

X CONGRESO MUNDIAL DE
10TH WORLD CONGRESS OF
SEMIÓTICA
SEMIOTICS

A CORUÑA

2009

22-26
de septiembre

22nd-26th
september

XIII CONGRESO DE LA ASOCIACIÓN ESPAÑOLA DE SEMIÓTICA
13TH CONGRESS OF THE SPANISH ASSOCIATION OF SEMIOTICS

Cultura de la Comunicación
Comunicación de la Cultura

Culture of Communication
Communication of Culture


Patrocina / Sponsored by

 OBRA SOCIAL CAIXA GALICIA

Para más información / Further information:
www.semio2009.org



IASS
-AIS

 ASOCIACIÓN ESPAÑOLA
DE SEMIÓTICA

Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of the
International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS)

**Culture of Communication/Communication of Culture
Culture de la Communication/Communication de la Culture
Cultura de la Comunicación/Comunicación de la Cultura**

*Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of the International Association
for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS)*

Pilar Couto Cantero
Gonzalo Enríquez Veloso
Alberta Passeri
José María Paz Gago
(Eds.)

A Coruña 2012

Servizo de Publicacións
Universidade da Coruña

Culture of Communication/Communication of Culture. Culture de la Communication/Communication de la Culture. Cultura de la Comunicación/Comunicación de la Cultura. *Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS)*

Edición a cargo de Couto Cantero, P., Enríquez Veloso, G., Passeri, A. y Paz Gago, J. M.
A Coruña, 2012

Universidade da Coruña, Servizo de Publicacións
International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS)

Cursos_Congresos_Simposios, núm. 130

2198 páxinas

Índice: páxinas 3-13

ISSN 2414-6862

ISBN: 978-84-9749-522-6

Depósito legal: C 1798 - 2012

Materia: GTE: Semiótica, Semioloxía. JFC: Estudos culturais

Edición:

Couto Cantero, P.
Enríquez Veloso, G.
Passeri, A.
Paz Gago, J. M.

Universidade da Coruña, Servizo de Publicacións
<http://www.udc.es/publicaciones>

© IASS/AIS

© Universidade da Coruña

Maquetación, edición electrónica e supervisión:
Marmore Producións
juan_marmore@mundo-r.com

Distribución:

Galicia: CONSORCIO EDITORIAL GALEGO, Estrada da Estación 70-A,
36818, A Portela, Redondela (Pontevedra) Tel. 986 405 051
Fax: 986 404 935, correo electrónico: pedimentos@coegal.com

España: BREOGÁN, C/ Lanuza, 11. 28022, Madrid. Tel. 91 725 90 72.
Fax: 91 713 06 31, correo electrónico: webmaster@breogan.org.
Web: <http://www.breogan.org>

Impreso en España / Printed in Spain

Reservados todos os dereitos. Nin a totalidade nin parte deste libro pode reproducirse ou transmitirse por ningún procedemento electrónico ou mecánico, incluíndo fotocopia, gravación magnética ou calquera almacenamento de información e sistema de recuperación, sen o permiso previo e por escrito das persoas titulares do copyright.

Filmic Communication on Controlling Film Culture: The Presentation of Movie Censorship within a Movie

GLORIA WITHALM

University of Applied Arts Vienna (Austria)

Abstract

A constitutive part of both communication and culture is the possibility to act in a free and unrestricted way, without being censored. Censorship, the act of censoring a text — be it a literary text, a newspaper or a movie —, is a large topic and its discussion necessarily has to include political, sociological and economic aspects in addition to the analysis of the actual changes of the text. As a matter of fact, even if confined to censoring films, it is too large a topic to be discussed in a short contribution. Accordingly, the paper will deal only with one small and very special subject that — though it might be considered marginal to the overall problem — sheds light on the view on censorship from within the medium: The paper will give some examples of how the issue is presented in movies and thus focus on the discussion of self-referential filmic modes of discourse and not on the analysis of censorship as such. In order to deal with the variety of manifestations, ‘censorship’ will be used here in the widest sense, covering the range from selfregulation, that is forms of self-imposed control, to actual direct state censorship (in advance as well as on the finished product) or to its milder contemporary form of a rating system. The agents will be both official censors, working on a large scale for an entire country, and local authorities, like the representatives of the Church, who simply ordered the local exhibitors to cut certain scenes, otherwise the population of the village would hear the strong disapproval of the movie during Sunday morning services. Apart from these stories about controlling the filmic text, a second group of examples will include the rare cases of an actual and deliberate onscreen presentation both visual or verbal of censorial practices.

A constitutive part of both communication and culture is the possibility to act in a free and unrestricted way, without being censored. Censorship, the act of censoring a text, be it a literary text, a newspaper or a movie, is a large topic and its discussion necessarily has to include political, sociological and economic aspects in addition to the analysis of the actual changes of the text. As a matter of fact, even if confined to censoring films, it is too large a topic to be discussed in a short contribution. Accordingly, the paper will deal only with one small and very special subject that — though it might be considered marginal to the overall problem — sheds light on the view on censorship from within the medium: The paper will give some examples of how the issue is presented in movies and thus focus on the discussion of self-referential filmic modes of discourse and not on the analysis of censorship as such. In my socio-semiotic model of self-referentiality that depicts the entire process of a film censorship is situated within the field of distribution together with other evaluating procedures (cf. Withalm 2007).

In order to deal with the variety of manifestations, *censorship* is used here in the widest sense, covering the range from self-regulation, that is forms of self-imposed control, to actual direct state censorship (in advance as well as on the finished product) or to its milder contemporary form of a rating system. The agents will be both official censors, working on a large scale for an entire country, and local authorities, like the representatives of the Church, who simply ordered the local exhibitors to cut certain scenes, otherwise the population of the village would hear the strong disapproval of the movie during Sunday morning services. Apart from these stories about controlling the filmic text, a second group of examples will include the rare cases of an actual and deliberate on-screen presentation both visual or verbal of censorial practices.

1. TALES OF CENSORS AND CENSORING

As it is the case with the majority of self-referential motifs, the most obvious ones are located on the level of the presented characters and the stories told. The work and life of movie censors is definitely not one of the major items to be discussed with regard to filmic self-referentiality, still there is a number of movies dealing with this particular handling of media texts.

