

DRAMA *Works*

Plays Through Practice

METAMORPHOSIS

by

STEVEN BERKOFF

EXTRACT

NOTES

I am working exclusively from the Amber Lane Press edition entitled Berkoff /Kafka and containing the three plays: The Trial, Metamorphosis and In The Penal Colony. ISBN number 0-906399-84-x

All page references are from this edition but enough is always quoted for anyone with a different edition to find their way around easily.

2. Please note that the contents of this teaching guide have been copyrighted. Permission is given to photocopy pages for the use of your own students but it is not permissible to pass copies to teachers in other establishments.

3. The hardest thing about giving practical work on a set-text is to try not to be too proscriptive. All the way through, I have attempted to give a variety of possibilities, a number of interpretations or approaches. There are of course many other ways of doing things, other than the suggestions I have made. I hope that the work here will be approached as a starting-point on a journey of personal discovery made by each group of students. And then, if all their ideas fail, at least these ones are there to fall back on!

4. To tie in with syllabuses, it is useful to know which practitioners are referred to for use in this resource. The obvious one, of course, is Berkoff himself, who is a practitioner in his own right with a very particular style. I have detailed the main points of this further in the resource. In addition, I have used for certain exercises and for reference:

Augusto Boal
Bertolt Brecht
Konstantin Stanislavski
Antonin Artaud
Jerzy Grotowski
Jacques LeCoq
Robert Wilson
Lindsay Kemp

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EXTRACT ONE from

PREPARATORY WORK, BEFORE STARTING THE TEXT

First of all examine Berkoff's preamble to the play: *Steven Berkoff on Metamorphosis*. It is a eulogy to Kafka who as 'introvert, artist, Jew, writer' is, in Berkoff's opinion, everything that is despised – certainly often so in history – and is therefore a mere bug under people's feet. Kafka was despised by his father as Gregor also is. So Gregor becomes a symbol for all despised humanity, who are self-effacing, who struggle daily for survival, who do what's expected of them as long as possible, suffering to serve employers and keep their family safe, until this act of martyrdom becomes of such proportions that it kills them. The bug is the symbolic outward shape of what happens to a person when he is treated as badly as Gregor, willing slave to his mother and sister, unappreciated and seen as worthless by his father, who nevertheless leans on him as heavily as the others.

Berkoff emphasises that he sees Gregor, as he sees all Kafka's put-upon main characters, as a 'contestant.' This is because he is in a constant battle for survival, against all that life and his surroundings – people, places, objects – throw at him.

He also muses on the difficulty of staging something so surreal, which has emerged without concrete realisation in the imagination of the author. If the bug is a symbol, how to physicalise it for an audience? The bug, with its 'geometric shape' is the setting and the whole production. Once Gregor becomes a bug, the family and other human beings are seen from the bug's viewpoint only: greedy, flawed, selfish, small-minded, though it is still a long time before Gregor lets go of his feelings of love and concern for his family. In fact, he only really lets go in death. So the image of human as servant to others and bug scuttling to collect balls of dung are one. Only the audience are able to see Gregor's translation from dung-beetle, through death, to something higher, more saintly, an echo of Christ's own sacrifice, or perhaps more accurately the sacrifice of all those who serve others selflessly.

There are other clues to performance style. Berkoff mentions the extreme physicality of the movement of Gregor as a beetle, how when he played it, Berkoff had to train at the gym to be able to hang from the scaffolding of the set – because the environment of the bug must 'be' the play – the set should suggest the 'geometric' shapes of the insect and enclose the actors in its imprisoning structure, since the family are as much imprisoned by their home and the brooding presence of their transformed brother/son as Gregor is imprisoned by his new body.

He talks of how the family move like 'animated marionettes', their insectile jerky moves showing that it is not just Gregor who is trapped in a bug-like existence. He talks of how music 'underlined' the movements in his staging of the play and uses the term Total Theatre: 'total theatre, total life, sound, movement, light, text, music.' This gives a clear link to the work of Antonin Artaud, who coined the phrase Total Theatre and who, similarly, meant by it that the production should assault the senses of the audience with everything that the theatre could offer: light, sound - music and vocalisation too – suggestive shapes, unsettling images. Total Theatre was intended to batter through the barriers to feeling and reaction held by the audience's reason, creating a sensory experience which could not be explained, and thus reduced, by the intellect.

