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Author(s): David Freedberg

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# Censorship revisited

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DAVID FREEDBERG

*The following guest editorial signals our intention to host, in the pages of Res, occasional contributions on art issues that are currently being debated. This text is derived from a lecture that was delivered by David Freedberg at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City, on November 10, 1991. With its publication, we are also welcoming the author on the Res Board of Editorial Advisors.*

*The Editor*

The topic of censorship has become a modish one. There has hardly ever been as much talk and writing about it as in recent months. The official organ of the College Art Association (the professional association of art historians), the *Art Journal*, has just devoted two issues to it (vol. 50, nos. 3–4). The recent exhibitions and reconstructions in Los Angeles and in Washington of Hitler's 1937 shows of *Entartete Kunst* provided a large number of instructive and often chastening parallels, while the Asia Society in New York held an exhibition about the censorship of prints in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan (it also happened to show examples of the kinds of images that are often proscribed to little or no avail). Puritans and fundamentalists continue to press for stricter controls on art, and the cultured press has not ceased to run articles about the dangers of doing so. Yet even the most committed opponents of censorship, even the most sophisticated proponents of artistic liberty, are unlikely to be able to avoid the feeling that there are limits and that there are indeed certain works, whether or not they are called art, that go too far. It would be futile to deny the complicated borderline area on the edge of the permissible.

The very quantity of talk and writing about the subject, however, especially in the last few months, has made discussion much more difficult. One might have thought that the problem would have been solved by the acquittal, on 5 October, 1990, of the Cincinnati Arts Center and its director, Denis Barrie, for having shown photographs of homoerotic acts and children with their genitals exposed. But this would have been either naive or unduly optimistic, for it soon became clear that the movement against artistic liberty that began in April 1989 was far from over.

Although it is easy enough to recall many other attempts at censorship before that date, it was from then on that hostility toward sexual representation and

political expression in the arts reached its most feverish pitch. Toward the end of that month, public objections to a work by Andres Serrano on display in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, began to surface. The work concerned was a photograph. It showed a plastic crucifix immersed in a bucket of what was termed to be the artist's own urine. No matter that the artist maintained that his idea was to convey something of contemporary attitudes, especially materialist ones, to religion, the charges of blasphemy instantly arose; and it is not hard to understand why. Within a few weeks of the initial complaints, the case surfaced in Congress. What was at stake was the fact that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) had provided funds for the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts; and that it was out of those funds that the center had drawn the \$15,000 that they had granted Serrano for his art. The outcry was great: should a government agency subsidize, even indirectly, what one congressman, Dick Armey from Texas, called "morally reprehensible trash"? Could Serrano's work even be called art at all?

Indignation ran equally high when Congress discovered that the NEA had funded an exhibition of the photographs of Mapplethorpe scheduled to open at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington. In the face of this indignation, and the concomitant political pressure, the curator of the Corcoran canceled the show. No one wanted to jeopardize one's grant from the NEA; and this is what was beginning to happen. On 25 July, 1989, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted in favor of a five-year ban on grants by the NEA to the two bodies that had organized the Mapplethorpe and Serrano shows—namely, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Philadelphia and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. The administrators of the NEA seemed uncomfortable with the vote; but in one way or another they began to collude with those in Congress who demanded that artists sign a pledge not to produce obscene, blasphemous, or racially offensive material if they were to be funded by the NEA.

By the beginning of November 1989, a \$10,000 grant had been withdrawn by the new director of the NEA, John Frohnmayer, from the Artists Space in New York, on the grounds that a planned exhibition of the work of twenty-three painters, photographers, and sculptors on the subject of AIDS included offensive homosexual imagery. The lines were now firmly drawn

between the defenders of freedom of expression (who constantly appealed, naturally enough, to the First Amendment), and those congressmen, senators, and clergymen who believed that taxpayers' money should not be spent on obscene or blasphemous art, or on what they did not regard as art in the first place. In Congress the chief objector, predictably, was Jesse Helms, aided and abetted by Dick Armey from Texas, Dana Rohrabacher from California, and Al D'Amato from New York. Their point of view was shared and reinforced by a group of clergymen, including, as one could have predicted, the Reverend Pat Robertson. But chief among them was the Reverend Donald E. Wildmon, director of the American Family Association, who had begun his pursuit of the painter David Wojnarowicz and his AIDS-related art.