1.1. The Man with the Scissors

Though not acting on her/his own behalf but rather as part of a differentiated system of regulations concerning the distribution and reception of media products, the character in the center of many movies dealing with censorship is the censor her-/himself. Most probably the earliest example of a film dealing with a censor is the British comedy *Cut It Out; A Day In The Life of A Censor* (Adrian Brunel, GB 1925). The on-line catalog of the British Film Institute gives the following brief description:

A satire on film censorship showing how the efforts of a film director and his cast are frustrated by a censoring busybody during the making of their film. Note: the characters include Izzy Panhard (cameraman), Rudge Z. Whitworth (director), Harper Sunbeam

(representative for The Society for Detecting Evil in Others) and Major Maurice Cowley
[<<http://www.bfi.org.uk/collections/catalogues/silent/details.php3?filmid=119>>]

Looking at the actual occurrence in real life, censorship is a typical feature of authoritarian systems, be it Latin American dictatorships or real socialism in East European countries until the late 1980s.

Argentina is the home country of Raúl Veirabé (Ulises Dumont). During the years of the military junta he is the head of the censor department that bans films or cuts them up. *El Censor* (Eduardo Calcagno, AR 1995; aka *The Eyes of the Scissors*) shows how Raúl lives and works. During a routine screening session he falls asleep and as he wakes up he finds himself transposed to the post-junta years. When hurled from the past into the resurrected democracy within seconds, he has lost everything. Not only that his services are no longer appreciated. Moreover, he is reproached by all those he has oppressed in the last decade. The group of affected filmmakers is certainly not confined to porn producers as he tries to convince a French television journalist who interviewed him at the heyday of his career. First he tries to appear as a moderate man. He objects to the notion «censor» since it sounds rather «medieval» and he does not burn movies, but — at least in his self-image — rather assesses them. The journalist, however, has a list of movies which were forbidden by the censor. The censor tries hard to cover up the complete range of his banning and talks only about cheap sex movies, for instance *Homoerótico Super-Macho*. But he cannot fool the journalist who adds the titles of several masterpieces like *Clockwork Orange* or *Le dernier tango à Paris*.

A censor of East European provenance is the main character of *Ucieczka z kina «Wolność»* (*Escape From the «Liberty» Cinema*; Wojciech Marzewski, PL 1991). The movie is set in the late days of the old regime, it tells the story of a local censor (Janusz Gajos) and the events taking place at the «Liberty» cinema, the local movie theater just across the street from his office, he has to cope with. One day during an afternoon projection for a school class, something extraordinary happens: all the characters or rather the actresses and actors of the screened Polish melodrama, titled *Daybreak*, first start to ad-lib and then refuse completely to continue with their lines and with the plot. They mock Polish films in general and their own film in particular: a bittersweet story about a sanatorium where a blind woman (the daughter of the head physician) is about to regain her eyesight. Moreover, they start to interact with the audience. This clear reference to *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, US 1985) is not only recognized by the viewers but also by one of the characters. A film critic who is asked to help in dealing with the problem notes the similarity and tells the other members of the Communist Party delegation about it. *Ucieczka...* quotes *The Purple Rose of Cairo* also in the material sense when the critic has the idea to show the US movie. During the screening the two projectors get mixed up and, accidentally, the two movies are projected one over the other. Eventually, Tom Baxter, the character from the 1930s film-within-the-film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, ends up in the late 1980s clinic from *Daybreak*. When Malgorzata (Teresa Marzewska), the leading actress of the film-within-the-film, talks to the censor she reminds him that they know each other already for some twenty years. The woman confronts him with his former life before he became a censor and all the ideas long forgotten and betrayed.

At the end, the authorities decide that there is no other solution to prevent the problem from spreading to other movie theaters and even to other cities than to burn the film. At that point, the censor enters the movie screen to talk to all the characters. Malgorzata and the others take him outside the on-screen scene (the main hall of the clinic) onto the roofscape of the/a city where he meets many other actors/ characters. As he is unable to recognize them and to recall what he did, they attack him for all the restrictions he has proclaimed, and thus for all the lives he has ruined, over the years as censor. One of them produces the very film which the censor has banned (Fig. 1).

1.2. Strict Rules – Elaborate or Simple

Censoring movies is a practice which occurs not only under actual dictatorship. The Indian film business is known both for the incredible number of movies released every year and for the strict rules filmmakers have to obey. *Censor* (Dev Anand, IN 2001) tells the story of the film director Vikramjeet (Dev Anand) who (successfully) fights censorship in his home country, India. Some critiques presume that the film is «apparently inspired by Dev Anand's efforts to get his last film 'Main Solah Baras Ki' past the censors» (Kataria 2001).

When the regional director of the Censor Board, Ms. Srivastava (Rekha), asks him to cut several scenes from his new film *Aanewala Kal*,^[1] which Vikramjeet considers essential, the director simply refuses to change anything. He smuggles a print of the film out of the country, gets it nominated for the «Millennium World Academy Award» and eventually the film wins in the foreign language category. Back in India, he continues his fight against censorship, goes to court and wins the case. The judge (Shammi Kapoor) rules that the Censor Board has to change its policy and criteria (cf. ApunKaChoice 2001a, 2001b; IMDb <tt0272543/combined>). According to several published critiques, Dev Anand summed up his film in the following way:

Censor is about a film that gets held up with the censors due to their rigidity. The message in the film is that one has to move with the times and quit the orthodox way of thinking. With the invasion of satellite television, the whole generation is exposed to a different, more liberal culture. Things that were taboo yesterday are being openly discussed today. The Censor Board too should change the way they look at films. (Cinemas-Online; cf. also Kataria 2001)

Another review shows a view on self-referentiality widely shared among critics from the early days on, namely that a backstage movie does not necessarily appeal to the audience: «The theme of the film is undoubtedly novel, but whether people outside the film industry will applaud it is highly doubtful.» (HindiSong 2001)

Though we generally tend to forget about it, democracies have likewise a set of complex regulations determining how movies are rated and sometimes still cut up. *The Adjuster* (Atom Egoyan, CA 1991) shows a woman who works as a censor for pornographic films:

[1] The spelling of both the name of the main character and the title of the film-within-the-film differs in the various sources, for instance *Aanewala Kal* vs *Aane Wala Kal*.

