

24

Museum censorship¹

Christopher B. Steiner

... they've got to solve this censorship thing.

Thomas Hoving, Director, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1967–77²

In what was eventually uncovered to be an elaborate hoax, performance/installation artist Yazmany Arboleda attempted to set up in June 2008 two impromptu, "guerilla-style" exhibitions in a vacant boutique on New York City's lower West Side.³ The planned exhibitions, *The Assassination of Hillary Clinton* and *The Assassination of Barack Obama*, were described as "re-installations" to be undertaken independently by the artist in response to what was said to be his prior censorship and forced eviction from two "reputable" Manhattan art galleries.⁴ The provocatively titled exhibitions were intended to explore what the artist described as the "character assassinations" by the media of the two leading Democratic contenders in the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign.⁵

Included in the planned Obama exhibition was to be an enlargement of the cover of then Senator Obama's book *The Audacity of Hope* but retitled *The Audacity of Black People*; a photomural showing an image of the Obama daughters captioned "NAPPY HEADED HOS"⁶ and the depiction of an enormous black penis wrapped around the white walls of the gallery accompanied by a text panel that read "ONCE YOU GO BARACK..." In the Clinton exhibition, the artist enlarged a magnified close-up photograph of Senator Clinton, appearing ravaged with wrinkles, accompanied by the words "The Face of Experience;" a reproduction of a high-school yearbook page with the phrase "Most likely to compromise" printed next to a teenage photo of Hillary Clinton; and a series of fake campaign posters and bumper stickers, including one that described the candidate as "The Antidote to Niggeritis."⁷ This was indeed the explosive stuff of outrage, indignation and potential censorship – racist, misogynist, sexist, ageist and unapologetically offensive art.

But, before the exhibitions were ever installed, their inflammatory titles, which had been stenciled to the storefront's marquis, had attracted not only the attention of curious passers-by but also the United States Secret Service and New York Police Department. Arboleda was detained for questioning and ordered by law enforcement officials to remove the words "assassination" which appeared in association with the names of the presidential candidates. Eventually it was uncovered that the two Chelsea galleries claimed by Arboleda to be the venues of his previous encounters with expurgation and the law, the so-called Leah Keller Gallery and Naomi Gates Gallery, did not actually exist; and, in fact, there were no exhibitions

being temporarily shuttered due to pending legal action. "The whole thing was fabricated," the artist admitted to a reporter from *The New York Times*.⁸ Arboleda had apparently taken photos of the interior of real art galleries; then, using Adobe Photoshop, he manipulated the digital images to depict his own artworks on the walls. The images were uploaded to web sites on domain names which he had purchased for the project; he included in these web sites phony press releases and fabricated installation shots of the non-existent exhibits.⁹ When the story broke, the claims by the artist of having been previously censored in these two art galleries only heightened the interest in what promised to materialize in the storefront installations.

The "censorship" of his shows was reported by nearly a hundred different news organizations around the world, most of which unquestioningly accepted Arboleda's story regarding his previous expulsion from the two Manhattan art galleries. The incident also provoked literally hundreds of comments on *The New York Times*'s web site, as well as on other online forums, that were both in favor of and against the censorship of Arboleda's art. What had been unleashed by these exhibitions-that-never-were was an almost perfectly scripted re-enactment of the typical litany of reactions provoked by controversial museum exhibitions during the past several decades in the United States. "While the first amendment allows Arboleda to express himself in any way he wants to," wrote one internet pundit, "it also allows citizenry to refuse to attend any gallery that will host this type of offensive material. Galleries considering displaying this particular exhibit should be aware of the backlash they could receive for doing so."¹⁰ Or, "To all those who say it's okay to say whatever they want, do whatever they want, whenever, to anyone, anytime, and to not be able to do so is censorship, are missing the point," opined another outraged commentator. "It's about decency and civility and about a so-called artist with no talent putting up provocative words that do absolutely nothing to bring enrichment into our lives (like art should)."¹¹ Arguing from the other side of the debate, one reader commented: "I don't find this art show as being offensive at all. Art holds a mirror to society. You either like what you see or you don't."¹²

Apparently, this is exactly the kind of response Yazmany Arboleda was shooting for. "The engagement and the conversation – that's the dialogue ... that's my art" said the artist in an interview.¹³ "If it was attention I wanted I would have climbed the side of the *New York Times* building. Instead I chose to take on some of those veneers by inspiring a dialogue, which when it stems from art, is the most effective means of questioning the truths we have come to take for granted."¹⁴ The point of Arboleda's project (which came to be known as *The Keller Gates Project*) became even more clear several months later when he opened, in September 2008, what was described as the last stage of the "performance" – an exhibition, held this time at the Art Directors Club Gallery, which displayed enlarged photocopies of all the comments, opinions, rants and raves from the blog posts and news items generated three months earlier by the *Assassination* "exhibits." In the end, we now know that the exhibitions had indeed not been subject to museum censorship; it was instead museum censorship which *was the subject* of the exhibitions.

The case of Yazmany Arboleda raises many challenging questions about the relationship between art, the media and the law within the context of both museums

and commercial art galleries. Was this merely the case of a crackpot attention-seeker looking for quick fame? Or was this a serious artistic intervention into the ethics of art and museum censorship, and an insightful exploration of the boundaries of the freedom of expression? I begin this chapter with a detailed synopsis of the *Assassination* exhibitions because it serves both as a backward- and forward-looking case study. The responses that Arboleda's exhibitions activated encompass the full spectrum of public reactions to incidents of museum censorship and controversial exhibitions in the United States since the height of the so-called Culture Wars in the 1980s and 1990s. In this sense it recapitulates a well-rehearsed dialogue between, on the one hand, staunch proponents of absolute freedom of expression and, on the other hand, the more conservative advocates for civic responsibility and the upholding of shared community values. At the same time, however, the Arboleda case also anticipates an emerging trend in museum approaches to issues of censorship which purposely engage with controversy as a way to provoke a public dialogue and to stimulate an educational forum for better understanding the very nature of both the museum and censorship itself.

I will suggest in this chapter that public demand for the censorship of museums is often generated in reaction to a hierarchical model of museum authority in which an external group (whether it be government, religious, civic or community-based) attempts to critique or control the dissemination of images or knowledge from an institution which the group perceives to be unilaterally powerful, and from which the group feels excluded. The growing trend among museums today to shift from a hierarchical model of authority to a more inclusive model of shared authority, with a greater openness for dialogue and debate, has the potential to transform the nature of museum censorship. Recent incidents suggest that censorship can be "worked out" if the museum and community engage in constructive dialogue about the nature of the offensive material and its provocation to incite controversy. At the same time, however, this shift in the museum's role from being defensive to engaged opens up new questions and ethical considerations regarding the museum's responsibility to its mission and to the public.

Censorship as propaganda in Nazi Germany

While the roots of modern censorship can be traced to earlier origins going as far back as the Renaissance, in the twentieth century one of the most commonly cited examples of museum censorship is the case of National Socialist (Nazi) Germany and Adolf Hitler's attack on modern German art and the work of Impressionists, Expressionists and the avant-garde from across Europe. Working under the direct orders of Nazi propaganda minister Josef Goebbels in the mid-1930s, members of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts confiscated from German museums and private collections thousands of paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures deemed by the Nazi regime as subversive, immoral or what they simply called "degenerate." Among the artists included in the purge were some of the major figures of early twentieth-century art, including Max Beckmann, Marc Chagall, Otto Dix, Wassily Kandisky, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Klee and Emile Nolde. The so-called degenerate works of art were singled out for being either an "insolent mockery" of religion, anti-war,

Jewish, Bolshevik, an insult to the German race or to German womanhood, "Negro" art or even as "total insanity."¹⁵

In 1937, Adolf Ziegler, National Socialist president of the Reich Chamber for the Visual Arts, organized an exhibition entitled *Degenerate Art* (*Entartete Kunst*) which opened in Munich and then traveled to museums in thirteen cities throughout Germany, attracting more than three million visitors during its tour. Featuring 650 of the Nazi regime's confiscated paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures, the art was installed in Munich in an abandoned warehouse where it was mocked in the gallery space by painted slogans on the walls deriding the artworks as depraved and insane.¹⁶ Part of the public attraction, of course, was a desire to see what had been censored by the state – to witness what was "officially" taboo and forbidden.