The movement against freedom of expression gained momentum. The NEA said it would withdraw funding from organizations not prepared to sign the antipornography and antiblasphemy pledge. In June 1990 it refused to make grants to four performance artists—Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and John Fleck—despite the recommendation of its own theater panel. By the end of September, the trial of the Cincinnati Arts Center for its display of seven offensive photographs by Mapplethorpe had opened. And although that trial ended in acquittal—somewhat to everyone's surprise—the allegations of obscenity and blasphemy continued to reverberate.

There were good and bad signs. On the one hand, the public outcry at these attempts by the government to control the arts was great. Many eloquent arguments were presented against them. The NEA reversed its stand on Karen Finley et al. just one year after its decision against them. But the drive to censor seems to have caught on. In July 1991, Elizabeth Broun, director of the National Museum of American Art in Washington, as if forgetting Christina Orr-Cahall's faux pas in banning the Mapplethorpe show a year earlier (the outcry was so great that she had to resign), decided to withdraw a controversial work from a show on the legacy of the great photographer of human and animal locomotion, Eadweard Muybridge. The work concerned was intended as an homage to Muybridge by the conceptual artist Sol LeWitt. It consisted of a sort of peep show, in which the spectator was required to gaze through a series of small holes at a female figure moving frontally toward the viewer. Broun's objection was on feminist grounds; but in its attempts to suppress a work of art, the politically correct left seemed to be joining the radical right. Within a few weeks, in the

face of strong and united pressure from a group of museum curators led by Jock Reynolds, Broun went back on her decision and put the offending work on display.

The general situation remains heated and confused. Everyone has an opinion about it. Much effective work has been done against the recent wave of censorship, such as Joseph Kosuth's remarkably wide-ranging and immensely popular installation, *The Play of the Unmentionable*, at the Brooklyn Museum from September 1990 to February 1991. In it he selected works from the museum's own collection to demonstrate examples of censorship from the past, as well as works that survived the past unscathed, or that come from other cultures but would be subject to censorship now.

Two purely political issues arise: first, whether the withdrawal of public funds constitutes censorship per se; and second, whether any one person or body is capable of defining not only what is obscene or not, but whether something is or is not art.

Aside from the very fiercest of the objectors to Serrano and Mapplethorpe, like the Reverends Wildmon and Robertson, and Senator Helms, most of the more hostile critics of 1989 showed a delicate awareness of the issues at stake. For example, even though Senator D'Amato publicly tore up the catalog of the show in which Andres Serrano's crucifixion piece had been featured, he later admitted that Serrano had the right to produce filth; the problem was that taxpayers' dollars were being used to promote such work. Another of his fellow critics, Congressman Armey, verged even more closely on the liberal when he confessed that "the arts do serve a role of probing the frontiers." "But I say let that be funded from the private sector," he went on. Many others took this point of view in the heated second quarter of 1989, and later. Were they being logical or disingenuous? In other words, could one say with them that there was no censorship, as long as they—and people like them—were willing to allow the right of artists to produce what they wanted? Or does the withholding of public funds in a country where government sponsorship of the arts is generally so feeble amount, in fact, to censorship?

This takes one directly to the second issue. At the very outset of the Serrano affair, the NEA, then without a director, responded in a rather dignified way to its critics. Having pointed out, correctly, that only a very small proportion of the grants it made had ever been found objectionable, it expressed its "deep regret" for

any offense that the work might have caused. But it went on to insist on its right to support the artistic decisions of cultural institutions, "even though the work may be deemed controversial and offensive to individuals." This quite proud response was like a red rag to a bull. The critics of the NEA in Congress instantly responded with any number of variations of the theme "I know filth when I see it—and so [implicitly] do my constituents." And if it was filth, then it was not art. Others suggested, seemingly more prudently, that perhaps the NEA should establish more stringent guidelines about "what sorts of art it should support."