Hera (Arsinée Khanjian) is the wife of the title character Noah Render (Elias Koteas) who works for an insurance company. At one point they talk about their respective professions. Noah describes his duties in the following way, «Sorting things out, deciding what has value and what doesn't», and Hera can only answer, «I know what you mean, it's the same thing I do». The movie observes the assessing team during their work in the screening room where, after viewing a film, they vote for the rating it deserves. In order to become a member of the board, one has to know the rules by heart, as shown in a scene in which the Head Censor Bert (David Hemblen) examines Tyler (Don McKellar), a young censor to be. The dialog is a verbatim quote from the relevant section of the actual Canadian non-approval regulations, from (a) «A graphic or prolonged scene of violence, torture, crime, cruelty, horror or human degradation» to (h) «A scene where an animal has been abused in the making of the film».^[2]

In addition to official rating systems or approvement regulations, local authorities can sometimes interfere with the showing of movies by applying very simple but nevertheless more strict rules. This practice can be found, for instance, in *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (aka *Cinema Paradiso*; Giuseppe Tornatore, IT/FR 1989) where it is Padre Adelfio (Leopoldo Trieste), the village priest, who demands a private screening of every movie to be shown in the village. By ringing a bell he «tells» the projectionist Alfredo (Philippe Noiret) to remove an «objectionable» scene — usually each and every depiction of a couple indulging in a kiss. Alfredo marks the shots on the reel (Fig. 2) and cuts them out later on.

1.3. Collecting Forbidden Images

In *Cinema Paradiso* Tornatore shows also one particular practice of privately counteracting the repression: instead of splicing them back into the print, Alfredo secretly collects all the clips he was ordered to remove from the film. Finally he edits them into one long movie entirely

[2] Every province has its own regulations which vary in wording and, to a certain extent, in the age limits applicable (for Ontario, e.g., the age mentioned in paragraph c is fixed with eighteen). Section 17 (4) of the «General Regulations made pursuant to the Theatres and Amusements Act» of Nova Scotia, for instance, has almost the same wording as the movie dialog — except that regulations (e) through (g) are omitted (which does not necessarily mean that Egoyan actually quoted from *this* source):

«(4) The Board may prohibit the exhibition, sale, lease, rental, exchange or distribution of a film in Nova Scotia where the film contains:

- (a) a graphic or prolonged scene of violence, torture, crime, cruelty, horror or human degradation;
- (b) the depiction of the physical abuse or humiliation of human beings for the purposes of sexual gratification or as pleasing to the victim;
- (c) a scene where a person who is or is intended to represent a person under the age of sixteen years appears.
 - (i) nude or partially nude in sexually suggestive context, or
 - (ii) in a scene of explicit sexual activity;
- (d) the explicit and gratuitous depiction of urination, defecation or vomiting;
- (e) the explicit depiction of sexual activity;
- (f) a scene depicting indignities to the human body in an explicit manner;
- (g) a scene where there is undue emphasis on human genital organs;
- (h) a scene where an animal has been abused in the making of the film.»

(Province of Nova Scotia 1989, <Thet_Reg.pdf>: 10)

made up of censored kisses that he keeps all the years for the film director Salvatore Di Vito (Jacques Perrin) who used to be up in the projection booth when he was still a kid.

Although he is actually the one who orders the cuts of the films, the censor in *El Censor* (Eduardo Calcagno, AR 1995) has also a private collection. At one point Raúl is shown at his work. Instead of simply marking shots to be removed, he himself takes the scissors. The shots he cuts out, however, are not sexually explicit pictures or politically dangerous scenes and only at the end of the scene we realize what he is actually doing. Whenever he finds images of a particular young actress, he takes out a number of frames (Fig. 3) and secretly edits the clips to a sort of homage reel of this woman. After he was hurled out of the junta period, the only stable and still intact element of his former life are the cans with this clip collection of the beautiful young woman.

2. SELF-REGULATION – CENSORSHIP FROM WITHIN?

Since many of the examples in the third and last part of the paper are based on various modes of media's self-regulation rather than on the persons and/or acts of state censors, a short excursion will deal with the most prominent variation of these regulations: the Hollywood Production Code.

Self-«censorship» has a long history in Hollywood filmmaking: executed on a more or less regular basis it goes back to 1909 with the National Board of Censorship (cf. Staiger 1985: 104) which was originally founded as The New York Board of Censorship of Programs of Motion Picture Shows (cf. Brownlow 1992: 5). The name most often associated with self-imposed strict movie regulations is certainly Will H. Hays who headed a trade association. The «*Hays Office*» at the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (officially named *Production Code Administration* of the MPPDA), is the origin of a set of rules — since 1934 generally known as the *Production Code*^[3] — which filmmakers had to obey in order to get a certificate of approval which was also included in the film (cf. Thompson & Bordwell 1994: 239, Fig. 10.1); similar versions of an extra title card or some lines on one of the credit cards existed also in European cinema (Fig. 4).

The control exercised by the Hays Office started already with the development of a story, no matter whether original or based on a novel. The producers and studios were only too willing to accept the Code, as they were reminded of the threat of «real» censorship on a regular basis (cf. Powdermaker 1950: 67-68).

[3] In 1924 Hays first established the *Formula*, but since the guidelines were not effectual, he formulated stricter rules eventually leading to the Motion Picture Production Code (nicknamed the «Hays Code») of 1930, generally implemented in 1934 (Thompson & Bordwell 1994: 160, 239-240; cf. Maltby 1995: 340-341; for the silent era cf. also Brownlow 1990). The Production Code lists all the Don'ts especially with regard to sex – even «[e]xcessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures are not to be shown» (Hayes 2000: <ProdCode.html>, Production Code, Particular applications, II.2(b)). Concerning the question of the depiction of violence, however, most discussions on the Code agree on the discrepancy (cf. Katz entry «Production Code»). The entire text is definitely worth reading in order to better understand the Hollywood movies of the 1930s and 1940s (for an annotated version showing all the changes between 1930 and 1967, cf. Hayes 2000).

Times have changed, the Production Code is no longer in effect and has long been replaced by the rating system. However, altering a film by cutting out scenes is still common practice — just think of movies aired by television channels at prime time to attract many viewers, while at the same time, they consider it necessary to cut some explicit sex or violence shots in order to be able to air the movie at prime time. (Another reason which might lead to astonished viewers who no longer recognize the films they have previously seen in a movie theater used to be the strict time-slots of television program schedules.)

3. CENSORING THE TEXT WITHIN THE TEXT

Apart from self-referentiality on the story level, depictions of, or at least allusion to, different methods of applying censorship are sometimes even integrated in the filmic text itself and thus gain a self-reflexive status. The on-screen presentation of censorial practices takes various forms and can be both visual or verbal.

3.1. Messages From the Media Institution

From the early days on, the cinema audience regularly got messages from the theater management projected onto the screen. Be it the request that ladies should take off their hats, any other behavioral directives, or the announcement of a short break, the viewers had learned two things: to better take the messages for granted (which included to obey the rules), and that not everything appearing on the screen is part of the film being viewed.

