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## THE COMMUNICATION ASPECTS OF CENSORSHIP

### 1. Introduction

The communicative nature of writing, publishing and distributing books, newspapers or other printed matter is obvious and needs no explanation. However, the well known *model of communication* [1] seen in Fig 1, consisting of an *information source* which *transmits* an encoded *message* in the form of *signals* to its final *destination* where it is decoded by a *receiver*, does not apply specifically to literature production, at least not directly.

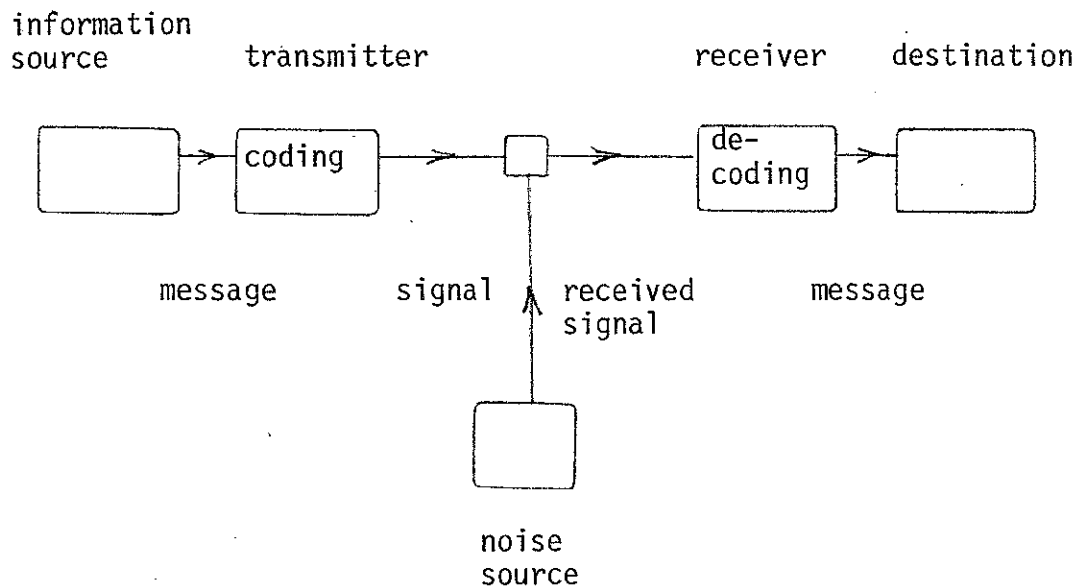


Fig. 1

THE MODEL OF COMMUNICATION  
(after Warren and Weaver)

Metaphorically speaking, literature also has an "information source" i.e. the author writing a text to be published. The "destination" of his or her message is quite obvious: the text is aimed to be read by anyone who wishes to do so. The language is the "code": only English speaking people can read English books. However, the "message" itself has a long and complicated way to go before it reaches the reader, and the whole process may extend in both time and space. For example, we are still able to read Caesar or Ovid today, or may subscribe to an illustrated magazine from the antipodes. For these reasons, the communication model shown in Fig. 1 is inadequate for investigating *censorship*. And finally, as Weaver puts it, Shannon's model represents only the "engineering aspects" of communication, which must not be confused with its "semantic aspects" [2]. So, for the purpose of the present study, another model had to be found.

## 2. The communication process in literature. The definition of censorship

A chart in a textbook chapter written by Lars Furuland [3] was found to be a nearly perfect basis for the planned investigation. The chart contains a detailed presentation of the *communication process in literature* with all its subdivisions, i.e. *production*, *distribution* and *consumption*. It also postulates the existence of a kind of *feedback*. Furuland's diagram has been adapted by the author to fit the special requirements of the present study (cf. Fig 2). The literature process has been divided into seven *stages*, and the idea of feedback has been elaborated upon.

Then, within the framework of the model thus modified, an ad hoc definition of **censorship** has been established. For the purpose of the present article, censorship is defined as any intervention by an authority into the communication process (in literature) aimed to cut off communication between its different parts, at any stage of the process.

