

CENSORSHIP IN THE AGE OF FREE SPEECH

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Abstract: *In the year 1989 there was a common celebration going on all around the world as the Berlin Wall fell and Western capital was crowned winner of the Cold War. One of the characteristics of the feared Soviet regime was of course censorship. The western mind would not perceive the idea of censorship as a reality in their geo-political hemisphere. However, as time went on the brave new world proved itself cowardly in other ways. In this article we will analyze how censorship worked in the west during the Cold War and how those tepid seeds grew into a new form of censorship.*

Keywords: censorship, cold, war.

I. Home is where the hatred is (Introduction)

What is censorship? This initial question may seem quite simple, however, there is a catch to this question. We are used to hear it so often from media figures, both mainstream and independent, however, do people understand the actual process and meaning behind censorship.

According to the Cambridge dictionary, censorship is an action by which one is prevented from seeing parts or the entirety of any communication as it is considered harmful, offensive or such things that are kept secret for political reasons (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/censorship>). Another definition by the same source indicates that censorship is a system of authority that limits ideas to be allowed to a wider public due to its support for certain ideas.

Purely by seeing these definitions we are hit with a tidal wave of questions. Who is doing the censoring? Why is it necessary? What are considered dangerous ideas and how dangerous can it be?

It's this first hurdle that we must overcome, what can be classified as censorship in a traditional sense? In a traditional sense, censorship is a system that spurs from a political context (Elliot Thomas Montagano, p.7). It spurs as a result of a regime that strictly forbids the existence of any dissenting opinions in order to preserve their existent power or in order to protect the public from perceived danger.

In ancient times even there were thinkers that preferred for censorship to exist as they already noticed the strength of such practices. Plato would even say that the state has to censor art in order to preserve the soul of the people that live in any and all states.

He goes as far as to call truth a state monopoly (Plato, pp.34-36) as lies offered by the government of any place is very much a medicine intended to soothe the souls of the citizen, be them children, soldiers or commoners. As such, Plato would prefer to expel artists that he calls polyphonic. If a person with too much talent may reach an audience, they might expose the lies of power. By polyphonic artists, Plato means those that may imitate many sounds belonging to people and natural phenomenon. This specific type of artist should not be welcomed in communities because they might convey truths that are not "suited" for the population.

As modernity came through, we had more nuanced takes in regards to the way censorship should be applied. If we are to look at the father of utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill, we see quite a libertine view on censorship.

He brings not only moral arguments in defense of free speech, he brings historical examples such as Socrates (Mill, p.25) who was executed for corrupting the youth. In regards to the moral argument, Mill proposes that any sort of censorship, regardless of which type of government is imposing it, is very much a crime against all of humanity.

The reason Mill is so categorical in regards to the nature of censorship is based on what he calls robbing the posterity (Mill, p.19). If a truthful statement is censored, then humanity is deprived of hearing the truth but if a statement is deceitful, the human race is deprived of the opportunity to observe a lie.

A first step to free speech was taken by the foundation of America. As America won the Revolutionary War in 1776 and adopted the Constitution in 1788 the world was stricken by the first government that allowed for free speech. The first amendment of the constitution, ratified in 1791 has been widely interpreted as to protect free speech as a fundamental right of all American citizens.

A safety measure has been accepted by the Supreme Court of the US in the case of *Schenck v. United States* in 1919. In this famous judgement, Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes explained that free speech would not protect someone yelling fire in a crowded theatre as it would be a clear intent to cause harm to the auditorium. This grants us a clear limit to free speech in the style of Mill's utilitarianism.

In the 20th century we observe newer opinions, we will stop at analyzing the ideas of Herbert Marcuse and Noam Chomsky. In the eyes of Marcuse, tolerance of all points of view is very much an oppressive mechanism that allows dominant systems to hold on to power by maintaining oppressive and discriminatory systems.

His critique of a market of ideas as exposed by Mill is that a market under capitalism is manipulated by those who have bigger shares of the business (Marcuse, pp. 6-7). In his view, dominant systems present both stupid and intelligent points as equal in order to not progress societal views on any important topic.

The solution as presented by Marcuse is to censor right wing opinions as they stop and actively fight against progress. This notion can come under fire as it would indicate that Marcuse would like to have a dictatorship, his counterargument is that we already live under a dictatorship of capital.

Chomsky very much exists in a similar sphere as he still approaches free speech as an economical issue. Considering that most information goes through some sort of corporate media, the interests of the owner will be presented as factual, excluding any real dissent but allowing some forms of allowed opposition (Herman, Chomsky, p.13).

The difference come by way of solutions. Chomsky more so thinks that a solution to free speech would be to have local, communal, truly free and informed with accurate facts that discuss issues in order to achieve real changes (Herman, Chomsky, p.20).

Going back to our definitions, we observe that they are correct, however, the way censorship operates becomes different and so do perceptions of it.