While this exhibition is often referred to as the first major example of state-sponsored censorship within the context of an art museum, the case of the *Degenerate Art* show actually stands out as one of the most curious forms of museum censorship in modern history. For unlike most forms of museum censorship, the primary goal of the Nazi regime was not to hide these works from public view (or, as it were, to protect the masses from seeing potentially corrupting and dangerous visual images) but rather it was to make the art known and visible to the largest possible public. "German Volk," said Adolf Ziegler at the opening ceremony in Munich, "come and judge for yourselves!"¹⁷

This notion of censoring-by-showcasing turns on its head the normative model of the "good museum" which needs to be protected from the occasional aberrant idea or image that tries to worm its way into the civic standards of morality and decency for which the institution normally stands. In Nazi Germany, the sites which originally housed the "degenerate" art, and those which were chosen to exhibit the confiscated works in the national tour of the *Degenerate Art* exhibit were not cherished as museums that upheld proper national ideals and moral values, but rather these institutions were portrayed themselves as forces of "evil" that could be enlisted as fodder in a broader campaign of Nazi political propaganda.¹⁸

When the *Degenerate Art* exhibit traveled to the Dresden City Museum (Stadtmuseum), one entire gallery (the "Dresden Chamber of Horrors") was devoted to an arrangement of paintings that had earlier been confiscated from that museum. The Nazis singled out the long-since-fired museum director, Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, and accused him in the gallery's wall text of mispending the wages of the hard-working German people to purchase such "horror" and "trash." In this sense, the *Degenerate Art* exhibit might better be understood not only as a public censoring of individual works of art but more largely as "an assault on the museum and its power to consecrate works of art."¹⁹ This better explains, perhaps, how the censorship of art in Nazi Germany could occur not by hiding the offensive images but rather by exhibiting them for all to see. The censored works are made impotent (and therefore safe for the museumgoer to look at) because they are exhibited in a *deconsecrated* "temple" of art, where the museum has been stripped of its cultural and moral authority – to be replaced by the power and authority of the National Socialist state. In the case of Nazi Germany it was the museum, even more than any single artist or work of art, which was being censored and portrayed as the enemy of the people.

Museum censorship during the Culture Wars

In the decades following the *Degenerate Art* exhibit, those seeking to censor museum exhibitions have generally aimed not to expose the banned art but instead to conceal or make invisible to the public images or ideas that were deemed subversive, illegal, pornographic, blasphemous, unpatriotic or corrupting. The unintended consequence of these censorship campaigns, however, has been to showcase what might otherwise have gone largely unnoticed. As Judith Butler explains:

Certain kinds of efforts to restrict practices of representation in the hopes of reining in the imaginary, controlling the phantasmatic, end up reproducing and proliferating the phantasmatic in inadvertent ways, indeed, in ways that contradict the intended purposes of the restriction itself.²⁰

Censorship, in this sense, almost inevitably brings greater exposure to the targeted artist, exhibition topic or museum. And, at least for the museum, with that "critical" fame come new questions about responsibility to core mission and how to handle the increased public attention which accompanies controversy.

Beginning in the late 1980s in the United States, Congress became actively involved in censoring selected artists and some of their exhibited works which were perceived to be attacks on the faith or the firmly held convictions of large numbers of individuals or whole communities. One of the earliest works to catch the attention of lawmakers was Andres Serrano's 1987 *Piss Christ*, a large-format photograph of a plastic crucifix submerged in a luminous bath containing the artist's urine. The image, which was punitively singled out and brought up for public inspection on the floor of the United States Congress, was denounced as blasphemous "garbage" and "trash." At stake was a debate on the appropriateness of using public government funding to subsidize a work of art (and then later to exhibit it in a museum gallery) that went against a majority viewpoint on morality and values of decency. Although not funded directly by federal appropriations, Andres Serrano had been awarded \$15,000 for *Piss Christ* which was selected as a winner of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art's "Awards in the Visual Arts," a competition that was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Eventually, a host of conservative lawmakers, including the Republican Senator from North Carolina, Jesse Helms, rallied around the contentious photograph as a launching pad for a broader attack on the perceived liberalism of the National Endowment for the Arts and the complicity of American museums in exhibiting inappropriate or obscene art.

The censorship campaign that began in 1987 with *Piss Christ* reached a fever pitch just a few years later with an attack on photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's retrospective exhibition *The Perfect Moment*. After an enthusiastic reception at Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art (which organized the exhibition) and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the exhibit was scheduled to travel to Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art on 1 July 1989. The targeting of Andres Serrano's photograph in 1987 had generated a much more systematic attack by a coalition of Christian groups and conservative elected officials waging war on government sponsorship of "obscene" art. Fearing negative publicity and the potential loss of federal appropriations, the Corcoran Gallery of Art cancelled the

Mapplethorpe exhibition three weeks before it was scheduled to open. The Corcoran's abrupt decision sparked a national debate (both within the museum community and in the broader art world) on censorship, public funding of the arts and the role of the museum in upholding First Amendment principles and the doctrine of free speech.

On 8 April 1990, *The Perfect Moment* opened at Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center. Those who sought to challenge the museum's decision to host an exhibit that included sexually explicit and homoerotic images chose Cincinnati (known for its conservative values and politics) as the city in which to take "a final stand." Seven of the photographs in the exhibition were deemed to be obscene by Cincinnati law enforcement officials. Five of the seven photographs depicted men in sadomasochistic poses; two of the photographs showed children with their genitals exposed. Both the Contemporary Arts Center and its director, Dennis Barrie, were tried on two counts – pandering obscenity and illegally displaying the images of nude children.²¹ If convicted, the museum faced up to \$10,000 in fines, and Dennis Barrie faced up to a year in jail and \$2,000 in fines. At the trial, a number of expert witnesses, including the exhibit curator, Judith Kardon, were brought in by the defense to "explain" to the jury why the seven Mapplethorpe photographs which were on trial should not be classified as either child pornography or sadomasochistic pornography but rather that they should be understood purely as art. The notorious image of one man urinating into another's mouth was characterized by one defense witness "as a classical composition."²² At the end of the trial, the jury determined that the works in question were "obscene"; however, they could not establish that the works had no artistic merit.²³ Dennis Barrie and the Contemporary Arts Center were thus acquitted on all charges.

