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## DOUBLE VOICES OF MUSICAL CENSORSHIP AFTER 9/11

Martin Scherzinger

In April 2003, shortly after the outbreak of war between the United States and Iraq, the Hollywood actor and activist Tim Robbins reported on a case of post-9/11 censorship: “A famous middle-aged rock-and-roller called me last week to thank me for speaking out against the war, only to go on to tell me that he could not speak himself because he fears repercussions from Clear Channel. ‘They promote our concert appearances,’ he said. ‘They own most of the stations that play our music. I can’t come out against this war.’”<sup>1</sup> This description of censorship in our times has two striking features. First, the restriction felt by the musician is not the result of a public body of censors (with links, say, to the State); and second, the artist is not receiving the direct attentions of a censor (who overtly supervises his/her public pronouncements). Thus we find two common ideas associated with censorship challenged: (1) that censorship properly belongs to the public domain; and (2) that the public operation of regulation and control is properly framed by a legal principle, which directly sanctions censored activities. That is, the apparatus of regulation must be publicly recognized; its field of operation officially authorized.<sup>2</sup> A state ban on the exposure of women’s breasts on public television, for example, would count as an uncontroversial case of (principled?) censorship. In this restricted sense of the term—censorship construed as a legally sanctioned public ban—the attacks of September 11, 2001, did not result in any new censorship of music in the United States.

Yet the case Tim Robbins cited draws attention to a different kind of censoring body, which issues a different kind of constraint. Here the artist exhibits a kind of pathological watchfulness, involuntarily incorporating a censor-figure into his/her interior, acting out an imagined quiescence. In Danilo Kis's view, this kind of introverted censorship is more powerful than the overt kind: "[It] means reading your own text with the eyes of another person, a situation where you become your own judge, stricter and more suspicious than anyone else" (1986: 45). For Kis, this kind of censor-as-alter ego cannot be defeated, for its prohibitionary/inhibitionary power is all-consuming. The very anonymity of Robbins's "famous middle-aged rock-and-roller" registers this crude power. Even in the relatively unrestricted environment of the blogosphere the name of the artist remains concealed. Is Robbins telling the truth? If so, the often-used argument that artists actively seek controversy by pushing the limits of social acceptability—to nurture anti-establishment credibility, for instance—is obviously not applicable here. Instead the musician's act of silence testifies to a policed self: silent and invisible to the public, silenced by an internalized and invisible censor. In Kis's terms, this could amount to one of the worst kinds of censorship, for the censoring subject is itself censored and thus kept from public scrutiny.

It is prudent nonetheless to exercise caution in defining a mode of non-traditional censorship (invisible, anonymous, interiorized), for the voice of the invisible censor must be weighed against the necessary internalized resistances without which artists cannot create. The belief in direct speech, authentic expression, unfettered creativity, and so on, strikes us as naive today. In a context of poststructuralist textual production, for example, we no longer isolate what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "direct, unrefracted, unconditional authorial discourse" without a degree of skepticism. According to Bakhtin, a kind of hidden dialogic discourse is a *general* condition of speech; "every thought, feeling, experience must be refracted through the medium of someone else's discourse, someone else's style, someone else's manner" (1984: 202). The "someone else" to which Bakhtin's analysis points is not only a persecutory figure of the censor, but, being its condition of possibility, also the irreducible set of restrictions placed on all utterances by their addressees. The shift from the figure of the restraining censor to that of the productive artistic obstacle requires but the slightest tilting of logical angle.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault argues against the very concept of "censorship" as a diagnostic perspective on society: "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,'

it ‘conceals.’ In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (1979: 194). Far from functioning as an impediment to subjectivity and knowledge formation, internalized forms of surveillance (by “eyes that must see without being seen”) are, in Foucault’s analysis, the very discipline that constructs and constitutes subjectivity along with attendant forms of knowledge (p. 171). The role of punishment in society (“directed above all at others, at all the potentially guilty”), for example, is to shape discourse among individuals, thereby producing homogenous effects of power (p. 108). In short, the “anxious awareness of being observed” is the necessary impediment that makes possible the normative individual (p. 202).

The idea that internalized obstacles are a necessary condition for normative behavior underlines many theories of art-making as well. In the Freudian paradigm, sublimation itself lays at the heart of all artistic production. The self, for Freud, is not a unity but multiply divided. Artists are people who can negotiate the inner tensions of these multiple selves and manage their antagonistic drives more or less successfully. Importantly, in Freud’s account, the process of artistic production involves not only satisfying but also occasionally *denying* the demands of these inner drives. The internal process of selecting, organizing, and assigning value to artistic material constitutes a field of aesthetic and political judgments without which there can be no artwork. Furthermore, when music is mediated by the interests of a sponsoring corporation responsible for its dissemination, an additional field of judgments weighs upon its content. But the question of whether styling, advertising, engineering, and marketing strategies of the sponsoring body constitute a *restrictive* or a *productive* intervention in the artistic process is hotly contested and open to debate. Cases on both sides of the debate abound: Prince, for example, has at times claimed the former, while Nigel Kennedy, for example, has suggested the latter. The point is that, far from representing straightforward sites of censorship, these mediating layers are overdetermined. A business executive’s decision about music’s styling may compromise an artistic vision, for example, but in doing so it may also multiply the product’s dissemination. It is a question of assessing how the harms and benefits, from the point of view of both artists and listeners, weigh up against one another. One might call these the *double voices* of musical censorship.

At the same time, it is important to distinguish between the artist’s various internalized constraints; to disentangle those intimate censor-figures that intrude and persecute from those that facilitate and inspire.

Drawing on Freud, the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee invites us to consider the dual (and dueling) aspects of this kind of internalized censor-twin in terms of a figure-of-the-father and a figure-of-the-beloved:

Imagine . . . a project in writing that is, at heart, a transaction with some such figure of the beloved, that tries to please her (but that also tries continually though surreptitiously to revise and create her as the-one-who-will-be-pleased); and imagine what will happen if into this transaction is introduced in a massive and undeniable way another figure-of-the-reader, the dark-suited, bald-headed censor, with his pursed lips and his red pen and his irritability and his censoriousness—the censor, in fact, as parodic version of the figure-of-the-father (1996: 38).

While the courted figure (the beloved) in Coetzee's scenario proffers restrictive hurdles that are the match of those imposed by the censorious figure (the father), the latter are unwanted and destructive: "Working under censorship," writes Coetzee, "is like being intimate with someone who does not love you, with whom you want no intimacy, but who presses himself against you" (1996: 38). Nonetheless, the opposite ends of the censor-twin often remain closely aligned; the beloved often interwoven with (if only as a constituent inversion of) the oppressive father—an inner tension that can be plausibly mapped onto current theories of popular music. According to Tyler Cowen, for example, rock and roll emerged as a pro-individualist cultural rebellion against State control; its seductions, one might say, gaining traction from its denunciations (1998: 178).

This essay offers a brief typology of music's restricting circumstances in a particular historical moment: the post-9/11 United States. The cases presented below do not represent an exhaustive list of effectively censored music in these times; nor do they present a consistent theory of censorship. Also, while the argument takes a special interest in the *intrusive* side of music's inevitable mediating layers, with particular reference to new sites and forms of censorship following the terrorist attacks in September 2001, it will not lose sight of the paradoxical nature of musical censorship—its double voices—in assessing its scope and authority. The essay begins by discussing some cases of relatively overt censorship, with a particular focus on the removal of existing songs from various important broadcasting channels (or the placing of prohibitive obstacles before them in such contexts).<sup>3</sup> Following this general discussion, the essay will examine the removal of music by the Dixie Chicks from many radio stations in 2003 in more detail. The second set of cases explored in this essay present a more subtle form of

censorship: the *voluntary* removal of musical products or cancellation of events out of forbearance or sensitivity in the context of a current political sentiment. In particular, the essay will examine the Boston Symphony Orchestra's cancellation of a performance of choruses from John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer*. As it is with the very definition of censorship, gauging such exercises of control over music's circulation is a vexing task: perhaps these amount to a more insidious form of censorship than the public banning of music; on the other hand, and equally plausibly, perhaps these do not constitute censorship at all. Here the analysis necessarily shrinks from the question of whether the decision to withdraw music from public circulation is willful or enforced, or some blending of the two. In any of these cases, the act of withdrawal registers the limits of American toleration at a particular historical moment and thus functions as an ideological gauge. These limits, in turn, mark the conditioning grounds for internalized censorship.