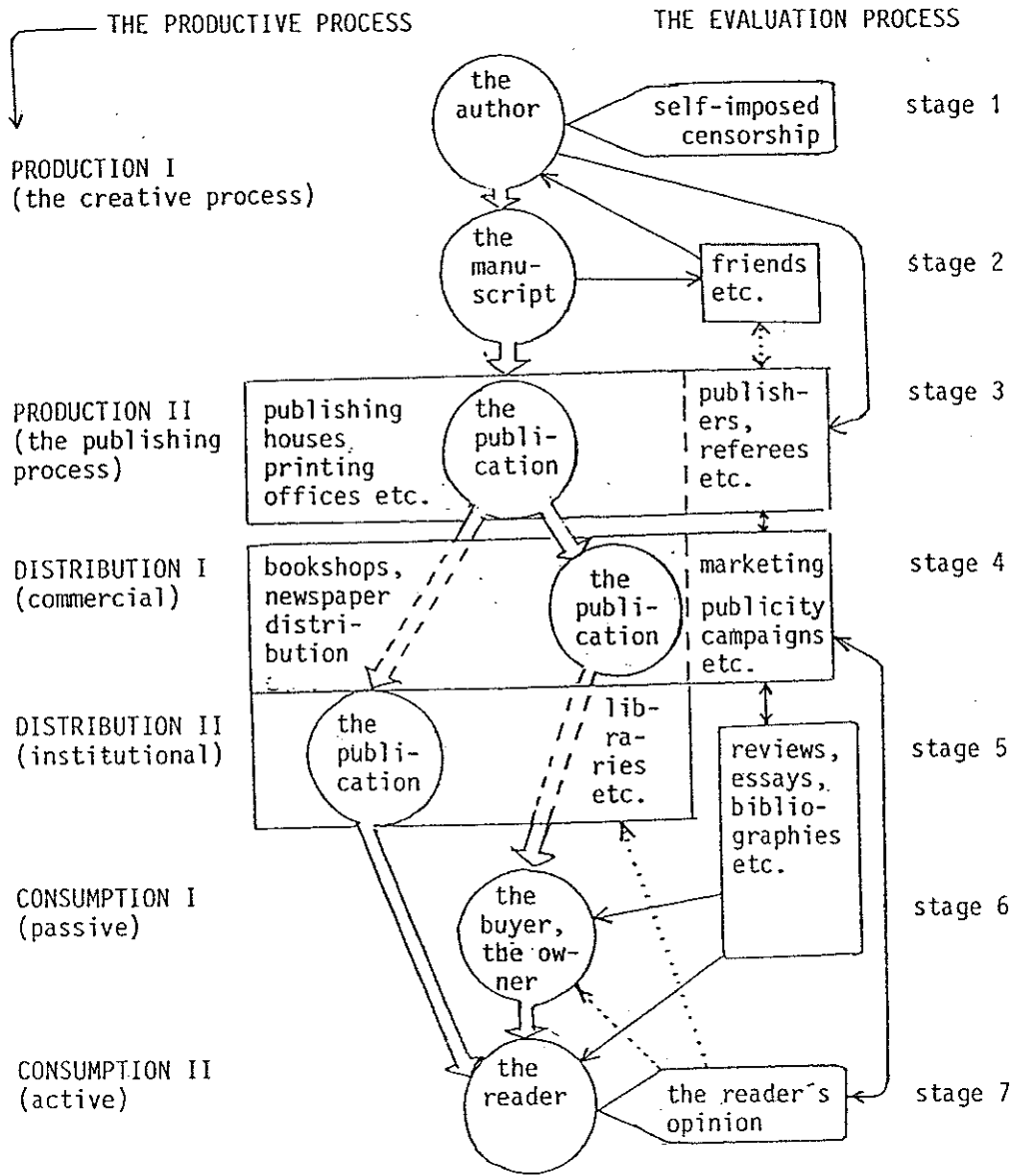


Fig. 2  
 THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS IN LITERATURE  
 (partly after Furuland)