Although the Mapplethorpe trial in Cincinnati was an important mandate for museums to uphold free expression – even under the most extreme pressure from organized interest groups and community outrage – it was a bittersweet victory for the image of museums in America. One of the unpredicted outcomes of the trial was that it served to further entrench the public's perception of museums as being out of touch with the general public and operating according to their own mandate as infallible arbiters of taste and adjudicators of cultural values. As Arthur Danto has suggested in his thoughtful reflections on the trial of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs, the jurors were demoralized by the art-historical rhetoric and what they perceived to be the erudition of the defense expert witnesses. Under the spell of persuasive arguments made by a parade of credentialed art historians and museum curators, the jurors were bewildered and compelled to agree with these authorities that the images of "men with objects stuck in their anuses" were merely "figure studies." They were convinced by the experts not to trust their own (untrained) eyes – an insinuation that they would really never understand art. Danto concludes by saying, "It was testimony of a kind that created a gap between the populace and works of art – a gap that the NEA had been established to close."²⁴ So, in the end, victory for the Contemporary Arts Center in a Cincinnati courtroom reinforced a negative popular conception of the hierarchical authority of the museum – an institution perceived to possess unquestioned moral power and the unilateral right to determine what is "right" for the consumption of the museumgoing public.

From censorship to self-censorship

By the time both the Mapplethorpe controversy had unwound, and the exhibit had completed its national tour, the pundits had already predicted that one of the long-term impacts of the trial would be the start of a far more cautious environment within which curatorial decisions would be made. Controversy, in the future, would be avoided rather than embraced. In the film *Dirty Pictures*, a made-for-television docudrama chronicling the events surrounding the trial of *The Perfect Moment*, the character of Monty Lobb, Jr. (president of Citizens for Community Values and one of the leaders of the protest against the Contemporary Arts Center) explains, in the final moments of the film, the prosecution's "hidden" victory in the case against the museum:

Our victory was won long before that trial; our verdict is in our power to bring prosecution. All across the country these days, people are much more careful about the kind of artworks they show in their museums and galleries. Nobody wants to come up against what Dennis Barrie went through. We sent that message out there.²⁵

Artists and curators alike have indeed taken the pre-emptive measures of self-censorship in an attempt to avoid the legal and financial complications of litigious actions against museums and their staff. Many of these internal decisions – exhibition cancellations, the removal of specific objects or the editing of exhibition narratives to downplay or excise particular points of view – have often been controversial in their own right.

In the fall of 1999, for example, the newly appointed director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, British art historian Graham W.J. Beal, abruptly closed its exhibition *van Gogh's Ear* two days after it had opened to the public. The show, curated by Michigan artist Jef Bourgeois, was the first installment of a series of twelve one-week exhibits that were to highlight contemporary art of the past century. The exhibit was full of cliché shock art, including a pile of human excrement, a toy Jesus wearing a condom, a film of a woman taking a shower while menstruating, a jar of urine identified as that used by Andres Serrano to create *Piss Christ* and a Brazil nut held by industrial clamps under a magnifying glass accompanied by the label "Nigger Toe."²⁶ Having been previously unaware of the exhibit's content, museum director Beal (only two months into his new leadership position) justified his choice to shut down the exhibit "as an act of cultural stewardship, not censorship."²⁷

Framing his decision as an issue of curatorial judgment, Beal noted in an interview that "the museum is always selecting works of art, and selection is not censorship." Artist/curator Bourgeois, however, interpreted the cancellation of his show as an act of museum self-censorship – since there were no cries for censorship coming from outside the museum, and two days into the show not a single public complaint had even been voiced against the content of the exhibition. "The show was closed and censored from the inside," said Bourgeois, "which is a new and disturbing twist for the art world."²⁸ And, along a similar vein, David Walsh, reporting for the World Socialist Web Site (www.wsws.org), accused Graham Beal of carrying out "a

preemptive strike against the exhibit, as a means of demonstrating to potential right-wing critics and wealthy donors that the museum plans to do nothing to rock the cultural or intellectual boat. It was a shameful act."²⁹

The case of the Detroit Institute of Arts' decision to retroactively cancel the show raises important questions about power and hierarchy in the museum's new role as community voice. Where does the power of self-censorship belong? Where are the boundaries of inclusiveness and free expression? Should the public always be allowed to make its own decisions about the suitability or appropriateness of an exhibit's content? And how does the museum navigate as both arbiter of quality and taste, on the one hand, and neutral disseminator of knowledge and visual culture, on the other?

No sooner had the buzz died down about the censorship of *van Gogh's Ear*, the Detroit Institute of Arts opened its doors to the traveling international exhibition *van Gogh: Face to Face*, described in the press release as the "first comprehensive exhibition of portraits by one of the best-known painters in the history of art."³⁰ The news coverage had suddenly shifted from an intense moment of hand-wringing about the disenfranchisement of contemporary art and artists in Bourgeois's shuttered exhibit, to a frenzy of media hype surrounding the greatest art franchise of our day – the Post-Impressionist blockbuster show. The museum drew public attention from both exhibits. While *van Gogh's Ear* was seen by virtually nobody (but widely commented on in the press for its sudden disappearance), *van Gogh: Face to Face* attracted 315,000 visitors – the largest attendance in the museum's history.³¹

The two "van Gogh" exhibits which appeared (and, as it were, disappeared) back-to-back at the Detroit Institute of Arts offer interesting insight into the complexities and nuances of museum self-censorship. The controversial "van Gogh" exhibit was quickly roped off from public view because the newly appointed director feared public outrage from an exhibit that showcased intentionally challenging contemporary art meant to provoke its viewers. But one could argue that hidden within director Beal's decision to close *van Gogh's Ear* was also an awareness of the power of corporate sponsorship and the potential public revenue from *van Gogh: Face to Face* which was scheduled to open on the heels of Bourgeois's "offensive" show. In this sense, the museum was protecting its future income-generating populist blockbuster from any potential backlash or contamination caused by what it perceived as a low-revenue, marginal, intellectualist distraction.

The outrage with which the censorship of *van Gogh's Ear* was met by Bourgeois and others in both Detroit and the broader art world³² was perhaps exacerbated by the fact that the censored "van Gogh" was followed immediately by a blockbuster "van Gogh." It was as though the museum was now in the business of administering to the public a carefully monitored regime of visual images that it deemed appropriate for public consumption. While the more challenging, push-button contemporary art was judged by the museum's "curatorial" standards to be too dangerous for the public to encounter, saccharine Post-Impressionist masterworks were considered palatable and safe. The public perception of the museum's hierarchical authority was underscored by the van Gogh blockbuster, in which risk-taking had been filtered out of the museum's mission in an effort to better control public reaction and community satisfaction.

From Sensation to *Lords of the Samurai*: censorship and the blockbuster

If we've learned one thing from the Culture Wars it is that controversy attracts attention, attention begets crowds and crowds bring euphoria, money and new audiences to museums. In the decade following the media frenzy surrounding *The Perfect Moment*, some museums sought to capitalize on the threat of censorship by purposely provoking their constituents through the exhibition of controversial images or divisive topics. Going against the prediction that the Mapplethorpe trial would inhibit museums from taking on risky topics and would temper their appetite for potentially offending one of their constituent groups, some museums chose to test community standards as a way of promoting their institution and attracting more visitors. In its newly discovered role as community irritant (rather than operating under the authority of its older image as community standard bearer), these museums hoped to generate new streams of revenue by transforming lackluster exhibitions into blockbuster shows. Perhaps the best-known example of this is the notoriously contentious exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, held at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in late 1999.³³

Drawn from advertising magnate Charles Saatchi's expansive collection of contemporary British art, the exhibition highlighted the work of some of the most provocative artists of this new generation. Included in the show were Damien Hirst's dead shark and a pig suspended in formaldehyde-filled glass cases; Jake and Dinos Chapman's fiberglass sculpture of naked little girls, some with penises instead of noses and anuses instead of mouths; Mark Quinn's self-portrait bust made from his own frozen blood; and Chris Ofili's painting *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996) in which the central figure of a black Madonna is surrounded by floating "angels" made from porn magazine cutouts of women's genitalia, and to which the artist affixed a clump of shellacked elephant dung to her right breast. The Brooklyn Museum, Michael Kammen notes, marketed the exhibit as a kind of "freak" show, with a tongue-in-cheek warning label at the entrance that cautioned "the public that the exhibit might cause nausea, vomiting, and other forms of personal discomfort – hype virtually certain to attract people eager to test their own tolerance for terrible and disgusting sights."³⁴