The underlying justification for this essay is the contention that it is the silent and invisible acquiescence of the cautious and compromised artist that ultimately registers the extent of genuine political power. That which cannot be sung needs most to be spoken about.

### QUESTIONABLE SONG LYRICS, UNPATRIOTIC POLITICS?

After September 11, 2001, cases of silencing musical dissent emerged in various quarters. Martin Cloonan has reported that in September 2001 the group Rage Against the Machine (RATM) had its message boards closed on its official Web site after their ISP provider received repeated calls from agents of the federal government. According to Cloonan, these boards, which were used for political and social discussion among fans, were deemed to contain "anti-American sentiments" by "the Secret Services."<sup>4</sup> Other musicians whose views conflicted with official government opinion often felt pressured to rescind them. Moby apologized for questioning the competence of the CIA and FBI—agencies that existed, in his view, to protect Americans from atrocities like the attacks on the World Trade Centers. Likewise, Kevin Richardson of the Backstreet Boys expressed regret because of a question he asked in a Toronto interview: "What has our government done to provoke this action that we don't know about?"<sup>5</sup> The record label 75 Ark pressured the political hip-hop group The Coup to change the cover design for their album *Party Music*. The original cover, which depicted the two rappers standing in front of an exploding World Trade Center in New York was "intended as a metaphor for the effect music can have on a corrupt system."<sup>6</sup> The design was replaced post-9/11 with a photograph of a hand holding a full martini

glass from which flames emerge. In November 2001, the Boston Symphony Orchestra canceled four performances of choruses from John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer* because they allegedly portrayed a Palestinian point of view. The orchestra released a statement describing the decision in terms of sensitivity in the context of "the current mood of its audiences in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks."<sup>7</sup> Following composer Karlheinz Stockhausen's ill-considered description of the September 2001 attacks as "the greatest artwork in the cosmos," the student-run new music group Ossia at the Eastman School of Music was required by the school's administration, which feared a controversial backlash, to cancel a performance of Stockhausen's *Stimmung* scheduled for December 2001 in New York City. Arguably, these were isolated decisions about appropriate programming taken at an individual and local level. Considered together, however, these various events can be seen to point to a gravitational force, instantiated in multiple and diverse forms, that exerts censoring pressure in sync with government values in a time of political crisis.

Most notoriously, Clear Channel Radio, owner of over 1,200 stations in the United States, issued a "don't play" list of 156 songs days after September 11, 2001, in deference to the national mood of mourning.<sup>8</sup> Deemed "lyrically questionable," the choices on the list ranged from reasonable to absurd. The exercise of restraint in airing songs seems understandable in some cases—Drowning Pool's "Bodies," with the refrain "Let the bodies hit the floor," eerily evokes traumatic images following the attacks on the World Trade Center, for example—but it seems dubious in most cases. It takes an exaggerated literalism, for example, to deem songs like Steve Miller's "Jet Airliner," the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Aeroplane" (a mode of transport transformed into a deadly weapon?) or The Beatles' "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" (an acronym for Osama bin Laden?) lyrically questionable. More disturbingly, however, Cat Stevens's "Peace Train" or "Morning Has Broken," The Doors' "The End," Black Sabbath's "War Pigs," and John Lennon's "Imagine" (which ironically became an anthem of post-9/11 mourning in various quarters), seem motivated less by the content of the lyrics than by the religious beliefs, antiwar stances, or political persuasions of the musicians themselves.<sup>9</sup> *All* songs by the left-wing Rage Against the Machine, for example, were placed on the Clear Channel list.

Radio, argues Michael C. Zalot, became the medium of choice in the months following September 11, 2001, when it came to providing comfort to communities across America. Listeners, writes Zalot, "turned to local rock, pop and country stations for a sense of community, in a virtual public space that television did not provide" (2002: 34).

Given the overall slant of Clear Channel's don't-play list, one might conclude that, its historical aspirations to anti-establishment irreverence notwithstanding, rock music on these stations came to serve as a natural conduit for ideological control at a critical historical moment. In the words of Murray Forman: "The conscription of music can be approached through what Middleton . . . identified as a theory of articulative process whereby music and musical meanings are rechanneled in a manner that reproduces the hegemonic structure and, *pace* Gramsci, reaffirms the prevailing social order of domination and subordination" (2002: 194).

Taken as a whole, the Clear Channel list is heavily skewed against musical expressions on the left of the political spectrum.<sup>10</sup> And yet, the politics of the list may be more bewildering than coherent. For example, the list contains some anomalies, such as Neil Diamond's rousing pro-America song "America" and Don McLean's anthemlike "American Pie." Perhaps Clear Channel was trying to prevent an overly nationalist social backlash as much as a critical one. On the other hand, these two songs may still fit the ideological bill. The lyrics of Don McLean's "American Pie" are notoriously elusive; the title of the song is rumored to refer to the plane in which Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, and Ritchie Valens were killed.<sup>11</sup> The song's widespread appeal notwithstanding then, "American Pie" may have risked reverberating ominously in the context of terrorist attacks using airplanes. Likewise, instead of noticing the open celebration of core American values (presented in lines like "freedom's light burning warm") in Neil Diamond's "America," Clear Channel's senior executives may have heard something more disturbing. Perhaps the triumphal refrain at the end of Neil Diamond's song "They're coming to America" (from "everywhere around the world") takes on menacing overtones in the context of an attack by non-Americans orchestrated from within the country's borders. Finally, as J. M. Coetzee observes, agents of censorship do not as a rule acknowledge their own censoring activities. Even in police states authorities tend to avoid the word "censorship."<sup>12</sup> Clear Channel's denials thus follow a well-worn historical pattern of sidestepping accusations of censorship.

A similar list of undesirable songs, with a similar refutation from the censoring agent, appeared in March 2003 following the outbreak of war between the United States and Iraq. The broadcast standards department of MTV Europe issued a memo recommending that music videos with images of "war, soldiers, war planes, bombs, missiles, riots and social unrest, executions" and "other obviously sensitive material" not be aired in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Examples of offensive videos listed in the memo included System of a Down's "BOOM!" (described by Mark Sunderland of MTV



as an “anti-war video containing facts and figures about, amongst other things, the projected casualties in the war in Iraq”); Aerosmith’s “Don’t Want to Miss a Thing” (“contains footage from the film ‘Armageddon’”); Manic Street Preachers’ “So Why So Sad” (“contains footage of soldiers being killed and man throwing a hand grenade”); Passengers/U2’s “Miss Sarajevo” (“contains missiles, guns and buildings being blown up”); Bon Jovi’s “This Ain’t a Love Song” (“contains war scenes and victims in distress”); Iggy Pop’s “Corruption” (“contains wars, riots, guns and captions ‘we love guns’ and ‘we love rifles’”); Paul Hardcastle’s “19” (“contains war footage”); Radiohead’s “Lucky” (“contains war footage including injured children”); Billy Idol’s “Hot in the City” (“contains an atomic explosion”); Armand van Helden’s “Koochy” (“contains an atomic explosion and ships being blown up”); and Trick Daddy’s “Thug Holiday” (“contains soldiers being killed at war”).

