

Jane SUNDERLAND

Stage Adaptations of Novels: 'Affordances' of Theatre in Two Stage Adaptations of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*

Abstract

Theatre – whether in the form of an 'adaptation' or not – is theatre. Following much of the current critical literature on film adaptations (e.g. Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007; Leitch, 2008; Hutcheon, 2006), in this paper I am therefore rejecting as far as possible any sort of 'fidelity discourse', i.e. that the stage adaptation should be 'faithful' to its novel sourcetext in terms of plot, characters, dialogue and resolution, or even, arguably, in 'theme' or spirit. In some ways a stage adaptation, as a recontextualisation in a new medium, *cannot* be faithful to its sourcetext, in part because of the 'epistemological commitments' (Kress, 2003) of theatre. More interestingly and constructively, I argue that because of theatre's multiple and enriching 'affordances' (Bezemer and Kress, 2008), many of which are not shared with the novel, it should not even try. I illustrate this with two non-deferential stage adaptations of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, to both of which the affordance of digitalisation is key. In one, a small TV-like screen facilitates representations of interiority (long seen as a challenge for theatre). In the other, sophisticated and extensive digital projection allows abstract and concrete images which go beyond visual enhancement of the *mise en scène* to foregrounding aspects of this particular retelling, and which give an appropriate nod to modernity and, in both the narrow (e.g. technological) and broad senses, to the value of change.

Keywords: affordance, epistemological commitment, Kafka, stage adaptation.

Introduction

Audiences and critics often praise stage adaptations of novels for their nearness to the sourcetext, and accordingly express disappointment if a particular scene, character, motif or perhaps what they see as the best line in the novel is omitted. This is understandable: audiences, as theatre managers and producers know, often buy tickets for stage adaptations (henceforth 'adaptations') because of their particular fondness for the

Jane SUNDERLAND

Lancaster University

Email: j.sunderland@lancaster.ac.uk

EKPHRASIS, 2/2013

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pp. 140-157

sourcetext or – rather differently - because they wish their children or students to learn about the novel from the adaptation. Hence the frequency of adaptations in the theatre. But while one understanding of ‘adaptation’ may be direct line-by-line transfer (at least of dialogue) from page to stage, here I challenge the idea that a stage adaptation of the novel can ever be just this - even if all the lines from a novel somehow appear in the stage-play¹. The two productions used as illustration in this paper are not simply ‘inspired by’ the novel – they are closer to it than that – but neither aims for ‘fidelity’.

There are different reasons why an adaptation *cannot* be faithful to its novel source-text, which we can see as *constraints* (rather than obstacles). Most basic is probably the length of the novel in relation to the duration of its stage-play. In a pre-show talk prior to his *Wind in the Willows* (Manchester Library Theatre, 2011/2012), based on Alan Bennett’s script, Director Chris Honer says, holding up Kenneth Grahame’s novel: “now here’s the book – it’s 240 pages long, you read it out loud it would probably take six hours - this [holding up Bennett’s script] is the play, it only lasts about two hours”. There is simply no time to render the novel in full, so something (episodes, characters, conversations) must be cut. In the two adaptations of *Metamorphosis* I discuss below, for example, the three lodgers have been removed from the story; in Steven Berkoff’s adaptation (used in this paper for comparison), which he both wrote for the stage² and directed, they were conflated into one. If an interval is required, the production will be divided in a particular way, perhaps creating its own theatrical need for a dramatic event at the end of Act 1.

Other constraints relate to the *materiality* of theatre (in interesting contrast to its potential for the symbolic). There is a limit to the number of actors who can fit on a stage (even if many were willing and able). The size of the stage itself will always be a constraint, as will the auditorium: if the seating is not raked, or raked only gently, this may limit what can be done at floor level. The number of scenes will be limited if changes involve complex staging, especially if digital projection is not wanted or not possible. This is in contrast to the novel (and the film), in which the number and type of scenes and settings are potentially unlimited. While theatre can arguably and *in principle* dramatise anything, and digital projection can help hugely here, a given production may not have the resources – technological, material, professional - to represent all scenes and settings. So an adaptation is likely to take place with fewer scenes and settings than its sourcetext, in particular fewer large-scale settings (wars, parades, riots), although of course a small patch of a battlefield (say) can be and frequently is shown. And actors are themselves material: it is not easy for them to convincingly die and lie as breathless corpses, for example, or appear in ghostly form after death. Animal ‘actors’ – who may be crucial to a plot and seen also to be so for a *production*; consider Steinbeck’s novel *Of Mice and Men*, for which Steinbeck himself wrote the playscript - bring with them a range of extra considerations.

A further frequently identified constraint of theatre is its apparent inability (especially in relation to the novel) to show interiority: what a character perceives, thinks, feels and understands (e.g. Isherwood, 2008). Below I look positively at some options for theatre here.

Theatre: epistemological commitment

Reasons why a stage adaptation cannot be faithful to the novel can be conceptualised in terms of theatre's 'epistemological commitments' (Kress, 2003; see also Bezemer and Kress, 2008). Kress refers to the epistemological commitment of *mode* (e.g. image *vis á vis* writing). He cites representation of the cell/nucleus relationship in educational materials: in writing there is 'Commitment of the naming of a relation ... "the cell owns a nucleus" '; whereas in image there is 'commitment to a location in space ... "this is where it goes" ' (2003: 3). In other words, the image maker cannot *not* show the nucleus in physical relationship to the cell.