The museum's role as *agent provocateur* was a huge success. *Sensation* thrived on its own sensationalism, provoking a loudly trumpeted (but unsuccessful) legal battle spearheaded by New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to censor and close the exhibition, to freeze museum funding and even to evict the museum from city-owned property. These issues have been dealt with extensively elsewhere,³⁵ but what is of interest here is how *Sensation* can be framed as an alternative model to the more conventional museum practice of generating increased turnstyle revenue from the most middle-of-the-road exhibition – the blockbuster show. Normally, the blockbuster eschews controversial or provocative topics in favor of the most familiar, intellectually vacuous and crowd-pleasing subjects and genres – anything from Vermeer to Versace and from King Tut to Harley Davidson.³⁶ But *Sensation* turned this practice on its head by deliberately courting censorship and controversy with a kind of "bring 'em on" bravado. While there may be room to debate the professional ethics of the practice, the strategy was largely successful in drawing attention to a museum with dwindling attendance and attracting a new, socially engaged

audience. *Sensation* helped the museum build exactly the kind of visitorship they wanted. Today, according to the *Washington Post*, the Brooklyn Museum has “the single youngest audience for a general fine arts museum in the country, and the most diverse.”³⁷

If the typical blockbuster exhibition lies at the opposite end of the spectrum from the exhibition of the radical and unorthodox, it can also be noted that, on occasion, the controversial and the conventional bump into each other, and, in the process, generate a new kind of dialogue that transcends the museum’s voice and creates an alternative space for debate and learning. In order to examine this process, let us turn our attention for a moment to the Asian Art Museum in downtown San Francisco which, in June 2009, opened its doors to a heavily publicized blockbuster exhibit entitled *Lords of the Samurai*.³⁸ Described by the *San Francisco Sentinel* as “one of the most spectacular exhibits ever assembled by its distinguished curators,” the exhibition featured over 160 objects of Samurai-related costume and material culture from the Hosokawa family collection and the Eisei-Bunko Museum in Tokyo.³⁹

Although praised in the mainstream press, and widely touted as a must-see popular public attraction, the exhibition was not without critics. The museum was faulted for its overt appeal to crass commercialism – the Samurai helmet, for example, that was featured in the exhibition poster and billboards bore an uncanny resemblance to Darth Vader (of *Star Wars*), and the exhibition title itself was a not so thinly veiled allusion to both Michael Flatley’s wildly successful stage show *Lord of the Dance* and J.R.R. Tolkien’s equally popular *The Lord of the Rings*.⁴⁰ The museum also dispatched throughout the Bay Area a character dressed in full Samurai armor and regalia, handing out brochures and posing for photographs.

In addition to the general critiques of commercialism and accusations of surface-depth scholarship, the *Lords of the Samurai* was also targeted by an anonymous Bay Area “guerilla art collective” that engages in “cultural interventions” as a means of challenging the misrepresentation of Japanese culture. In response to this exhibition, the artist group created a parody web site (hosted on the domain www.asiansartmuseum.org) which was designed to look exactly like the official web site of the Asian Art Museum. On the parody site, the artists criticize the Asian Art Museum for perpetuating a stereotype of Samurai culture which glorifies violence, obscures the history of Japan’s military imperialism and exoticizes Asian culture and identity by presenting the Samurai as cartoonish fantasy warriors and romanticized cultural Others.

In their intervention, the collective changed the original exhibition title to *Lord It’s the Samurai: Myth, Militarism and Man-Boy Love*, and redesigned the iconic poster by transforming the central image of the Samurai’s helmet into a Disney-like creature with Mickey Mouse ears. The parody also added a human nose to the warrior’s helmet, alluding (as the hypertext link on the web site explains) to a sixteenth-century practice by Japanese invaders of Korea to cut off enemy noses and ship them back to Japan packed in salt. Behind the helmet, in the parody graphic, rises an atomic mushroom cloud, “insinuating a grim linkage between the samurai ethos, modern Japan’s imperial hubris and America’s ongoing effort to steer world affairs by military means.”⁴¹ A version of the modified poster was also printed as a rack card and distributed throughout the Bay Area.

In response to this provocation, the Asian Art Museum created a new section on its web site with the header "Invitation to a Discussion."⁴² The museum's statement on the blog summarizes the key points of the artist group's intervention:

The Asian Art Museum has recently been at the receiving end of some biting humor. An anonymous person (or persons), concealing identity through a privacy service, has created an imitation of the Asian Art Museum website ... While the fake website is humorous in tone, it has a serious intent. It amounts to a critique of the museum's *Lords of the Samurai* exhibition, which it suggests romanticizes the samurai and glamorizes militarism ... It also makes the more general accusation that the museum panders to orientalist fantasies and stereotypes in order to profit from them monetarily (we are a nonprofit organization).

The blog concludes by saying, "Unfortunately, because of their anonymity, we can't directly engage the authors of the fake website. So let's use this blog post to discuss issues of stereotyping and orientalizing." Although the discussion prompted by the blog was quite thoughtful and interesting, it generated only a scant twenty-two responses which were posted between 27 August and 27 September 2009. The intervention itself, however, went "viral" and received wide-ranging media and internet attention, including an article by the art critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, an interview on Pacifica Radio, discussion on two Japanese Studies listservs and an extensive exchange of ideas on at least six different blogs.

Several months after the exhibition closed at the Asian Art Museum, the artists who had constructed the web site parody submitted their work to a juried "College Night" art competition held at the de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park.⁴³ The piece they entered consisted of the documentation of their *Lord It's the Samurai* intervention, with a reproduction of their modified exhibit poster, samples of the rack cards that had been distributed, photocopies of the internet and press coverage and an audio track playing a recorded loop of their radio interview. Their work was accepted in the juried show, but, as the artists installed the piece on the evening of the opening, senior museum staff reportedly interrupted their installation and asked them to remove a large portion of the work. The museum's official position was that the artists were installing more than the jury had seen or accepted, and that it was inappropriate for the de Young Museum to be associated with a critique of a local "sister" institution, the Asian Art Museum.⁴⁴ Although the de Young never made a public statement on the incident, the case begs us to ask: what are the ethical responsibilities of one museum to another? Some observers interpreted the whole incident as a calculated provocation by the artists who, they thought, were actually hoping to be censored by the museum. As one writer noted in her comments on the response section of the parody web site, "I think congratulations are in order! The museums' responses were perfectly scripted – how did you manage that? It was like a Borat or Bruno moment where you set them up to act badly. You are a genius."⁴⁵

Whether the artists were purposely courting censorship from the de Young Museum to enhance their point, or whether they simply wanted to present their critique of the *Samurai* blockbuster as a legitimate artistic intervention, the case

illustrates (albeit rather imperfectly) how institutional critique can generate a new level of dialogue on serious issues of representation. The Asian Art Museum did indeed take the critique seriously enough to engage with the anonymous voice of their critics through a web site blog, and the discussion that was generated on the parody site (which was both in favor of the intervention and against it) offered an opportunity for an alternative voice and a more nuanced and complicated reading of *Lords of the Samurai*. Rather than picketing the steps of the museum and demanding that the exhibit be closed, the intervention was a productive contribution that enhanced the exhibition narrative. Like Yazmany Arboleda's *The Keller Gates Project* (2008), this work, too, was about opening up discussion. As one member of the Bay Area artist collective concluded, "We see the success of this action in the debates that have already taken place among folks who might not ordinarily question these kinds of things." In the end, of course, just like the fuss created around so many other museum controversies, the intervention stimulated public interest in the exhibition itself. "This makes me want to go to the Asian Art Museum," declared one respondent on the *San Francisco Chronicle's* reader response page.⁴⁶