As is often the case with devices, as soon as they are used they are also parodied in films showing messages that pretend to originate from the theater management. Fred «Tex» Avery, the master of self-reflexive cartoons, included many of this kind of pseudo-messages in his films. One example refers to a particular element of the traditional motion picture theater programs and thus the US film culture from the 1930s to the 1950s: beside the newsreel and a cartoon there were short films on landscapes and faraway places, called travelogues. *Cross Country Detours* (US 1940) is a spoof of these much-loved travelogues. One scene is set in the Everglades: the camera shows a frog, and the narrator talks about the frog croaking, but instead of simply croaking, the frog draws a gun and blows his head off. After the frog has dramatically died and fallen into the water with a huge splash, a title card is pushed in from the left side of the screen:

We are not responsible in any way for the puns used in this cartoon. The Management.

Some 30 years later, we find similar apologies (both as inserts/roller captions and spoken voice-overs) in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, thus replacing the faked messages of a theater manager by the faked messages of a TV corporation. In contrast to the authors of the 1940s wording, the chaotic television comedians are much more graphic in their formulations, like in the example taken from the film spoof sketch titled «Ken Russell's 'Gardening Club'» aired in episode 3 of the third season (fall 1972). This time, the message comes as a kind of warning before the sketch:

Apology for Violence and Nudity

Eric Idle [V.O.]

The BBC would like to announce that the next scene is not considered suitable for family viewing. It contains scenes of violence, involving people's heads and arms getting chopped off, their ears nailed to trees, and their toenails pulled out in slow motion. There are also scenes of naked women with floppy breasts, and also at one point you can see a pair of buttocks [...].

(Monty Python Flying Circus 1989: <viol-nude.php>)

More than three decades later, real warnings prior to airing film material can still be observed on television. Although officially meant as a disclaimer, the promise to show some gory and graphic scenes keeps the viewers glued to their television sets.

3.2. Watching Over a Pure and Decent Language

Although they were certainly good at it, the guys from Monty Python's Flying Circus were not the first to poke fun at the attitude of media institutions toward the depiction of, or even just the talking about, sex and violence. The Production Code dealt not only with the actual showing of something considered to be immoral, in article IV it also ruled that «[o]bscenity in word [...] is forbidden» (Hayes 2000: <ProdCode.html>).

One of the first feature films in which censor practices were spoofed was the highly self-reflexive comedy *Hellzapoppin'* (H.C. Potter, US 1941). Chic (Chic Johnson) and Ole (Ole Olsen) find out that what they meant to be a trick to get their friend Woody off his idea to marry the rich socialite Kitty — the story that she is having an affair with a phony Russian prince called Pepi — seems to be «true». When Chic is about to use some indecent word to describe her, the projectionist (who frequently interferes in the movie and talks to the on-screen characters) knows how to stop him.

Two shot, OLE Olsen and CHIC Johnson.

Ole

That nice sweet innocent girl —

Chic

That nice sweet innocent girl is just a —

A bell is ringing out loud and from the left side a title card «CENSORED» enters and covers the entire screen. The dialog can no longer be heard.

PROJECTION BOOTH. Louie behind the projector.

Louie

There's still a Hays Office [...].

Bell is ringing again. The card is drawn off the screen. OLE and CHICK have obviously kept on talking, but we have missed some parts.

Ole

She's worse than that!

A few minutes later, when they want to tell Jeff the truth about Kitty, they have already learned: Ole starts to say «that Kitty —, that Kitty is a —», but before he can utter the word he looks up left, and the bell is ringing. Then the CENSORED card enters the screen again, but only halfway. Chic makes a gesture as if he wants to stop the insert (Fig. 5), and comforts, «Okay, Louie.» The card is withdrawn, and Chic continues the comments on Kitty in a more decent way.

Road to Utopia (Hal Walker, US 1945) is another movie full of self-reflexive twists. It also has one example of censorship integrated into the primary movie text. In one scene, Duke Johnson (Bing Crosby) and Chester Hooton (Bob Hope) watch through a window how the rightful heiress to the goldmine is tied up by the bad guy and his moll.

Chester

«Why — the dirty — — — —

Absolute silence – even the music stopped

(Chester mouthing several words)

Duke

I told you they wouldn't let you say that!

Despite the fact that the Production Code has long been abolished, the problem of foul talking seems to be still virulent almost half a century later, at least on the major US networks. As is the case with movies, they still (have to) obey certain rules with regard to the depiction of sex and violence and the use of decent language. The main characters of the comedy series *Moonlighting* (US-ABC 1985-89) know quite well what is allowed on television and frequently comment on the don'ts, in particular with regard to the differences between cable and the major networks as the following dialog excerpts show.

In the beginning of the episode «Portrait of Maddy» (Peter Werner, US-ABC 1985; ep14/s2), Maddie (Cybil Shepherd) and David (Bruce Willis) find out that they are finally in the black with the agency. Happy about the money they made, Maddie hugs David and he puts his arms around her. However, Maddie doesn't like their very position and tells him, «Get your hand off my behind.» David keeps fooling around and Maddie starts to argue, «Would you get serious!». However, as usual, David has the last and striking say, «Maddie, I just had my hand on your behind. If I get any more serious, they're gonna move us to cable». In another episode («When Girls Collide»; Dennis Dugan, US-ABC 1989; ep63/s5) when Bert starts to talk about «the most beautiful word in the English language», David warns him: «Careful, this ain't cable». With the last episodes of season 5 *Moonlighting* was moved from the usual time slot (Tuesday, 9 p.m.) to Sunday night, 8 o'clock. Unfortunately, nobody has told the singer Al Jarreau about the changes in the program. Thus at the beginning of «Those Lips, Those Lies» (Dennis Dugan, US-ABC 1989; ep61/s5) the theme music is only instrumental. Apart from this problem the new schedule has some additional consequences, especially for David's language. When he asks «Why the hell didn't somebody call —» he can't complete his sentence because Maddie warns him, «David, you can't talk like that», since kids are watching, and ends with a list of don'ts: «From now on nil sexual innuendo. no more double entendres, no more off-color remarks.»

Maddie seems to know exactly what is possible on television and what isn't. Even in a television show like *The Osbournes* (US-MTV 2002-) which is definitely for a special target group who is not offended by a talking that is not always suitable for kids, networks feel obliged to erase four-letter words by the typical TV «bleep» — the auditive equivalent of the practices of interfering with the images described in the next chapter.

3.3. Covering up

A well-known way still used to handle undesirable male nudity in print media is to stick a label over the incriminated body parts. Sometimes, this device is also used in motion pictures. In the late 1930s and 40s when the rules were still very strict, *Cross Country Detours* spoofed the reaction to the «danger» of depicting somebody in full frontal nudity even if it is only a female lizard, though a rather sexy specimen. In a scene set in the Southwest of the USA a lizard is introduced by a crazy commentary, and it behaves in an extraordinary way.