Within no time at all, however, even the critics were forced to recognize the one great difficulty about such a proposal (as with every other such proposal): Who decides? Who would decide "what sorts of art it [the NEA] should support"? Congressman Sidney R. Yates, a defender of the NEA and chairman of the House subcommittee that authorizes it, noted of the request for stronger guidelines that "that had been tried and found impossible." It is not hard to sympathize with his predicament. But Yates displayed considerable political shrewdness in inviting the hapless Congressman Arme y to devise some guidelines about what would be acceptable and what would not. The very man who had been one of the strongest advocates of such guidelines was now forced to recognize the difficulties—if not the impossibility—of determining them. He immediately declined, and suggested that the acting director of the NEA, Hugh Southern, might try to do so himself. Southern's response was to say that he was indeed thinking of a way to remind his panelists that they were "spending public money and that they should therefore be especially attentive to artistic merit and quality." One has some sympathy for him, too. It is hard to tell whether he really thought that such judgments could easily be achieved by anyone, let alone by his panelists, or whether this was just an attempt at appeasing the critics of the National Endowment.

The problem of all such approaches is the old one: Who decides what is art and what is not art? Who is finally capable of adjudicating in the matter of the obscene and the indecent? The number of witnesses and reporters who noted at the Cleveland trial that evil lies in the eye of the beholder was legion, while the elusiveness of a firm definition of art is—or has come to be—*precisely* one of the chief constitutive elements of what we think of as art.

Congressman Arme y himself admitted that a Picasso

of the crucifixion did not offend him, even though he knew that others were offended by it. It was, he said, "a tricky business." But still he went on to claim, just like Senator Helms, that "I clearly know offensive art when I see it, and there ought to be a way that the Endowment can establish procedures where they can clearly deny funding for an art like Serrano's or Mapplethorpe's." Ought to be, perhaps—but how? Shortly after the initial outcry, the Senate voted to bar funding for material that "may be considered obscene (including depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children and individuals engaged in sex acts), and which, when taken as a whole, does not have serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value." In whose eyes? we may well respond, once again. The history of art is full of examples of works that "taken as a whole" (whatever this may mean) were once not regarded as having had "serious artistic value," but which have subsequently come to be regarded as works of high art. Rembrandt's representation of female nudes, much attacked by his contemporaries, is only one of many hundreds of possible cases in point.

It was at the time of this vote that Senator Metzenbaum noted sharply that "we're approaching more and more the Congress telling the art world what is art." Or, as Daniel Moynihan eloquently asked, no doubt with the First Amendment well in mind, "Do we really want it to be recorded that the Senate of the United States is so insensible to the traditions of liberty in our land, so fearful of what is different and new and disturbing, so anxious to record our timidity that we would sanction institutions for acting precisely as they are meant to act? Which is to say, art institutions supporting artists and exhibiting work." Even John Chafee of Rhode Island, normally an opponent of the controversial grants, confessed that "we're getting into a slippery area here."

The plain fact is that judgments about art, about quality, and about decency are always political judgments. In defending his agency in June 1990, John Frohnmay er admitted as much when he acknowledged that "things beside artistic quality had to be taken into consideration . . . it is our job to recognize political realities." On the face of it, he may seem to have been pleading for the separation of the domains; but in fact he was acknowledging as openly as anyone possibly could that political realities entered into the NEA's judgments about art. These are the realities that underlay both the ban of 1989 on the grants to organizations that showed Serrano, Mapplethorpe, and



others, and the guidelines that the Senate recommended in June of that year. Thus those who attacked these decisions for “crossing the line into censorship” were missing the real point, which was the state of American public morality itself. The problem extends beyond representation alone. After all, every period, whether in East or West, has examples of pornographic imagery that flourish despite the edicts against them.