Censorship as dialogue

In the past few decades, museums have sometimes mounted exhibitions of works of art that were considered by previous generations of museum-goers to be offensive or obscene. These exhibitions provide an opportunity for the visitor to understand judgments of taste and evaluations of community standards as historically contextualized phenomena that change or evolve through time. Among the most ambitious of such projects was the Brooklyn Museum of Art's 1990 exhibition *The Play of the Unmentionable*, an installation in the museum's Grand Lobby by conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (see also Chapter 19).⁴⁷ The idea for the exhibition (which was itself funded by the National Endowment for the Arts) came as a direct response to the Culture Wars of the late 1980s and the government attacks on freedom of expression and artistic liberty.

Drawing on over a hundred objects from nearly every department of the Brooklyn Museum's permanent collection, the exhibition sought to showcase the triumph of art to survive (in the protective sanctuary of the museum) the vicissitudes of iconoclasm, racism, imperialism, and state censorship.⁴⁸ "Works that eventually come to be seen as masterpieces," Kosuth noted in an interview with Brooklyn Museum curator Charlotta Kotik, "do so precisely because they represented serious problems for their original audiences."⁴⁹ Using large-type quotations stenciled on the walls (a subtle reference, perhaps, to the defamatory slogans scrawled on the walls of the *Degenerate Art* show), the exhibit's narrative recounts a history of verbal and textual attacks upon the visual arts. In each case, the survival of the art, and its triumphant acceptance into the canon of great art, is attributed to the power of the museum to preserve works of art in spite of community outcry and demands for its removal or destruction. *The Play of the Unmentionable* sought to engage the museum visitor as an active agent in constructing an interpretation for the objects on view.⁵⁰ "Some people appear shocked that such things could ever appear in a museum," says Kosuth, "but my art has always tried to resist a position in which we're supposed to

be passive consumers of culture ... The viewers complete the work. They're the other half of the making of meaning."⁵¹

Building on the kind of project Joseph Kosuth undertook in 1990, museums more recently have continued, in different ways, to use art censorship as a "teaching moment" to engage audiences with critical thinking about community values, the question of obscenity versus art and the role of museum in upholding ethical practices. In 2004, for example, the Newport Art Museum, in collaboration with the Blink Gallery in downtown Newport, mounted a joint exhibition of Rhode Island artist Umberto ("Bert") Crenca's oil paintings and charcoal drawings of monster-like hermaphroditic creatures with grotesquely deformed penises and ovaries. The exhibition, *Frenetic Engineering: Censored/Uncensored*, included works by Crenca that the artist calls "post-apocalyptic, genetically reengineered figurative images."⁵² Both sexually explicit and graphically disturbing, these pieces, as Crenca describes them, are "ruminations on the de-evolution of the human species," inspired because he "started to see people as inside-out, with psychology of the human becoming distorted. The figure inside is a little different from the figure outside."⁵³ Or, put slightly differently, the figures are intended to capture Crenca's idea that "We're kind of fucked up."⁵⁴

Having agreed to show Crenca's work at the Newport Art Museum, curator Nancy Whipple Grinnell became uneasy when she laid eyes on some of the more outrageous images of monstrous erections and misshapen genitals that were to be included in the show. "We're a family-oriented, community-oriented museum," said Grinnell, "and we have a number of audiences to please and don't want to do something that some would find offensive."⁵⁵ Although she deemed some of the images "inappropriate for a museum setting," Grinnell wanted to find a workable compromise with the artist. The agreement reached between Grinnell and Crenca was that the museum would show full-sized giclée digital reproductions of the paintings and drawings with the "blush-inducing appendages pixilated out" while the Blink Gallery would show the unaltered originals.⁵⁶ Grants from two Rhode Island foundations footed the bill of \$14,000 to pay for the cost of reproductions and mounting. In addition, the exhibition featured a video documenting the process of arranging this exhibition of "controversial" material, and the museum hosted a panel discussion entitled "What is Offensive? Freedom of Expression in Museums and Galleries," in which Grinnell and Crenca, among others, participated. Thus the initial impulse toward censorship was transformed collaboratively by both artist and curator into a "teaching moment," and an opportunity for community reflection and discussion on the ethical complexities of exhibiting contemporary art. "We want to carry the dialogue about censorship forward," said Grinnell in the museum's press release, "by providing a forum for interaction between members of the public, artists and intellectuals who write and speak about the issue."⁵⁷

As part of this trend toward engaging museum censorship as a topic of discussion, other exhibitions have been organized specifically to encourage audience reflection on issues of freedom of expression. A traveling installation entitled *Exposing the Censor Within* invites people into a "confessional" booth where they are asked to write their story about self-censorship on an index card. Inside the booth, visitors are posed a series of questions: "Were there times you were afraid to speak up?" "Have you changed what you've written for fear it would get you into trouble?" or "Have you ever stopped yourself from saying something because you thought it

might be rude or insulting?" and "Are you glad you stopped yourself?" The completed cards, without author attribution, are then "processed into site-specific poster portraits of self-censorship." The exhibition was first installed at the San Mateo County History Museum in April 2007, and then traveled to the Redwood City Library in March 2007, and eventually to the College Art Association annual conference in Dallas in February 2008. The self-censorship stories that were gathered on the index cards and exhibited in the poster installations are published on line at the web site of the National Coalition Against Censorship.⁵⁸ The web site also continues to accept new self-censorship stories which can be posted anonymously to the site, and a version of the exhibit can also be found in the 3D virtual world of Second Life.⁵⁹

Finally, some museums and galleries have tried to engage with censorship by opening up a dialogue that mocks prudishness and openly questions the very nature of moral indignation. A recent exhibition of "fine art nudes and erotica," entitled *Censored*, at the artDC gallery in Hyattsville, Maryland, sought to challenge the taboo nature of human nudity and sexuality through irony and humor. "Our intention," says exhibition organizer Renee Azcra Woodward, "is to poke fun at the long-running practice of moral and social censorship of art by covering any visible genitalia in each work with 'post-it' notes." Visitors, she goes on to say, "will of course be encouraged to take a sneak peak at what's going on underneath the notes."⁶⁰ The exhibition, which was intended to draw attention to the "lack of erotic art shows" in the DC area, also offered a "witty approach to a very serious subject."⁶¹ In the end, of course, it is hard to assess the didactic impact of such a project, but the organizers did conclude that "there were more lower 'post-its' peeled back than tops."⁶²

What all these exhibits/projects point to (*The Play of the Unmentionable; Frenetic Engineering: Censored/Uncensored; The Censor Within; and artDC's Censored*) is that censorship itself can shift from a dangerous and taboo topic that should be avoided at all cost to a subject of inquiry that, when broached directly, poses instructive challenges and compelling questions for all participants in the museum world – museum administrators, curators, artists and the general public. Museums involved in these sorts of dialogues acknowledge that censorship (and self-censorship) exists all around us in contexts or instances we might not always be aware of. By focusing on censorship as a form of negotiation in which different interests are weighed and measured, the museum or gallery moves beyond a monolithic view of censorship as something imposed from "above" to a multi-dimensional view of censorship as a mediated process which can be explored objectively and even sometimes woven into an exhibition and its narrative framework.

