

Big Brother 2.0: censorship, privacy and the Internet (part 1)

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For starters

- ... another reminder: you do not have to agree with everything this guy here says – thinking along is what counts
- The last two lectures will have a lot of material for diverse opinions
- The volume of the topic is large and spans two lectures

A lil' bit of trollin'

- In times of old, it was OK to
 - build hideouts
 - catch some fish
 - go adventuring
 - have a gang/team
 - get some scars
 - say a bad word or two
- Today: HEEEEELLPP!!
 - attack on nature!
 - not vegan at all!
 - violence!
 - antisocial behaviour!
 - self-harm!
 - political incorrectness!
- ... and then people ask where the 'snowflakes' keep coming from
- Produced by the society – including online
- “Think of children!” has been a favourite of censors for some time

Why is the topic important

- Access to information is a condition for being a full citizen
- Limitations make it questionable:
 - Information ==> power ==> money
 - Information ==> knowledge ==> freedom (== hard to exploit)
 - Suppression of dissent <==> democracy
- Has recently been most notable in the “democratic West”, especially in the form of self-censorship or ‘soft censorship’ (“hey, no decent person would THINK like that!”)
- Angela Merkel in November 2019: freedom of expression has cost and limits (<https://reclaimthenet.org/angela-merkel-limit-freedom-of-expression/>)

A shift along the years

- In (roughly) 1950-80, freedom of speech used to be promoted by the political left (labour, civil rights and free speech movements, hippies, Martin Luther King etc) – censorship used to be backed by right-conservatives (“decent families”)
- Today, we have clear tendency towards the opposite – censorship is promoted by the “formerly oppressed” (Neo-Marxists, ‘antifascists’, 3rd-wave feminists etc etc); there is a clear parallel with historical revolutions (which usually conclude with mass murders and dictatorships)
- Probably the best example: the same American universities that once backed the Free Speech Movement (perhaps the most notably, UC Berkeley)

The 'post-truth' media

- The (ongoing) rise of social media:
 - fast and handy
 - networks and echo chambers
 - allows following of very different sources
 - also allows increasingly complex counterfeiting (deepfake)
- The (ongoing) fall of traditional media:
 - increase of obviously ordered content
 - choosing news (and also people) by political inclination
 - increase of clickbait (speed vs quality)
 - increasing lack of competent writers

It is serious: education and science

- UC Berkeley was already mentioned
- ‘Trigger warnings’, ‘safe spaces’ and cancelling the ‘heretics’
- A logical consequence: fundamental changes in science
- Taboo topics and “hey, you cannot ask this question!” (on the pain of cancelling). Comparison: Galileo
- A practical consequence: see the topic of professionalism earlier
- “My (lawyer, dentist, car tech, security detail) has got proper worldview and graduated from a correct school!” (...but is not that skilled at work)

“There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes)

- Censorship has been tracked back to Ancient Egypt
- Classical Greek and Roman civilizations had it too
- Mentioned in the Bible (persecution of prophets)
- *Index librorum prohibitorum*
- The USSR outlawed all religious literature (among others)
- ...

The US: long-standing issues

- On the one hand, strives to be a model democracy
- On the other hand, has a long history of hard censorship
- The Comstock Act (*Federal Anti-Obscenity Act*) - signed in 1873, has not been voided yet
 - Voltaire, Boccaccio, Chaucer....
 - *1001 Nights* (was considered “youth literature” in the USSR!)
 - *Dr Dolittle* by Hugh Lofting (a children’s book in the USSR)
 - *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe
 - *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