The novel (usually using the written mode alone) and the theatre (minimally, using spoken and visual modes) have different epistemological commitments. Let us take the example of a character's appearance. The novelist does not *have to* say anything about this at all; if s/he does, s/he is unlikely to describe the character from head to foot – hairstyle, clothes, accessories, footwear. This is partly because of word numbers but partly because it may not, simply, be seen as relevant. Theatre, however, must show appearance in its entirety: costumes (actors must – usually – wear particular items of clothing, of particular styles and colour), hair (is a woman's hair long or short? worn up or down? what colour is it?) and skin colour. So a character's stage appearance will almost certainly be represented in more detail than in the novel: she or he will probably be wearing a *range* of garments, a form of footwear, and a particular hairstyle. The novelist can select from this range, but a stage play (unless it is performed in the dark, or behind screens) must show all.

As a visual medium, theatre is thus 'epistemologically committed' to *showing* a range of things. One is the relative proximity of each actor on stage to the others: each must be *some* distance (near to or far from) each of the others. A further commitment is to some sort of action (at a given point, is each actor still – in which case, in what pose? or theatrically 'frozen?', or moving – in which case, how?), to gaze (actors must be looking at *something*, or have their eyes closed) and to posture (standing or sitting; in either case, how?). Theatre here will have to go beyond the novel. The same is true of props. Particular props may be prompted by the novel, but detailed descriptions about size, shape, colour *and* historical appearance (and more) is unlikely to have been provided. Even if some such decisions are not are not consciously made by the Director or stage manager, each prop will have its own specificities. The point is clear: it is almost impossible that everything shown on stage *can* have been indicated in the novel; there are just too many possibilities. In this 'showing' sense, theatre is 'epistemologically committed' to a higher degree of *specificity*. Regardless of one's artistic position on 'fidelity', then, the stage adaptation *cannot* be faithful to its novel sourcetext. This was recognised for film adaptations nearly fifty years ago, when George Bluestone wrote: ... mutations are probable the moment one goes from a given set of fluid, but relatively homogeneous, conventions, to another; ... changes are *inevitable* the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium (1957: 5; Bluestone's italics).

This is equally true of adaptations, which, because of the specificity of the stage, will in a sense always go further than their sourcetexts.

The 'affordances' of theatre

While it can be easily accepted that an adaptation *cannot*, in the sense shown above, be faithful to its novel sourcetext, it is more controversial (at least outside the field of adaptation theory) to argue that, for reasons of creativity, it *should not try to*. The argument here is that the novel can do certain things 'better' than theatre, and theatre certain things 'better' than the novel. The notion of *affordance*, related to *epistemological commitment*, was introduced in 1977 by James Gibson in the field of design technology, to refer to the physical properties offered ('afforded') by something in the environment, as perceived by humans. For example, a doorknob 'affords' twisting and pushing; a chair affords sitting, standing and drying clothes on. In communication studies, associated with the notion of mode (text, image), an *affordance* is what a particular mode can (not must) easily express and represent; it is a 'source for meaning-making', with reference to its *potentials* (Bezemer and Kress, 2008; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). So while any creative genre or medium can in principle express ('afford') anything ('X'), in practice, some genres and mediums are much better at X than are others. This is a fuzzy, fluid, not an essentialist notion: the claim is not that plays do one set of things, novels another. The notion has however been little used in relation to theatre – despite the affordances of theatre being manifold. In the following paragraphs I briefly explore just some of these.

Most obviously, theatre (like film), is a multi-modal (mainly visual and aural) medium. As a *visual* medium, it is well able to *show*. And not only can it (and must it) show details of appearance, action, gaze and proximity as discussed above, it can also show facial expression, and fleeting and less fleeting angles of glance. As regards a production's *mise en scène*, facilitating and being informed by the Director's particular interpretation, screens afford shadows, and changes in size of what is behind them. Lights (and darkness) afford the possibility of focus: on a particular character, episode or prop.

The list of visual affordances, almost endless, now includes digital projection, including on several screens from several projectors simultaneously. This allows different moving imagery, of large and small scale and scope, which may complement or contrast with what is happening on stage. It also allows sound, and highly accurate integration of the visual and the aural, all preservable for posterity. What can be seen includes large-scale geographical literal representations, abstract representations and their juxtaposition. The potential for continual movement spans pre-existing documentary or feature film clips and new sequences of characters talking to or being watched by characters on the stage, for example in *Return to the Forbidden Planet* (Lancaster Girls'/Royal Grammar Schools, 2012), and Nicholas Hytner's (2004) adaptation of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (National Theatre, London). And although adaptations can always acknowledge their novel sourcetexts (and hence par-

ticular prior authorship), digitalisation affords further resources for this: projection in Oldham Coliseum/Imitating the Dog's production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Dukes Theatre, Lancaster, April 2012), for example, featured moving pages of a book.

As an *aural* medium, theatre affords not only words spoken, and the possibility of dialogue, characters 'thinking aloud', or talking to the audience (hence interiority) – but also vocal qualities such as intonation, pitch, rhythm, tone and accent (indeed, is epistemologically committed to *each* of these for any given utterance). Theatre also affords the possibility of mimicry, hesitation and overlapping speech, the last of which is normal in everyday conversation, and which may indicate hostility or solidarity. (The novel, in contrast, cannot tell in a *non-sequential* way about (or even 'show') two characters talking at the same time.)