Censorship in an age of shared authority

A recent article by Philip Kennicott, culture critic for *The Washington Post*, points out that since 2001 American museums have been the subject of far fewer controversies and censorship debacles than during the Culture Wars of the 1980s and 1990s. "Over the past decade, small controversies occasionally unsettled the museum world, but they went away quickly, and few gained enough traction to become national issues."⁶³ The author goes on to ask how one explains the decline in public outrage against museums in the first decade of the new century:

What happened? Was it a cultural or historic change? Self-censorship or a more subtle shift in what museums were exhibiting? Did audiences grow up, or were they just inured to radical art and provocative historical revision?⁶⁴

The answer, according to Kennicott's article, can be found in a blend of several elements. In part, the audience has been desensitized to inflammatory issues by the internet, the media and, in particular, cable television which lowered the bar for what was considered obscene or outrageous. In part, the events of 9/11 deflected attention away from a symbolic Culture War against an internal enemy to the "War on Terror," a real military operation against a new common (and external) enemy. In part, the museum controversies of the 1980s and 1990s have now shifted to other venues – debates over monuments and memorials such as the contentious rebuilding of the World Trade Center site. But the final reason offered by Philip Kennicott for the decline in public outrage against museums is perhaps the most compelling. He suggests that museums have responded to a younger and more diverse generation of museum audiences by breaking down the hierarchical authority of the traditional museum and opening up a space for dialogue and exchange that takes place both within the museum itself and on the internet. "Museums have become more open forums ... New museums specialize in groups and topics that were not always well served by established institutions, and the grand old museums that once dictated much of the cultural dialogue have become more attentive and diverse in what they present."⁶⁵ This new opportunity for exchange, one could argue, deflects public dissatisfaction with any given museum decision about what to exhibit or not to exhibit – and thereby short-circuits cries for censorship before they can even take root.

In her 2010 book *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon lays out a new paradigm for both individual and community engagement within the framework of a shared authority in contemporary museum culture.⁶⁶ Drawing on the concept of a museum as audience-centered institution (i.e., John Cotton Dana, Elaine Heumann Gurian and Stephen Weil) and the notion that visitors construct their own meaning (i.e., George Hein, John Falk and Lynn Dierking), Simon presents a new, dynamic model of participation in which museums enable visitor dialogue (both amongst themselves and with the museum staff) and create the necessary framework for communities of meaning to come together and generate their own agenda. Much of the participation that Simon highlights (and anticipates) occurs as a result of specific steps taken by the museum with interactive design techniques and new strategies of engagement that promote visitor learning, recreation and exploration. The participatory museum is a "place where people are invited on an ongoing basis to contribute, to collaborate, to co-create, and to co-opt the experiences and content in a designed, intentional environment."⁶⁷

The principle of participation is not only an effective way to promote knowledge formation and visitor engagement, it also presents new possibilities for thinking about censorship and self-censorship in the museum. How might the model of the participatory museum – with its emphasis on shared authority and institutional transparency – deal with the threat or potential of censorship more effectively than an older, hierarchal model of the museum – with its emphasis on academic and intellectual authority and its aversion toward transparency and the unencumbered

sharing of information about management and operational details? Museum censorship in the United States escalated into a national frenzy at the height of the Culture Wars in the 1980s and 1990s when institutional authority was still an important mandate in the construction of knowledge and values in museums. Many of the most vitriolic censorship battles in that period were caused by the perception held by outsiders (whether they be politicians, religious or civic leaders or community activists) that the museum was an arrogant institution profoundly out of touch with its constituents and its community of visitors. In an op-ed piece published by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* following the trial of *The Perfect Moment*, Monty Lobb, Jr., president of Cincinnati Citizens for Community Values, captures the spirit of the public's attitude toward the hierarchical authority of the museum:

The Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) sanctimoniously acts as if I and everyone else must silently accept their every artistic fling without public or private comment or criticism. What's more, they expect me to pay for it, or at least part of it. With all the demagoguery about free speech, rights and "censorship," somewhere on the way to the art show CAC forgot my rights.⁶⁸

By opening up a dialogue and engaging its dissenters (as did the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco against its charges of racism and cultural misrepresentation), museums can weave a chorus of disapproval into the very fabric of an exhibition's narrative and its didactic goals.⁶⁹ The complexities and contradictions that are often glossed over in the blockbuster exhibition can become a platform for discussion in other exhibits to which public interest would be drawn not because these issues are easily palatable but, on the contrary, because they offer food for critical thought.

Museum censorship and time

Museum censorship can take many forms – from overt, restrictive government actions to block the exhibition of certain images or ideas, to the most subtle and covert forms of manipulation, alteration or self-editing. In almost all cases, however, what has been banned or subjected to censorship generally survives the incident and reappears years (or even generations) later to tell a different story – a story about values and morality in a different time; a story about the capacity of museums to protect what is controversial so that it can be reassessed with the wisdom of hindsight. Consider the fact that in 1938 the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts confiscated from the New State Gallery (Neue Staatsgalerie) in Munich Vincent van Gogh's *Self-portrait* of 1888; the canvas was then sold at auction in 1939, along with hundreds of other works, in order to cleanse Germany of its "degenerate" art and to finance the Nazi war machine. In 2000, the very same picture was showcased at the Detroit Institute of Arts in its blockbuster exhibition *van Gogh: Face to Face*, where it now stood as a symbol not of deviance but of normative splendor. In the sixty years that had elapsed since its confiscation in Munich the very same painting had been transformed from a target of state censorship to a celebrated icon of the art-historical canon. The popularity of van Gogh's self-portrait today stands in sharp contrast to

the controversial contemporary works of art from *van Gogh's Ear* – an exhibition that had been censored just months before by the same institution in which the infamous self-portrait now hung.⁷⁰

Seeing the van Gogh painting, few visitors to the Detroit Institute of Arts would have likely connected the image to its history of censorship under the regime of the Third Reich. But what about images from the more recent past whose legacies of censorship are better known? Would it not be difficult today to look at the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe without associating them with their censorship in the early 1990s? Does censorship become part of an image's permanent identity? And, if so, what is the responsibility of the museum to either preserve this aspect of an object's past or to rehabilitate it to its original context and its "untainted" meaning? Writing about his first "innocent" experience in seeing the Mapplethorpe photographs at the Whitney Museum of American Art before the censorship controversy erupted, Arthur Danto laments, "It is a matter of some sadness to me that no one, ever again, will be able to see Mapplethorpe's work in that way."⁷¹

In the heat of the moment many censorship debates generate more sparks than light. These sporadic episodes of collective outrage often fail to enlighten us immediately about the broader nature of taste and values in society or about the role (and limits) of a museum to represent its constituents and their different points of view. The challenge for museums today, then, is to find a balance between their institutional mission to educate broadly a diverse and engaged museum audience and to better deal with the occasional and unexpected outbursts of community outrage that sometimes provoke cries for censorship. Rather than trying to avoid controversy altogether, or engage in the kind of self-censorship that dampens the palette of intellectual discourse, museums need to find creative ways to connect with audiences about issues of censorship and to better explore the range of judgments of taste and value that coexist in diverse communities. Taking a page from Yazmany Arboleda's *The Keller Gates Project*, museums might sometimes need to engage directly with censorship itself by preparing their audience to better understand it by making it the subject of their discourse, rather than being engaged by censorship when they least expect it as unprepared subjects of public outrage.