Censorship fails because those who censor do not—or will not—recognize the underlying social problems. The censors think that by suppressing or mutilating art they can exercise social and moral control. Time and again, the desire to control public life expresses itself in efforts to extend control into the private domain, and into private consumption. Morality and civic order are constantly seen to be reflected in art. The exhibition at the Asia Society showed how the instability of the floating world, that society represented by the *ukiyo-e* prints, was felt to threaten social order (as, indeed, it probably did). In his essay in the exhibition catalog, H. D. Harootunian noted that these prints represented the culture of the rising urban classes that had come to threaten the rigid social hierarchy of Tokugawa Japan. One of the ways in which the government responded was to issue strict sumptuary laws. Sexually explicit pictures were felt to be inappropriate to the morally superior society that the shogunate was supposed to stand for. Such attempts at censorship and social control, it seems clear, are generally stronger in times of economic weakness or decline. Is it not in these recession-struck days that questions of sexual morality have been most heatedly debated? In the same catalog, Vishakha Desai perceptively noted of both Tokugawa Japan and present-day America that “among the more potent contenders for censorship are expressions of explicit or alternate sexuality and views that challenge the dominant political ideology.” True enough, but the point that she goes on to make reaches to the very core of the discussion. “The extent to which the ruling powers,” as she puts it, “find such expressions offensive, and the efforts they extend to control them may vary from culture to culture and over time, but the desire of a ruling power to control the power of the visual arts transcends cultural and chronological boundaries.”

This seems to be the nub of the matter. In a way the political issues themselves are all too clear. Much more problematic—and therefore the subject, perhaps, of science rather than morality—is why and how images have the power they do. While there can be no doubt

that arousal by image (whether pornographic or not) occurs only in context and is likely to be dependent on individual beholders’ conditioning, recurrent phenomena such as censorship cannot be explained by the appeal to context and conditioning alone. The fact is that art historians and anthropologists have ignored some of the fundamental problems of why visual images should have the strong effects they evidently do and why the effectiveness of censorship should be more than a local issue. We have to learn to deal both with the power of images and with the desire to control them. The relation between the power of images and the desire to control them may not be a universal one, but it is certainly recurrent, as Vishakha Desai pointed out. If everyone responded in a *wholly* different way, the censors would have concurred much less on what to censor and what not to censor. One has to look at how things are censored, at what is believed to be gained by the act of censorship, and what it is about images specifically that makes them provocative.

All this is much less clear than the moral and political issues, and this is what has largely been neglected in the vast amount of writing on the subject in recent months. Even if one takes the view that everything we get out of images is a matter of projection, the problem still remains as to *why* we project our needs, desires, fears, and so forth onto inanimate representation. In many cases what is at stake is the fear of unacknowledged or unarticulated sexual desires (a fear often projected onto homosexuals). While it is certainly appropriate and necessary to consider the social dimension of censorship, there still remains the question of what happens when such desires, especially latent ones, are allowed, consciously or unconsciously, to relate to representation, and when they find their expression in the creation of another. The problem becomes acute in the case of children, both as subject and as audience. Everyone now seems to agree that however thick-skinned adults may be, children are much more susceptible to images and much more likely to be disturbed. We all know how frightening the pictures of *Struwwelpeter* and *Max und Moritz* can be, whatever educational purposes they may be thought to serve. There is a remarkable passage by the fifteenth-century Florentine Cardinal, Giovanni Dominici, in which he describes the beneficent influences on infants of beautiful pictures of Christ, the Virgin, and various saints; while any number of texts about art, even though they may recommend erotic pictures in bedrooms as aids to desire (or even to the making of

more beautiful offspring), concur in stipulating that they be kept out of the way of children. The issue is the power of images.