[My resource *Artaud Through Practice* is a full explanation and practical exploration of Artaud, a profound though largely unacknowledged influence on Berkoff.]

Here are one or two practical ideas that will prepare the students in work on Total Theatre.

Create an environment in the studio or on stage with whatever cloths, blocks, rostra shapes and other things you can find lying about and which are easily available, to suggest an unsettling atmosphere where horrors, or nightmares, could occur. Use lights, shadows, objects leaning against each other, or piled up in such as way, as to suggest other more scary things.

Add your own bodies as part of the mix and experiment with further shapes that may be made and ways of moving which are unsettling.

Experiment with changes of pace, stillness, slow motion, sudden jerks and freezes.

Add sound to this, made by things lying around, or the groups' own bodies and mouths.

If possible either film these or, better, if you have enough students to have two or more groups, have each group create different environments and discuss their effectiveness after each has been watched.

[There are echoes, of course, of Grotowski's Poor Theatre here, because the groups are, of necessity using things that are around them.]

Finish this exercise by discussing what, in an ideal world where they would be able to throw everything a modern theatre has on offer, they might add to their own pieces to create the effect they would like. Consider shadows, film, slides on the cyclorama/ screens, larger than life-size puppets, more complex sound and light, etc.

Improvise a short naturalistic scene in pairs. It could be an argument, a disagreement between two people [one threesome if you have an odd number]. Decide on a short section of this scene which works successfully. What happens if this section is exaggerated to the nth degree?

Concentrate first on the movements – pull these out as large as you can make them. It might help you to do this in slow motion first.

What happens when using slow motion is that the actors begin to think about the gestures they are making. Slow motion, even if not exaggerated, clarifies what you are doing, makes you realise which parts of your acting are useful and contribute to the effect that you are wanting to make.

This is very similar to a Brechtian exercise that I use often. It is part of the process, to use Brecht's terminology, of turning a naturalistic movement from gesture to gest – that is, intentional, thought-about gesture, which says clearly what the actor wants it to communicate.

Watch your partner while doing this exercise and discuss if, in your view, your partner's body-language is saying what s/he thinks it is saying.

Voice is harder. Revisit what you said in your short section. Try to communicate it using gobbledy-gook, or a couple of strung-together syllables [ana, ana/ dobba, dobba, for example] stressed appropriately, to put over the vocal tone only. Your planned gestures should help with this. Then identify the different moods/ideas you are trying to communicate, e.g. scorn, anger, sympathy, appeasement, anxiety, fear.

Explore each of these emotions [and any else you might think of] first – using sounds only. There are an enormous range of chirrs, rattles, clicks, long drawn out syllables, sung or half-sung notes, tocs with the tongue, etc. that you might play with. Now find sounds that are equivalent to what you are trying to communicate vocally through your argument.

Finally, in the case of the gestures – pull those you have now decided on out to the most exaggerated versions of that gesture you can make. Keep the moves clear and deliberate, even slower than normal if that helps.

Add your 'language' of sounds and individual words, perhaps, used with exaggerated intonation to this and exaggerate.

When you have practised these things together, perform them to the rest of the group.

This exercise may be one you revisit often when working through the script of this play. It is very useful.

Since the stools in the production have to be 'mini-stages', use stools yourself preferably and, if not, upright chairs or the smaller rostra-blocks, for the following exercise. [I'm not sure whether chairs with backs will work very well. I feel they might impede freedom of movement. If this is all you have, try sitting sideways on them, to give your back room to move. If you cannot borrow any stools, the blocks may be a better option.]

Start by trying different positions with arms, legs, backs etc.

Sit on your stool as if you are on
a throne
an armchair in front of the fire

a chair with a reclining back
a hot stove
Sit on your stool as if you are preparing to:
play the piano for a concert
play an instrument you know you are not very good at
answer a telephone call you are dreading

Taking it out of naturalism now [the above are exercises from Stanislavski – to which of course you may want to add other possible situations] sit on your stool, remaining seated upright, as if:

you are snuggling down in a comfy bed
you have woken in your bed from a nightmare
you are running to escape from a mad axeman
you are creeping slowly up on something, trying not to alert it
you are bored, waiting for the bus
you are impatiently wanting to interrupt a speaker, so as to put your own point of view over
you are walking along the street as a child
an old person

You can of course play this as long as you like, adding your own ideas.