II. *Rasputin*

We have answered the question of what censorship generally is and how it operates, now we can look at how censorship worked in the USSR and satellite states.

We don't have to ponder how or why all soviet states had some sort of censorship organism, be it Glavlit in the USSR or the CPT (The Committee of Press and Typography) in Romania, every communist state had some sort of censorship apparatus. From a capitalist perspective, there is an obvious reason for mass censorship. In order to preserve control, the state must forbid the population to read, hear, or see anything that could in any way or shape tell them the truth of their predicament.

From the standpoint of the communist party, there is a quite a bit of nuance to the issue. In reality, the mass ban on western exports had the purpose of not spreading anti-communist propaganda. It would be hard to rebuild or build anything if pamphlets critiquing the quality of all building materials fell from the sky.

Would the previous argument fall on its own? Yes, very much so. It would be ridiculous to claim that there is only a sincere motive behind the full ban of western art until the 1960-1970 period and even then, set art was censored, modified, used ideologically and permitted only through many checks.

There is a selfish aspect to how censorship worked in the USSR as all oligarchical powers will fight tooth and nail to maintain the power that is holden. What makes the prior argument relevant is the work done by the US during the Cold War in order to demolish the USSR.

If communism was certainly worse ideologically and the economic model was inferior, wouldn't capitalism win by simply existing? The answer would surely be yes, but the Western forces still did contribute to the fall of communism. It would be unfair to just state that the USSR fell, as many other communist movements fell, the most interesting of those is of course the Western flavors of Marxism that died.

III. *Voulez vous....?*

Another intricacy regarding the Cold War era was the birth of a strange, heterodox spirit of Marxist and Communist movements. In France we had a veritable intelligentsia of leftist thinkers such as Foucault, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Deleuze, Georges Bataille and many others that formed what we can call a theoretical framework for western European Marxism has been shaped by the rebuilding of France after The Second World War and the slow crawl towards a proper capitalist structure of the French republic.

In that era, western Europeans were even tempted to emigrate towards the USSR as the West did not have public healthcare structures or even gave workers such benefits as the East in the early times of the post-war period.

In America, there was the Civil Rights movement which had socialist leanings that many historians tend to forget or hide. Martin Luther King had socialist leanings (<https://inthesetimes.com/article/martin-luther-king-jr-day-socialism-capitalism>), Malcolm X was a militant socialist with interests in global revolution (<https://communist.red/malcolm-x-you-show-me-a-capitalist-i-ll-show-you-a-bloodsucker/>), the Black Panthers had connections to North Korea and to Cuba and had a clear socialist agenda (<https://jacobin.com/2016/03/black-panther-party-revolution-fred-hampton>).

So how come that so many figures, essential to the evolution of the west and why such important facts relating to their ideological and political views tend to be omitted? It is because of censorship, but not in the classic means of applying such norms.

The Americans and more broadly, western countries have attempted to present such people as capitalist leftist or simply as intellectuals. The absence of these facts are part of a censorship mechanism that fits the definition but uses more subtle mechanisms to operate.

The land that birthed free speech as a practice has used mechanisms of censorship in order to "protect" the American population from dangerous ideologies that challenged economical models applied by the powers that be.

A first accounting of such censorship are the infamous McCarthy Trials. Starting from a relatively unknown senator, Joseph McCarthy, who held a speech in Parliament by which he condemned a number of people in the US state apparatus of being car carrying members of the American Communist Party and the danger they might pose in their positions.

This speech has given birth to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which started a veritable witch hunt in order to purge the system from any danger that

communists may pose. The hunt for communist sympathizers was not limited to the state employee, but it became a frenzy to find any and all communists in universities, Hollywood, manufacturing plants, and higher offices of the state.

There was no space that was not somehow affected by the McCarthy hearings from 1940 up to 1954. In that year, army lawyer Joseph Welch asked McCarthy “*Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you no sense of decency?*”. At that point, public opinion started to go against the trials resulting in the formal censorship of the senator and his fall into political and historical obscurity (<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/mccarthyism-red-scare>).

This is why there is some truth to the idea of soviet censorship due to protecting the socialist projects. The bastions of democracy applied censorship themselves in order to mold public opinion, why shouldn't the “bad guys” do it too?

Another clear example of how censorship worked in the West was George Orwell's book, *1984*. The author is mostly known for *Animal Farm*, a novel in which he critiques Stalinism as a political ideology through the power of fable. In the case of *1984* the inspiration is markedly different. In an interview, Orwell admitted that what inspired the dystopic novel was not communist censorship, but his brief stint as a journalist for the British Broadcasting Company (<https://moldigital.ac.uk/blog/orwell-1984-and-ministry/>).

A stranger question arises from protests that happened in America during the Civil Rights movement. Even if the protests were not art in themselves, they were a manner of exercising free speech, so the question arises, was the aggression shown by policemen in that era a form of political censorship?