The concept of censorship according to this definition is much *broader* than the conventional one. It is not limited to the scrutiny of works to be printed, which is the definition of censorship according to many sources, including the Swedish encyclopaedia "Stora Focuss" [4]. It applies, in fact, to any intentional interference with the production, distribution or consumption of the printed word by any holder of power. It also includes actions directed against authors or readers as individuals. And this, I am afraid, is what censorship means in our day. A glance at the MLA database [5] may serve as an illustration. Among articles indexed by the keyword "censorship", descriptions of events such as the burning of books, the closing of printing shops and the discarding of books from libraries are found in abundance. Banning or even executing authors is also found to be consistent with the concept of censorship. For example, many newspapers did not hesitate to use the word *censorship* in connection with the Rushdie affair.

It must be stressed that even the concept of *authority* in the definition above is to be interpreted in a general way. Any person or institution in possession of the power to break the communication chain may take on the role of censor. The State, the Church and "the Party" are evident examples, but even a parent or headmaster who confiscates an indecent illustrated magazine from a youngster is a censor in this sense of the word.

According to the definition, disruption of the communication chain by an authority must be done *deliberately*. An accidental event such as, for example, a power failure in a printing factory is not censorship. On the other hand, modern technology offers an excellent opportunity for authorities to practise censorship in disguise. A technical fault can easily be used as an excuse for a journal or a daily newspaper not appearing on time etc.

The holders of economic power are sometimes accused of censorship in the selection of applicants for printing subsidies or grants. In all such cases it must still be the *intention* to cut off the communication chain that decides whether a particular action is

be considered censorship or not. However, it is not always easy to discover the real intention. Consequently, there will always be borderline cases.

Finally, the model shown in Fig. 2 deals with the communication process in *literature*. It goes without saying that, after some alteration, it could also be applied to non-verbal communication. Photographs, paintings and films can also be submitted to censorship, as can even music. The present article, however, deals only with printed (or written) communication, i.e. fiction and non fiction, periodicals, advertising, etc.

### 3. The communication model of censorship

As a further step in the present investigation, an attempt has been made to establish a communication model of censorship consistent with the definition given above. The principal assumption was that the communication chain (cf. Fig. 2) would behave as a *system* when "attacked" by a censor, which means that its reaction would mainly depend on the *stage* at which the chain was disrupted. To verify this assumption, a number of different methods of censorship have been examined systematically.

The results of these examinations are shown on a chart in the Appendix (pp 104-106). On the vertical axis, stages 1 to 7 of the *communication process* are shown. Within each of the stages three different aspects are considered: A) the *direction* of the censor's intervention, B) the *effect* of the intervention, and C) the appropriate *defence mechanism* of the system. Because of the dichotomy of the first stages of the communication process (the author on the one hand and the manuscript on the other) each of the three columns (A, B, and C) had to be divided into two parts (a and b). Three sets of arrows can be seen in each column in the upper part of Fig. 3, pointing to three pairs of objects or events. It is easily understood that the "situation" described in the corresponding components of each pair is identical; it is only the point of view that differs.

In the following, some real cases of censorship are described. The examples are mostly taken from Slavic (most often Czech) literature.

### 3.1. *Intervention against the author in connection with the publishing process* (stage 1b and 3b, all columns)

This kind of intervention is directed against the author as a person, not against his or her political, religious or moral views. The writer is simply not allowed to publish, whatever the topic of his or her work may be. Censoring of Jewish writers in the Third Reich can serve as an example. The appropriate defence is to try to publish anonymously or, where possible, under another person's name. During World War II, a novel appeared in the bookstores in Prague, then occupied by the Nazis. The name on the cover was *Vlastimil Rada* (1895-1962), a well known cartoonist of the time [6]. The real author was *Karel Poláček* (1892-1944), a Jewish novelist who wrote in Czech. The danger with this trick was Poláček's unique style of writing, humorous, witty, and at times reminiscent of Jewish anecdotes. Luckily enough, Nazi censors did not have the same reference frames as the general public: they had hardly ever read Czech fiction before.