A green lizard crosses the screen from the left to the right.

Narrator (*v.o.*)

Here is a lizard which as you all probably know sheds its skin once a year. Let's watch this interesting procedure.

MUSIC: «It has to be You». The lizard gets up on its hind legs and starts to dance to the music. After a few seconds it, or rather she begins to «undress». The first part of her skin/cloths she takes off is the upper part that suddenly looks like a short jacket. What started — weird enough — as a lizard's dance turns into a hot stage strip tease. She opens her skin on the backside and slowly takes it off, moving perfectly to the rhythm of the music. When she is about to take it off completely — she is on the verge of full frontal nudity, a small card saying «CENSORED» is superimposed, hiding her body from the eyes of the viewers. (Fig. 6)

In August 2002, the «censored» seal was revived for entirely different reasons in a late night television commercial for a sex line. Here the viewers are made to believe that the spot just taken off the air was offering something really hot that had to be replaced by the test image which is shown instead of these «censored» images (Fig. 7), something that is not allowed on regular television. Therefore they are deprived of the images (but eventually they can find out about the sexy content by calling in...).

3.4. Blurred Reality

Apart from covering up details of an image which are regarded «immoral» or «indecent», there are other pictorial strategies to prevent the audience from seeing these details. For in-flight movies it is still common practice that they are heavily cut and, in addition, parts of the image (which are considered too graphic for a general public across all ages) are blurred. The electronic version of the image blurring looks like part of the film is rendered at an extremely low resolution showing nothing but big pixels. Normally, it is used to hide the identity of persons (interviewees, prison inmates, bystanders, etc.) or to render certain body parts almost invisible (most often the large color squares appear to pixelize an erected penis on prime-time television).

However, also this electronic estrangement device is spoofed: it re-appears for instance in a commercial for *Smirnoff Vodka*, titled «Censored» (Martin Denecke, CH 1999; Lowe/GGK), as a self-ironic handling of (alleged ?) censorship.

The ad opens with the line «We proudly present the Swiss version of the international Smirnoff spot». What follows, however, is more than strange: not a single frame is in focus. We can hardly decode the images — most probably a scene in a bar and a flirting couple — since everything is pixelated (Fig. 8), and a subtitle explains why.

Sorry, but the Paragraph 42b of the law on spirits advertising prohibits us from showing you the international Smirnoff Vodka commercial uncensored.

The ad ends with a comforting lines for the viewers:

But fortunately, there's no law yet that prohibits you from enjoying Smirnoff Vodka.

Sometimes, however, parody comes true when fiction is outdone by reality. As mentioned above, the solution on television is pixelation. However, the low resolution rendering of parts of the image is not confined to cover up the identity of persons or male frontal (or sometimes even rear) nudity. Contrary to middle European television standards, in the US even upper parts of the female body still seem to be an absolute no-no.

The latest scandal in this respect was Janet Jackson's bare right breast (adorned with a silver star over the nipple) that was presented for nine-sixteenths of one second during the half-time show of the Super Bowl XXXVIII on February 1, 2004. A week after the event, CNN ran a feature on the 2004 Grammy Awards Ceremony with the following voice over commentary:

The sights, the sounds, the threat of censorship. The 46th Annual Grammy Awards offered them all. The fallout from Janet Jackson's revealing Super Bowl flash prompted CBS to air the Grammy Awards using what the network calls «a new enhanced tape delay system». Now, instead of just seconds, network censors had several minutes to alter any offensive sounds or sights that might occur on stage. (CNN 2004-02-09)

The pictures accompanied by these words, however, had not only the «threat of censorship», but they were censored by CNN already. When the commentar spoke about «Janet Jackson's revealing Super Bowl flash» the very seconds of the respective shot from the Super Bowl broadcast were shown when Justin Timberlake ripped off a crucial part of Jackson's leather outfit. Only this time, nobody could see her right breast since the area was transformed into a square of nine oversized pixels (Fig. 9). Obviously, CNN's legal advisors knew why they had the breast pixelated. Already on February 3, a first class action lawsuit was launched against Jackson, Timberlake and the involved media organizations (CBS, MTV and VIACOM) on behalf of «all American citizens who watched the outrageous conduct» and the FCC Federal Communications Commission imposed a fine of more than half a million dollars on CBS.^[4]

[4] As of October 2009 the case is not yet settled and developed into a kind of never-ending story: first, in July 2008, CBS succeeded to have the fine dropped, but only some four months ago (May 4, 2009), the Supreme Court ordered the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to re-examine its ruling in favor of CBS (FCC v. CBS Corp., 08-653).

Maybe, to end with a tongue-in-cheek example, again from an Argentinian director, maybe broadcasting corporations should consider the brandnew invention featured in the fake promo spot *Pixel Censor Technology* (Antonio Balseiro, AR 2008): instant pixels out of a box to protect the «private parts» (Fig. 10).