Actors can use language in a range of ways, from what is perceived to be naturalistic conversation to theatrical, poetic talk - the audience hears this; we do not have to imagine it. Theatre also affords the possibility of *minimising* dialogue, because so much can be depicted visually and otherwise aurally. And theatre affords the projection of sound *extraneous* to the characters: music, songs, weather, a whip...., which may be live, pre-recorded, or part of an aural-visual digital installation. All these (with associated symbolic potential) are likely to be closely related to the Director's particular interpretation, and there may be no direct literal correspondence at all between say, a particular sound and anything in the novel.

Theatre currently does not allow the audience to taste, although it has allowed us to smell. Tactile experiences are also afforded – the sense of rain, for example³ - and are common in pantomime or other shows in which anything descends on the audience or is thrown into or around the auditorium. And even if the audience does not experience a tactile experience directly, we can *witness* touch on the stage. The novel can only tell us about this.

Actors themselves constitute theatrical affordances, responsible for imaginatively executing many of the affordances of sound and vision identified above. Steyn (1997) observes how Fiona Shaw, in *The Fire Sermon* (part of the adaptation of T.S. Elliot's *Waste Land*):

Simply by crossing the stage, removing her cardigan and standing at a different angle to a different light bulb, [is] able to effect a plausible, unobtrusive shift from deep tragedy to music-hall and back again (1997: 2).

Wider directorial decisions are relevant here too. Having actors means that two sets of things can be going on simultaneously, a juxtaposition which in turn affords dramatic irony. A one-man or woman show in particular affords not only the idea of everyman/everywoman, but also the articulation and embodied materialisation (through action, gesture, posture, expression) of interiority. When Michael Gambon performed Joe in Beckett's *Eh Joe?* (August 2013, Edinburgh International Festival) he said not a word but responded to what was said to him, his face projected onto a large screen⁴. An actor playing more than one role in the same production can be directed in a the-

atrically principled way, so that, for example, a connection is established between two roles. In her playscript of *Ciphers* (2013), Dawn King indicates the four 'pairings' of the eight roles, suggesting that this is not just a matter of keeping costs down. Conversely, theatre affords several actors playing the *same* person at the same time, for example, Helen Edmundson's 1994 adaptation of *Mill on the Floss* with its three Maggies. Such actors can interact with other about what they are thinking and how they are feeling, externalising not only interiority but also internal conflict. A Director can also practice gender-blind casting, or deliberately cast men to play female roles, or *vice versa*, to *re-gender* the characters of the novel, to serve a particular interpretation.

While novel reading (other than in story-telling) is a characteristically solitary endeavour, theatre affords audience interaction. Pantomime maximally exploits this, but in many stage plays, actors look specifically at and even address particular audience members. The auditorium itself affords a further theatrical space for entrances, exits, or to indicate distance or height: Mermaids Theatre's *Angels in America* (2013, Edinburgh Festival Fringe), where the audience was in the stalls, concluded with a directional change of lighting and an angel appearing at the front of the circle.

But perhaps the most important affordance of theatre is theatricality itself – what Berkoff refers to positively as “the alchemical possibilities of the stage” (1995: 53) – as opposed to naturalistic productions. “If you give [the audience] a small gesture of something more abstract”, he says, “such as the idea of a man as an insect, they will gladly fill in the rest themselves” (p. 40). Indeed, theatricality is constituted in part *by* the affordances of theatre. Given an acceptance of theatrical symbolic conventions, a red cloth on the floor *is* a bloodstain, feathers a bird, and a trapeze, flight. Theatre audiences *expect* simple, mimetic non-literal representations, such as non-existent coffee being poured from an actual coffee pot, and are (increasingly?) also open to furniture being represented by blocks (which may also be walls), to furniture and walls being temporarily represented by actors themselves, for example in an ensemble production, to anachronistic and visible use of technology to achieve a certain effect. In Chris Hannan's adaptation of Dostoyevsky's (1866) *Crime and Punishment* (Lyceum, Edinburgh, November 2013), the knocks and calls at the door behind which unlikely murderer Raskolnikov is slumped are amplified, the callers using visible microphones. From the perspective of the audience, the door being *behind* Raskolnikov helps us to share his perceptions. Physical theatre techniques (see e.g. Murray and Keefe, 2007) mean that an actor can externalise emotion with her or his body: an *embodiment* – often a dance-like one – of interiority.

Theatricality also affords puppetry (Francis, 2011). This potentially theatricalises the actor-operator and her relationship with her puppet: are they one and the same (shown for example by costume)? Puppets can have an additional theatrical role in the suggestion of the puppet character being *actually* (not only literally) 'manipulated' and/or 'ventriloquised' – as in HookHitch's Theatre's *The Turn of the Screw* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 2012) in which a human Miss Jessell operates a puppet Flora.

Basically, then, theatricality affords the dramatization of anything. And given theatre's many affordances, it would seem perverse for a Director not to make use of these in an adaptation, to serve and create his or her particular interpretation. *Any* production entails interpretation, of course (including those using a pre-existing *playscript*, as the words must be 'clothed'), but, given the various affordances of theatre, this is, I suggest, *particularly* so for a stage adaptation of a novel.