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EXTRACT 2:

WORKING THROUGH THE TEXT IN A PRACTICAL WAY

Students are advised that they should have read the text before attempting to work through the following, which will assume an understanding of plot and characters. At the very least they should have read the plot and character studies given in the opening sections of this resource.

The working method ought to be that after every experiment made, every student should note down the work achieved and their opinion about how well it worked. Since the practical work encourages experiment, they should note which preferences they have made. Then at the end of the play, they should check back to make sure their decisions show a consistency throughout.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS: SET, LIGHTS

Look first at the stage setting page, which precedes the opening of the play. Berkoff's ideas, as ever, are very specific. But this does not mean that you don't have a free rein yourself. You ought to try out his ideas, and maybe you'll end up adopting them, but should explore others too. This goes right across the board, not just with the stage set.

The effect Berkoff wanted in his many productions of the play was that of a cage. For this, he used scaffolding built up high above a raised platform, which represented Gregor's room, while the floor level was where the family lived. The scaffolding created a cage, actually quite small, of Gregor's room, but also stretched upwards and outwards, so that Gregor could move over the top of the family quarters, brooding there physically and with his shadow, to show that his presence was always hanging over them. The set suggested webs, cages, traps. The effect continued on the floor even, with cage-like bars painted there too. The family could not escape.

Gregor's platform from which he watched the family constantly was high enough for him always to be visible to an audience. There was a sloping wooden ramp in front, down which – through the use of polish and French chalk, he could slide down in his insect position to the stage floor level. Lighting was then used to create shadows and to enlarge the nightmare effect of a giant-sized bug.

Perhaps a metal ramp like a playground slide for small children[i.e.not too steep] would work as well, allowing the same uncanny sliding down so that the insect, feelers/hands waving and feet shoving, can appear surprisingly fast on the human level of the family.

Come up with your own design of the scaffolding setting which forms the rear part of the stage. Decide what effect you are trying to make. Cage? Web? Trap? Bear in mind that the scaffolding needs to be used, to suggest climbing up walls, climbing across and hanging from ceilings. You may want to put platforms, or stopping areas in many places. If so, do you want them in a pattern – such as the shape of a giant insect, the root points of legs and arms and the joints, being made by mini-platforms, with the metal bars of scaffolding making up the legs between perhaps? The body could thus be made up of a larger platform. Perhaps you could have some parts of the actual set mechanised, with pulleys and levers, so that even when Gregor is elsewhere, or between section, the legs are articulated and can move? You might want to bring the scaffolding right over the whole stage so that Gregor is literally overhanging the family as the play progresses. In all these physical ideas with scaffolding, bear in mind the limitations of an actor. Even the fittest person cannot spend too long hanging by his knees upside down!

Berkoff suggests that all doors and furnishings and props are mimed and that the rest of the set is only three black metal stools. These could perhaps swivel – if such things exist on stools without arms. To keep up the idea of the formal structuring of the set, the stools are equidistant, towards the front of the playing area.

So that is the set that Berkoff used and suggests. We know it works, because it has done many times. Within this idea, there is still room for variation as I hope you will already have discovered and discussed.

What other ideas could you come up with? Consider:

thinking of different setting materials. How about suggesting the cage through softer materials – ropes, nets, muslin-like material cocoons, suggestive of spider-webs and stickiness. Think of safety nets used by trapeze artists. Try composing a setting made from ropes of differing thickness, hanging 'rooms' or platforms made of rope-strengthened white cloth, which will allow light to shine through, trapezes that can ascend and descend, safety nets, or climbing nets like those used for army manoeuvre training activities. A less rigid structure might allow for more surprises, sudden entrances. A cocoon of cloth might allow Gregor to lick his wounds, and suggest healing and bandages.

How about using the picture of the girl with a fur muff in surreal ways: making it very large, having it so that the eyes and the mouth of the girl allow light through, or open and shut to create nightmare effects. Could there be a hologram of the picture against a white screen or cyclorama behind the action? Could something happen to it before the end of the play? It starts to fall apart, decompose, a creeping mould starts to eat away at it, etc.?

How about having a naturalistic room suggested below whatever you use for Gregor's domain. Dark furniture, knick-knacks etc. Could this start to disappear as the play progresses? Or fall apart? How could you do this without interrupting the action? Through trapdoors? Through hinged parts that are easy to collapse?

