Department of Analytic Philosophy
Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences

is pleased to invite you to

The XII. Prague Interpretation Colloquium on

The Power of Analysis and the Impossibility of Understanding: Lessons from Kafka

to be held on April 24-26, 2017 in Prague.

Samuel Beckett attempted to show what one can do, feel, express and expect in the situation of *universal chaos*. At the time readers were getting acquainted with his powerful works, they had already known from Franz Kafka what chances of mutual understanding and meaningful action there are in a *rigidly organized world* – and the outcome was equally disquieting. On the one hand, the structure of Kafka's world encourages an unprecedented eloquence and talkativeness in Kafka's characters: it inspires them to detailed *descriptions*, obsessively pedantic *analyses* of actual as well as possible courses of events and sophisticated *explanations*, which – taken together – create an illusion of reliable orientation within the system. At the same time, the more elaborate and detached these analyses are, the more it becomes clear that the system by its very nature resists *understanding* and does not leave any space for an agent following his/her own aims and priorities. This confronts Kafka's interpreters with a series of questions, including:

(1) Are there any specific („Kafkaesque") *patterns of analysis and explanation* detectable in the utterances of Kafka's characters? What does their peculiar *strengths* and their *inability to generate understanding* consist in?

(2) What kinds of *strategies, tricks and manipulative moves* are recognizable in the actions and linguistic utterances of Kafka's characters? What is the source of the impression that their lengthy monologues fit together and reply one to another, without constituting *genuine communication*?

(3) Why does the world presented by Kafka create the simultaneous feeling of *strangeness and familiarity*? Should we approach it as a *fictional world construed by the author*, which the reader is supposed to enter and look back at the actual world from its specific („Kafkaesque") perspective? Or, are we invited to imagine (make-believe) *about the actual world* that it differs from what we (suppose to) know about it in the way suggested by Kafka? Or again, are we simply supposed to recognize the (hidden or manifest) *contours of the actual world* in Kafka's texts?

(4) What kind of demands impose the specific features of *Kafka's narrative* on the reader and what space do they provide for her *immersion* in the fiction? What are the possibilities (and limits) of their *transmission* to other, non-textual media, such as theatre, film or the fine arts?

(5) Is there any optimal relation between *interpreting the text* and *interpreting the author* which would be specific for Kafka's case? And if the author is admitted as one of the referential points of interpretation, should it be Franz Kafka as an inhabitant of the actual world, known to us from his diaries, letters, contemporary testimonies etc.? Or should we *construe the author* (more or less exclusively) as a part of the interpretation of his literary texts, and hence, perhaps, as an inhabitant of the Kafkaesque world? Analogically: should we approach him as a sensitive human being recording – not necessarily for other readers – his anxieties and obsessive visions? Or rather as an inventive author who follows narrative strategies, resulting in a remarkable literary construct?

(6) Has the term *"Kafkaesque"*, as used in both ordinary and journalistic language, enriched, or rather trivialized our discourse about oppressive and non-transparent features of our social environment? Are there any yet unnoticed *challenges and inspirations* to be found in Kafka's work for contemporary ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of religion etc.?

Colloquium coordinator:
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The Department of Analytic Philosophy was founded in 1990 as a part of the *Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague*. Its main task was then to introduce the central topics of analytic philosophy into Czech context and to initiate systematic research in this field. With this aspiration, the *Department* organized a series of international philosophical meetings in Karlovy Vary and in Prague, attended by W. V. O. Quine, D. Davidson, H. Putnam, P. Strawson, J. Searle and many others. Since 2000 the program of the Department includes, as one of its priorities, interdisciplinary research in the theory of interpretation, located at the confluence of the philosophy of language, aesthetics and literary theory. The outputs of this project include international meetings organized within the *Prague Interpretation Colloquia* series and several collective monographs, e.g. *Fictionality-Possibility-Reality* (ed. by P. Koťátko, M. Pokorný, M. Sabatés, Bratislava: Aleph 2010); *Mimesis: Metaphysics, Cognition, Pragmatics* (ed. by G. Currie, P. Koťátko, M. Pokorný, London: College Publications 2012); Text and Work: The Menard Case (ed. by T. Koblížek, P. Koťátko, M. Pokorný, Praha: Litteraria Pragensia 2013. In progress is a joint publication project on *The Aesthetic Illusion in Literature and the Arts* and *Chaos and Form: Echoes of Beckett in Literature, Theatre and the Arts.*

CHAOS AND FORM, PRAGUE 2016
Jim Hamilton, Josef Honzík, Petr Koťátko, Anne-Francoise Joseph and Jerry Levinson in Beckett Theatre Night