Videos containing words associated with war (“bomb,” “missile,” etc.) were also not to be shown by MTV Europe. The memo identifies Outkast’s “B.O.B (Bombs over Baghdad),” Megadeth’s “Holy Wars,” Gavin Friday’s “You, Me and World War Three,” and Radiohead’s (nonexistent!) “Invasion,” as songs whose titles “may offend.” All songs by the Atlanta-based B-52’s were to be avoided.<sup>14</sup> As justification for its recommendations, the memo refers to the programming code of the Independent Television Commission (ITC), which regulates commercial television in Britain. Although the memo cites the code’s obligation “not to broadcast material which offends against good taste or is offensive to public feeling,” it does not rely on or cite the examples provided by the code. (The code itself does not mention images of or references to war.) As a result of the memo, System of a Down’s “BOOM!” was not shown in Europe.<sup>15</sup> The video, which was directed by documentary filmmaker Michael Moore, begins with the words: “On February 15, 2003, ten million people in over 600 cities around the world participated in the largest demonstration in the history of the world. Because we choose peace over war, we were there too.” According to System of a Down’s Web site, “The video ‘BOOM!’ is a life-affirming video that rallies people to visualize, and then create, the world they want to live in. ‘BOOM!’ looks to empower people with the knowledge that war is ultimately their choice, not the media’s nor the government’s.” The video presents footage from antiwar demonstrations in cities across the globe, quotations from various protestors that become song lyrics, war imagery, and a satirical cartoon animation of George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden flying over cities on missiles. Headlines of various newspapers appear as subtitles beneath the flow of images: “Halliburton wins contract to rebuild Iraqi oilfields,”



“Iraqi oil reserves worth \$4 trillion,” “War to cost U.S. \$70 Billion,” “Pentagon orders 77,000 body bags,” and so on.<sup>16</sup> As it was with Clear Channel, MTV denied enacting a ban on songs mentioned in the list; MTV spokesman Graham James explained that “the leaked document was never intended to be implemented.”<sup>17</sup> This denial notwithstanding, the song was conspicuously absent from MTV’s European playlists.

### GRASSROOTS FLAK OR CORPORATE CENSORSHIP?

In March 2003 dozens of radio stations, including prominent stations owned by Clear Channel Communications, all fifty country stations owned by Cumulus Broadcasting, and all stations owned by the Cox Radio chain, removed the country musicians the Dixie Chicks from their playlists (Rohr 2004: 74). The blacklist followed a comment made by Natalie Maines, lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, at a concert on March 10, 2003, in a London nightclub: “Just to let you know, we’re ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas.”<sup>18</sup> At the time of the comment the Dixie Chicks quintuple-platinum album *Home* featured two massive radio hits. “Landslide” (written by Stevie Nicks) was number one on the adult contemporary chart and “Travelin’ Soldier” was number nine on the country chart. In the days following the comment, however, various public actions were taken against the band. In Kansas City, Missouri, a “chicken toss” took place, at which Dixie Chicks CDs and tapes were tossed into the trash (Nuzum 2004: 156). Likewise, KRMD-FM, part of Cumulus Media, organized and sponsored a CD-smashing rally in Louisiana.<sup>19</sup> In an effort to lure Dixie Chicks fans away from Dixie Chicks concerts, some protestors organized alternative concerts offering free entry to Dixie Chicks concert ticket-holders. The South Carolina State House passed a resolution requesting that the Dixie Chicks apologize directly to South Carolinians and also that the band should feel obliged to offer a free concert for military families and troops.<sup>20</sup> Two DJs, Dave Moore and Jeff Singer, at KKCS in Colorado Springs were suspended for playing a Dixie Chicks song.<sup>21</sup> Jerry Grant, the manager of KKCS, explained the station’s ultimatum in stark terms: “I gave them an alternative: stop it now and they’ll be on suspension, or they can continue playing them and when they come out of the studio, they won’t have a job.”<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that at the time of the Dixie Chicks blacklist Clear Channel also used its considerable market power to garner support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq. On March 15, for example, Clear Channel’s WGST sponsored a pro-military rally in Atlanta attended by 25,000 people.

In defense of its censorious actions, radio executives at Clear Channel and Cumulus Broadcasting claimed that the measures responded to grassroots initiatives taken by local listening audiences.<sup>23</sup> Far from meting out censorship, the removal of the Dixie Chicks from radio playlists, according to these defenses, reflected conservative social pressure on these stations. Such pressure, which Frederick Schauer would call *censure* (or private censorship), cannot properly be conflated with public censorship, as it does not reflect a legally sanctioned restriction on freedom of speech (1982). In short, the censoring actions of a privately owned media company cannot properly amount to the stifling of free expression; rather, the media company arguably asserts *its* free expression in these contexts. Gabriel Rossman interprets the Dixie Chicks controversy as a case of *censure* (“flak” from aggrieved citizens). The blacklist, he maintains, was a measure of a “vengeful audience to whose wishes corporations responded with varying degrees of haste” (2004: 76). Using radio airplay data from *Radio and Records*, a trade magazine for the radio industry that uses airplay charts and other data tables, Rossman effectively demonstrates the power of the citizenry to pressure radio corporations to remove unwanted artists from the airwaves: “Rather than corporate interests punishing dissent and imposing conservative values on the citizenry, in this instance [the Dixie Chicks blacklist] citizens imposed conservatism and punitiveness on corporations” (p. 76).

Rossman determines the extent of social pressure on radio stations by way of various “independent variables”: the first set of variables measures the percentage of electoral support for George W. Bush in 2000 and the percentage of the population in active military duty; the second set of variables measures the degree of support for military action in Iraq in August and September 2002 and a question designed to measure tolerance for free speech: “Suppose [an] admitted Communist wanted to make a speech in your community. Should he be allowed to speak, or not?” (p. 71). Rossman’s variables accurately predict a greater decline in Dixie Chicks airplay in markets (1) that showed larger electoral support for G. W. Bush; (2) with more active-duty military personnel in their communities; (3) whose citizens supported the war; and (4) were relatively less tolerant of free speech. These findings resonate with Rossman’s descriptions of country music, which he associates with “pastoral white America and its values, such as independence, patriotism, and religion” (p. 68). Furthermore, Rossman demonstrates that blacklists were as prevalent, or more prevalent even, among independent radio stations as they were for large chains; and that blacklists were more prevalent on

country stations than they were on adult contemporary stations, which “skew [more] female” (p. 75).

Although he makes one reference to “angry phone calls” that apparently “flooded” a Nashville radio station (p. 62), Rossman does not, offer an ethnographic account of either the extent to which, or the mechanism by which, the citizenry actually exerted pressure on the radio stations. For example, the Colorado-based radio station KKCS, where the DJs Dave Moore and Jeff Singer were suspended for playing the Dixie Chicks, did receive “flak” from its listeners, but it was less one-sided than Rossman’s model would imply. According to the Associated Press, “The station has received a couple of hundred calls and 75 percent favored playing the music.”<sup>24</sup> Instead of offering ethnographic evidence, Rossman’s variables for registering right-wing political sentiment are measured abstractly and assumed cleanly to map onto playlist decline. Neither do the variables directly address issues pertaining to the Dixie Chicks, music, or culture. Instead they are framed in terms of politics pure and simple (support for Bush, support for the war, etc.). Furthermore, the variables measuring conservative sentiment are qualitatively different from the variable measuring tolerance for dissent. The former are closely linked to contemporary political contexts (the profile of the Bush vote, the current number of military personnel, etc.), while the latter invokes as a yardstick an entirely different historical era (Cold War attitudes toward communism). For Rossman, intolerance for communism counts as a “reasonable proxy for attitudes towards repression of this kind” (2004: 73). The problem is that a *word* like “communist” (like the word “liberal”) routinely registers instant hostility among Americans. Eric Alterman argues that, while many Americans distance themselves from an appellation like “liberal,” for example, polls show that most Americans generally espouse liberal positions.<sup>25</sup> To bring the question of tolerance into the qualitatively similar contemporary arena as the questions about support for conservatism thus requires a less inflammatory reference point than “communism.” Take the question, “Suppose a mother who lost her child in the Iraq war wanted to make a speech criticizing war in your community. Should she be allowed to speak or not?” This less provocative, but more relevant, question would unlikely produce the same profile of abstract figures required to yield the relative intolerance, which in turn stands in for grassroots pressure in Rossman’s account.