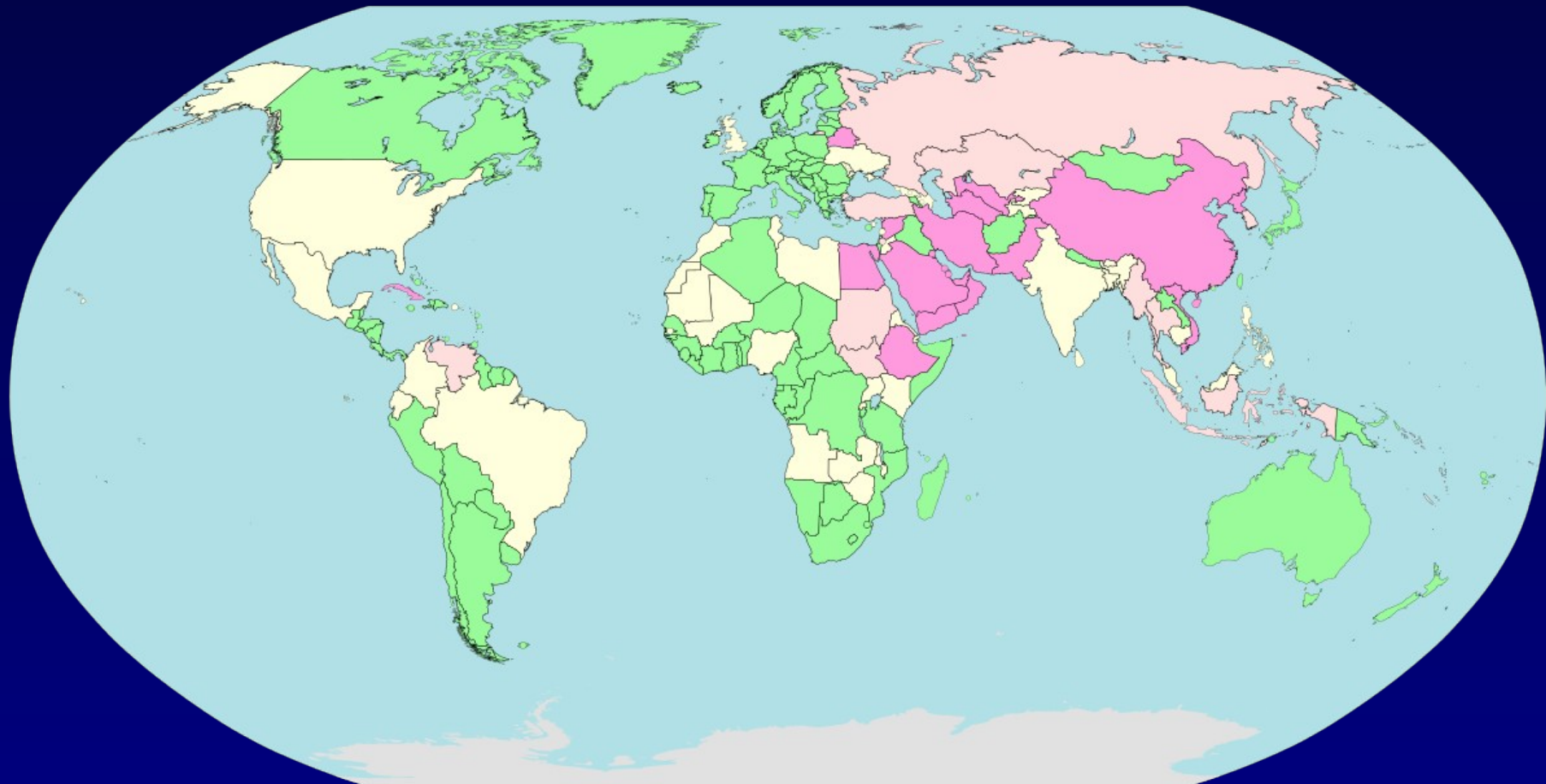
Online censorship

- A relatively new phenomenon, starting mostly in the nineties
- A reason: Internet stems from radically different roots and culture than censorship hardliners – the latter just were not aware of it for awhile
- As already mentioned: the early censors were from the political right (religious/family values), nowadays they are heavily left-leaning (academy, media, various NGOs/'think tanks', many large corporations(!), also some governments and parties)
- Plus, everyone (and his/her pet hamster) is fully entitled to be offended to high heavens and demand your head on platter...
- Self-censorship is sometimes more damaging than external

All the same fertilizer in different vessels

- Filtering => "remove dirt, keep the clean stuff" (e.g. coffee)
 - Blocking => "denying access" (e.g. basketball)
 - Censoring => "(ab)using power to deny access" (e.g. media)
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- SAME MEANING, DIFFERENT ATTITUDES

Internet censorship in 2018



Beginning

- 1990 – U.S. Secret Service raided a games company of Steve Jackson blaming the created materials of 'helping hackers' – a reason was the company hiring Loyd 'The Mentor' Blankenship to write the rulebook for a game. The Electronic Frontier Foundation was founded as a reaction
- 1993 – the SS lost the court case (50k damages + 250k legal expenses)
- Wider publicity in 1995: “Cyberporn”, the cover story of Time magazine – later deemed to be massively incompetent

Legal battles in the US

- 1996 – *Communications Decency Act (CDA)* – passed by Congress, dismissed next year as incompatible with freedom of expression
- 1998 – *Child Online Protection Act (COPA)* – after a long battle, dismissed in 2009
- 2000 – *Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)* – passed as constitutional in 2003; all public schools and libraries are obliged to censor Internet traffic to be eligible to federal grants (not mandatory, but eating is not mandatory either)