The only fair answer is to say yes, because on both sides of the ideological barricade there were acts of forceful censorship in regards to protests and revolts. Even if the job of the police or military is to preserve public order, there is no reason to intervene in the case of peaceful protests such as the March on Washington or Tiananmen Square.

IV. Team America

So far, we have seen what censorship was and how it operated until the year 2000. From antiquity until the contemporary age, but we must come back to our initial time frame, the fall of the Berlin Wall. After 1989 censorship has left the confines of the Soviet Era and marked the start of an epoch of free speech, or at least it seems like that.

By the notion of the era of free speech we must understand a period of time by which all speech is free and it reaches the masses in pure forms combined with a certain optimism of the future.

The 2001 terrorist attacks have cut the optimism of the era as it gave birth to a new form of censorship. As time passed along and technology developed further new ways of communication spread like wildfire. The initial AOL and Yahoo Messenger software gave birth to instantaneous, portable and strictly chained to algorithms social networks.

Were these two points of history that intersect through the so-called Patriot Act as adopted by the US legislature in the year 2001. After the September 11 attacks, this law will allow the US government to spy on its population by monitoring all phone data, purchases, online searches, online comments, online conversations and any other possible data that is generated by the average American citizen.

Because of strong developments in technology, the average human started to live as much on the internet as it lives in the physical world. We exist as split subjects due to work, leisure, hobbies and worst of all, due to loneliness. Data generated by our digital lives becomes as much as our physical selves for both governmental and private apparatuses.

V. Toxic Garbage Island

Felix Guattari proposes that the idea of ecology is not strictly an issue of nature. In the original context, the author called for the creation of an ecological thought as a philosophical imperative in order to solve the climate crisis that humanity has been facing since the 20th century. He argued that there are 3 ecologies, environmental, social and mental (Guattari, p.6)

We are going to extrapolate the notion of humans holding on to multiple ecologies in order to apply it to our current predicament, and we will add a fourth ecology, that is the digital ecology.

The reason that we cannot just fit our digital existence in either of those previous ecologies is rather simple. According to Guattari, the ecological crisis had strong effects even in 1989 on all ecologies and they required different solutions. In order to fix your mental ecology, you should resist conformism and standardization (Guattari, p.35), your social ecology is fixed by creating groups of people that dissent from artificial consensus (Guattari, pp.50-51) and environmental ecology has to be fixed by violent resistance against the companies and states that pollute the environment (Guattari, p.52).

Even if we do not condone violence, all solutions are reasonable in context. From the perspective of mass extinction humanity has to shift. In our current material context, we have to deal with a new dimension, the digital. The digital space occupied by most of humanity is originally forged by people that had to make everything by using electronics and coding for websites.

Currently, the internet is ruled by small thieftoms such as Meta, Amazon, Netflix and other such companies that don't hold a monopoly but form a strange mirroring. Every feature that appears in any and all pieces of software. Short form content, messaging, AI integration, reactions and so on, have all been proposed by specific software programs and then they became standardized in all software programs.

Another aspect that allows us to call such companies thieftoms is how they slowly eroded parts of all ecologies. We are facing a genuine crises due to climate change beyond having abnormal meteorological phenomena (<https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/earths-climate-swings-increasingly-out-of-balance>) more often. About 1000 species of animals (<https://earthly.org/blog/how-many-species-are-extinct-due-to-climate-change>) have fully disappeared between 1989, the date in which the article we are referencing was published, and 2026. Not all of these changes are due to the internet using up resources, but it did contribute and with the apparition of data centers around the globe it will continue to get worse (Manisha Bharambe, Poonam Ponde, Harshita Vachhani, Smita Ghorpade, Dipita Dhande, p. 3390).

Our social ecologies were fundamentally scrapped for the sake of capital. Due to the appearance of social media new forms of socialization became a divider of political views and currently an algorithmic trap of eco-chambers. Adding to this, there is a clear disappearance of tertiary spaces which require no money in order for people to exist there. By tertiary spaces we mean to say libraries, parks, coffee shops that don't require any purchase and even public squares which offer basic utilities such as water or electricity.

As for the psychological ecology, we don't need much explanations since we have seen a swift rise in mental health issues. We can attribute this rise from de-stigmatizing discussions about mental health, however, we cannot just ignore the growth of mental health issues to pure data.

The fourth ecology of digital existence is finicky to define and delimitate. The internet is used by all three ecologies as a tool, a new technology, however, it is also a thing in itself. We are faced with a strange intermezzo of tool and ecology. The digital space has influenced the ecological environment, the social environment and the psychological environment.

As hard as it is, we need to acknowledge that humanity has gained a new ecology that doesn't serve to enrich the human spirit as much as it serves to create an intermezzo, or a

convoluted road system that crams elements of all these ecologies into a new dimension of human existence.