While grassroots flak probably played some role in the formation of the blacklists, Rossman’s account fails to reckon with the complicating details of media ownership and its relation to organized political movements. For example, in congressional hearings held on July 8, 2003,

Simon Renshaw, representing the company that manages the Dixie Chicks, disclosed that members of his office had received death threats, which, according to evidence presented to congress, were orchestrated by “right-wing political” groups (Holland 2003). If Renshaw is correct, the conservative flak registered by Cumulus media may have reflected less the broad “grassroots” censure to which Rossman points than that of a highly organized, aggressive and vocal minority.<sup>26</sup> Although it is impossible to settle the question decisively, Renshaw’s assessment would tally with the actual calls made to KKCS in conservative Colorado Springs, where three-quarters of all callers favored *continuing* airplay of Dixie Chicks songs.<sup>27</sup> It is easier to settle the question about who gave the actual orders to take the Dixie Chicks off the air. Facing questions from John McCain and Barbara Boxer, Lewis W. Dickey Jr., CEO of Cumulus, conceded that *he* had ordered Cumulus stations to remove the Dixie Chicks and that local station managers “fell in line” with the corporate decision.<sup>28</sup> In response to Dickey’s appeal to grassroots pressure (“a groundswell, a hue and a cry from listeners”), Boxer argued, that this is “what happens when you have a diversity of views, discourse.” For Boxer, “A hue and a cry is a beautiful noise. It’s the sound of freedom” (Holland 2003). McCain argued that, because it came from corporate headquarters, the order was “a strong argument that First Amendment erosion is in progress” (*ibid.*). At the very least, the corporate directive disconcerts the idea that the ban was merely the result of local grassroots sentiment.

Although his argument attempts to debunk the notion that corporate ownership influences media content, Rossman leaves out certain facts about the large corporations involved in the Dixie Chicks blacklists. Rossman does not mention, for example, that Clear Channel increasingly controls the music reported in the industry trade magazine *Radio and Records*, on which his figures rely.<sup>29</sup> In 2001, *Radio and Records* decreased (from 200 to 140 markets) the number of stations reporting their weekly playlists to the magazine.<sup>30</sup> Only seven Clear Channel stations lost their reporting status. Moreover, *Radio and Records* uses the Clear Channel–owned system *Mediabase* to verify the accuracy of reporting. More generally speaking, if it were true that Clear Channel stations were entirely responsive to local political sentiment one might reasonably expect stations in markets like Atlanta to organize (and sponsor?) pro-war rallies, which they did, and stations in markets like New York to organize antiwar rallies, which they did not.<sup>31</sup> Rossman ignores Clear Channel’s uneven responsiveness to local political sentiment in different parts of the nation. The narrow focus on country stations in conservative markets obscures Clear Channel’s tendency to

nurture conservative sentiment and downplay progressive sentiment in all markets.

Censorship and restrictions on artistic expressions can be as effective when they are imposed within a highly concentrated market place as when they are imposed directly by the federal government. The distinction between the public and private becomes especially porous when the censoring media corporation has close links to government. The circle of mutual assistance between corporations and government (via campaign contributions, and the like, which in turn assure tax breaks, subsidies, and corporate leverage over the political process) can streamline these interests—a condition exacerbated by increased corporate consolidation of the media. The bond between the owners of Clear Channel and the Bush administration, for example, extends beyond the rationally predictable logic of mutual support. The Vice Chair of Clear Channel, Tom Hicks, is a member of the Bush Pioneer Club for elite and generous donors. Paul Krugman, writing in the *New York Times*, reported, “When Mr. Bush was governor of Texas, Mr. Hicks was chairman of the University of Texas Investment Management Company, called Utimco, and Clear Channel’s chairman, Lowry Mays (a personal friend of former President Bush), was on its board. Under Mr. Hicks, Utimco placed much of the university’s endowment under the management of companies with strong Republican Party and Bush family ties. In 1998 Mr. Hicks purchased the Texas Rangers in a deal that made Mr. Bush a multimillionaire.”<sup>32</sup>

One of the companies benefiting from the University of Texas’s tilted investments, mentioned in connection with Tom Hicks of Clear Channel above, is the Carlyle Group, a global private equity firm with George Bush Sr. on its payroll. The Carlyle Group’s primary focus is on the aerospace and military defense industries, though they have expanded these areas to include industries such as telecommunications and media.<sup>33</sup> While it is impossible to establish the exact connections between these government interests as they interface with military investments and the content of media broadcasting, it is reasonable to predict that this alliance of agendas could become integrated in practice. Perhaps this alliance explains why Clear Channel radio stations air cultural expressions reflecting the party line and censor cultural expressions dissenting from it. Aside from the banning of the Dixie Chicks and the sponsorship of pro-war rallies, it should not come as a surprise, for instance, that Clear Channel radio stations gave little airplay in 2003 to antiwar songs by musicians like Lenny Kravitz and Michael Stipe of R.E.M.; nor should it come as a surprise that Clear Channel concert promoters threatened to remove Ani DiFranco from

the stage in March 2003 in New Jersey if she permitted antiwar representatives to speak; nor should it come as a surprise that the company syndicates talk-radio hosts like the extreme Republican conservative Rush Limbaugh and the radical homophobe Dr. Laura Schlessinger; nor should it come as a surprise that Clear Channel refused to display Project Billboard's image critical of the war in Iraq with the words "Democracy is Best Taught by Example, Not by War" in New York City in July 2004; nor should it come as a surprise that Clear Channel fired Community Affairs Director Davey D from KMEL/San Francisco, a hip-hop journalist known for his presentation of controversial issues and personalities on October 1, 2001; and so on (Kim et al. 2002: 201).

Clear Channel's meteoric rise to prominence cannot be underestimated. Clear Channel owns and operates radio stations and businesses in over sixty countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, New Zealand, and Australia. In August 2001, NIPP (*Nobody in Particular Presents*), a small independent promotions firm that handles local concerts of Pearl Jam and Beastie Boys, filed an antitrust suit in the Federal Court in Denver, Colorado. NIPP charged the company with using monopolistic, predatory, and anticompetitive business practices. According to NIPP, Clear Channel coerces artists to use their promotional outlets, and practically thwarts attempts by independents to buy advertisements on Clear Channel stations.<sup>34</sup> Clear Channel owns the country's largest concert promoter (SFX Entertainment, recently renamed Clear Channel Entertainment), over a hundred concert venues, numerous radio research companies, trade magazines, syndicated programming, and an airplay monitoring system. In May 2003 Clear Channel introduced a venture that will sell live music on CD within a few minutes of a concert's conclusion, thereby cannibalizing sales of official CD releases it does not control.<sup>35</sup> This development reflects an intracorporate struggle, which explains why some of the loudest voices against media centralization come from within the music business. Thus the emergence of Clear Channel is another episode in a long battle between record companies and broadcast companies that goes back to the 1920s. When it must bring itself into line with the imperatives and interests of such highly concentrated, unaccountable economic power, musical censorship occurs less visibly than if it were inscribed in law, with artists second-guessing the wishes of industry executives. Under these conditions, the musician can become cautious and compromised, seeking to balance his/her artistic vision with a duty to serve the ideological demands and political interests of industry executives and their advertisers, which, in turn, articulate with the highest forms of political authority and power.



And yet, since corporations are private entities, the First Amendment does not strictly apply to their censoring ambitions. J. M. Coetzee states the problem thus: “When censure is not only expressed but acted upon by bodies that hold an effective monopoly on particular media of expression (via, for instance, distribution or retail networks), freedom of expression may be stifled as effectively as under outright legal ban. On the other hand, monopoly holders can argue that in exercising censure they are simply asserting their own freedom of expression rather than stifling anyone else’s” (1996: 235). The question is: Does radio have a public dimension that transcends its private ownership? The 1934 Communications Act established radio as a public resource managed according to a model of “trusteeship” by the federal government. Broadcasters receive a free slice of the radio spectrum in exchange for serving the “public interest, convenience and necessity.” The act also included provisions to promote diversity and localism.<sup>36</sup> As a public resource, radio stations, according to this legislation, have public obligations.<sup>37</sup> To this extent, even though it expands the strict definition of censorship, acts of corporate censorship, especially when they are taken at the highest levels, approximate blunt modes of legal censorship. Today’s censoring agents may not be tied directly to the state, but their scope and authority is its match.