The novel

Although a novel does not have to tell a story chronologically, and many do not, as a *textual* medium, the novel is normally epistemologically committed to sequential, non-simultaneous, 'telling' depiction. Here it contrasts with the 'showing' modes of both film (with the potential for split screens) and theatre (for different action in different parts of the stage). As regards dialogue, because of the usual linear nature of the text, overlapping speech (which, as suggested above, may entail hostility or solidarity) on novels can only be *indicated* as such, even though this may be very important to a stage relationship. A constraint of the non-illustrated novel is that it can only *tell*.

An obvious affordance of the novel, as suggested, is that there are absolutely no constraints on where it can be set, in how many settings, over what period(s) of time or on what happens. Given theatricality and theatrical affordances, this is true of theatre too – but it takes talent and thought in bucket-loads, and may not be straightforward (or cheap) to achieve. Hytner's (2004) elaborate dramatization of Pullman's spatially complex three-part novel *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) for the National Theatre is a case in point.

The novel's affordance *par excellence* is often identified as showing 'interiority': what someone feels and thinks, including their motivations. These may be indicated through the narrator-character's use of the first person, or through an omniscient third person narrator who may focalise the character, perhaps through verbs such as *see*, *hear*, *imagine*, *think* and *believe* (Short, 1996: 268). The last three of these are cognitive, so how are we to know what a counterpart on stage is imagining, thinking or believing? Shakespeare used the aside and the soliloquy (most famously, Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' speech). In modern plays the soliloquy, however, noticeably used only with great care.

Interiority is accordingly frequently cited as one reason why novels should not be adapted for the stage, especially if the novel's 'essence' lies in this: "the inner life of Holden Caulfield or of Proust's narrator Marcel" (Rushdie, 2009: 4). (Often, of course, it does not.) Bluestone claimed that "The rendition of mental states – memory, dream, imagination – cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language" (1957: 47). Linda Hutcheon, however, characterises the claim that "interiority is the terrain of the telling mode" (2006: 56) as a *cliché*, and Leitch similarly includes the notion that "Novels create more complex characters than movies [and we can add stage-plays] because they offer more immediate and complex access to the characters' psycholog-

ical states" in his (2003) 'Twelve fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory'. While interiority may be a challenge for theatre, it is not necessarily, then, a constraint, as I show below.

Broadly, if they are to be included, "represented thoughts ... must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds and visual images" (Hutcheon, 2006: 40). These include, but go beyond, voiceovers and narrators. In Waterhouse and Hall's dramatization of Waterhouse's novel *Billy Liar*, for example, Billy's internal monologue, key to his fantasy life and the novel itself, is exteriorised when Billy talks out loud to an imaginary character. In Nicholas Wright's playscript of Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, protagonist Lyra Belacqua's internal monologue is either omitted, replaced with action, or externalised through her words. In *Northern Lights* (Book 1), for example, we read "if he [Lord Asriel] caught her in her [the Retiring Room] she'd be severely punished, but she could put up with that" (p. 6). The playscript reads:

Salcilia: Kids can't go in there, and nor can women
 Pantalaimon: Yeah, and it's probably haunted
 Lyra: Good, that settles it. Come on, Rodge; this is gonna be fun.

In Helen Edmundson's adaptation of *War and Peace*, Anna's and Levin's internal monologues are externalised by having them constantly meet and argue (whereas in the novel they only meet once, at the end) (see interview in Sunderland, 2009). In Berkoff's *Metamorphosis*:

Gregor recounts the agony of his day to his sister ... I chose to take this 'dialogue' from Gregor's silent thoughts[I] put it into the mouth of a pre-insect existence so that we could see Gregor before the transformation took place (1995: 14).

And about his (2013) *Crime and Punishment* (see above), Director Chris Hannan says:

For the whole of this book you're inside this guy's head, so how do we do that? It was about making sure that Raskolnikov has a direct link to the audience and can talk to them directly and that we keep ... what's going on in his head, in front of the audience all the time. That was relatively simple because it feels in the book that he is continually having conversations in his head with other people (programme, p. 5).

Finally, it could be argued that novels themselves do not *show* actual thoughts, feelings and perceptions, we read *reports* of these: words, as signifiers of thoughts.

Two stage adaptations of *Metamorphosis*: an empirical contribution

In the remainder of this article I continue the discussion of theatrical affordances in the illustrative light of two different adaptations of Kafka's short novel *Metamorphosis* (1915). While the topic of film adaptations of novels continues to be staple fare for adaptation studies (see e.g. Elliot, 2013; Stam and Raengo, 2005; Naremore, 2000; Cartmell and Whelehan, 1999), scholarly work on stage adaptations is far thinner on the ground, tending to refer to adaptations of specific novels (e.g. Butler, 2003; Cox, 2000; Reynolds,

1993; Edgar, 1988; Bolton, 1987). Most relevant to this paper is of course Berkoff's (1995) *Meditations on Metamorphosis*, an account of the process of his 1992 Tokyo production, his tenth, which includes reflections on the previous nine.

