

Kafka in Mind

25th September 2024

2.00pm-4.00pm Richard Doll Lecture Theatre



As part of the Oxford Kafka celebrations, welcome to a conversation on Kafka's work related to Mind and Mental Illnesses. You will hear from experts in literature, Kafka, arts, psychology, mental health, and multiple forms of research and practice; not least Professor Duttlinger leads a new AHRC programme on Kafka.

Sign up via Eventbrite: <https://kafkainmind.eventbrite.co.uk/>

Programme

Welcome and Opening remarks

2.00-2.05 pm Chair. Professor Kam Bhui

Brief Presentations

2.05pm-2.15pm	Carolin Duttlinger
2.15pm-2.25pm	Sylvan Baker
2.25pm-2.35pm	Neil Armstrong
2.35pm-2.45pm	Ana Gomez-Carillo
2.45pm-2.55pm	Kam Bhui

Roundtable Conversation

2.55pm-3.30pm All speakers

Questions from the audience and closing remarks

3.30pm-4.00pm.

Speaker Biographies and Abstracts

**Prof. Carolin Duttlinger, Professor of German Literature and Culture
Sub-Warden, Wadham College, University of Oxford**

Kafka, Psychology and Literature

Like all pupils in Austro-Hungary, Kafka studied psychology as part of his A-level curriculum. His lessons were based on the *Handbook of Empirical Psychology* by Adolf Lindner, the first chair of psychology at Prague University. Though Kafka later expressed his scepticism towards psychology and especially psychoanalysis, this early exposure had a profound and far-reaching impact on his writing. In my talk, I summarise the dynamic theory of the mind which Kafka encountered before tracing its echoes in his 1914 novel *The Trial*.

Dr Sylvan Baker, Senior Lecturer Community Performance/Applied Theatre, Royal Central School of Speech & Drama, University of London

Alienation and Marginalisation

Metamorphosis seemly charts the insectoid 'transformation' of Gregor Samsa. Resulting in his withdrawal from his family and the outside world. What might we think if we invert the narrative, and explore what it is like for an individual to be demarcated and excluded from a society which deems them deviant. Is paranoia unwise if the world is out to get you? This short talk considers how societal performances of Demarcation and alienation experienced by marginalised young people shifts to focus of the metamorphosis- from the individual to the society, challenging readings of the monstrous as the deployment of weaponized oppression.

Dr Neil Armstrong, Lecturer in Anthropology, SOAS, University of London

Horror as insight: reading Kafka

The Trial begins: 'Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested.' Kafka knew that bureaucratic institutions are unpredictable, inscrutable, impersonal, fundamentally deceptive. One morning, you wake up, and they just arrest you. Reading Kafka today is unsettling because we seem to have fallen in love with bureaucracy, whilst knowing it is unrequited. Mental healthcare is organised bureaucratically, but it is more than this. Managerialism has become a way of seeing the world, a lens through which we apprehend health, and, even, as form of care itself.

**Prof. Ana Gomez-Carillo, Psychiatrist working with Inuit youth in Nunavik in the Quebec arctic.
Assistant Professor, McGill University's Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry.**

Double Binds and Taken for Grantedness

Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis is sudden and yet both the ensuing isolation and broken communication seem to precede it. However, tangled with the imprisonment of the metamorphosis are also insights and feelings of liberation experienced by Gregor. I will explore this constellation and relate it to the double binds Gregor is caught in throughout his trajectory drawing on Wolfgang Blankenburg's work on natural-taken-for-grantedness which he considers is the anchor point of experience in a common world of pragmatic concerns (Blankenburg 1971/2012).

Prof. Kamaldeep Bhui, Professor of Psychiatry, Dept Psychiatry, Nuffield Dept of Primary Care Health Sciences, and Senior Research Fellow Wadham College, University of Oxford. Hon Consultant Psychiatrist at Oxford Health and East London NHS Foundation Trusts. EDI Lead for Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre.

Psychosis, Metaphor and Stigma.

Waking up as an insect, and surviving with less and less love and care, whilst feeling alien and diseased is a striking metaphor for the experience of developing and living with psychoses over the life course. In particular, prejudice, dehumanisation, discrimination, and untimely and slow death impact the family and society. Death is seen as a relief and a new beginning for the surviving family members. Literature can provide insights into the experience of developing psychosis and how it changes identity and self-image, deepening and illustrating what we know from social-cultural epidemiology of psychosis.