

Call for Papers

Living with Kafka: World, Mind, Legacy

Wadham College, University of Oxford, 1st – 3rd September 2026

Organised by the Oxford Kafka Research Centre and the AHRC project '[Kafka's Transformative Communities](#)'.

Franz Kafka's work continues to shape how we think about the conditions of life, its spaces, constraints, and possibilities. From his reflections on the physical body, the world of work, and dwelling places, to the distinctively varied atmospheres of his fictional worlds, Kafka's writing remains a touchstone for understanding what it means to live, both in his own time and in ours. In the afterglow of the centenary of Kafka's death, *Living with Kafka* turns to questions of habitation and habituation, to explore the ways Kafka and his contemporaries lived and imagined living, and to how we continue to live after and with Kafka today.

To this end, the conference asks a series of questions: How do the spaces Kafka and his readers inhabit (physical, mental, domestic, intellectual, creative) shape our sense of self and community? How may not only issues of health and illness, but also the ordinary and the everyday, inflect our reading of Kafka's texts? What forms of renewal, reform, or resistance emerge from his example? How might Kafka's reflections on insomnia, fatigue, and habit illuminate the texture of everyday mental life in the early twentieth century and today? How might *Lebensreform* and alternative health movements, with their emphases on nature, the body and simplicity, inform new readings of Kafka's aesthetics of life and environment? How did early twentieth-century living conditions (rented rooms, offices, sanatoria, parks, cafés) shape Kafka's sense of space and subjectivity? What role has Kafka played in modern creative depictions of depression, anxiety, or dissociation? What might Kafka's writing teach us about the boundaries between sanity, imagination, and artistic inspiration? How do contemporary artists and writers draw on Kafka to reimagine mental illness as part of the condition of living under late capitalism?

This conference will offer a forum for scholars and creative practitioners to explore Kafka's life and legacy through the lenses of space, health, creativity, and the mind. It will take place at Wadham College, University of Oxford, from 1 to 3 September 2026, and forms part of the AHRC-funded research project [Kafka's Transformative Communities](#). The event aims to foster a diverse and interdisciplinary Kafka community spanning literature, philosophy, history, architecture, the medical and environmental humanities, as well as psychology, music, and the arts.

Conference Strands:

1) Kafka's Living World

This strand examines how Kafka and his contemporaries lived in, moved through, and reimaged their environments. Possible topics might include:

- Architecture, built environments, space, movement, and dwelling
- Body culture in Kafka's time: *Lebensreform*, diet and exercise; cultural renewal movements
- Kafka's works as a record of nascent ecological thought around 1900
- Work, bureaucracy, and the everyday

2) Kafka's Life of the Mind

This strand explores inner worlds, thought, and imagination, considering Kafka's intellectual and creative life as a model for understanding the relationship between writing, consciousness, and mental health. Possible areas of inquiry include:

- Kafka and philosophy, mysticism, and psychology
- Creativity, productivity, introspection, and the mind-body relation
- Thinking, dreaming, and the work of the imagination
- Health, illness, and embodiment

3) Living with Kafka's Legacies

Kafka's influence extends well beyond his own era into the ways others have lived with, and sometimes through, his thought, texts, and image. This strand reconsiders Kafka's enduring cultural, artistic, and intellectual legacy by considering:

- Kafka's presence in contemporary debates on mental health, creativity, productivity, and resilience
- Kafka's work as a contemporary touchstone for rethinking community, identity, and crisis
- The 'Kafka-esque' as a useful/less diagnostic tool in contemporary political discourse
- Kafka's life and work as talisman for contemporary artists' creative processes

Submissions

We invite proposals for individual papers (abstracts up to 250 words). The primary language of the conference will be English, although papers in German are also welcome.

Please send abstracts and proposals to kafka@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk by **20 December 2025**.

We expect to confirm attendance by early February 2026.