The reasons for the dearth of work on stage adaptations of novels *per se*, it seems to me, are both practical and epistemological. Practically, a given stage adaptation of a particular novel may not be running anywhere in the world, at the time of interest. If it is running, the run will not be finite. I chose *Metamorphosis* primarily for its obvious theatrical challenges/opportunities – for which reasons Berkoff's have not been the only adaptations – but also because two productions were running in the same location at the time of data collection (see below), and because 'secondary' data was available in *Meditations*.

The practical constraints relate to the epistemological question of what the 'evidence' is to be when exploring a stage play (adaptation or otherwise). Is it the production as a whole? Is it one performance (if so, which, and why?) More concretely, if one of these is agreed in principle, again, given theatre's essential ephemerality (Phelan 1993), what then is the actual data? This depends on the research question (RQ). For some RQs, a *film* of a given production may suffice (see e.g. McIntyre, 2008) – for example, an RQ about which props are selected and the different uses to which they are put – although even here there is an assumption that this will be the same throughout the production. For a RQ concerning the visual perspective of the viewer, and hence angle of view, entailing whether the viewer is looking straight at or down at the stage, and his or her closeness to the stage, a film taken from a different, single point would not be adequate. For RQs concerning the deliberately fleeting – whether, how often and how thrown objects are caught, for example, or audience applause and how this responded to by the cast – film would not be sufficient either. These challenges do not however mean that stage adaptations of novels should be neglected in the adaptation literature; quite the contrary. But the researcher needs to develop and be explicit about her particular methodology (see below).

I propose two sets of RQs for the study of adaptations, the first relevant to adaptations (indeed stage plays) in general, and the second to the adaptation of a specific novel. The first set consists of 'generic' questions relating to what may be seen as the theatrical challenges, such as:

- (how) is interiority addressed?
- (how) are changes in setting and the passage of time addressed?

The '(how)' is important, as it cannot be assumed that an adaptor or Director will wish to transpose features such as interiority or even changes of scene and time into a given adaptation. Related to these two RQs, and relevant to this paper, we can add:

- what theatrical affordances are drawn on?
- how do these inform/constitute the interpretation of the novel?

Kafka's *Metamorphosis* certainly creates an interesting theatrical challenge, or opportunity – and, accordingly, invites consideration of a range of theatrical affordanc-

es. On the surface, it is the story of Gregor Samsa, a young man who wakes up, late, to find he has become a beetle. Other than this, the novel can be described as a 'naturalistic' one. What really concerns Gregor is that he has overslept and his need to leave the house get to work (he is a travelling salesman), as he supports his family – his parents and his sister Grete, a talented violinist. The Chief Clerk from his company arrives and makes matters worse. Gregor cannot leave. Time passes and his family, in particular Grete, feed him, but inappropriately. The family let a room to compensate for the lack of income, but the lodgers leave when they encounter Gregor. His family become increasingly alienated from him. Gregor finally dies, weakened by an apple which his father has thrown at him embedded in his body, and the family apparently move on with their lives. The story is told by a third person narrator but focalised through Gregor. As Berkoff puts it, with a dose of irony:

Kafka's story is told from Gregor's room, and the family are naturally shadowy, heard through the partly open door which they kindly don't shut so that their son can hear the familiar sounds of their activities from a distance (1995: 29).

This raises issues both of interiority, and, as the story does not only take place in several rooms and apparently over several weeks, changing settings and the passage of time.

The story contains several metamorphoses, including that of Gregor *while* he is a beetle, of the family as a family during the 'crisis', and in particular of Grete. *Metamorphosis* can be interpreted as being about the socially and personally damaging nature of capitalism, but more broadly as being about the social treatment of the marginalised, of those who do not or cannot fit into a social system, in Berkoff's words: "an allegory of the outsider ... anyone who cannot conform to the norm acceptable to a society that is distinctly uncomfortable with damaged goods, or individuals" (p. 29). This includes religious readings (consider Kafka's Jewish origins, the apple, and Gregor's death; Bruce, 2007, 2002). The marginalised entity in a given production/interpretation thus does not need to be a breadwinner; indeed, the metamorphosis does not need to be into a beetle. And of course the relative emphasis given to the protagonist and to the family members (always assuming there is a protagonist and there are family members) can and will vary with particular interpretations.

The most obvious RQ specific to adaptations of *Metamorphosis* is surely 'How do they do the beetle?' In Berkoff's productions, Gregor is played *as* a beetle and *by* a single actor – who the audience have already seen in 'human' form. Of his 1992 Tokyo production, Berkoff writes:

[Gregor] uncurls like a foetus, beginning as a tight ball: stick-like feelers of the insect slowly emerge as if he were being newly hatched First a clawed hand rises gradually from the inchoate mass, then another The hair-pinned legs jerk open a spasm at a time and his upturned face peeps through his open legs to the audience. Now his arms come through his legs, enabling him to hold them up while at the same time looking more creature-like. A thing on its back. (pp. 40-41)

While some might expect a 'naturalistic' portrayal, as far as this is possible, others will be open to an obviously theatrical one, such as Berkoff's, or that of Cambridge University ADC, who performed the beetle *compositely*: several actors in black moving and climbing leggily as one (Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 2009).

A wiser specific RQ however might be:

(i) Do they do the beetle? If so, how? If not, is something else put in its place?

As well as, with a nod to 'fidelity':

(ii) Is Gregor focalised (as in the novel)? If so, how?