A good example of how this ecology operates is memetic humor. Even if the notion of memes was already an existing concept courtesy of Richard Dawkins and his book, *The Selfish Gene*, it entered mainstream consciousness with the advent of internet content that is remixed in order to gain new meaning. The reason this is a proof of an ecology is living beings. As art gains a life of its own so does internet content, remixed infinitely just as bacteria lives for seconds before it reproduces and dies leaving it's offspring to fulfill the sole function that it served. And just as bacteria, context gives it purpose.

While some memes end up giving fame and wealth to the original creator in some way, there are instances of memes that destroy lives or jokes that are taken to the extreme. As puerile as this notion may be, through memetic humor we have definitive proof of a new ecology that resides like bacteria inside and at the margin of all other 3 ecologies.

VI. Banned in D.C.

As far as it goes, this new digital ecology may be forgotten as a foreign and artificial mechanism, built by passionate people off the back of the infrastructure that evolved slowly. As generation Alpha is getting older, we have the first true iPhone babies that grew up connected directly to this 4th ecology even before entering and forming the necessary 3 ecologies to which we adhere by growth.

The profiteers of such a new material predicament is the censor. As we have previously stated, these new technologies have invaded all ecologies. One aspect that we intentionally left out is the issue of privacy. Most social media apps are free to use and even may generate revenue for content creators. The cost of this specific new occupation is the footprint of one's digital ecology.

To put it in context, every single action done by a netizen is recorded by the parent company of the used website. This data forms a specific digital footprint that generates revenue for set company. To explain this in the best terms, it would be comparable with a person going to a doctor to solve an infectious disease, receive a prognostic, but instead of this analysis to be yours and your doctor's it would reach every big pharmaceutical company that makes medicine that may aid you in healing.

As soon as you reach your house, instead of just purchasing the proposed medicine, you would receive offers from each pharmaceutical company regarding the best prices and effects. This is fundamentally how these free pieces of software work. You don't pay anything to use, but a deep analysis of your digital ecology that is ultimately used to propose purchases and keep you socially isolated.

The censor is now a 2 headed serpent which bites in unison. This description is still in the spirit of Guattari and the double pincher (Guattari, p.29). the first head is the state and the second head is the represented power of global capital. The state will censor speech both in a traditional manner, by banning, limiting, forbidding and ostracizing people and the art or content generated by them. A new, more obtuse form of censorship, is now being used by the state even since the early days of 24/7 television programs or the apparition of written newspapers.

Nowadays, more than ye olden times, governments use the media machinery to manufacture consent in regard to the actions of the governments or individual political parties in the states. Chomsky proposed this idea firstly, but in our context, this is a new form of censorship. While traditional censorship is direct and clear, while this new form of media manipulation consists of manipulating what should be objective information being passed to the population by way of news.

What really happens, by producing this consensus towards the governing power or for a specific political party, you manipulate the audience in order to censor reality itself in the eye of the beholder as separated by many intersecting interests.

The second head of the snake, the representators of capital, have a silent and yet more venomous bite. What social media does through algorithmic is to extend censorship directly into the depth of the psychological ecology. Initially, social media was not optimized to promote anything specific, if you had an interest, you searched for it, you discovered content creators that speak or show elements of set interest.

Somewhere between 2011 and 2016 all social media platforms started developing recommendations algorithmically and started suggesting creators or to “befriend” people which you don’t know in real life. This shift has formed the current landscape of loneliness of isolation which is continuously infecting our ecologies, transforming the wildlife that once flourished or perished in our personal or public selves.

This is no longer a censorship that forbids you to speak or create, it is a censorship that annihilates the spark of creation in itself by coopting all creation to capital and its issues. Mill spoke of the censorship that degrades posterity, currently all futures become obsolete in the absence of truths that cannot be born by thought or art.

VII. In the Court of the Crimson King. (conclusion)

What used to be a simple, political mechanism meant to suppress descent since the days of Plato became a fully automated invasive species of thought that crawls into its own ecology to infect all others.

While traditional censorship could be fought against by force or by law this new form of censorship has become so obtuse and engrained in the public consciousness that we no longer understand a life in the absence of unread terms of service and media manipulation.

We lost the sense of liberty granted by socialization and popular strength and have bought a new false sense of community with strangers that we don’t quite know or understand, and worse of all, the spark of creation is slowly fading from the mind of the human. The spirit of creation that has led humanity to reach the moon, to build towards the sky and to revolt for what was given to them by the mere belonging to the human race is being strangled, censored before it can burst into the hearts of men to take physical form.

Free speech has become the apparent norm, but what is free speech when the thoughts cannot form to oppose what we may consider wrong? We received pleasure at the cost of beauty, and such dealings with the devil may cost whatever allowed us to be human in the first place.

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