In the case of the recent issues of the *Art Journal*, the problem lies not simply in the fact that the reproduction of the Mapplethorpe photographs seems both a gratuitous and tardy act (that particular battle was won months before), but in the failure to acknowledge that these are, in fact, disturbing images. There is, these days, what seems to be an extraordinary resistance to acknowledging the presence of the provocative—not only resistance, but confusion. To acknowledge the full force of the provocative, however, is by no means to suggest that it ought to be censored; it is only to recognize something of the individual beholder's role in the power of images.

Begin with the case of the performance artists whose grants were withdrawn by the NEA in July 1990. In reporting on this, the *New York Times* recorded that "Ms. Finley, who sometimes performs nude with chocolate smeared over her body, and Mr. Fleck, who said he once simulated 'making love to myself in my underwear,' have been frequently mentioned by Endowment critics as performers who cross over the line from the merely provocative to the obscene." But what does "merely provocative" mean? Charles Hope, a noted student of Titian, once observed, in discussing the sexual dimension of the *Venus of Urbino* and the various paintings of *Venus and an Organist*, that they were little more than mere pinups. But there is no such thing as the "merely provocative" or a "mere pinup." This is not to say that some things cannot be *more* provocative than others, and it's possible that some live acts are indeed more provocative than some representations. But *no* representation can be "merely" provocative. The matter of response, both social and psychological, is simply more complex than this. Only once we admit the full provocativeness of the provocative will we understand the futility of trying to decide what is obscene and what is not. All images, by their nature, are provocative, certainly all representations showing or alluding to sex. Of course the degree of provocativeness, as I have just admitted, may vary from viewer to viewer, and certainly from gender to gender: how *then* might one define obscenity? The issue, to say it again, is a social and political one, and not, in the end, a matter of physical—say visual—representation itself.

The very fact that the guardians of culture, civility, and decency think they can cultivate just these qualities by crossing out, mutilating, or canceling an image is

testimony to the power of images and their essential provocativeness. The eyes, as so many writers from antiquity on have insisted, are the channel to all the other senses, and therefore to sensual carnality. One has only to read Bernard Berenson, with his emphasis on the "life-enhancing" tactility of the greatest Renaissance pictures, to have some sense of the role of this notion in Western writing about art. But the great irony is that most art historians, even Berenson, have failed to grasp the full implications of this position, in their refusal to come to terms with the pleasure and the sensuality of seeing, and the particular pleasure of seeing what the representation shows. This pleasure is akin to that of the fetishist, because it is derived from a pleasure in the substitute; and—of course—from the fear, which can be thrilling, of finally seeing the real object (or, to put it in more specifically Freudian terms, the reality of the originating sexual object). The motive underlying the actions of the censors of the visual arts is that we won't be aroused if we block off what we would otherwise see. The basis for this motivation may be wholly mistaken—everyone knows how titillating the veil that covers can sometimes be—but it is testimony to a profound sense of misgiving about visual imagery, or to tacit acknowledgment of its capacity to disturb.

None of this is to deny that we are also capable of being aroused by words and texts, and that texts can be even more suggestive or arousing than pictures; but the present claim is a more radical one than usual. It is for the *essential* provocativeness of visual representation. Scopophilia—the desire to see, or rather, to look—is, as Freud suggested, to be related to that fundamental infantile experience, the curiosity about the mother's genitals, the desire to look, and then the "disavowal" (*Verleugnung*) of the fearful revelation of her lack of a penis. This Freud saw as the origin of all forms of fetishism. It is this frame of reference that also seems to me to be fundamental for the processes of censorship. Even Freud's own blindness in failing to give an adequate account of the implications of his theory for women and male homosexuality has a close parallel in the particular forms of suppression and anxiety about female looking that may be detected in most Western writing about art, and in its recent preoccupations with the representation of homosexual desire.