The readers of the occupied land kept silent throughout the war. All of the numerous postwar editions carried the name of the real author [7], but Poláček himself never got to see it: he did not survive the Holocaust.

The second example of intervention against the author as a person seems rather humorous today, but was real and serious enough to be documented in the history of literature. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, students of secondary schools were not allowed to visit restaurants or public houses. Consequently, they adorned themselves with false beards whenever they wished to do so [8]. Neither were they allowed to write for journals or newspapers. Consequently, they used pseudonyms whenever they wished to do so. Thus at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an entire

generation of poets of both Czech and German extraction made their first attempts to climb Parnassus in this way. *Josef Svatopluk Machar* (1864-1942), who published his first poem in 1882 under the pseudonym of *Antonín Rousek*, may serve as an example [9]. It seems, however, that the officials of the Austrian Department of Education were more interested in saving face than persecuting young students.

### 3.2. *Intervention against the author in connection with the creative process* (stages 1a and 2a, all columns).

Under extreme conditions, an authority may even forbid the act of writing itself. In a totalitarian regime the very existence of a pencil or writing paper in a prisoner's cell may be considered an offence and severely punished. In such circumstances, writing with unusual instruments on unusual material is the only answer. Writing with one's own blood on rags, or toilet paper, has been reported to the author of the present article by alleged witnesses. It is, of course, difficult to ascertain whether this is legend or not. But nevertheless, the problem of how to smuggle the written message out of the prison remains.

*Nadežda Mandel'stam* (1899-1980), the wife of the Russian poet *Osip Mandel'stam* (1891-1938), who shared exile in Voronež with her husband, learned some of his poems by heart. It was the only way to save his production for posterity [10]. Another "cause célèbre" of a work written in detention is *Julius Fučík's* (1903-1943) "Report from the gallows" (orig. Reportáž psaná na oprátce). Written in collusion with a prison guard during the author's detainment in a Nazi prison, the piece was later translated, after World War II, into no less than 27 languages [11]. Recently, questions have been raised about the authenticity of some parts of the work and the role of its editor [12].

For obvious reasons, all cases reported in this part of the present paper are not entirely clear and have not been able to be documented completely and sufficiently.

3.3. *Intervention against the manuscript in connection with the publishing process* (stages 2b and 3a, all columns)

This is the stage in the communication chain where the *scrutiny of works to be printed* takes place or, in other words, where censorship in the conventional sense of the word is performed.

As a rule, two different methods of disturbing the communication are used. In democratic societies the censor's deletions are often shown openly. For example, blank columns or pages appeared almost daily in Czechoslovak newspapers during the Munich crisis in 1938. An authoritative regime, on the other hand, usually prefers not to inform the readers as to whether the message has been mutilated or not. For example, in a science fiction novel written by *Karel Čapek* (1890-1938) in 1936 [13], a paragraph containing the personal name "Molokov" has been left out in some of the post-war editions [14], apparently because it could have been interpreted as the name of the Soviet minister Molotov. How meaningless and negligible such a deletion may appear, the fact remains that it cannot be recognized by the reader, who is being manipulated without his knowing.

Sometimes a form of bargaining can take place. The Czech novelist *Josef Škvorecký* (born 1924) refers to a visit to the Ministry of the Interior in Prague in 1962, in connection with the second edition of his novel "The Cowards" (orig. *Zbabělci*) [15]. He was asked quite openly to leave out a torture scene as well as a number of indecent words. After doing this the book could appear on the market without further intervention.