REFERENCES

- ApunKaChoice (2001a): «Censor – General Movie». Web online: <<http://www.apunkachoice.com/movies/mov154/index.html>>; visited: 2003-08-19
- (2001b [2003-04-04]): «Dev Anand's 'Censor' – a film within a film». Web online: <<http://www.apunkachoice.com/scoop/bollywood/20010404-0.html>>; visited: 2003-08-19
- Brownlow, Kevin (1990): *Behind the Mask of Innocence, Sex, Violence, Prejudice, Crime: Films of Social Conscience in the Silent Era*. Berkeley–Los Angeles: University of California Press 1992
- Cinemas-Online (no date): «Censor». Web online: <<http://www.cinemas-online.co.uk/films/censor.fhtml?return=&sitecode=0>>; visited: 2005-03-03
- Hayes, David P. (2000): «The Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry». Web online: <http://home.earthlink.net/~davidp_hayes/prodcode/index.html>; visited: 2002-01-28
- HindiSong (2001): «Movie Review - Censor. A Bold Attempt». Web online: <<http://www.hindisong.com/Movie/MovieReview.asp?MovieID=648>>; visited: 2005-03-03
- Jowett, Garth (1996): «'A Significant Medium for the Communication of Ideas'. The *Miracle* Decision and the Decline of the Motion Picture Censorship, 1952.1968». In: Couvares, Francis G. (ed.). *Movie Censorship and American Culture*. Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 258-276
- Kataria, Sonia (2001): «BBC - Leicester - Movies - Censor». Web online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/leicester/entertainment/movies/2001_04/06/censor2.shtml>; visited: 2005-03-03
- Katz, Ephraim (1979): *The Film Encyclopedia*. New York: HarperCollinsPublishers Inc. Database version on the CD *Microsoft Cinemania '95*. 1994
- Maltby, Richard (1995): *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Blackwell
- Monty Python Flying Circus 1989 = *The Complete Monty Python's Flying Circus: All The Words*. Volume 1+2. Pantheon Books. Web online: <<http://www.montypython.net/scripts/>>; visited: 2000-09-17
- MPPC (no date): «Motion Picture Production Code», Web online: <<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/mardorossian/DOCS/films/filmdocs/mppc.html>>; visited: 2001-10-02
- Powdermaker, Hortense (1950): *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950. Web online: <<http://nimbus.ocis.temple.edu/~jruby/wava/powder/table.html>>; visited 2001-10-02
- Province of Nova Scotia (1989): *Regulations made pursuant to the Theatres and Amusements Act. S. 4, R.S.N.S. 1989, C. 466. General Regulations*. Web online: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/aga/Legislation/Theatre/Thet_Reg.pdf>; download: 2005-03-03
- Staiger, Janet (1985): «The Hollywood mode of production to 1930». In: Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger & Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 85-153
- Thompson, Kristin & David Bordwell (1994): *Film History. An Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Withalm, Gloria (2007): «The self-reflexive screen: Outlines of a comprehensive model». In: Nöth, Winfried & Nina Bishara (eds.). *Self-Reference in the Media* [= Approaches to Applied Semiotics. 6]. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 125-142



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4

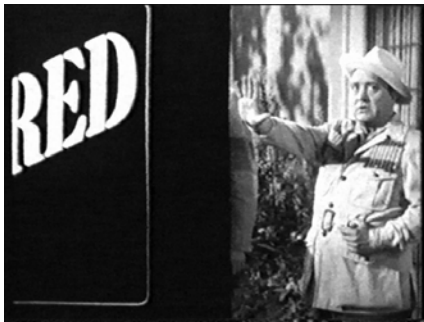


FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8



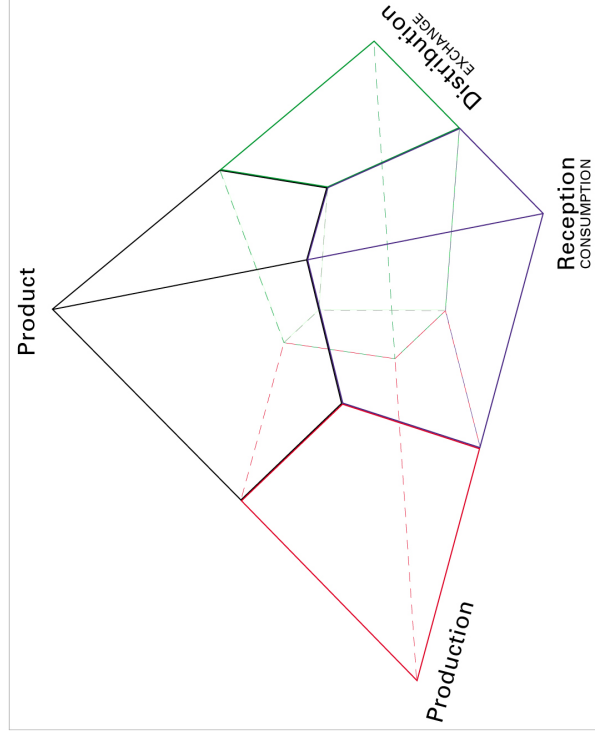
FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10

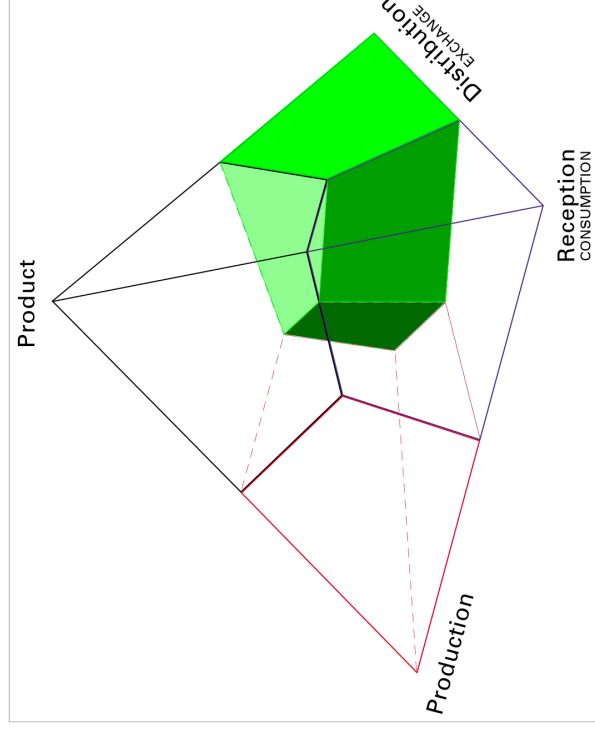


Self-Referentiality – a Model



[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

Self-Referentiality – a Model



[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

Gloria Withalm:

Filmic Communication on Controlling Film Culture: The Presentation of Movie Censorship Within a Movie

1. Tales of Censors and Censoring

- 1.1. The Man with the Scissors
- 1.2. Strict Rules – Elaborate or Simple
- 1.3. Collecting Forbidden Images

2. Self-Regulation – censorship from within ?

3. Censoring the text within the text

- 3.1. Messages From the Media Institution
- 3.2. Watching Over a Pure and Decent Language
- 3.3. Covering up
- 3.4. Blurred Reality

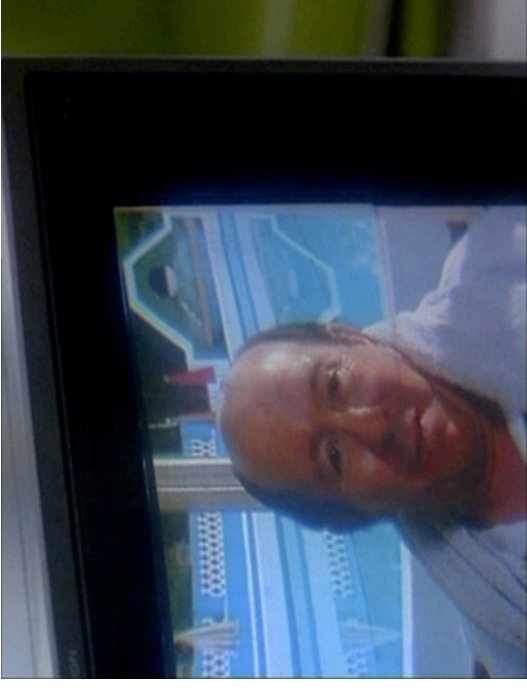
[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1. **Tales of Censors and Censoring**