Notes

- 1 Museum censorship is a vast and complicated topic, the scope of which far exceeds the limitations of space for this chapter. This chapter highlights representative case studies as a way to suggest some of the intellectual and ethical issues involved in museum censorship, both in the past and present. For further research on this topic, and to keep up with the most current cases of museum censorship, I would suggest the following web sites: National Coalition Against Censorship and The File Room, which maintains a virtual archive of censorship cases from around the world. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.ncac.org> (accessed 12 May 2010); <http://www.thefileroom.org> (accessed 12 May 2010). One of the most comprehensive books on the history of censorship in general is D. Jones (ed.), *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. For an excellent discussion of the history of museum controversies (including cases of censorship) see S. C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum from the Enola Gay to Sensation*, New York: New York University Press, 1999. And for a history of censorship in the arts,

- see E. C. Childs (ed.) *Suspended License: Censorship and the Visual Arts*, Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997.
- 2 T. Hoving, interview with Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, 1993. Reprint of original transcript on 11 December 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.npr.mobi/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=121335708> (accessed 10 February 2010).
 - 3 Arboleda credits his inspiration for the storefront venue to Richard Prince's 1983 installation of *Spiritual America* (a semi-pornographic nude image of ten-year-old child star Brooke Shields, which Prince had rephotographed) in a rented storefront at 5 Rivington Street in lower Manhattan. See A. M. Gingera, *Richard Prince's Second House*, Parkett 72, 2005, p. 116. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.parkettart.com/library/72/pdf/prince.pdf> (accessed 16 May 2010).
 - 4 S. Chan, "'Assassination' Artist is Questioned and Released," *New York Times*, 4 June 2008. Online. Available HTTP: <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/06/04/police-shut-down-assassination-art-exhibition/> (accessed 15 May 2010).
 - 5 It is unclear whether the artist also intended the exhibitions as a kind of word-play on George Bernard Shaw's famous quip, "Assassination is the extreme form of censorship."
 - 6 This is a reference to shock-jock Don Imus's controversial comment in which he described (during his radio broadcast on 4 April 2007) some of the players on the Rutgers University women's basketball team as "rough girls" and "nappy headed hos." After receiving sharp criticism from the NCAA and activist Reverend Al Sharpton, CBS Radio canceled *Imus in the Morning* and heeded the requests of protesters to fire its host, Don Imus. See D. Carr, "Networks Condemn Remarks by Imus," *New York Times*, 7 April 2007. Online. Available HTTP: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A07E4D8173FF934A35757COA9619C8B63&sc=4&sq=imus+nappy&st=nyt> (accessed 15 May 2010).
 - 7 D. Segal, "A Young Artist who Mostly Draws Attention," *Washington Post*, Style section, 6 June 2008, p. 1. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/05/AR2008060504056.html> (accessed 16 May 2010).
 - 8 J. Lee "'Assassination' Artist's Trail of Deception," *New York Times*, 5 June 2008. Online. Available HTTP: <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/06/05/assassination-artists-trail-of-deception/> (accessed 16 May 2010).
 - 9 The "piece" consisted of domain names purchased for the fictitious galleries <http://www.naomigatesgallery.com> and <http://www.leahkellergallery.com>, as well as websites for the two fictitious exhibitions in which Arboleda inserted digital images of his own art into photographs he had taken of real gallery spaces <http://www.theassassinationofbarack-obama.com> and <http://www.theassassinationofhillaryclinton.com>. The so-called exhibitions neither existed in the fictitious galleries, nor were they ever installed in the rented storefront venue. All that ever existed of the exhibits were the fake installation shots on the web sites and the provocative titles that were stenciled on the storefront window. Had the authorities not intervened to demand the removal of the word "assassination" from the exhibit titles, it is unclear from the reporting on the case whether Arboleda actually had any "real" objects to install in the show, or whether everything existed simply as digital imagery that were inserted into the photographs posted on the project web sites.
 - 10 S. Duclos, "Op-ed: Artwork calling Barack Obama's Children 'Nappy Headed Hos' is Offensive," *Digital Journal*, 13 June 2008. Online. Available HTTP: www.digitaljournal.com/article/256083 (accessed 15 April 2010).
 - 11 Reader response to S. Chan, "'Assassination' Artist is Questioned and Released," *New York Times*, 4 June 2008. Posted 4 June 2008 by "chutney28." Online. Available HTTP: <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/06/04/police-shut-down-assassination-art-exhibition/#comment-66871> (accessed 15 May 2010).
 - 12 Reader response to Duclos, "Op-ed: Artwork calling Barack Obama's Children 'Nappy Headed Hos' is Offensive." Posted 14 June 2008 by "666divine." Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/256083> (accessed 15 May 2010).
 - 13 Lee, "'Assassination' Artist's Trail of Deception."
 - 14 Y. Arboleda, "The Art Offends," *Huffington Post Online*, 29 June 2008. Online. Available HTTP: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/yazmany-arboleda/the-art-offends_b_108281.html (accessed 15 April 2010).

- 15 S. Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-garde in Nazi Germany*, New York: Abrams, 1991.
- 16 For an excellent discussion of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, see C. Zuschlag, "'Chambers of Horror' and 'Degenerate Art': On Censorship in the Visual Arts in Nazi Germany," in *Childs Suspended License*, pp. 210–234.
- 17 N. Levi, "'Judge for yourselves!' The *Degenerate Art* exhibition as political spectacle," *October* 85, 1998, p. 41.
- 18 This idea of the "good" museum and the "evil" museum is based in part on a discussion of related issues by Elaine Heumann Gurian. See E. H. Gurian, *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 7.
- 19 Levi, "'Judge for yourselves!'" p. 57.
- 20 J. Butler, "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess," *Differences* 2: 2, 1990, p. 108. Quoted in R. Meyer, "The Jesse Helms Theory of Art," *October* 104, 2003, p. 134.
- 21 I. Wilkerson, "Cincinnati Jury Acquits Museum in Mapplethorpe Obscenity Case," *New York Times*, 6 October 1990. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/06/us/cincinnati-jury-acquits-museum-in-mapplethorpe-obscenity-case.html> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 22 A. Danto, "Censorship and Subsidy in the Arts," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 47: 1, 1993, p. 38.
- 23 Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, "Imperfect Moments: Mapplethorpe and Censorship Twenty Years Later," news release, February 2009. Online. Available HTTP: http://www.icaphila.org/news/pdf/mapplethorpe_pr.pdf (accessed 5 May 2010).
- 24 Danto, "Censorship and Subsidy in the Arts," p. 38.
- 25 *Dirty Pictures*, Frank Pierson (dir.), MGM Television, 2000.
- 26 C. Abe, "Creating a Sensation in American Museum: Art until Now, van Gogh's Ear." Online. Available HTTP: http://jefbourgeau.com/Jane_Speaks%20creating_a_sensation.htm (accessed 5 May 2010); R. Meredith, "Another Art Battle, as Detroit Museum Closes an Exhibit Early," *New York Times*, 23 November 1999. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/11/23/us/another-art-battle-as-detroit-museum-closes-an-exhibit-early.html> (accessed 5 May 2010).
- 27 K. Kersten, "An Act not of Censorship but of Stewardship," *Star Tribune*, 8 December 1999. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.americanexperiment.org/publications/1999/19991208kersten.php> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 28 Quoted in R. Meredith, "Another Art Battle."
- 29 D. Walsh "Detroit Museum Controversy: Censored Artist defends his Exhibit," 10 December 1999. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/dec1999/dia-d10.shtml> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 30 Press release, *van Gogh: Face to Face*, 2000–01. Online. Available HTTP: <http://philadelphia.about.com/library/weekly/blvangoghpressrelease.htm> (accessed 16 May 2010).
- 31 Detroit Institute of Arts web site, "Museum, Attendance." Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.dia.org/about/facts.aspx> (accessed 10 May 2010).
- 32 J. Bourgeau, transcript of interview with K. Paulson, *Speaking Freely*, PBS television, 12 September 2000. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?id=13503> (accessed 10 May 2010).
- 33 *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2 October 1999–9 January 2000.
- 34 M. Kammen, *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture*, New York: Knopf, 2006, p. 294.
- 35 The exhibition produced a barrage of publications analyzing almost every aspect of the controversy. Some of this literature has been pulled together in L. Rothfield (ed.), *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001. Also, see C. Becker, *Surpassing the Spectacle: Global Transformations and the Changing Politics of Art*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, pp. 43–58; Dubin, *Displays of Power*, pp. 246–76; A. Fraser, "A 'Sensation' Chronicle," *Social Text*, No. 67, 2001, pp. 127–56.