I address these specific RQs below, in the light of the more general question of theatrical affordances.

The two adaptations of *Metamorphosis* to which the remainder of this paper is devoted were both performed both in Edinburgh in August 2013 – the first by Resuscitate at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and the second by Contemporary Legend Theatre as part of the Edinburgh International Festival. Although Resuscitate would have 'signed themselves up' and paid their own expenses, and Contemporary Legend Theatre would have been invited, productions at *both* Festivals are expected to push artistic boundaries. While contrasting in many ways, both productions utilise a range of theatrical affordances in ways completely unpredictable from the novel alone.

Below, then, I apply the notion of *affordance* to theatre, using it to contest the prescriptive 'fidelity discourse' when it comes to stage adaptations, and provide an empirical study of two adaptations of (as indicated, something rare in the adaptation literature). But how was the data to be collected? Assuming it is agreed that the production as a whole is of interest, with the performance(s) viewed being seen as representative, it seems to me that the only real choice is fieldnotes, made during or immediately after the performance. Ideally the researcher will attend more than one performance; ideally she will go with a companion who will share recollections of details. The fieldnotes of course need to be focussed, addressing the chosen RQs. I therefore made fieldnotes on both productions immediately after watching them, supplemented with observations from my audience companions, as well as from associated documentation: the flyer for (i), the programme for (ii).

I am less interested in making comparisons with Kafka's novel as at looking at how the affordances of modern theatre, in particular digitalisation, are creatively drawn on in these adaptations.

The Resuscitate Theatre production

The Resuscitate production of *Metamorphosis*, performed at the Merchants Hall, to a small audience in Edinburgh, August 1 – 10 2013, is "inspired by the original" but "retell[s] Kafka's tale with a new and surprising twist" (flyer blurb). And it does. The question is indeed 'Do they do the beetle?' 'Resuscitate' don't have a beetle at all: the metamorphosis in question is not from human to insect but from young to old. And

Kafka's male Gregor has become a female Grega. The script is devised, using modern English.

How is this done and how is it sustained? One key to this production is indeed digitalisation. The stage itself is a small rectangular area, in front of a wall, constituted by boards, on which a small screen is mounted at about head height on the right hand side. On the left hand side is the door joining Grega's room with the rest of the house. Grega thus remains in the foreground; we only see the family, in black and white (and hear what they say) on the screen. As regards interiority, although Grega (like Gregor) does not speak, and even though (or because) only the opinions of *the rest of her family* are actually (and strongly) voiced, we are *implicitly* invited to share Grega's perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

The affordance of theatricality immediately comes into play. We start by seeing young Grega 'in bed', i.e. on a mattress and pillow, vertical against the wall. She wordlessly goes through three cycles of waking and getting up and going to work: she rises, has a cigarette, makes a hot drink, takes a Lithium pill, is phoned by her employer to check she's on the move, and once on the bus briefly watches an episode of *Friends* – shown on the screen. Each cycle is performed at a faster and more frantic pace than the previous one, 'physical theatre'-style movements indexing Grega's panic⁵. The set is then darkened. On the screen we see images of hair changing to grey and skin changes: symbols of the process of this metamorphosis. We then see the actual transformation: old Grega (a kindly old woman, wearing a bun and woollen stockings, and identical spectacles to those of her younger self), a puppet with three operators, for her feet, hands and head⁶. Still present, through exuberant physical movement young Grega expresses delight at not having to go to work. At the same time, she and we hear the family expressing concern about Grega's lateness, as we watch them on the small screen. The mother is spineless, the father angry, Grete is sympathetic and constructive.

While young Grega remains at the back of the stage, on her 'vertical' bed (as if she is looking down at the scene), old Grega takes her pills and makes herself a hot chocolate. Her pill jar (and money jar) are small versions of young Grega's full size ones. She opens a box containing her 'stereotypical old person' belongings – an inhaler, her knitting, some false teeth – and knits. Young Grega watches with interest and amusement. Old Grega has a cat (operated as a puppet), which she delights in and strokes and which shows her affection, (underlining her loneliness). When she (and we) hear the family arguing about what to do with her, she passes her money jar under the door.

Food on a tray is put under the door but old Grega (like Gregor) can't eat it properly; she loses two teeth. On the small screen Grete tells her parents that Grega now has a cat for company. Father is angry: another mouth to be fed. Old Grega watches television, shown on the screen: the introduction to *Panorama*, featuring elderly abuse in care homes. She switches the TV off.

During the night the cat escapes: we watch its movements on the screen (via a camera on its collar?). It creates havoc, knocking over the goldfish bowl, then comes back

into old Grega's room – with a dead goldfish. The following day Grete takes away the cat. Trembling, old Grega smashes her family photograph.

Grete comes in and she and young Grega express the awfulness of the situation, using parallel dance movements. The play concludes with young Grega and old Grega, in communication with each other, simultaneously swallowing an additional Lithium pill to take their own life.

Digitalisation in this production allows us to appreciate not only precisely what Gregor hears, but also, as she is in the foreground throughout (embodied as human and as puppet) and the family are distanced, to infer what she is feeling and thinking. Her own, very motivated actions are responses to their uncaring, hostile ones and this theatrical focalisation of Grega allows the audience to both comprehend and sympathise with her.

