

# International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC)



## CALL FOR PAPERS

**World Congress**

**BRNO, Czech Republic**

**May 20-26, 2024**

**“Truth” in the Kafkaesque World of Theatre:**

**Tragic or Comic?**

*“Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K.; he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested.”* This cult phrase opens Franz Kafka’s renowned novel *The Trial*.

At first, poor Joseph K. was appealing to common sense, referring to what he considered standard rules of communication that respect privacy and individual rights: “*Who are you?*” he asks two strangers entering his room, one of them with the telling name “Franz.” Joseph K. was not so much worried about his own belongings but wanted to understand more clearly his new existential situation. “*What authority could they represent?*” he asks. The two, however,

have no doubts about their mission and authorization: “*You’ll soon discover that we’re telling you the truth.*” They believe/pretend to represent the Law, the all-powerful law that knows no limits. And how could there be a mistake in that? But what if the Law exists nowhere but in their head? What if this is a joke? If this was a comedy, Joseph K. would insist on playing it to the end.

Kafka, writing in the heart of European modernism, talks about alienation, the struggle of human beings with their identities and their subject position in the world, the dehumanization of “the different,” biased truth, and “alternative facts” years before the two world wars of the last century, years before modern totalitarian regimes were born, long before artificial intelligence started to be widely used, with all the digital algorithms that no one seems to understand and no one seems to be responsible for.

According to his publisher and friend Max Brod, Franz Kafka regarded this novel as unfinished. Since the trial of Joseph K. was never to get as far as the Highest Court, in a certain sense the story was interminable; it could be prolonged into infinity.

Today, all sorts of similar cases are taking place all over the world: People are still killed, tortured, and jailed in the name of some undefined, dogmatic, or even frivolous rule or ruler, or threatened, intimidated, ridiculed, defamed in a virtual space. The world has become even more and more Kafkaesque, more perplexed and perplexing, with various entrances and exits now left ajar to new anxieties and phobias, with prison-type models of surveillance and control and complex mechanisms of punishment or extradition becoming just a banal administrative act, a change that makes Kafka’s work even more attractive for theatre artists.

***We invite papers that critically reflect on this Kafkaesque universe in relation to the theatre of our times. Papers that show how contemporary theatre theory and practice deal with, and dramatize issues and questions such as:***

- Does knowledge (of truth) lead to tragedy or comedy?
- Can we find “truth” about ourselves in and through contemporary theatre?
- Are theatre critics in the position of Joseph K. or his warders, his invisible judges or TikTok influencers?
- How can theatre reflect and critique the apparatuses of control in the postmodern world?
- How do fluidities of boundaries and identities in life enter theatre praxis?

- How does theatre deal with a world that leaves no margins to get out?
- The vast web of capitalism: human beings stand up and fight, but do they have a chance?
- How far or near are modernism and postmodernism's nightmares, necropolitics and biopolitics?

Those interested, please send an abstract of 200 words (max), and your short bio (of no more than 80 words) to:

**Zuzana Ulicianska** ([zuzana.ulicianska@gmail.com](mailto:zuzana.ulicianska@gmail.com))

**Savas Patsalidis** ([spats@enl.auth.gr](mailto:spats@enl.auth.gr))

**Hana Strejkova** ([hannastrart@gmail.com](mailto:hannastrart@gmail.com))

**Length of articles:** Reading time 15 minutes (**maximum**)

### **Timeline**

**Submission deadline for abstracts:** 19 November 2023

**Notification (of acceptance or rejection):** 30 December 2023.

**Final date for article submission:** 15 April 2024

*We are open to articles in English and French.*

### **IMPORTANT NOTES**

**All submitted abstracts will be considered for publication in the special Congress Issue of the IATC's online journal *Critical Stages* (scheduled December 2024).**

**Participation in the conference of IATC (BRNO, Czech Republic, May 2024), is limited to applicants who are members of their respective National Associations of Theatre Critics.**