More often the bargaining has not been this straight forward. The Russian writer *Viktor Nekrasov* (born 1933) once said to a Swedish reporter: "The censors in our country are omniscient and omnipotent. The authors themselves, however, nearly never get to meet them. Instead, they are summoned to appear before their editor or publisher and given 'friendly advice' to alter this and that. Sometimes certain passages must be omitted, sometimes a novel's hero has to undergo a little 'moral improvement'. There are certain



subjects which are taboo, for example, any criticism of Communism as such, the Winter War against Finland (it doesn't exist any longer in accounts of Russian history), Russian people's alcohol problems, criminality, etc., etc." [16].

Generally speaking, there are two basic defence strategies against the censors at this stage of the communication process. The first is to escape the reach of their power. This can mean publishing abroad or in a so called "*samizdat*" (publishing oneself). Both phenomena are well known to all of us. As one example among many others, the Nobel laureate *Boris Pasternak* (1890-1960) published his novel "Doctor Zhivago" (orig. Doktor Živago) through an Italian publishing house in Milan. It was, of course, translated into Italian [17].

The "*samizdat*" method consists of typing copies that are delivered personally or, if possible, by mail. This is, as Gordon Skilling says, "a return to the Pre-Gutenberg Era" [18]. In 1991 the Uppsala University Library arranged an exhibition of such home-made books of the so-called "edice petlice" (Padlock Publishing House). One of the books exhibited was a poem by another Nobel laureate, the Czech poet *Jaroslav Seifert* (1901-1986). It was typed, with a cover made of wallpaper. Exhibited alongside the samizdat edition, was a police report showing that the book has been confiscated [19].

When using the second basic strategy, the author does not try to avoid the censor but to outwit him. A classical manoeuvre of this nature was a false denial covering a potentially dangerous scoop in the German newspaper "Bohemia" which appeared in Prague before World War I: "So erschien ein Dementi in Fettauchdruck an der Spitze des Blattes: 'Von hoher Stelle werden wir um Widerlegung der speziell in Militärkreisen aufgetauchten Gerüchte ersucht, daß der Generalstabschef des Prager Korps, Oberst Alfred Redl, der vorgestern in Wien Selbstmord verübte, einen Vertrat militärischer Geheimnisse begangen und für Rußland Spionage

getrieben habe' [...]. Solche Dementis versteht der Leser, es ist so, wie wenn man sagt: 'Der X. ist kein Falschspieler' [...]" [20].

Another - more subtle - method of "fooling the censor" is the use of cryptic symbols or codes. Here again the questions of reference frames must be considered. It requires the use of such symbols and allusions that are understood by the reader but not by the censor. Several Czech poems written and published under German occupation at the beginning of World War II can serve as examples. In one of them, allusions are made to a spiritual song. For those readers who can guess the right song, the poem reveals a hidden meaning [21]. The censor, apparently, could not.

At about the same time, the Czech journalist *Milena Jesenská* (1896-1944) cited the German song "Soldaten wohnen auf den Kanonen" in one of her articles [22]. In this case, her German supervisor could easily see that allusion had been made to an antimilitarist text of communist *Bertolt Brecht* (1898-1956). For unknown reasons however, the article did appear, but the author was sent to a concentration camp, where she later died.

#### 3.4. *Intervention against distribution* (stages 4 or 5, all columns)

It is not easy to perform censorship on a book or a daily that has already left the printing press, and it is no doubt expensive, too. Authorities often use this method in times of sudden political change, when some matter already printed must be destroyed quickly and effectively - in the bookstores, or elsewhere. Examples of such actions are found in abundance in a lexicon of contemporary Czech fiction [23]

As far as books and periodicals printed abroad are concerned, the only way to practise censorship is by cutting off the routes of distribution. According to an editorial note, up to 50% of the copies of certain issues of the weekly magazine "Nature", mailed to regular subscribers in Eastern Europe, were confiscated by the customs in the seventies [24].

This procedure may, of course, be selective. Some trustworthy institutions may be allowed to acquire "dangerous" books, while the general public is not. In other words, distinction is made between *institutional* and *commercial* distribution (stages 4 or 5, respectively). In an exhibition at the Museum of Czech Literature in Prague, a list of trusted Party officials eligible for the circulation of western weeklies, including fashion journals, was shown [25].