- 36 R. E. Spear, "Editorial. Art History and the 'Blockbuster' Exhibition," *Art Bulletin* 68: 3, 1986, pp. 358–59.
- 37 P. Kennicott "After an Age of Rage, Museums have Mastered the Display of Commotional Restraint," *Washington Post*, 31 May 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/28/AR2009052804119.html> (accessed 14 May 2010).
- 38 Asian Art Museum web site, "Lords of the Samurai." Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.asianart.org/Samurai.htm> (accessed 14 May 2010).
- 39 S. Martinfield, "Exhibition Explores the Many Sides of Famed Japanese Warrior Elite," *San Francisco Sentinel*, 12 June 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.sanfranciscosentinel.com/?p=30916> (accessed 17 May 2010).
- 40 Asians Art Museum web site. Online. Available HTTP: <http://asiansart.wordpress.com/2009/09/03/a-museum-curators-response/> (accessed 14 May 2010).
- 41 K. Baker, "Samurai Parody takes Jab at Asian Art Museum," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 September 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/09/21/DDID19060Q.DTL> (accessed 10 May 2010).
- 42 Asian Art Museum blog, "Invitation to a Discussion," 27 August 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.asianart.org/blog/index.php/2009/08/27/invitation-to-a-discussion/> (accessed 14 May 2010).
- 43 Asians Art Museum web site, Online. Available HTTP: <http://asiansart.wordpress.com/2009/11/23/censored-by-de-young-museum/#comment-79> (accessed 14 May 2010).
- 44 This account of the events surrounding the de Young's alleged censoring of the asiansart-museum.org collective is based on reporting provided by the artists themselves on their web site. There is no publicly available account of the incident from the de Young Museum staff. See "Censored by de Young Museum." Online. Available HTTP: <http://asiansart.wordpress.com/2009/11/23/censored-by-de-young-museum/> (accessed 14 May 2010).
- 45 Asians Art Museum, "Censored by de Young," 23 November 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <http://asiansart.wordpress.com/2009/11/23/censored-by-de-young-museum/> (accessed 17 May 2010).
- 46 Reader comment by "jonvn" on K. Baker, "Samurai Parody takes Jab at Asian Art Museum," 22 September 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article/comments/view?f=/c/a/2009/09/21/DDID19060Q.DTL&plckFindCommentKey=CommentKey:584df82af45a-46bb-b872-baa162357e2e> (accessed 17 May 2010).
- 47 *The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable*, curated by Joseph Kosuth. Brooklyn Museum of Art, 27 September–31 December 1990.
- 48 R. Smith, "Art View: 'Unmentionable' Art through the Ages," *New York Times*, 11 November 1990. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/11/arts/art-view-unmentionable-art-through-the-ages.html> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 49 D. Freedberg, *The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum*, New York: New Press in association with Brooklyn Museum, 1992, p. 26.
- 50 G. Glueck, "At Brooklyn Museum, an Artist surveys the Objectionable," *New York Times*, 17 December 1990. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/17/arts/at-brooklyn-museum-an-artist-surveys-the-objectionable.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 51 Freedberg, *The Play of the Unmentionable*, p. 28.
- 52 Newport Art Museum, "New Show at Newport Art Museum enters Discourse on Censorship in the Arts," April 2004. My thanks to Nancy Whipple Grinnell for providing me with a copy of the exhibition's press release.
- 53 Quoted in J. Margolis, "The Education of Umberto Crenca," *Democratic Vistas Profiles*, No. 1, Chicago: Center for Art Policy, Columbia College Chicago, n.d., p. 2. Online. Available HTTP: http://www.colum.edu/administrative_offices/Academic_Research/PDF_folder/umberto_crenca.pdf (accessed 15 April 2010).
- 54 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 2.
- 55 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
- 56 B. Rodriguez, "Bridging the Gap: Umberto Crenca's Frenetic Engineering: Censored/Uncensored," *Providence Phoenix*, 14–20 May 2004. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www>.

- providencephoenix.com/art/other_stories/documents/03861260.asp (accessed 24 March 2010).
- 57 Newport Art Museum, "New Show at Newport Art Museum Enters Discourse on Censorship in the Arts," April 2004.
- 58 National Coalition Against Censorship, "Exposing the Censor Within." Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.ncac.org/censorwithin> (accessed 16 May 2010).
- 59 Second Life web site. Online. Available HTTP: [http://shurl.com/secondlife/Commonwealth %20Island/104/81/30](http://shurl.com/secondlife/Commonwealth%20Island/104/81/30) (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 60 Censored, blog posted 9 March 2010. Online. Available HTTP: <http://artdc.com/> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 61 J. Cohen, "Censored," discussion forum, artdc.org, 13 March 2010. Online. Available HTTP: <http://artdc.org/forum/index.php?topic=13381.0> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 P. Kennicott, "After an Age of Rage."
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 N. Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/read/> (accessed 24 May 2010).
- 67 Ibid, p. 350.
- 68 M. Lobb, Jr., "The Side of Virtue and Dignity," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 30 March 1990. Reprinted in R. Bolton (ed.), *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts*, New York: New Press, 1992, pp. 161–62.
- 69 Cf. L. Bunch, "Embracing Controversy: Museum Exhibitions and the Politics of Change." *Public Historian* 14: 3, 1992, pp. 63–65.
- 70 It is also perhaps worth noting here that the Detroit Institute of Arts was the first U.S. museum to purchase a van Gogh canvas – his *Self-portrait* of 1887, which was acquired by the museum in January 1922. Detroit Institute of Arts web site, "The Cultural Gem of Detroit." Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.dia.org/about/history.aspx> (accessed 4 August 2010).
- 71 Danto, "Censorship and Subsidy in the Arts," p. 37. Both Kennicott's article and this chapter were written before the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery removed (in November 2010) David Wojnarowicz's video *A Fire in My Belly* (1986–87) from the exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. The video, which contains a brief scene depicting ants crawling on a crucifix, was taken off display after demands for its censorship from both the Catholic League and Republican leadership in the United States Congress. That decision, made by Smithsonian Secretary G. Wayne Clough, set off demonstrations, panel discussions and Internet debates about censorship in the arts and the relationship between exhibition content and federal funding at the Smithsonian. Protesters set up on the street outside the south entrance of The National Portrait Gallery "The Museum of Censored Art" – a mobile office trailer bearing the sign "Showing the art the Smithsonian won't." A web site for the museum was also created. Online. Available HTTP: <http://dontcensor.us/> (accessed 4 March 2011).