The flyer for this production refers to 'the way society treats the vulnerable' – for which wider issue 'old Grega' is a metaphor. While Kafka's 'worker/ant/beetle' functioned in a similar way but stressed a particular vulnerability, Resuscitate's production retains a critical focus on the unfairness of what happens to the marginalised, with specific reference to elderly women.

One obvious way in which Resuscitate's production differs from Berkoff's is that in the latter, "Gregor was seen through [the family's] eyes and they brought him to life by acting as a chorus for him, speaking about his needs – 'What's he doing now?' " (1995: 28). Resuscitate in contrast put Grega in the foreground (literally), and the family are seen through her eyes (we never even see Mother and Father in the flesh), as they are through Gregor's in Kafka's novel, and hence through the audience's eyes too. The adaptation by Contemporary Legend Theatre similarly puts Gregor in the foreground, but to an even greater extent.

The Contemporary Legend Theatre production

Contemporary Legend Theatre's *Metamorphosis* is a one-man performance by Taiwanese actor (and Director) Wu Hsing-kuo, accompanied by an orchestra of nine Chinese instruments and a cello. It was performed at the Kings' Theatre, Edinburgh, August 10 – 12 2013, to large audiences. Wu Hsing-kuo, as Gregor/the beetle (together and as one) sings and dances throughout; Gregor is thus again focalised. And while the 'one-man show' genre allows a focus on the human individual, the other characters are not quite backgrounded, as



Fig. 1. A one-man performance by Wu Hsing-kuo. Performed at the Kings' Theatre, Edinburgh, August 10–12, 2013. Photos by Kuo Cheng-chan and provided by Contemporary Legend Theatre.

Wu also performs Grete. This *Metamorphosis* is sung, in the manner of Beijing opera, in Mandarin Chinese, with English surtitles at the top left and right above the stage. When he is not wearing/carrying the ornate 'beetle' costume, Wu also dances and performs a range of acrobatic feats. The production is more a portrayal of the human condition through a lens of Eastern philosophy (in the programme, Wu writes: "even a little bug can float in endless time and endless space") than about the marginalisation and abuse of the vulnerable. Wu adds:

This production is emphatically personal
 This is my Kafka, and Wu Hsing-kuo's metamorphosis!
 This is Western Existentialism, but also Eastern Nirvana!

This *Metamorphosis* also draws on Kafka's other writings: his love letters, and 'Before the Law', a fable within *The Trial*. It is divided into six scenes (as documented in the programme): A Dream/The Awakening/The Door/Love/Inhibition/Flying, of which Awakening, Love and Inhibition bear some narrative resemblance to the novel. Digital projection, largely black and white, is a key part of this visually-striking production from the start. With its ability to show continuous moving images, digitalisation here provides more than and is more powerful than a mere 'backdrop' – and more powerful than Berkoff's cyclorama: a large curtain which, through moving lighting, allowed "huge beetle shadows of the group downstage" to "slide and shudder over [it]" (Berkoff, 1988: 110). Digital projection in Contemporary Legend Theatre's production is far less limited.

The production opens with a dream: digital projection on huge screens at the back of the stage shows seas, mountains (as if we are flying over them), abstract shapes, Chinese ideograms, a small person, and a bed on the left. The protagonist is sitting at the left of the stage, watching, for some time. A black ball lands on the bed. A white cocoon hangs from the ceiling. A clock chimes, and the light changes with daybreak. Centre stage is a large white 'ice mountain', streaked with geometrical lines, with a path going up the side. A bed descends. A huge beetle comes through an opening, shocking in its size and detail (see above), and dances, Beijing-opera style. Its waving antennae are long, feathery, pheasant feathers – peacock-like at the bottom. The beetle's 'hands' are however flesh coloured.

When the dancing ceases, the beetle changes again to 'skin' – in a white skin-tight suit, with head markings – suggesting human vulnerability. This beetle hangs up-



Fig. 2. A one-man performance by Wu Hsing-kuo. Performed at the Kings' Theatre, Edinburgh, August 10–12, 2013. Photos by Kuo Cheng-chan and provided by Contemporary Legend Theatre.

side down from top of the ice mountain, facing the audience. The family's knocking on the door (on both sides of the stage) is shown through digital projection onto the large backscreens, with dramatic shaking of the large door knob. Gregor sings about his problems getting back through the door – echoing the novel. Father's, Mother's, Sister's and the Chief Clerk's words are incorporated into the lyrics: we hear their voices as part of the installation.

There is then another metamorphosis. Chairs, table and a dress come down from the ceiling. Enacting Gregor's sister, who brings him food on a tray, wobbling in with bound feet, Wu then goes through an elaborate routine of putting on feminine make-up and costume. This scene includes a projection of the protagonist's face from a different angle. Black and white petals come floating down. She wobbles up the mountain, losing one shoe after another, and destroys her musical instrument. Wu, first in a white shirt and black trousers, and finally black jacket and underwear, again suggesting vulnerability, then embraces his beloved painting - of a woman delicately coiffured (rather than wearing fur, as in the novel). Now Gregor, Wu clings onto it to but is attacked by apples thrown by his father, digitally projected as a host of large red apples rising up, and is injured.