- 1.1. The Man with the Scissors
 - 1.2. Strict Rules – Elaborate or Simple
 - 1.3. Collecting Forbidden Images
-
2. **Self-Regulation – censorship from within ?**
 3. **Censoring the text within the text**
 - 3.1. Messages From the Media Institution
 - 3.2. Watching Over a Pure and Decent Language
 - 3.3. Covering up
 - 3.4. Blurred Reality

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.1. The Man with the Scissors



El Censor (Eduardo Calcagno, AR 1995; aka *The Eyes of the Scissors*)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.1. The Man with the Scissors



El Censor (Eduardo Calcagno, AR 1995; aka *The Eyes of the Scissors*)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.1. The Man with the Scissors



Ucieczka z kina "Wolność" (Wojciech Marczewski, PL 1991; aka *Escape From the "Liberty" Cinema*)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.1. The Man with the Scissors



Ucieczka z kina "Wolność" (Wojciech Marczewski, PL 1991; aka *Escape From the "Liberty" Cinema*)

[Withdraw: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.1. The Man with the Scissors



Ucieczka z kina "Wolność" (Wojciech Marczewski, PL 1991; aka *Escape From the "Liberty" Cinema*)

[Withdraw: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

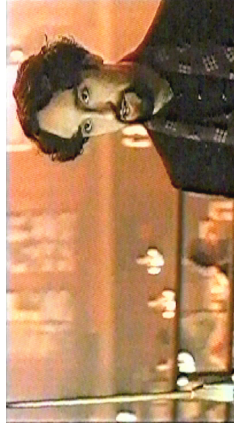
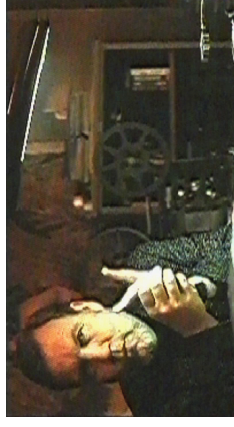
1.2. Strict Rules – Elaborate or Simple



Censor (Dev Anand, IN 2001) tells the story of the film director Vikramjeet (Dev Anand)

[Withdraw: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.2. Strict Rules – Elaborate or Simple



Head Censor (David Hemblen) examines Tyler (Don McKellar)

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| (a) — | A graphic or prolonged scene of violence, torture, crime, cruelty, horror or human degradation. |
| (b) — | The depiction of the physical abuse or humiliation of human beings for the purposes of sexual gratification or as pleasing to the victim. |
| (c) — | A scene where a person who is or is intended to represent a person under the age of sixteen years appears —
— nude or partially nude in sexually suggestive context, or
— in a scene of explicit sexual activity. |
| [...] (d) — | The explicit and gratuitous depiction of urination, defecation or vomiting. |
| (h) — | A scene where an animal has been abused in the making of the film. |

The Adjuster (Atom Egoyan, CA 1991)

[Withdraw: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.2. Strict Rules – Elaborate or Simple



Nuovo Cinema Paradiso (aka Cinema Paradiso; Giuseppe Tornatore, IT/FR 1989)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

1.3. Collecting Forbidden Images



El Censor (Eduardo Calcagno, AR 1995): the censor Raúl Veirabé (Ulises Dumont)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

Gloria Withalm:
Filmic Communication on Controlling Film Culture: The Presentation of Movie Censorship Within a Movie

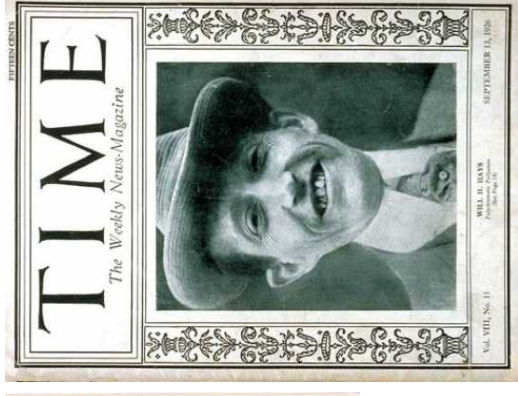
1. **Tales of Censors and Censoring**
 - 1.1. The Man with the Scissors
 - 1.2. Strict Rules – Elaborate or Simple
 - 1.3. Collecting Forbidden Images
2. **Self-Regulation – censorship from within ?**
3. **Censoring the text within the text**
 - 3.1. Messages From the Media Institution
 - 3.2. Watching Over a Pure and Decent Language
 - 3.3. Covering up
 - 3.4. Blurred Reality

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

2. Self-Regulation – censorship from within?



Will H. Hays, 1935 / 1926



The "Hays Office" at the MPPDA (officially named *Production Code Administration* of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.1. Messages From the Media Institution

“Party Political Broadcast”

Superimposed Caption: “Politicians – An Apology”.

Eric Idle [v.o.]

We would like to apologize for the way in which politicians are represented in this programme. It was never our intention to imply that politicians are weak-kneed, political time-servers who are concerned more with their personal vendettas and private power struggles than the problems of government, [...]. Nor indeed do we intend that viewers should consider them as crabby ulcerous little self-seeking vermin with furry legs and an excessive addiction to alcohol and certain explicit sexual practices which some people might find offensive. We are sorry if this impression has come across.

Monty Python's *Flying Circus* (s3-ep6; GB-BBC 1972)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.2. Watching Over a Pure and Decent Language



David (Bruce Willis)

Why the hell didn't somebody call —

Like what?

Why not?

They are supposed to be in bed by now.



& Maddie (Cybil Shepherd)

David, you can't talk like that.

Like you just talked.

It's eight o'clock. Sunday night, there are kids out there watching. You gotta've to clean your mouth up.

From now on nil sexual innuendo, no more double entendres, no more off-color remarks.

Moonlighting “Those Lips. Those Lies” (Dennis Dugan, US-ABC 1989; ep61/s5)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.2. Watching Over a Pure and Decent Language



Hellzapoppin' (H.C. Potter, US 1941). Chic (Chic Johnson) and Ole (Ole Olsen)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

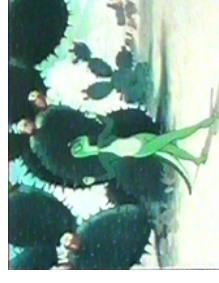
3.3. Covering up

Narrator

(v.o.)