Use all the ideas I have suggested to free yourselves from Berkoff's somewhat proscriptive suggestions and see if you can come up with something different. What do you need to retain of Berkoff's suggestions, what could you alter? It does not matter in the least if you end up by going back to your own version of Berkoff's suggestions.

Before beginning to experiment with the acting, it is important to establish what basics of the set you would want to retain. Then build or suggest this as far as possible in the space you are going to be using. For instance, build up a couple of rostra for Gregor's space, centre back of the playing area and place the furnishings on which you have decided in position. It may be that you stick with the three stools, there's nothing wrong with that.

One idea might be to have other rooms indicated with rostra and a sheet for beds for the parents on one far side, similar for Greta on the other far side. Props, if used, like Greta's violin, perhaps even a music stand, could be set there.

THE ACTION BEGINS: Pages 79-85

The play opens with the actors physically 'introducing' themselves and then creating a shape of a beetle with their bodies. Consider, if you wanted to start with a more naturalistic setting, the actors creating the insect from first deconstructing the ordinariness of the

setting. For example, a curtain could shield the insect-like structure – made of scaffolding or whatever - at the back of the stage. One or two ordinary period-like pieces of furniture could be set in front of this, and then the actors could enter, or rise from the chairs, or out of a cupboard, or from under a table, deconstructing the item as they do, and use these collapsed pieces and the curtain as part of the insect shape they create. There are possibilities here. The furniture, in their collapsed shapes, could then hang off the scaffolding perhaps, or make a sinister shape, before the play begins and we are reduced to only the one or two bits you decide on as permanent to your version of the play.

This idea emphasises the fact that the Samsa's life was perfectly ordinary up until this moment, when it becomes for the duration of Gregor's life as an insect – extraordinary.

I can't stress enough that studying this play as you are, it is important that whatever choices you make they are your own, and what works best for the play, *in your opinion*, as actor, director or designer.

Though I have mentioned 'more naturalistic', *a propos* the setting etc, this play written as it is cannot be performed in a completely naturalistic style, it would be against the spirit of Berkoff. The story is also not realistic nor is it meant to be. We are in a nightmare. But there are degrees of extremity, and different approaches to design and acting all the same.

Now we are starting the play itself. Each of the characters come in and, without speech, establish something about who they are.

From the description, those who know the original story, will notice that Berkoff has lowered the status of the characters. Father is described as 'lower middle-class tradesman' 'looking like Hindenburg'. Hindenburg was the second President of Germany from 1925-1934. He had a fine large twirling moustache, a military bearing, very upright, very confident-looking. As a military man, photos of him always show him in military uniform with rows of medals. If you google his name, you'll see many images which may give you ideas as to his look, stance and way of moving. So the lower middle-class bit and Hindenburg appear a contradiction. They give a clue as to the self-importance of the small man who wants to be thought big.

With Mother it is her excess of feeling that Berkoff wants to emphasise. A 'pained heart and angst' helps you to find exaggerations of the feelings of pain and anxiety.

Greta and Gregor are both roughly sketched as a student with violin and 'an amiable being.' What other things would you want to add as signifiers for these characters? Something unconfident and anxious about Gregor as well as his 'niceness'? Something young and hopeful and naive about Greta?

Discuss the first impressions you would wish to make and, dividing the characters up [there can be more than one of each if you have large numbers] work individually on a walk, facial and body expressions and a still pose to end with.

This is the first venture into the style of Berkoff. His kind of mime is exaggerated, much larger than life and with very clear outlines. **Pull out the facial expressions and the body positions. Find a clear pose to freeze on that sums up the character, as far as you can. Show these to the rest of the group and discuss their effectiveness, then in fours, put them together.** From where and how is each character going to enter? Draw on your setting experiments and discussions and the decisions you made.

Bearing in mind that in this kind of stylised acting, each character will have his/her own style of movement, way of walking, and of speaking. Spend some time establishing what that might be. Some ideas to start you off might be:

Mr Samsa: chest out, chin up, arrogant, the aspect of a bully, fuelled by anger and a sense of injustice, vain, selfish, self-important to cover up feelings of failure.

Mrs Samsa: inconsistent, indecisive, fluttery, given to extremes, panicky, breathy [Kafka has her as asthmatic], full of a cloying kind of love, sentimental, fuelled by both guilt and fear which pulls her in contrary directions.