How to define obscenity

- The Miller test – named after Marvin Miller, a porn producer losing a court case vs California in 1973:
 - Whether "the average person, applying contemporary community standards", would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest,
 - Whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct or excretory functions specifically defined by applicable state law,
 - Whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value

Seven bad words

- In 1972, stand-up comedian George Carlin recorded “Class Clown”, that included "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television"
- In 1973, it was broadcast by WBA station – the ensuing court case went up to the highest level and was finally won by censors (votes 5:4) in 1978
- (you may google the words by yourself :))
- In comparison, blogger Patrick Ishmael googled the words from political blogs in 2007, finding... plenty: <https://web.archive.org/web/20070303151722/http://newsbuckit.blogspot.com/2007/02/seven-words-you-can-never-say-on.html>

China vs Google

- A general tendency – the Chinese adopt Western evils, add national colouring and push them further
- 1994 – Internet reached China
- 1996 – First law on Internet censorship
- 1998 – beginning of the Great Firewall of China
- 2000 – all content creation regulated
- 2002 – Google blocked
- 2005-2010 – Google offered 'sanitized' services
- 2010 – Google dropped censorship and was ousted

1984, Chinese style

- The Chinese social credit system has its roots in
 - Traditional Chinese thinking (Confucianism, Emperor worship, and stiff punishment system)
 - Communist ideology (mix of Marxism and native, original stuff partially developed from the abovesaid)
 - Modern technology
- Blueprints in 2007, national pilot in 2014, 60+ local programmes by 2022 (national level is still incomplete)
- Main components: surveillance (cameras, microphones, online tracking), Big Data and its processing, sanction system

Examples

- ... of things resulting in “loss of EXP”:
 - eating in public transport (Beijing; exceptions are made for small children and seniors)
 - inadequate visiting of older relatives (Shanghai; upon complaint)
 - taking a wrong seat in public transport (Guangzhou)
 - misuse of car headlights (beams; Shenzhen)
 - booking a table in restaurant and not showing up (Suzhou)
 - ...

Online censorship: tech

- Keywords
- Web addresses (URLs)
- IP addresses
- Nameservers
- Packet filters
- Search engines and portals

- Additionally, “active censorship” (DDOS and other attacks) can be used

...

- E-mail – the border between censorship and legitimate spam blocking can sometimes be foggy
- Browsers (via plugins) – ditto
- Computer – typically takes admin privileges
- (Local) networks via proxies
- Search engines
- ...

Examples

- Net Nanny 1994 – the first of its kind
- Websense 1994 – belongs to Raytheon, a major contractor of the US military industry
- Green Dam Youth Escort 2009 – main player in China
- Compared to the situation about a decade ago, the “censorship industry” has consolidated (less players left), but also has developed wider than just a purely U.S. phenomenon

Main problems with censorware

- Do not block everything they are supposed to
- Do block a lot of stuff they aren't supposed to (mostly words and terms with more than one meaning)
- Block mostly what the developer (not the user) wants
- Fall out of date easily (proprietary!)
- Can be cheated against
- Slow down the computer
- Sometimes pose a security risk by themselves
- THE MAIN THREAT IS BEING A TOOL FOR POWER PLAY

What gets blocked

- Some offensive sites
- A lot of controversial issues – citizen rights activists, environmentalists, minorities, pro-choice activists, people with disabilities... Even U.S. Democrats used to get hit much more than Republicans – in this section, the bias seems to be still in favour of political right!
- A great host of bystanders

Crazy stuff

- The Scunthorpe Problem - hillaryanne@hotmail.com, assassins...
- Mr Tyson Homosexual, 'breast' and a species of kestrel
- WINE is bad for you
- A well-known censorware product let *hardcoresex.com* pass
- Note: U.S, Middle East, China and Russia all block a lot, but quite different things – US mostly political, ME religious and political, China and Russia try to keep anything 'foreign' out and the 'bubble' up

A piece of por[n|k] (according to a Chinese filter)



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Dam_Youth_Escort

... and a hot chick with nice pussy



<https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/kitten-and-baby-chick-gm144285819-3790194>

Counters

- VPN
 - Proxy servers
 - Crypto
 - Sneakernet
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- But also Wikileaks, Tor, I2P...
 - Main point: censorship (also in the more general sense) is only effective with large-scale public ignorance

Thanks

... will go on next week with Part 2