicuous as censorship and controlled, deleted or promoted discourses are topical not only to the presentation but to the plot of *The Master and Margarita*; censorship is explicitly turned into the "double-sided relationship" that always makes up its implicit form, and Bulgakov can be said to censor the censors even as they censor his work (Kudelina). However, the same power of exposure is achieved by any work that reflects upon its methods of communication to the point where it reveals the second and implicit underbelly of explicit discourse: The dialogic discussions of clerical and divine power and justification from the *Brothers Karamazov* could conceivably be censored and suppressed, but they cannot be incorporated into a censorious discourse because they constantly expose the excluded alternatives to their own distinctions and will not serve to encourage their deletion.

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