The beetle lies still, apparently lifeless, a carapace, now a separate entity from Gregor. A projected, distinctly Western image of Kafka, in a stylish hat, talks to and encourages Gregor. Wu as Gregor in his skin-tight white suit turn talks to and worships the bug/carapace, both on stage and as projected on the screen, pleading with it not to die, and carrying it up the mountain. He walks into the light, through the door in the ice mountain. The beetle dances, suggesting freedom and release, and finally ascends.

Jonathan Mills, the Edinburgh International Festival Director, refers in the programme to this as "a uniquely 21st century approach to Peking Opera to shed new light on a European classic". This is clearly in part a reference to the digitalisation, about which Wu jokes, mimicking Kafka's famous opening to *Metamorphosis*:

'One morning, a Peking Opera actor wakes up to find himself surrounded by sets of electric technology..... He grumbles some incomprehensible sounds, incapable of communicating with others!' (programme, np, quotes in original)

adding "The next generation's life is governed by electronic technology, interactive games and the Internet. This is the reality we need to face". Wu's dramaturg, Keng Yi-Wei, observes: "traditional performance is surrounded by multimedia, which symbolises modernity". Modernity indeed entails an on-going and often difficult metamorphosis, living as we do with ever-developing information and communication systems.

Beyond this, digitalisation in this *Metamorphosis* affords foregrounding through visual and aural enhancement. In the novel, when the family knocks on Gregor's bedroom door, there is a 'cautious tap' from his mother, followed by 'his father was already knocking, gently, yet with his fist', and when the Chief Clerk has arrived, his father is 'again knocking on the door'. (This contrasts with the ring of the front door bell, by the Chief Clerk from Gregor's company.) In this adaptation, the cumulative

effect of the knocking is rendered through the visualised, projected vibrations of the huge door knob. A second foregrounding is the double visualisation of Wu Hsing-kuo as (as Grete) she at length applies her make-up: we see the actor on the stage, and her face projected – not onto the large back screen, but on a smaller, closer one, her face in relative close-up, allowing a reading of her reflective, fantasising mental state. A third foregrounding is the upsurge of huge red apples on both sides of the back screen. In the novel, Gregor's father was "shying apple after apple" and his mother "begged for her son's life". The huge apples visually portray the significance of this act. Fourthly, having Kafka appear in digitalised form to talk to the actual, embodied Gregor on the stage, allowing their interaction in two different modes, nicely underlies the post-modern nature of Wu Hsing-kuo's mystical rendering. It is also a nod to Kafka's authorship of the original, classic novel.

Conclusion

This exploration of two adaptations of *Metamorphosis* points to why it is not only epistemologically impossible for adaptations to be 'faithful' to Kafka's novel, but also that fidelity is not a productive aim, for the positive reason of theatre's very special, and very rich, affordances. Digitalisation is a relative newcomer here, but a powerful one. While digitalisation can facilitate naturalistic theatre, its visual and aural capacity is such that it also affords a range of *theatrical* contributions to any adaptation (or indeed stage play): not only to its visual/aural impact, but to the particular interpretation. While *Metamorphosis* has been performed perfectly well very recently without digitalisation (e.g. David Farr and Gísli Örn Garðarsson's adaptation, which they also directed, at the Lyric Hammersmith, 2013), the two productions explored here – which used digital projection in very different ways – illustrate its value as a theatrical affordance. While it would seem artistically insensitive to suggest digitalisation has improved theatre, given the rich, vast range of *other* available affordances, and the importance of imagination, it is certainly a welcome resource, in particular for its facilitation of interiority – if this is what a Director wishes to show.

Digitalisation does not, I suggest, offer anything to adaptations that it does not – very valuably – offer other stage plays (beyond further ways to acknowledge the sourcetext). And while a Director may choose not to use digitalisation, it would be a pity if this was because it afforded something the novel did not. Here, it *did* afford something Kafka's novel does not, but digitalisation as an affordance is not alone in this. Those who take the hard-line position that novels should simply never be adapted for the stage because they cannot be will always be negative and disappointed. Those who are open to the possibility of stage adaptations of novels as being something potentially wonderful, like all theatre, and who embrace theatre as a crucially visual, showing medium, will welcome its enriching affordances, of which digitalisation is just one, to facilitate a range of interesting, non-deferential interpretations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Bethany Berry-Henshaw and Emily Pinfield-Sunderland for their companionship on our theatre visits and for their recollections and comments.

- 1 For example, reviewing Elevator Repair Service's *The Sound and the Fury*, Paul David Young writes "[Faulkner's] novel is read verbatim ... Characters speak their dialogue, adding 'he said' or 'Dilsey said' " (2008: 52-53).
- 2 An adaptation which has been used by other Directors.
- 3 Or even of mice running under the seats, as anyone who has experienced *Honey I Blew Up the Kids* at Disneyland will know. While associated with film, the same technique is afforded to (and by) theatre.
- 4 Edinburgh International Festival, 2013 - <http://www.eif.co.uk/metamorphosis> (accessed Nov. 11 2103).
- 5 Berkoff describes something similar: Amon (the actor playing Gregor in Tokyo): executes a simple walk showing his progress through the day. He becomes tired and during the walk he looks at his watch, also in rhythm, until it looks like a video playback as he repeats the gesture with exactly the same expression of horror each time at his lateness (1995: 13).
- 6 In the production the three puppet operators wear black and white, but not the large spectacles.

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