Defence against this kind of censorship would of course be, to avoid normal routes of distribution. "Samizdat" editions must be distributed by personal delivery, books from abroad must be smuggled into the country, etc. The effectiveness of defensive actions such as these is, however, relatively low.

3.5. *Intervention against consumption* (stages 6 or 7, all columns)  
It is also possible to practise censorship on books which are already in hands of the readers. For example, the Holy Inquisition succeeded in exterminating a great number of heretic writings to such a degree that their existence is known only from lists made of the books to be burned [26]. Contemporary bibliographers should, however, be cautious, as the lists made by the Jesuit fathers were not always reliable and sometimes included books that did not exist at all [27].

Sometimes the distinction between *owners* (stage 6) and *readers* (stage 7) may be of importance. The existence of "libri prohibiti" in the libraries of former convents confirms this. While the convent may have owned prohibited books, the monks were not allowed to read them. Double sets of library catalogues can serve the same purpose. The "service catalogue" refers to the complete holdings of the library, while the "reader's catalogue" can be highly selective. The reader, of course, does not ask for books of which he or she does not know.

It is hardly possible to practise this kind of censorship on books that have already been sent abroad. The former Soviet authorities did try, but with poor results. After the fall of dictator

Berija, subscribers to the "Great Soviet Encyclopedia" [28] were sent a special feature on the Behring Sea (Russian spelling: Bering). Subscribers were asked to destroy the article on Berija and insert the article on the Behring Sea in its place. This intervention has proved to be quite counterproductive. In many places, including the Uppsala University Library, both articles are displayed to the public, along with the necessary explanations.

#### 4. The evaluation process. Feedback. Self-imposed censorship

In literature, institutionalized evaluation mechanisms have existed for a long time (see Fig 2, right-hand column). As long as the evaluation process influences the foregoing stages of the production process (i.e. the left-hand part of the diagram in Fig. 2), we are justified in calling it *feedback*. In Fig. 2, ways of receiving feedback are represented by lines with arrows pointing upwards. Dotted lines represent less frequently occurring feedback.

There are many examples of the existence of feedback in literature. Readers can express their views privately or publicly, influencing thereby booksellers and librarians. Book reviews in dailies and other periodicals can have considerable influence on the editing policies of publishing houses etc. In scientific journals, referees decide whether a manuscript should be accepted or not.

These evaluation mechanisms may even affect the author himself. This phenomenon is often called *self-imposed censorship*. The author is supposed to change the theme or the style of his own work in order to fulfil the expectations of the power holders. Their wishes may be expressed more or less explicitly; in other words, there is a step by step transition to open censorship.

Self-imposed censorship is something often understood in political terms only. In the opinion of the author of the present study, it may also reflect moral, aesthetical or economic views.

## 5. Limitations of the model of censorship

The censorship model of the present study is strictly neutral, meaning that it does not contain value judgements. As a result, it cannot be used in any investigation into the *justification* of censorship.

It is important to note that censorship may sometimes be justified from moral or other standpoints. But it can also be an expression of deep immorality, political oppression, etc. It may be completely legal or completely illegal depending on the circumstances. The present model shows that - once started - the *mechanisms* involved in censorship work quite automatically, regardless of moral, aesthetical, political or any other implications\*).

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\*)The communication model of censorship as a theoretical concept has been presented by the author at the 4<sup>th</sup> Internat. Conference of Bibliometrics, Scientometrics and Infometrics in Berlin in September 1993. An abstract has been published in "Science and Science of Science" volume 3, 1994, number 4, pp. 133.