### PRUDENT FORBEARANCE OR COMPROMISED SELF-CENSORSHIP?

One feature of overt censorship is that it can work out inconsistently in practice, often spawning a backlash. A paradoxical logic seems to launch itself against the censoring agent, as if the object of its censoring attention contained some hidden and prohibited authenticity, something the censor cannot afford to tolerate. As Joseph Jacobs, an editor of *Aesop*, writes, “A tyrant cannot take notice of a fable without putting on the cap that fits.”<sup>38</sup> Newly endowed as a cipher of buried truth, the suppressed cultural item then receives more attention than it might if it circulated freely, and the censoring body, descended in esteem, is set up as an object of ridicule and contempt. The banning of the Dixie Chicks is a case in point, producing an array of scornful commentary, jokes, blogs, and cartoons that regard the censor with derision. One well-known example of this ridicule was the end of Michael Moore’s acceptance speech on receiving the 2003 Oscar for best feature documentary: “Shame on you, Mr. Bush, shame on you. And any time you’ve got the Pope and the Dixie Chicks against you, your time is up. Thank



you very much.” More seriously, the backlash against the ban on the Dixie Chicks reverberated at a Senate Commerce Committee Meeting on July 8, 2003, where it was regarded as a case of censorship at a chain level, and thus contributed to an argument against deregulation of media ownership rules.<sup>39</sup> Overt censorship, one might say, often meets its match.

But another kind of censorship, more covert and voluntary, seems to elude this paradoxical logic to some extent. It is as if the relationship between action and reaction exists on an inverse continuum. In diametric contrast to overt censorship, self-censorship, in its purest form, remains wholly outside the grasp and logic of public reception. Cases of musical censorship after 9/11 often lie in-between these two extremes. The controversy surrounding the decision by the Boston Symphony Orchestra to drop four performances of choruses from John Adams’s *The Death of Klinghoffer* is a case in point. Adams’s opera depicts the hijacking of the cruise ship *Achille Lauro* in 1985 by Palestinians. During the opera one of the ship’s passengers, Leon Klinghoffer, is killed by the hijackers. On the one hand, by withdrawing performances, the orchestra risks yielding to a censoring reflex that diverts culture from its proper task. According to at least one dominant strain in theories of art (in the West), unreflective censoriousness flies in the face of art’s historical mission to challenge and contest, open perspectives, test limits.<sup>40</sup> In his critique of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Anthony Tommasini demonstrates an allegiance to this view of art: “[H]ow patronizing for the orchestra’s directors to presume what audiences will or will not find offensive. Of course, art can provide solace and comfort. Yet art can also incense and challenge us, make us squirm, make us think.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, the liberal argument goes, the act of banning challenging work deflates (and thereby paradoxically also inflates) the work’s actual social valences and relevance. “The Boston symphony missed an opportunity to present an acutely relevant work,” Tomassini writes; “Mr. Adams and his co-creators tried [to help us understand why so many Muslims hate us].” In the composer’s view, too, the work, while “upsetting” to some, offers “the sad solace of truth.” Instead of being “too soft on the terrorists,” then, the envelope-pushing *Klinghoffer* is aligned here with the long-term interest of the nation. This position reflects the liberal ideal that the free circulation of challenging ideas is a measure of a free and progressive society, or perhaps even a *positive* feature of such a society. In Jeremy Waldron’s words, “If . . . widespread moral distress is detectable in the community, then far from being a legitimate ground for interference, it is a positive and healthy sign that the processes of ethical confrontation . . . are actually

taking place” (1987: 417).<sup>42</sup> Under this reading, then, *Klinghoffer’s* confrontational stance should be welcomed in a free society.

The liberal stance often supports its position with reference to the so-called “slippery slope” argument, which claims that it is near impossible to devise a principle separating offensive from nonoffensive art. Instead of elaborating a standard that might arbitrate the offensiveness of art’s content, the liberal position accepts tolerance for free speech as an overarching value. As a solution to the problem of offensive work, liberalism offers *choice* to the consumer of art: as one is free to make art, one is free to not pay attention to it. Reactions to Richard Taruskin’s *defense* of the decision by the Boston Symphony Orchestra to cancel its scheduled performances of the *Klinghoffer* choruses testify to the tensions inherent to the liberal position outlined above.<sup>43</sup> Taruskin’s argument (about which more below) is in favor of the cancellation on grounds of sensitivity and forbearance in a time of national crisis. On the one hand, readers unsympathetic to Taruskin’s view pointed out art’s challenging social role, as well as the consumer’s freedom to avoid it. For example, Jeffrey Shallot writes: “Richard Taruskin sees the Boston Symphony’s decision to not perform the ‘Klinghoffer’ choruses as admirable ‘self control.’ . . . Self-censorship is a force that decreases art’s diversity and homogenizes art’s response to life’s difficulties. . . . Self-control is needed, but it is the self-control of the audience, not the artist. If one thinks that one would be offended by attending ‘Klinghoffer,’ the option is simply to not attend the symphony that night.”<sup>44</sup> Dramatizing the paradox of “deflation/inflation,” no less than the problem of the “slippery slope,” on the other hand, readers sympathetic with Taruskin’s view quickly stretched the implications of his argument to cover additional cases of art they found offensive. One reader wrote, “Richard Taruskin’s statement that ‘there is no need to shove Wagner in the faces of Holocaust survivors’ can logically be extended to: there is no need to shove offensive images into the faces of New Yorkers who are required to pay for the images—as the Brooklyn Museum did when it displayed the *Virgin* surrounded by pornographic images.”<sup>45</sup> The reader is here referring to Chris Ofili’s work *The Virgin Mary*, which was exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art two years earlier under the rubric “Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection” (1999). *The Virgin Mary*, which uses elephant dung and pornographic images to depict the Virgin Mary, caused a controversy that involved the mayor of New York, who threatened to remove funding from the museum on account of the work’s purported moral offensiveness. In sync with the paradoxical logic of censorship, however, the mayor’s threats quickly spawned massive attendance and protests.

On the other hand, when the choice to remove an artwork from public display or performance lies with the *producer* (or, perhaps by extension, the sponsor), the problem can become more vexing. As Taruskin argues in the context of the *Klinghoffer* case in Boston, an internally imposed expurgatory action must be distinguished from an externally imposed one:

Where should control come from? Unless we are willing to trust the Taliban, it has to come from within. What is called for is self-control. That is what the Boston Symphony laudably exercised; and I hope that musicians who play to Israeli audiences will resume exercising it. There is no need to shove Wagner in the faces of Holocaust survivors in Israel and no need to torment people stunned by previously unimaginable horrors with offensive “challenges” like “The Death of Klinghoffer.”<sup>46</sup>

Taruskin plausibly suggests that the public has a right to defend itself from work that is considered offensive. Thus the work’s offensiveness in this account supersedes the liberal tolerance for an artistic challenge. Taruskin nonetheless shies away from dismissing altogether the liberal aversion to censorship. This kind of argument hinges on the idea that art, and music in particular, can be harmful in certain contexts (which raises the question about the nature of this harm), and that control can be self-imposed (which raises the question of the self/social body that does the imposing).

Let me deal with these two ideas in turn. On the former point, Taruskin frames the crux of his argument with ethnographic and historical evidence of music’s dangers in various quarters. While he mentions four “Western” examples (Plato’s resistance to the effects of rhythm and harmony on the soul, medieval suspicions of music’s sensuous power over the body, the Nazi rejection of art that was not close to the spirit of the people, and the Soviet resistance to formalism), it is the banning of music by the Taliban, then in power in Afghanistan, that holds pride of place in Taruskin’s argument. The article begins as if in a conversation—“And on top of everything else, the Taliban hate music too. . . . After taking power in 1996, the Islamic fundamentalists who ruled most of Afghanistan undertook search-and-destroy missions in which musical instruments and cassette players were seized and burned in public pyres”—and ends with an argumentative punch line: “In the wake of Sept. 11, we might want, finally, to get beyond sentimental complacency about art. Art is not blameless. Art can inflict harm. The Taliban know that. It’s about time we learned.” The Taliban seem to play an odd role here. On the one hand, they are casually offered

as a self-evident example of unacceptable intolerance in the non-West (“Musicians caught in the act were beaten with their instruments and imprisoned for as many as 40 days”) and, on the other, offered as a serious alternative to complacent, perhaps even repressive, tolerance in the West (“[*Klinghoffer*] express[es] a reprehensible contempt for the real-life victims of its imagined ‘men of ideals,’ all too easily transferable to the victims who perished on Sept. 11”). The contradictory use of the Taliban *does*, however, point toward a consistency of argument, one that acknowledges the logical proximity of all censoring/expurgatory activity. By surrendering an aspect of the pure liberal position (its unqualified embrace of free speech), that is, Taruskin acknowledges that his argument shifts to the ballpark of Plato, St. Augustine, John of Salisbury, Joseph Goebbels, Andrei Zhdanov, and the Taliban. Yet these are the “utopians, puritans and totalitarians” most prominently associated with outright censorship, and with whom Taruskin does not identify. While he agrees that art can be harmful, what distinguishes Taruskin’s attitude toward that harm from the attitude of these outright censors is the aspect of (public) *volition*. It is in this respect, it seems, that “we” are not “willing to trust the Taliban.”<sup>47</sup>

What is the nature of the harm caused by art? Is it truly injurious or simply offensive? Is it a genuine assault or a groundless aversion? And on whom is this harm inflicted? Is it a class of people or a whole society? Does society’s right to protect itself from harm (to safeguard its core values, for example) surpass the rights of the individual? Taruskin does not tackle these questions directly, but he does offer a moral argument, which draws on a competing value held by Western society in the extended sense, to show that music, and *Klinghoffer* in particular, does indeed inflict harm.