Greta: young, hopeful, practical, quick, helpful. These attributes are whittled away as the play progresses, so that she becomes increasingly resentful. Her quickness becomes haste, carelessness. The carefreeness of her body movements becomes warped and sharp. With her, try to show a progression.

Gregor: as his human self: willing, loving, courageous – he doesn't enjoy his work, but he braces himself and does it despite that, pleased that he is able to give pleasure, fuelled by the secret joy that he has plans for the future, especially for Greta. This is contrasted with the insect movement, which you have already done a little work on. Try moving between one and the other, when you have worked out a suitable mode for human-Gregor.

To practise the movements, work in groups ideally of four, but fewer may have to do. **Try out some improvisational sequences along the following lines:**

It is a weekend. A morning routine - preparing breakfast, chatting about plans for the day

an excursion out en famille to buy some new clothes

the evening, post supper routine. Each gets on with his/her hobbies, having made sure that Mr Samsa is comfortable and has all he needs.

Concentrate on both movement and speech. Whichever idea you choose, repeat it a second time, exaggerating every movement and facial expression even further. Exaggerate the speech cadences too, colouring them with the essential emotion by which the character is fuelled.

Back to the entrance of the characters. Would you have the characters enter in silence – or against a background of sound? Sound is an important element in the script. You might want to consider a sound scape that emphasises every key moment of the play. Here the choices might be:

the taped sound of the violin playing a sweet tune – one that Greta will 'play' later perhaps

as above, only the playing begins to go off key, or make scraping sounds

a long held taped sound, like that which precedes and warns a film viewer of something dire that is about to happen

a sound made live by instrumentalists that are at the edges of the stage, maybe even visibly

Lots to discuss here.

When I direct Berkoff plays – I have done a few – I always use the latter option, but of course it is a matter of personal choice. I tended to have a couple of musicians who created a sound scape throughout, using a variety of oddities – hanging metal bars, lengths of rubber piping or hosing, metal tubes etc – all gleaned from local tips and retained for the different weird sound qualities they could produce. To this, I added a 'distressed' piano – which makes quite a different sound to an ordinary one. Don't use a school one, you'll be hung, drawn and quartered, but pianos are often scrapped. Ideal! You need things that make scratching sounds [insect-like], creaks, squeaks and slammings of doors. Most sounds in the play are heard from Gregor's point of view and should sound over-loud and frightening. They should, Artaud-like, make the audience feel unsettled or make them jump in their seats.

[N.B. After I'd written the above suggestion, I got hold of Berkoff's *Meditations on Metamorphosis*, in which he suggests the use of a distressed piano as he did for a production of the play in Islington in 1972: '... in the dusty rehearsal rooms in Islington ... there was a beaten-up old piano against the wall. Our chief clerk, played by Tony Meyer, decided to experiment with the strings in the back of the piano, plucking it like a harp, and lo and behold there issued forth the most strange and melodious sound... just a nail pulled down gently on one of the strings would underline and evoke a particular mood and it created another layer we had not felt or heard before.' And there was I thinking it had been my own idea!]

I shan't always mention sound through the following work, but make it a habit to consider it anyway. It may be too much to have it continual – may even take away the surprise element – but there is plenty of opportunity for exciting effects.

Of course, one of the most important things sound-wise, is to find a way of changing Gregor's voice when he is an insect. It needs to be understandable to the audience, of course, but be different enough – with a background buzz, or rasp, plus amplification of some kind, to show a total difference from the actor's normal voice. Beware of coming up with a solution that puts too much strain on the actor's voice: there are an awful lot of long

speeches! Perhaps, a simple idea for the actor such as speaking lower or higher than normal, accompanied by live raspings, scratchings and so on from the musicians is a good option.

Again there is a lot to discuss as a group over the whole sound issue. **Try out as many options as you can before settling on what you want.**

At sometime during this opening scene, Gregor begins his changeover. You could open the whole play with it – that's an idea to discuss, another option. Have all of the group try this out. It is important for everyone to realise what the Gregor actor has to manage. Here is a description of it from Berkoff:

'while Gregor unfolds his human legs and arms, very slowly as if they were newly formed, the mind of the audience will automatically ... create the image' by suspending disbelief and filling in the gaps with their imaginations. 'So Gregor unfolds from his squat round ball but like a flower opening in a slow-motion film. First a clawed hand rises gradually ..., then another, as if exploring this new world. The hair-pinned legs jerk open a spasm at a time and his upturned face peeps through his open legs... Now his arms come through his legs, enabling him to hold them up while at the same time looking more creature-like...' A rhythm or series of rhythms begins to emerge. Little jerks of the head... from which the audience fill in the gaps...'