It is in this context too that one begins to understand something of the motivation underlying Elizabeth Broun's decision to remove Sol LeWitt's *Muybridge I* from the exhibition on *Muybridge and Contemporary American Photography* in July 1991. LeWitt's work consisted, as we have seen, of a series of peepholes

focusing ever more closely on individual frames from one of Muybridge's serial views illustrating human locomotion. The experience of the piece may be taken to be paradigmatic for the desire always to see more, to see more clearly, to focus on the significant. Desire is the operative word here, since the peephole exemplifies the inescapability of the compulsion to see. Once we peep we are forced to see what is before us, and are compelled to look ever more closely. By bringing the female nude ever closer toward the peeper, LeWitt makes the fetishistic aspect of all looking plain. In so doing he also brings to the fore that aspect of Muybridge's work that has generally been overlooked in all discussions of his photography, and that is their evident sexual dimension. Broun was perfectly correct in her sense of the power of LeWitt's work—not only because of the peephole, which, as in Duchamp's *Étants données* in Philadelphia, forces the viewer to concentrate on the naked figure, but because of its ever-closer focus on the abdomen of the figure, here striding toward one. It is not hard to see why she fell into the trap of maintaining, when she first explained her wish to suppress the work, that what she found most offensive was the increasing focus on the pubic region. Her opponents may have been more accurate when they noted that the focus was in fact on the figure's navel; but they must also have grasped exactly what was happening.

Once one understands what might be called the peephole effect—that is, the connection between the peephole and the desire to see—one may also begin to understand more clearly why (as has always been observed) the suggestive image is generally more erotic than the blatant one. It is because of the compulsion always to see *more*. Everyone is familiar with the experience of images that suggest that what is covered might yet be revealed, or that a slightly different viewpoint might still show what the actual viewpoint obscures or leaves hidden. Hence the relevance, in contexts like these, of the parallel with peeping, and with fetishistic looking, where one concentrates on something one can see as a substitute for what one wishes to see but cannot.

All this applies equally well to less-than-blatant images in other cultures too. Sometimes the erotic charge may be less, on other occasions considerably greater. Images of this broad class generally escape the censor precisely because they are not so blatant and are therefore thought, wrongly as it turns out, to be less subversive. Censorship fails because it fails to recognize

the essentially elusive aspect of that which it seeks to suppress. One may be able to cut out the obviously offensive; but there are no obvious limits to be imposed on the imagination that is sparked and driven by sight. Nothing is to be gained by refusing to acknowledge the provocative component of all images, whether sexual or not. In the end, censorship has no serious effect on morality, because the eye always *has* to see that which is forbidden.

And here we may begin to understand the initial power—or rather the shock effect, the arousal of any number of disturbing feelings, including disgust—of what may euphemistically be called “strong imagery.” Arousal in such cases depends at least as much on the fact of representation as on content, if not more so. An image is capable of revealing—no, displaying and making available for consumption—that which ought not to be revealed. Its shock effect consists in making available that which is not often seen. It makes the forbidden and the unattainable available to the eyes, if not to actual possession. You can take it away, keep it on you, and look at it when you want to, as in the case of small pornographic images (such as the classic examples by Hans Sebald Beham) that require one to look especially closely, giving one the combined sense of concentration and furtiveness that may make it exciting. The harder one looks, the more intense the desire to see. But then, with varying degrees of swiftness, the effect may become less disturbing. “May,” because there are clearly limits to naturalizing that which, for whatever reason, we find ugly or repellent, whether aesthetically, morally, or sexually.

How, then, does all this square with the fact that in the West at least the chief target of the censors, the target above all others, has been the phallus? Examples are legion, from mutilation to the covering with fig leaves, from classical sculptures to Michelangelo and later. Other kinds of censorship take the form of obliteration, cancellation, and even tasteful alteration, as in the case of the successive states of Marcantonio's *Pan and Syrinx* or the Ghisis' *Venus and Adonis*. Often enough, it is true, there is censorship of other body parts, as well as scenes showing the act of copulation. One of the more extravagant instances of sixteenth-century pornography is the series of *Modi*, or positions, by Marcantonio Raimondi, of which only nine fragments survive in the British Museum, the precious remnants of an early censor's action; while other examples now seem rather charming to us, such as the alteration of second and third states of Enea Vico's



*Mars, Venus and Vulcan*, where the figure of Mars coupling with Venus is first burnished out and then replaced altogether by a new and more modest arrangement of her legs.