If terrorism—specifically, the commission or advocacy of deliberate acts of deadly violence directed randomly at the innocent—is to be defeated, world public opinion has to be turned decisively against it. The only way to do that is to focus resolutely on the acts rather than their claimed (or conjectured) motivation, as crimes. This means no longer romanticizing terrorists as Robin Hoods and no longer idealizing their deeds as rough poetic justice. If we indulge such notions when we happen to agree or sympathize with the aims, then we have forfeited the moral ground from which any such acts can be convincingly condemned.<sup>48</sup>

Here we can identify the harm Taruskin has in mind. By indulging *Klinghoffer*’s challenge we threaten to lose our *moral bearings*.<sup>49</sup> Morality, in this view, is associated with fortitude and conviction about

particular deeds (in contrast, say, to an ethics of foundational empathy as elaborated by Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and others), and the belief that thinking about or listening to some kinds of art and music can erode this conviction.

The advantage of this moral mindset lies in not doubting itself; the disadvantage lies in not being able to afford to doubt itself. Thus Taruskin must freeze the dichotomy between *act* and *motivation* when it comes to terrorism (the defeat of which can be achieved only via resolute focus on the former and absolute negation of the latter). When it comes to acts of self-imposed censorship, in contrast, Taruskin's frozen dichotomy reverses itself; here the focus is resolutely on the motivations of the censoring community and concomitantly all consideration of the resulting acts is suspended. As long as the community (out of "sensitivity," "forbearance," "mutual respect," etc.) decides to censor its own cultural productions, the act is legitimate. It is noteworthy, for an argument that is doubtlessly confident that certain acts transcend all possible motivating ideas (as in the case of terrorism), that certain motivating ideas (such as sensitivity and forbearance) can sufficiently transcend their resulting acts. As a result, Taruskin cannot register complexity in either case; he can neither afford to entertain a motivation, however appalling and misguided, behind the terrorist attacks in New York City, nor can he afford to register an affront, however slight, on another fundamental value held by liberal Western democracy as a result of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's censorious act. The difference between the position that opens to such complexity and the position that does not is not, as it is often construed, the difference between relativism and fundamentalism. Consider Tomassini's solution to the challenge facing the Boston Symphony Orchestra: "The Boston Symphony missed an opportunity to present an acutely relevant work. It might have sponsored preconcert panels, bringing Middle East historians together with Mr. Adams, Ms. Goodman, and the director Peter Sellars, who was involved with this opera from its inception."<sup>50</sup> Although Tomassini and Taruskin share the same basic horror of terrorism and distaste for censorship, Tomassini calls for more information about what lies behind the attacks in New York City, and Taruskin calls for less; concomitantly Tomassini favors fewer acts of self-censorship, and Taruskin favors more. Far from reflecting a fundamental difference in moral values, then, these writers offer different views about what is actually required to reduce terrorism in America, on the one hand, and censorship in America, on the other.

The second key idea in Taruskin's argument about music's dangers as they intersect with the dangers of censorship is that of *volition*. Voluntary

control over cultural production, it seems, is acceptable; it does not count as censorship. The question arises, What is the character and size of the social unit that can coherently (sincerely?) act on its own volition? Can it extend beyond a single person? A like-minded community of concern, perhaps? If so, how is this like-mindedness ascertained? Can like-mindedness extend to an entire society? A nation? How does this emphasis on volition reckon with conflicts of interest within the group? Again, Taruskin does not tackle these questions directly. And yet the very difference between Taruskin and Tomassini (as well as David Wiegand, columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and Mark Swed, music critic at the *Los Angeles Times*, among others) registers such conflicting interests. In Barbara Boxer's lexicon, this is the "beautiful noise" of a free country. Moreover, while it is difficult to ascertain the exact details of it, the case of the Boston Symphony Orchestra seems equally embattled. On the one hand, Tommasini reports that a member of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, scheduled to sing the choruses in Boston, had been personally connected to the tragedy of September 11, 2001.<sup>51</sup> Other members of the chorus were therefore reluctant to perform the work. On the other hand, not everyone was in agreement with the decision to cancel. The composer, for example, disagreed with the reasons given for the cancellation:

I do think that symphonies and opera companies are very skittish in this country, and I'm sorry that they are, because it confirms the distressing image of symphony-goers as fragile and easily frightened. That's really a shame, because I want to think of symphonic concerts as every bit as challenging as going to MOCA or to see "Angels in America."<sup>52</sup>

Taruskin's emphasis on volition seems unobjectionable if one does not factor into its conditioning ground conflicts of this sort, which are especially vexing in the context of terrorist attacks that were met with widespread bewilderment after 9/11. Once conflicts are accepted as routine, the power relations between members of the community become relevant. How is consensus reached? Should the audience be factored into this consensus? Who holds positions of authority along the path to consensus? Should power relations be taken into account here? Is there a restraint on the use of coercion, for example? If so, how is coercion to be identified? Once again, the questions proliferate.

To consolidate his case, Taruskin might show, first, that the Boston Symphony Orchestra acted in the real interests of the community and, second, that the harms flowing from a performance of *Klinghoffer* outweigh whatever benefits may be claimed for it. This act of moral vigilance

involves the paradoxical task of identifying (inventing?) both the interests promoted by the removal of the work and the community that is deemed too vulnerable to experience the opera. The argument should also demonstrate why to experience the harm is to suffer the harm, and finally, why the outright withdrawal, instead of a counter-representation, is not the appropriate action to take. Intuitive appeals to “forbearance” and “sensitivity” need to be assessed against these criteria lest they descend into unqualified prejudice. Nonetheless, Taruskin’s insistence on voluntary behavior *does* avert the problems that accrue to officially sanctioned censorship backed by the force of law. Unlike the “utopian” protagonists of his argument, Taruskin’s position, in theory at least, opens up to the possibility of this line of questioning and analysis from members of the community in whose interests he claims to act.

## AFTERWORD

As is evident from these examples, it is practically impossible to present a characterization of musical censorship after 9/11 at a general level. Instead, the examples discussed in this essay provide an entryway into various debates: the play of productive artistic restrictions against censorious ones, the role of art and freedom of speech in society, the nature of art’s social benefits and ills, the nature of appropriate action in the face of artistic transgressions, the question of individual rights as against the rights of a collective, and so on. Of particular interest in this field of competing interests is the tension between the institution of censorship, on the one hand, and the aspirations of art, on the other. According to John Milton, the professional censor should be “above the common measure, both studious, learned and judicious.” For Milton, the problem is “there cannot be a more tedious and displeasing journey-work . . . than to be made the perpetual reader of unchosen books. . . . Seeing therefore those who now possess the employment . . . wish themselves well rid of it, and that no man of worth . . . is ever likely to succeed them . . . we may easily foresee what kind of licensers we are to expect hereafter, either ignorant, imperious, and remiss, or basely pecuniary” (1968: 88). Milton suggests that those willing to act as censors are, practically by definition, not suited to the task. If art’s social role is to test the limits of social conventions and laws, which is to say to probe their fault lines and weaknesses, the ideal artist places a high premium on individual expression and treats prejudgments with suspicion. Thus, the ideal artist’s mindset is in direct contrast to the necessarily bureaucratic, foreclosing and judgmental mindset of the ideal censor. While some acts of censorship seem warranted (desirable even) in certain



circumstances, these fundamentally opposed interests, should—when it comes to assigning power to the censor—give us pause.