Here is a lizard which as you all probably know sheds its skin once a year. —

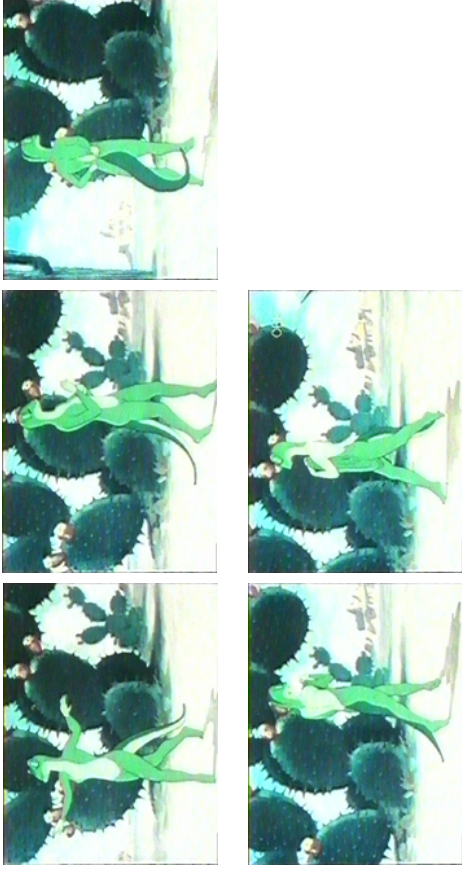
Let's watch this interesting procedure.



Cross Country Detours (Fred “Tex” Avery, US 1940)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

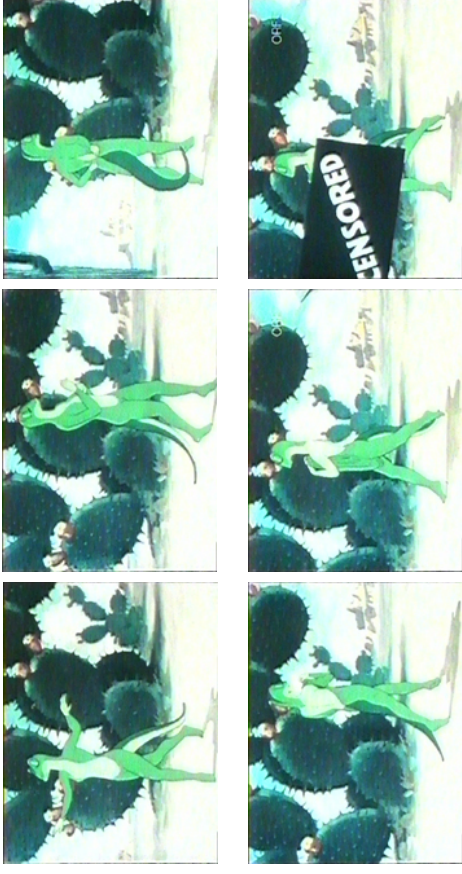
3.3. Covering up



Cross Country Detours (Fred "Tex" Avery, US 1940)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

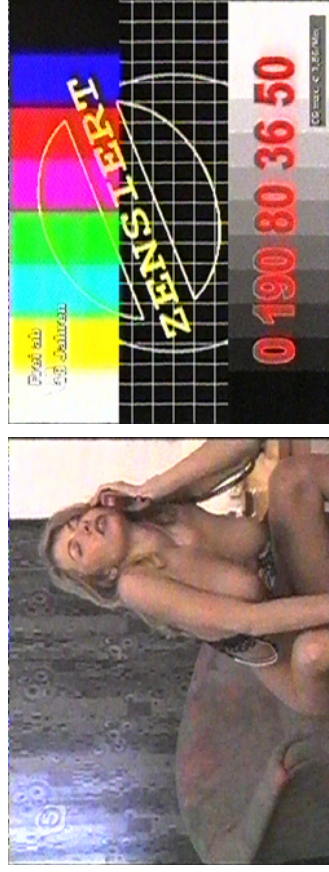
3.3. Covering up



Cross Country Detours (Fred "Tex" Avery, US 1940)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

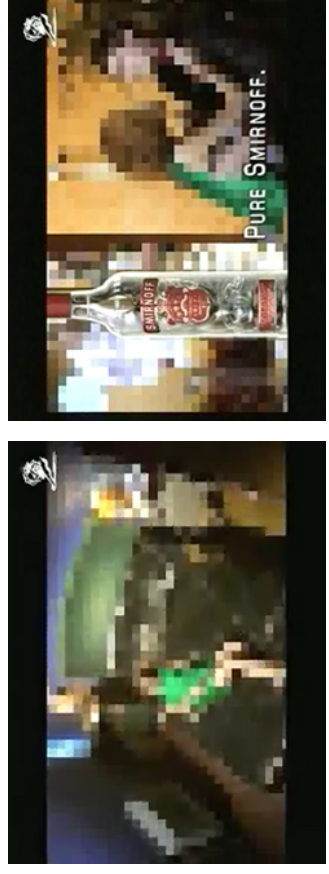
3.3. Covering up



Sex Line "Zensiert" ["Censored"] (DE 2001)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.4. Blurred Reality



"Sorry, but the Paragraph 42b of the law on spirits advertising prohibits us from showing you the international Smirnoff Vodka commercial uncensored."

But fortunately, there's no law yet that prohibits you from enjoying Smirnoff Vodka."

Smirnoff Vodka "Censored" (Martin Denecke, CH 1999; Lowe/GGK)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.4. Blurred Reality



Super Bowl XXXVIII on February 1, 2004 – “Scandal” at the Halftime Show

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.4. Blurred Reality



Super Bowl XXXVIII on Feb. 1, 2004: 9-16th second “Scandal” at the Halftime Show

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.4. Blurred Reality



Super Bowl XXXVIII on Feb. 1, 2004: 9-16th second “Scandal” at the Halftime Show

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.4. Blurred Reality



CNN feature on the 2004 Grammy Awards Ceremony (CNN 2004-02-09)

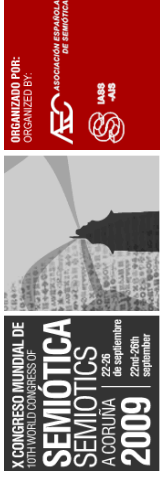
[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]

3.4. Blurred Reality



Pixel Censor Tech (Antonio Balseiro, AR 2008)

[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]



[Withalm: ...Movie Censorship... / 10-IASS 2009]