



CALL FOR PAPERS

Feeling the Limits: Censorship and Creative Freedom in Theatre, Film, and Visual Arts in the Age of Populism

23-25 October 2025

University of Łódź, Poland

Department of English Drama, Theatre, and Film

University College Cork, Ireland

School of English

Artistic freedom has been recognised as an international right that needs to be protected because it is threatened when artists question political ideologies, religious beliefs, and social mores. However, today the meaning of such concepts as “artistic freedom” or “freedom of expression” seems more complex and in need of greater definition. As democracies have, to a large extent, abandoned systems of censorship, new constraints have emerged to silence artists in contemporary cultural life. Censorship, as a term encompassing a wide array of mechanisms identified by Catherine O’Leary (Routledge 2016), constitutes complex processes of cancellation, voiding, erasure, or outlawing, which control the level of visibility and audibility of artistic institutions. Censoring practices influence the circulation of ideas, the condition of public debate, and the possibilities of artistic creativity in areas as diverse as museums, art galleries, universities, and the media in ways which dominate the production and interpretation of knowledge. As Paquette, Kleinfelder, and Miles claim, the current state of freedoms in the arts and culture has been shaped by earlier “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s, in which orthodox values clashed with the ideas of progressivism (‘Introduction’ to *In and Out of View: Art and the Dynamics of Circulation, Suppression, and Censorship*, Bloomsbury 2022).

The aim of the conference is to reflect on the concept of limitation (from various theoretical perspectives) and to explore how productions in the fields of drama, theatre, film, television as well as visual arts and performance are influenced by limits internally or externally applied. It is to ask about positive and negative roles played by

a variety of controls imposed by states, public institutions, activism, conservative or liberal mores, or populist politics on artists and artistic independence, or by the artists themselves. Is complete lack of censorship or control a required and positive goal to strive for? Is censorship an effective method of erasure, or – to the contrary – a method of stimulating interest? The scope of the conference includes, but also extends beyond, the field of state censorship and aims at various cultural practices which experience a controlling influence over artistic life and creativity.

Censorship and other forms of public and private control, as well as self-imposed repressive mechanisms, form part of the cultural history of Western civilisation. The conference intends to rethink the presence of political, social, moral, and ideological pressures imposed on the arts in reference to the contemporary rise of populist politics. However, it is also the intention of the organisers to trace the development of censorship practices back into history, in order to show the extent to which contemporary legislative activity and licensing regulations may continue the tradition of state censorship operating across cultures and the arts. The current state of artistic freedoms has been the product of complex historical circumstances. Investigating how the tension between censorship in cultural institutions and the demands for freedom of artistic expression has evolved across decades provides insights into the future of what might be a seriously compromised creative independence.

The organisers of the conference invite papers to investigate issues of artistic freedom and censorship in the contemporary world, as well as in connection to both historical development and possible projections into the future.

In an effort to map the territory of freedom and censorship in a concise way, the organisers will give priority to paper proposals concerning English-speaking territories and continental Europe. The conference will be held in English.

We invite papers addressing, among other topics, the following issues:

- Cultural censorship
- Covert and overt censorship in the arts
- Arts sponsoring
- Funding and organisational limitations in artistic institutions
- Legislation and performance
- Corporate art censorship
- Activism, protest, and censorship
- Representing censorship in drama, theatre, film, and art
- Artistic works as challenges to censorship limitations
- Visibility, audibility, and cultural silencing in the arts
- Exhibition cultures
- Adaptation and artistic freedom
- Adaptation and cultural censorship
- Self-censorship
- Current geography of censorship in the arts
- Taboos as artistic topics
- Disability and representation in the arts

- Marginalised and silenced voices
- Hollywood/Netflix/HBO/streaming platforms and censorship
- Censorship, democracy, and art
- Censored pasts in art
- Art vandalism and censoring practices

The event is the eleventh edition of the biennial Drama Through the Ages Conference which has been organised by the Department of English Drama, Theatre, and Film, University of Łódź.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Anne Etienne, Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Drama, University College Cork, Ireland

Jacek Fabiszak, Professor in the Department of Studies in Culture, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

FEE:

Regular: 140 Euro / 600 PLN

PhD reduced fee: 70 Euro / 300 PLN

The fee covers conference materials, lunches, coffee breaks and the conference reception.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION:

Please submit your topic proposals and abstracts (up to 300 words), together with a short bio, to: lodz.conference@gmail.com.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: 31 May 2025

VENUE: University of Łódź, Faculty of Philology. The conference is run on-site.

MORE INFORMATION:

For further information, please visit the conference website:

<https://dramathroughtheages.wordpress.com>

ORGANISING COMMITTEE:

Prof. Michał Lachman (University of Łódź)

Dr Anne Etienne (University College Cork)

Dr Katarzyna Ojrzyńska (University of Łódź)