It is not always clear in the examples examined in this essay whether censoring power has been exercised over music. Yet, after 9/11 signs of musical constraint abound. Madonna, for example, withdrew her antiwar video “American Life,” “out of sensitivity and respect to the armed forces,” in March 2003.<sup>53</sup> The video presents images of Muslim children in the context of an escalating frenzy of war imagery: weapons exploding, missiles launching, fighter planes on the wing, bombs dropping, buildings burning, mushroom clouds blooming, and so on. The song’s antiwar message is dramatized by the peace sign in the upper corner of the screen. On the one hand, Madonna’s withdrawal of the video from the American public appears to be a clear case of “voluntary abstinence” in the context of war between the United States and Iraq; and yet, on the other hand, it resonates with the cautious attitude of the effectively muzzled musician to whose plight Tim Robbins alerts us. Either way, the withdrawal of the video—as it is with all the cases discussed in this paper (the withdrawal of songs from various radio stations, the cancellation or obstruction of musical performances, etc.)—registers the limits of artistic expression in the post-9/11 moment. In this (negative) sense we can discern how the behavior of cultural commodities in a particular political climate discloses the political standards of our times. The question is whether these signs of ideological limits produce a climate of self-constraint that diverts art from free expression, which, according to the liberal position, is a precondition for art’s proper task, or not. When censoring activity assumes significance in the inner life of the musician alone, it is no longer open to public scrutiny or debate. It then risks violently descending into the anxious silence of Foucault’s “panopticism”; inducing a “state of conscious and permanent visibility,” which, as unverifiable, assures “the automatic functioning” of non-individualized power (1979: 201).

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## NOTES

1. Cited in "Tim Robbins' Speech (Part 2)," posted on <http://moby.com/index2.html>, April 21, 2003.
2. Addressing music specifically, Martin Cloonan registers a similar starting point toward a definition of censorship: "For many commentators censorship has to be systematic. It has to be part of a deliberate process, often at the behest of government or its agencies" (2004a: 4).
3. Another case of censorship might emerge when obstructions are placed before possible musical events. Unlike the restriction or outright suppression of music, such censorship involves prior constraint—forbidding what can take place musically. In the fall of 2004 the Zimbabwean mbira player Forward Kwenda and the American-Muslim singer Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), for example, were denied entry into the United States, the latter "on national security grounds" (according to Transportation Security Administration officials). These cases register the heightened vigilance toward immigration movements in a time of national crisis. While probably no less harmful a form of censorship today, this essay will not concern itself with such cases of interference.
4. Quoted in Cloonan 2004: 14. It is likely that the surveillance of RATM's Web site, and the subsequent phone calls to its ISP provider, originated in a branch of American intelligence forces other than the Secret Service, which is primarily charged with protecting the U.S. president. Regardless of the exact source of the calls, to date the RATM message board remains closed.
5. Moby and Kevin Richardson incidents reported in Kim et al. 2002: 120.
6. Quoted in the Pitchfork Media online review, where the original and revised CD covers also remain posted: <http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/record-reviews/c/coup/party-music.shtml>. For more on The Coup's *Party Music*, see Garofalo in this volume as well as Nuzum 2004: 150–51.
7. Tommasini, Anthony. "John Adams, Banned in Boston," *New York Times*, 25 November 2001.

8. It is not clear whether the list was actually enforced. On September 20, Pam Taylor, a Clear Channel spokesman, stated that the list was a fake (see Phleps 2004: 60). As the story gained attention in the media, Clear Channel also released a press statement, which denied the banning of songs from its radio stations and affirmed Clear Channel's commitment to the First Amendment and freedom of speech (for a full citation of the Clear Channel statement, see Nuzum 2004: 158–59). Nonetheless, Clear Channel did not deny the existence of the list in its official statement, even as it did call on each program director and general manager to “take the pulse of his or her market to determine if play lists should be altered” (cited in Nuzum 2004: 158). Eric Nuzum reports that the list had the practical effects of a ban when it came to the actual content of programming on Clear Channel stations: “While many Clear Channel programmers were quoted in the media as saying that they did not follow the suggestions of the e-mail, many times more said that they did indeed remove songs from the broadcast because of the list or its suggested use of restraint” (2004: 151–52). Martin Cloonan points out that at least one radio station did not play any music on the list (2004b: 16).
9. As it is with another song on the Clear Channel list, Simon & Garfunkel's “Bridge over Troubled Waters,” it is ironic that Lennon's “Imagine” was heavily requested on classic radio stations in the United States in the months following the World Trade Center attacks (Cloonan 2004b: 21).
10. It is not surprising, in this regard, that the highly vocal right-wing blogosphere did not come down against the Clear Channel list.
11. See <http://www.rareexception.com/Garden/American.php>
12. On the wide-reaching system of official censorship in the Republic of South Africa under apartheid, for instance, Coetzee writes: “Called in official parlance not censorship but ‘publications control’ (censorship was a word it preferred to censor from public discourse about itself), it sought to control the dissemination of signs in whatever form” (1996: 34).
13. See Neil Strauss, “The Pop Life: MTV is Wary of Videos on War,” *New York Times*, March 26, 2003. The contents of the memo can also be found on <http://board.unearthed.org/viewtopic.php?t=1738>.
14. Fred Schneider of the B-52's was baffled by MTV Europe's ban: “I guess MTV doesn't have a research department, because from Day 1 we've said in interviews that our name is a slang term for the bouffant hairdo Kate and Cindy used to wear—nothing to do with the bombers” (ibid.)
15. Although it did appear on MTV in the United States, the band's singer Serj Tankian points out that the video was not being shown on the music-video network MuchMusic USA either (ibid.).
16. On the official System of a Down Web site, Michael Moore provided sources for every claim made in the video. See also Rohr 2004: 71–2.

17. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported James as saying: "There is absolutely no MTV policy anywhere in the world banning war-related music videos. . . . The memo was only a recommendation from a staffer and was not and will not be implemented. It was ludicrous. In the U.S. and everywhere, all voices have been and will continue to be heard on MTV." From Joe Garofoli, "Artists React to Tale of Intimidation," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 April 2003.
18. Betty Clarke, "Pop—The Dixie Chicks—Shepherd's Bush Empire London," *The Guardian*, 12 March 2003.
19. Stephen Marshall, "Prime Time Payola," *In These Times*, 5 May 2003, 23–24. See also Paul Krugman, "Channels of Influence," *New York Times*, 25 March 2003.
20. NBC News, March 19, 2003. Available at <http://www.nbc4.tv/news/2051323/detail.html>.
21. Alisa Solomon, "The Big Chill," *The Nation*, 2 June 2003, 17–22.
22. Associated Press, May 6, 2003. Available at <http://www.polarity1.com/pcrr50.html>.
23. See, for example, remarks about the "groundswell, a hue and cry from listeners" made by Lewis W. Dickey Jr., CEO of Atlanta-based Cumulus Broadcasting in Bill Holland's "Radio under Fire: Chicks Ban Comes Back to Haunt Chain" (2003; see [http://www.recordingartistscoalition.com/press.php?content\\_id=27705](http://www.recordingartistscoalition.com/press.php?content_id=27705)). Executives at Clear Channel advanced the same basic defense of its actions: their radio stations, it was claimed, were buckling under grassroots pressure.
24. Associated Press. May 6, 2003. See <http://www.polarity1.com/pcrr50.html>.
25. Alterman writes: "In a May [2005] survey published by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 65 percent of respondents said they favor providing health insurance to all Americans, even if it means raising taxes, and 86 percent said they favor raising the minimum wage. Seventy-seven percent said they believe the country 'should do whatever it takes to protect the environment.' A September Gallup Poll finds that 59 percent consider the Iraq War a mistake and 63 percent agree that U.S. forces should be partially or completely withdrawn [from Iraq]." From Alterman's "Corrupt, Incompetent & Off Center," *The Nation*, 7 November 2005, p. 12.
26. The claim that conservative flak did not represent a majority of the citizenry does not in itself undermine the legitimacy of the politicized minority. Jean Hardisty and Deepak Bhargava describe the success of the right-wing rise to power at the turn of the century in terms of astute political mobilization: "Conservatives focused on building powerful mass-based institutions that could provide muscle for the conservative agenda, such as the National Rifle Association, the Moral Majority, the American Family Association and, later, Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America and the Christian Coalition of America" (Jean