The above is the exploratory movement of Gregor on first awakening. **Now try the positioning of the insect the other way up. Experiment with ways of moving forward and back in this position.**

Plan the gigantic insect shape in groups of four. An alternative might be to use the fifth person – or more – who play the Chief Clerk and the Lodgers – as further parts of the gigantic insect. Don't forget, if you are using your setting as something that deconstructs, or that makes additions to the scaffolding, as in one of the suggestions I made, this is when that happens too. Perhaps these extra characters can move the setting from 'normal' to nightmare during this opening movement.

It would help if these first few lines are learned by the characters involved. Try out the whole sequence now. Add sounds if you are able.

How might lighting help this image? This is a great play to do for a lighting designer. Lots of back-lighting throwing monstrous shadows. Most of the scaffolding needs to be exclusively back-lit, to enhance the cage effect and the nightmare qualities of the insect shape or low front-lit to throw shadows onto the back cyclorama. Colour might help too, or you can decide to contrast the black and white of the nightmare, just bringing in softer pastel colours and warmer light at the end, after Gregor has died.

Again food for discussion. **Even if you cannot design a full lighting plot now, at least do some experiments to see how effective lighting from different positions can be. Using a single standing spot or more if you can, put actors and objects in front of them and see what happens. The features of the actor are lost, of course, with backlighting, so such lighting would not do for the whole play. The expressions of the family are important.**

Now experiment with lighting from underneath. You can do this with just a torch if you like, in a dark room. It gives a very spooky effect. How about having back-lighting and lights trained up on the underside of Gregor on the scaffolding, especially on where his face would jut out over the front of his platform?

Jot down a few ideas now, to be added to as you work through the text....

EXTRACT 3

THE LODGERS Pages 114-119

As a prelim to that new spring, the light snaps up on a new phase in the story: the advent of the Lodgers or Lodger.

If you use three lodgers they move together as one. Even in the original prose story this is so. It is up to you and your group numbers which option you take. If you have a small group, it is usual to double up the Chief Clerk and the Lodger.

'The Lodger gives enormous opportunities for different interpretations,' comments Berkoff in *Meditations on Metamorphosis*. When they did the play in Japan, the man playing the single Lodger had 'the greatest entrance on earth' which 'should be enjoyed and drawn out.' It was 'a long Bach-like entrance as he slowly walks in like a prince rescuing some damsel' while 'the family look on as if he were the saviour of all their dreams.' The version played in Israel extended this idea even further. This time the lodger is like 'an angel', wearing a white suit and entering slowly to Bach-like chords.

Discuss first of all in what ways the Lodger [s] is a 'saviour' or an 'angel'? How has this changed from the direction written in the original script, on the top of Page 115 where 'harlequin masks exactly externalise their inner state' of greed and selfishness?

It seems to me that to use the idea of entering like a saviour, emphasises the hope that they bring to the Samsa family: how they've built up the idea of lodgers as a breath of fresh air, a diversion from their troubles, something that will lift them out of themselves. Hence they kowtow to the lodger to a ridiculous extent.

The harlequin mask with its round pig-like nose, used in the original, throws the emphasis on the lodger himself rather than on the family's expectations of him. The use of this mask, and the original stage direction, emphasises the greed and selfishness of the lodger, demonstrating that he is an unpleasant taker of all he can get.

It is up to you which of the above you want to stress. Or perhaps you could suggest a way in which both ideas figure. The lodger may do this long heroic entrance, like a rock-star, emphasising his saviour status by wearing an over-garment of white which he removes when he investigates the room. You may want to add a temporary ironic halo, as well, which could be removed by one of the family taking his 'hat'. With his outer garments removed, the lodger is revealed in all his mundaneness.

You could of course choose not to have him masked at all, but as the version in which Tim Roth played had him, with exaggerated red lips, mad, somewhat clown-like hair and whitened face.

Take time now to plan how you would want him to look, and his costume. He/ they could be business men or, more likely the kind of lower level worker who is sent to a place for a month or two, where he has to rent a room, to work on a construction project. They could even be actors in a repertory company.