It is perfectly clear that standards vary across time and space and according to context. No objections—certainly no official ones—are recorded to Masaccio's painting of the *Expulsion from Paradise* in the stupendous fresco cycle commissioned from him in the mid-1420s for the Brancacci Chapel in Florence. But for many years—possibly even since the late sixteenth century—Adam's nakedness has been covered by tasteful foliage. Now that the Brancacci chapel has been restored to its pristine splendor, one can see that Adam is endowed with a large and beautifully painted male member, for two perfectly good reasons: first, as a virtuosic demonstration (just as one would expect in the early Renaissance from a friend of Donatello and Brunelleschi) of the artist's naturalistic skill; and second, and more important, because it was just this that was both the instrument of man's knowledge and of his fall, and the cause of his expulsion from Paradise. The impulse to censor may represent a kind of refusal of sin; but it also denies the fact that it is too late. Sin is already in the world.

The problem, therefore, is not only that which men and women take to be obscene or offensive varies from context to context, but that art and sensuality are not supposed to go together. If it is indecent, as the conservative cohorts would maintain, then it is not art. Or conversely—and even more worrying—if it is art, it is not (or ought not to be) provocative, or obscene. This is even what certain kinds of liberal thinking seem to imply; and this is why it is important to acknowledge that art may indeed be indecent, offensive, and sometimes even downright dangerous.

But of course it is not only the phallus that has been censored. The greater and subtler censorship has been the ancient suppression of the female genitalia. A striking phenomenon throughout the whole history of Western art has been the acknowledgment of the phallus and the denial or suppression of female sexual organs—still more of a risk, one must suppose, to the separation of sensuality and art. The issue is either suppression, or even, in the most explicit of respects such as the prints of the Behams or Marcantonio, the renunciation of anything like the kind of accuracy and attention to detail that is to be found in male genitalia, from the Hercules Farnese to Masaccio. Never even a

hair, let alone anything more detailed. It is not surprising that one of the most persistent targets of attempts at censorship in recent years has been Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, where the chief objection has been to the pudendalike representation of the flowers on the tablecloth and the dinner plates. The threat of the female sexual organ is more profound, because it is more unsettling to the male orders of looking and hegemony than is the phallus. To acknowledge the female passions is to undermine the very underpinnings of what the proponents of censorship regard as civilization and culture; for *their* civilization has, of course, come to depend on those very three K's on which the national socialist state was also built—*Kinder, Küche, und Kirche*: children, without whom society could not continue, but who are at the same time vulnerable and whose morality is most easily susceptible to corruption or improvement; *kitchen*, the classic domain of women; and *church*, where sex is suppressed, avoided, or absent. Homosexuality, of course, is at odds with all of this too: it is sexuality without the possibility of reproduction, all the more unconstrained because all the less purposeful and fruitful. Now it is possible to see still more clearly the roots of the anxiety about the phallus itself and about the homosexual representations of recent years.

To say all this is to return to the sociopolitical dimension of censorship; but it can be understood only in the light of the other essential factor here, that of representation itself. If one cannot control representation, one cannot control or govern society—or so it is believed. But all that censorship proves is that images are resistant to control. They resist control not only because they are a symptom (rather than a cause) of morality, but because of their power and their inescapability. Once one has seen a picture, one cannot undo the fact that it has been seen. But if *this* is what motivates the censors, then they are mistaken too—and not only because the moral problems are as much social as artistic. The power of images resides not within representation itself, but in the irrepressible and impossible desire to look until we have seen everything, until our eyes are wide open. But the fact is that we can never see everything. If we do not acknowledge the power of representation in visual form, even in its disturbing forms, and if we do not acknowledge what we know about ourselves and what underlies our exchanges with pictures and sculptures, then we will continue to collude with the censors.