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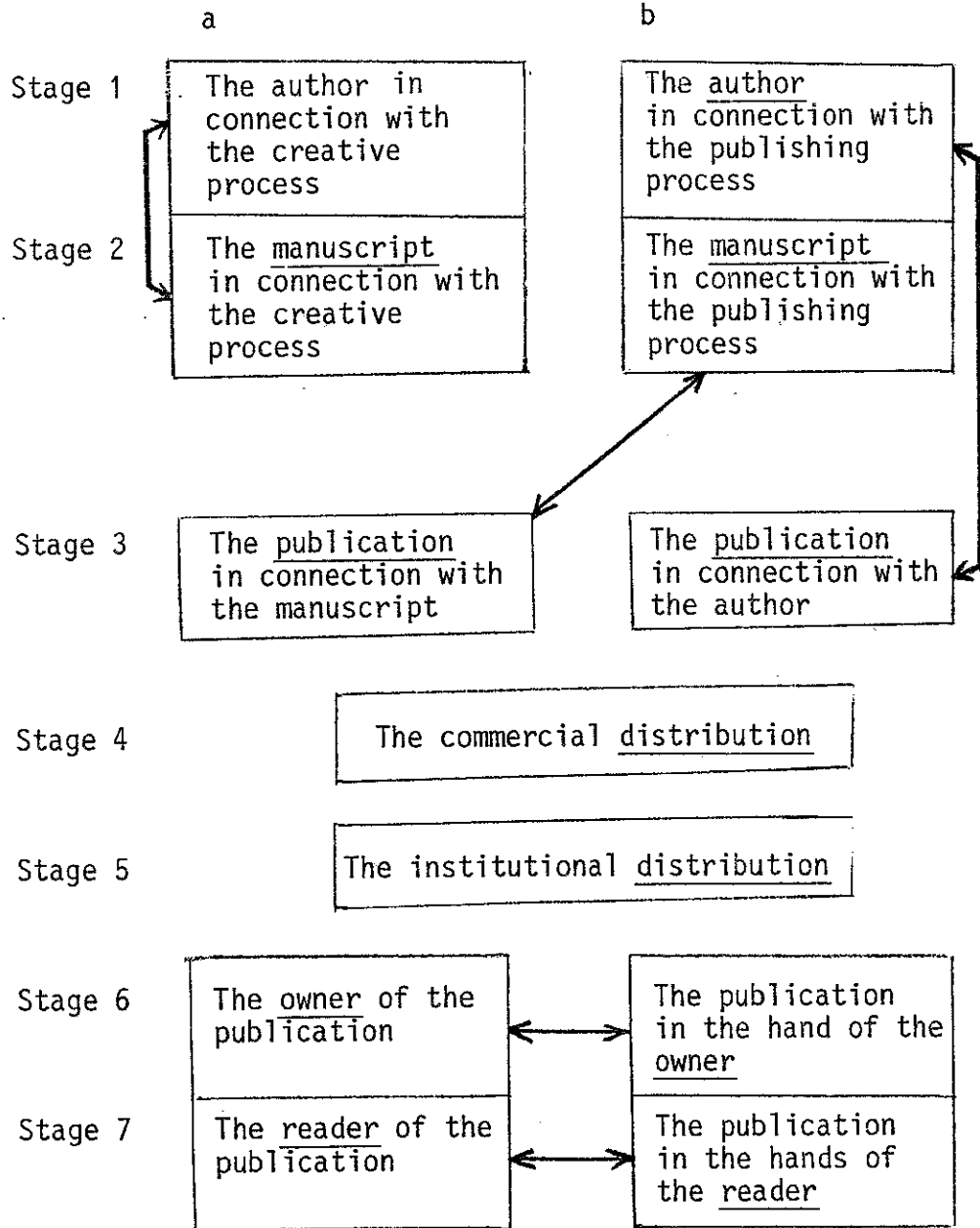
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APPENDIX: THE COMMUNICATION MODEL OF CENSORSHIP