While you are about it, think about what period you are setting the play in: Kafka's own? Or another? Could it be set in the present-day? What would be lost and what gained?

In a sequence that deliberately echoes the earlier one where the family state what Gregor's earnings mean to them, the financial help expected from lodgers is spelled out by each member of the family. One could argue that if the lodgers are greedy and on the take, the family are not much better. In the earlier sequence, Greta is the 'root-point', being the one who repeats 'Gregor' while the two others detail what Gregor means to them – clothes, cash, etc. In this second sequence, it is Mrs Samsa who is the root-point, repeating the word 'Lodgers' while the words cash, clothes etc. are spoken by Greta and Mr Samsa. What subtle difference does this indicate?

In both cases Mr Samsa is identified as a 'taker'. His greed is not in question.

Remember it is Greta who has sympathy for Gregor, her dear brother, at the time of the earlier sequence.

What does Mrs Samsa as the repeater of the word 'Lodgers' add?

Try the first sequence, with Greta as the 'driver' [Page 81] so that Greta says the word 'Gregor':

full of pride and confidence in him

emphasising concern that he works too hard – adding a cautionary note to the others' expectations

Now try the second sequence with Mrs Samsa:

whipping up an increasing frenzy of joy and giddy excitement as she repeats the word 'Lodgers'

increasingly anxious, worried about what it'll mean to their unity as a family, and particularly how it will affect Gregor

Discuss Greta's new attitude in the second sequence. What does it tell us about changes in her?

Experiment with both sequences and make any adjustment needed to your previous decisions in the first sequence. Would you want to keep the snap images of 'cash' 'shoes' etc. identical?

After this, the Lodger or Lodgers enter as you have already discussed. What differences would you make, if you are using more than one Lodger? Does the slow 'saviour' entrance work with more than one? It could be that whether you use one Lodger or more, you could do a 'saviour' entrance, representing the family's hope and expectations, but when they arrive in the apartment, the reality proves very different. He, or they, are as greedy as perhaps the family deserve and the audience sees this first.

Berkoff suggests the Lodgers move fast, acrobatically, while copying every movement of the leader.

They could move absolutely together, or one beat after the other in a sort of Mexican wave/ chorus effect. Or they could use an identical style of movement so that, for instance, they make a slow motion 'saviour-style' long entrance, absolutely together, and then split up once they're in the room, separating to, pig-like, rootle around the room, examining, prodding and poking, snuffling and snorting before they comment. The first Lodger sets the tone, movement and accompanying gesture.

Have the whole group try a follow my leader exercise round the room. Stop and formalise/ choreograph further so that the movement is done to a strict beat. Now the second person copies the leader's beat on the second beat, the third on the next beat, and so on. If you have a large group this could take too long, so an alternative would be to have two number twos, two or three number threes and so on. EVERY move is copied, so the leader needs to pare down his moves and make them decisive. The result is like a slow motion Mexican wave.

Experiment with these ideas, deciding whether you would prefer one, two or three in your own production.

Three has the advantage of showing how they usurp the family's own places, their space, by settling one after the other into the three stools, while the family hover and grovel.

Practice the kind of body language needed for this grovelling: rubbing hands together, ingratiating smile, dipping, bending, semi-bowing of the upper body etc. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a great phrase for this kind of bowing and scraping: 'mopping and mowing'.

Now try it in an improvised context: in pairs [one threesome only if necessary].

a]A home-owner, desperate to sell his house, greets and shows round a prospective buyer [s].

b]An out-of-work person seeks to ingratiate himself at a job interview for a very mundane job.

When these have been run through, choose one and add to it, using the corresponding a or b letter below:

a]There is one part of the house that the owner is ashamed of and is hoping to hurry the viewer past/through.

b]There is something about himself that he is concealing.

When these have been explored, repeat without words, making clear through the body language instead. Exaggerate and extend.

Take the scene from the Lodgers' entrance to where Mrs Samsa takes them out [bottom of Page 115]. First of all plan where the family stand once their stools have been usurped. Would they try to conceal the entrance to Gregor's room? And what does Gregor do during this? He has been described as 'tired, old' and with the apple rotting in his body he is in no position to climb, but he should be well-lit and clearly visible, listening.

