

# Censorship & Visual Culture

## Ruling Images, Shaping Societies

12-13 December 2022

*Online Workshop hosted by De Montfort University (UK)*

*Censorship & Visual Culture* seeks to explore the impact that censorship, with its multiple forms and apparatuses, has exerted on the development and manifestation of visual culture worldwide. Since the age of the first societies in human history, pictures and images have played and are still playing an essential role in the creation, organisation and perpetuation of social and political orders. Together with other non-textual products, they shape the sphere of visual culture, through which ideas are often introduced and conveyed. For this reason, political powers have commonly sought to legitimise themselves and to strengthen their standings through visual culture. Yet, visual culture has often also challenged political powers through the introduction and circulation of other images of contradictory character, foregrounding certain conditions or realities that states, governments and political groups may prefer to conceal.

Censorship has been one strategy that such and other political powers have employed to confront the unwanted appearance of certain materials in the visual sphere. Often understood as the centralised assessment of material and the enforcement of restrictions vis-à-vis the circulation of those deemed inappropriate for one reason or another, censorship is commonly perceived as a well-organised mechanism geared towards suppressing the communication of certain types of information. However, the way it operates may be much more complex and indirect for at least two key reasons. Firstly, because censorship relies on the interpretation and judgement of specific institutions and individual censors. Secondly, because censorship tends to trigger informal layers of suppressive systems and assessment mechanisms, such as cultural conventions, grassroots censorship, and self-censorship. In our time, these also include state, corporate, and private forms of algorithm engineering, further dissociating censorship from any of the tangible powers invested in controlling visual culture.

In seeking to explore how censorship has affected the development and manifestation of visual culture worldwide, *Censorship & Visual Culture* proposes to create a platform for scholars from a wide range of academic fields and disciplines to experiment with an underused research paradigm. Indeed, more traditionally, the study of visual censorship has revolved around the questions of what, why, and how visual materials have been excluded from a given visible sphere, and what practices have developed to share them within restricted social circles, nevertheless. While still interested in elaborating understandings about these issues as well, the workshop is even more eager to consider two additional complementary questions: The first of these asks What representational conventions and image-production practices have emerged precisely due to censorship restrictions? The second inquires How have subsequently these representational conventions and image-production practices continued to shape the historical and more recent visual cultures familiar to us today?

*Censorship & Visual Culture* wishes to investigate these and related issues in connection with examples and case studies from any historical period. But we are particularly keen to expand the knowledge base about the conception, implementation, and operation of visual censorship against the background of the explosion of image-production and communications technologies that occurred between the late modern period and our time (i.e., between the mid-eighteenth to the early twenty-first centuries).

To this end, we invite paper proposals for presentations of 15 minutes from scholars working in research areas such as, visual culture, media and communications studies, cultural history, visual sociology and anthropology, cultural studies, history of art, photographic history, and any other related fields of research. Proposals are expected to speak to questions connected with the ones raised above, and specific topics and contexts of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- the politics of visual censorship in democratic states;
- visual censorship in dictatorships;
- censorship in digital visual culture;
- liberal and/vs libertarian uses of visual censorship;
- censorship and the image of climate change/global warming;
- cultural hegemony and visual censorship;
- grassroots visual censorship;
- self-censorship and the development of visual culture.

Paper proposals should be of no longer than 300 words, submitted as Word or PDF documents to [visualcensorship@gmail.com](mailto:visualcensorship@gmail.com), by **30 September 2022**. In addition to your paper proposal, please also embed the following in the document itself:

- Your full name;
- Email address;
- Paper title;
- Institutional affiliation (when applicable);
- Biographical note of 80-120 words;
- List of up to 5 keywords capable of capturing the essence of your proposed paper.

**Importantly:** The organisers would also like to invite the event participants to contribute extended versions of their papers (c. 8,500 words) to an edited volume / journal special issue on the same theme. We would therefore like to ask that all applicants consider their paper proposals as expressions of interest to contribute to our edited publication as well, and that all submissions pertain subsequently to research not yet published elsewhere.

The language of the workshop will be English, and it will be hosted via **Microsoft Teams**. Should you have any questions, you may contact the organisers via [visualcensorship@gmail.com](mailto:visualcensorship@gmail.com)

#### **Workshop Organisers**

Claudio Monopoli (PhD Candidate in Historical, Geographical, Anthropological Studies, University of Padua, Italy).

Gil Pasternak, (Professor of Photographic Cultures and Heritage, De Montfort University, UK).