Column A

The action is directed against

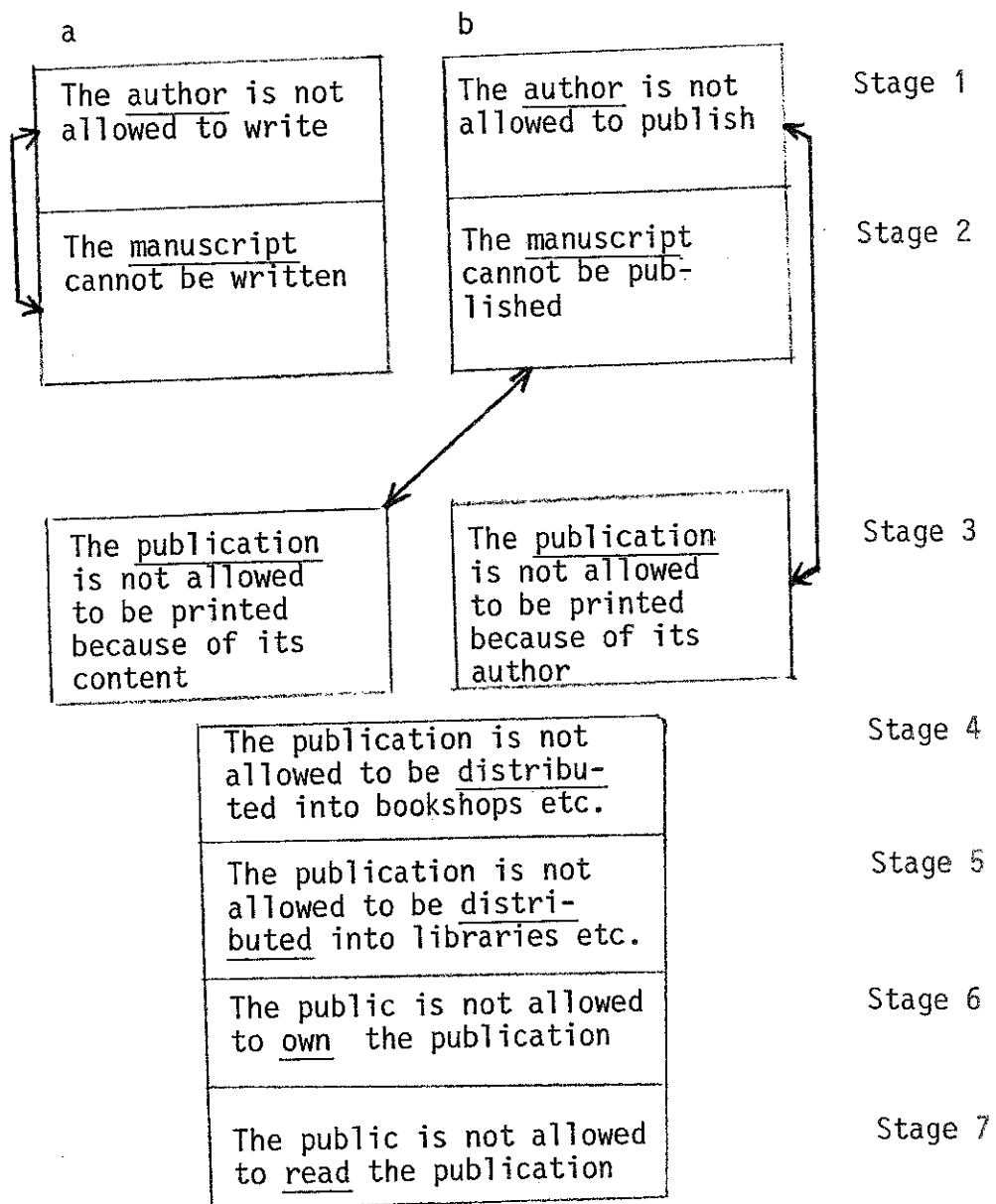




APPENDIX: THE COMMUNICATION MODEL OF CENSORSHIP

Column B

The effect of the action



Continued on p. 106

APPENDIX: THE COMMUNICATION MODEL OF CENSORSHIP

Column C

The appropriate reaction