Greta only says one line, and that is an eye-opener for an audience, a jolt of reality or perhaps warning. She is shut up, because by now the Lodgers have become the one

hope of escape from their situation. The situation – Gregor – is, however, still very much there of course.

Perhaps the parents are flanking the stools, one each side, with Greta close to her mother. Mrs Samsa could be miming taking notes like a waitress while Mr Samsa mops, mows and grimaces on the other side. Greta just stares with the kind of gob-smacked curiosity of a much younger child, riveted by strangeness.

Run the scene with the number of lodgers you have chosen, one or three. If one, this lodger speaks all of the words given to the three. Breaking up the phrases as one person, gives room for focusing on each new idea as it comes into his head and is just as effective as using three people. The only change to the language would be 'we' to 'I' and 'they' to 'he'.

Revisit the second half of your improvisations for body language inspiration, to cope with the awkward 'elephant in the room', the shameful secret – Gregor. Mr Samsa skates over it with some aplomb. How would Gregor, listening, react on the upper level?

The next few lines, finishing over the page, show Mr and Mrs Samsa in hurried whispered conference. **Before tackling it, work out what the end of each sentence would be. Say the lines with your added endings, then remove the additions and put gestures and body/ face language in their place.**

From now on, I will stick to the idea of the three lodgers as written. The ultimate decision is up to you though.

The lodgers come back in carrying unwanted objects or furniture. Think about what these things could be, though they needn't be especially accurately shown – remember how the food taken to Gregor's room was mimed. It would be good, though, if at least size and weight was varied amongst the objects. **List what objects there might be, ranging from heavy to light and each lodger could bend and pick up another, as if the whole lot are piled just behind him.**

Just as Greta took a dizzying pile of imaginary dishes and food into Gregor earlier, she is now loaded down, not realistically, but certainly stumbling and unbalanced by the weight and the need to carry everything without dropping a single item. If you like, you could briefly characterise each object by passing it from lodger to Mr, to Mrs, to Greta, showing it is a hideous picture, or a cushion, or an ornament, or a chair or a small table. Facial expressions and perhaps a single sound for some would add to this. For instance, a picture could bring a grimace from Mr Samsa, but an 'Ahh' from Mrs.

The throwing open of Gregor's door and Greta's sweeping motion of her arms is enough to show that everything has been chucked in any old how, and then the door slammed on it.

The Lodgers take their seats and are served by the family as Gregor speaks. **Try up to 'You don't speak of me any more':**

with infinite sadness

with anger, tempered by exhaustion

For the last part of the speech, 'I still would...' sounds as if he is talking about himself at one remove, as if he is looking at himself down a long tunnel, already disappearing. If this is what you feel too, then the last 'I still hope' should be heart-breaking.

Berkoff ends the speech with the direction 'Fade.' This is so that we can focus better on the lodgers. Gregor's presence is felt instead through sound effects of him eating, much amplified. You could choose to darken his room completely, bringing the light back slowly up while Greta plays, or you could simply fade the light down slightly, keeping him still visible, which would mean that his body should jerk and shudder with the difficulty he is having eating.

Before embarking on this comic scene, try all the mime out first. Berkoff is quite clear about what he wants. Use realism as your starting point, and then exaggerate

and pull every action and facial expression out. Particularly enjoy teasing the family and drawing out the verdict on the meal before 'Excellent!'

The Lodgers' freeze in a ridiculous position, cradling their stools like dancing partners, would occur on Mrs Samsa's line: 'Is the violin playing disturbing you, gentlemen?' The answer comes from their freeze, which remains until Gregor has made his dramatic entry.

Gregor's speech on Page 117, using his human voice, is an important one. It is almost the last thing he says, and it reminds us of his humanity. **Try the first line, 'I'm not an animal...':**

quietly, with wonder and surprise

like a shout of triumph

with relief, an assertion

Which works best?

This discovery, that inside his vile body he is still himself, is the motivational colouring for the rest of the speech. It is upbeat and should be taken quite fast. It culminates in his slide into the room. Note this is the second time he has slid in one mass down the ramp. Revisit your stage setting plan and check whether it will work for this scene too.

Have fun deciding how the lodgers scatter from their frozen tableau. Could one jump into another's arms, or on his shoulders? Could the stools that they have in their hands be used as things to climb onto, as someone afraid of a mouse might? Or could they be used as a defensive barrier? Or weapon? Consider comical groupings of all kinds before settling on one that works.