Modernism and Censorship in Eastern Europe (Bussels, 5-6 Sep 22)

Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium, Sep 5–06, 2022
Deadline: Jul 1, 2022

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Cracks in the Canon: Modernism and Censorship in Eastern Europe

The institutions of censorship and modernism are often typecast as battling forces within twentieth-century culture. They are routinely situated at opposing ends on the spectrum of communication: the creative effort to expand language versus the oppressive effort to curtail it; the individual versus the establishment; the advance of art versus its elimination. Yet, recent research problematises these binaries, revealing a more nuanced and reciprocal relationship between exponents of modernism and agents of cultural control. Eastern European history provides rich case studies for this topic, albeit ones which are still regularly reduced to stereotype.

Exploring art, literature, film, and the complex censorial apparatus surrounding their creation from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s, this conference explores how both 'soft' and 'hard' censorship operated as a formative force within modernist culture. Drawing on the methodological tools and approaches of the New Censorship Theory, we aim to break simplistic binaries and condemnatory categories in order to challenge notions of top-down, state repressive force in favour of more productive conceptions of censorship that increasingly see it as integrated and secondary to impersonal, structural forms, such as the market. Repositioning 'state censors as actors internal to communication networks, and not as external, accidental features' invites opportunities for revisiting entrenched stereotypes of both official and unofficial censorship.

This conference ultimately seeks to recast censorship in the Eastern Europe not as a crushing boot stamping out the rich potential of modernist creation but as a messy companion to it, kicking along content, crafting meaning, complicating things.

Possible topics and panels will include:

The Unsayable
(Modernism's long engagement with the aesthetics of obscenity; artists' encounters with the scandalous, the taboo; efforts to control and define outer limits of acceptability)

Reimagining repression
(New paradigms for studying censorship, foregrounding not its acts of prohibition, silencing, and erasure, but its capacity to act as a generative force producing new forms of discourse and communication).

The Aesthetics of Evasion
(Creative strategies for evading censorship throughout modernism: handmade books, the small press, self-publishing (Samizdat), international export (Tamizdat), censorial evasion through stylistic experiment)

The Art Market as Arbitrator
(The art market as a structural system for content-control; ways in which economic forces incite selective silences; authenticating authenticity, identifying forgeries, and understanding market demand as an adjudicating force for cultural production)

Collusion & Complicity
(Hidden histories of modernism's productive engagement with censorial restriction: editorial exchange, Aesopian language, subversive mimicry; studies of ways in which external restriction could stimulate experiment; internalisation of censorship norms as a constitutive feature of modernism).

Censorship networks
(Expanding the understanding of actors involved in censorship beyond authoritarian figures, encounters with policing and publishing forums; censorship legislation; how works were written, revised, published and performed in relation to this complex web of social forces)

Law and Literature
(The relation between law and fiction; how authors address their confrontation with censorship, and how they imagine and represent censorial authority in fiction; attempts by writers and legal scholars to defend literature on free speech principles)

Censorship and cinema
(Studies on censorship in film, audience accessibility, various forms of 'banning' or curtailing dissemination, practices of regulating, trimming, and tailoring films)

Ministries of Truth
(Explores the enduring appeal of Orwellian tropes of censorship; how 1984 has consolidated a specific image of censorship in public consciousness, appropriation and adaption of 'Orwellian' as a critique of cultural control)

Expressions of interest are welcome by July 1, 2022 at: Modernism Censorship ULB Conference <modernismcensorship@gmail.com>.

Please send your abstract (200w and a short CV including a list of main relevant publications).

Accepted speakers will be notified by 10 of July. The conference will reimburse hotel accommodation for the selected number of participants.

Reference:
CFP: Modernism and Censorship in Eastern Europe (Bussels, 5-6 Sep 22). In: ArtHist.net, May 17, 2022 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/36720>.