

Call for Papers

**Contemporary Freedom and the New Crisis of Theatre
Between Ideological Extremism and the ‘Cancel Culture’**

International Conference

Nová drama / New Drama Festival 2022

The Theatre Institute Bratislava – The Slovak Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI)
under the Patronage of ITI Worldwide

18 – 21 May 2022

These days, the freedom of theatre is as much targeted by extremist ideologies, as it seems to be threatened by the mutations of contemporary public discourse. In Europe and beyond, the ideological extremism is gaining momentum. At the same time, the so called “cancel culture” is often described as the culmination of a purging process that has gradually limited one’s right to manifest one’s internal beliefs. It is, however, a timely response given to old and new waves of racism and xenophobia. It is thus an undeniable necessity in the face of intolerance and extremism, a defense mechanism meant to prevent not only hate speech, but hatred as such. And yet, its consequences for the arts are more and more problematic.

So, what is the current condition of theatre, between the two flanks that it has to equally resist: the rise of ideological extremism and the resentment of the cancel culture? How can it stay true to its vocation of freedom, bestowed upon its stages by a longstanding tradition, and yet fulfill its mission to reflect (on) the world itself? This may well be the new, most difficult challenge faced by playwrights, directors, and actors in a time of polarizing beliefs and social division. Will the theatre community still uphold freedom of thought and expression as its cardinal virtue?

This conference will discuss the new crisis of theatre in relation to the perils of extremism and the threats of the cancel culture. Drawing on examples illustrating both categories, such as the scandals provoked by Rodrigo Garcia’s *Golgotha Picnic* or the debates around the collaboration between Robert Lepage and Ariane Mnouchkine for *Kanata*, it will ponder the same, always relevant relationship between theatre and freedom as one of the most urgent questions of our time.

Octavian Saiu

Individual papers as well as panel presentations will be included in sessions that are meant to map the relationship between theatre and freedom in different parts of the world, from America

to Asia, from Northern Europe to Australasia. We particularly welcome submissions that address the following conference topics from various local and regional perspectives:

- the rise of extremism – new forms of censorship?
- the post-pandemic world: end of culture or rebirth – new visions and forms of art?
- the end and the beginning - artistic and theatrical reforms, historical or aesthetic views on the “end” of culture
- the concept of otherness and the new ethics of alterity in performing arts
- surveillance and dissent on the contemporary stage
- theatre and censorship in the latest context of liberal democracy
- the survival of artistic freedom in the face of political extremism
- the artists’ rights and responsibilities in contemporary Western culture
- ideological challenges and creative responses in contemporary theatre

You can submit your abstract (around 250 words) by **February 8, 2022** to the following email address: jakub.mudrak@theatre.sk (Jakub Mudrak – Project Coordinator, The Theatre Institute Bratislava).

The letter of acceptance will be sent to participants by **February 28, 2022**.

The conference will be held in a hybrid format, which will allow online and in situ participation.

The selected proceedings of this conference will be published in a volume by the international publishing house, Anthem Press.

Conference Committee: **Vladislava Fekete** (Director of the Theatre Institute, Bratislava, President of the Committee), **Tobias Biancone** (Director-General of ITI), **Octavian Saiu** (Conference Chair)