- Hardisty and Deepak Bhargava, “Wrong about the Right,” *The Nation*, 7 November 2005, 23). Many of these groups actively pressure the culture industry to conform to a conservative agenda.
27. By most accounts, the issue was more contested than Rossman’s analysis would imply. On March 19, 2003, NBC news, for example, reported: “A lot of people were calling up saying they were never going to listen to the Dixie Chicks again,’ B93-FM radio personality ‘Some Guy Named Tias’ told WYFF News 4’s Todd Gladfelter, ‘A lot were saying they have the right to say whatever they want to say’” (see <http://www.nbc4.tv/news/2051323/detail.html>). WYFF is based in Greenville, South Carolina.
  28. Ibid.
  29. Using different databases, Michael Moore reported opposite sales figures for the Dixie Chicks on April 7, 2003: “This week, after all the attacks, their album is still at #1 on the *Billboard* country charts and, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, on the pop charts during all the brouhaha, they ROSE from #6 to #4” (See [http://www.globalaware.org/noticeboard/mm\\_dixie.html](http://www.globalaware.org/noticeboard/mm_dixie.html)).
  30. Eric Boehlert, “More Waves in the Radio Business,” Salon.com, August 6, 2001 ([http://dir.salon.com/ent/music/feature/2001/08/06/radio\\_records/index.html](http://dir.salon.com/ent/music/feature/2001/08/06/radio_records/index.html)).
  31. Rossman’s argument is strikingly consistent with arguments advanced in corporate headquarters at Clear Channel. Executives at Clear Channel, for example, insisted that the Atlanta rally on March 15, as well as other sponsored rallies organized by Clear Channel’s talk show host Glenn Beck, were a reflection of audience sentiment. Clear Channel spokeswoman Lisa Dollinger said, “Any rallies that our stations have been a part of have been of their own initiative and in response to the expressed desires of their listeners and communities,” while Beck maintained these were simply “grassroots” rallies (See Tim Jones, “Media Giant’s Rally Sponsorship Raises Questions,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 March 2003). Yet the *New York Times* reports that of the eighteen “Rally for America!” events held across the country during the month of March, thirteen were cosponsored and actively promoted by local Clear Channel stations (See John Schwartz and Geraldine Fabrikant. “War Puts Radio Giant on the Defensive,” *New York Times*, 31 March 2003, Business Section).
  32. Paul Krugman, “Channels of Influence,” *New York Times*, 25 March 2003.
  33. For a critical appraisal of the Carlyle Group, see <http://www.takeback-themedia.com/radiogaga.html>; for a company statement, see [www.carlylegroup.com/funds.htm](http://www.carlylegroup.com/funds.htm).
  34. Eric Boehlert, “Suit: Clear Channel is an Illegal Monopoly,” Salon.com, 8 August 2001 ([http://dir.salon.com/ent/clear\\_channel/2001/08/08/antitrust/index.html](http://dir.salon.com/ent/clear_channel/2001/08/08/antitrust/index.html)).
  35. Mirapaul, Matthew. “Concert CDs Sold on the Spot by Radio Giant,” *New York Times*, 5 May 2003.

36. In 1996, Congress passed the Telecommunications Act to replace the 1934 law. The principal aim of the 1996 law was to deregulate all communication industries. As a result, Clear Channel grew from owning just forty to over twelve hundred radio stations in the first nine years after the law's revision.
37. The arguments by business executives claiming "grassroots pressure" as the cause of the Dixie Chicks blacklist backhandedly testify to the public obligations of radio. Similarly, the arguments claiming increased "diversity" on the consolidated airwaves (often with reference to the concept-metaphor of "formats") equally acknowledge these obligations. For example, David F. Poltrack, Executive Vice President, Research and Planning at CBS, indicates that the public is served by deregulation because of the sheer increase in television channels in the last decade. Similarly, Dennis Swanson, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Viacom Television Stations Group, maintains that media consolidation has increased the actual number of minutes of programming devoted to local news (see remarks made by Poltrack and Swanson at the Forum on Media Ownership Rules held at Columbia University on January 16, 2003, webcast of proceedings available on <http://www.law.columbia.edu>). For a critique of these arguments, see Scherzinger 2005.
38. Quoted in Patterson 1991: 17.
39. See [http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=831&wit\\_id=2340](http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=831&wit_id=2340) and Holland 2003.
40. J. M. Coetzee offers historical reasons for the hostility between governmental authority and writing, especially in the context of the disseminative power afforded by printing. "Hostility between the two sides, which soon became settled and institutional, was exacerbated by the tendency of artists from the late eighteenth century onward to assume it as their social role, and sometimes indeed as their vocation and destiny, to test limits (that is to say, the weak points) of thought and feeling, of representation, of the law, and of opposition itself, in ways that those in power were bound to find uncomfortable and even offensive" (1996: 9). This hostility is considerably intensified in the context of vast new technologies of dissemination today.
41. Anthony Tommasini, "John Adams, Banned in Boston," *New York Times*, 25 November 2001. All following quotes by Tommasini are drawn from this article.
42. Waldron's position echoes what Barbara Boxer calls a "beautiful noise."
43. Richard Taruskin, "Music's Dangers and the Case for Control," *New York Times*, 9 December 2001.
44. Jeffery Shallit, "Music's Dangers: Whose Self-Control?" *New York Times*, 23 December 2001.
45. Michael Trombetta, "Music's Dangers; Brooklyn Too," *New York Times*, 23 December 2001.



46. Taruskin, "Music's Dangers," 2001. All following quotes by Taruskin are drawn from this article.
47. Taruskin differs from Plato, St. Augustine, and John of Salisbury (but less so from Goebbels and Zhdanov) in another important respect as well: Where Plato, Augustine, and John tend to emphasize the purely musical aspects of music (its harmonies, rhythms, polyphonies, etc.), Taruskin is more interested in its hermeneutic aspects (the political, possibly anti-Semitic, dimensions of Adams's opera, etc.). Taruskin does attempt to transfer the argument to the music itself ("The libretto commits many notorious breaches of evenhandedness, but the greatest one is to be found in Mr. Adams's music"), but this argument rests on an analogy; a cryptographic association between the musical language accompanying the words of Jesus in the *St. Matthew Passion* and that accompanying the Palestinians in *Klinghoffer*. Taruskin does not question the musical aspects of the "Bachian aureole" as such (with its "effects of limitless expanse in time or space," etc.), but rather the composer's choice of protagonists with which such sublimity is associated.
48. Taruskin's attempt to identify the harm embodied by *Klinghoffer* is erratic, often creating the conditions of the argument's undermining. On (*Los Angeles Times* music critic) Mark Swed's upholding of the post 9/11 relevance of the opera, for example, Taruskin writes: "But whence this quaintly macho impulse to despise comfort (women's work?) and even deny it haughtily to sufferers? And whence the idea of seeking answers and understanding in an opera peopled by wholly fictional terrorists and semifictionalized victims, rather than in more relevant sources of information?" In an apparently feminist gesture, Taruskin here paradoxically feminizes an apparently masculinist pose, and then rhetorically insists that not canceling the performance denies comfort to sufferers. The problem with this construal lies less with the exaggerated claim about suffering (surely only the removal of a musical performance could deny anyone anything), and more with the diminished claim about art's relevance, which undermines the very impulse that launches Taruskin's critique. If the opera is as "fictional" (and thus futile to the cause of "understanding") as claimed, why is it construed as harmful enough to warrant withdrawal?
49. On whether this loss leads to tacit acceptance of terrorist acts Taruskin's text is silent.
50. Tommasini, "John Adams," 2003.
51. Ibid.
52. Mark Swed, "'Klinghoffer': Too Hot to Handle?" *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 2001.

53. For an extended analysis of Madonna's video in the context of impending war, see Scherzinger and Smith's "From Blatant to Latent Protest (and Back Again): On the Politics of Theatrical Spectacle in Madonna's 'American Life,'" forthcoming in *Popular Music*.

