

Metamorphosis

Review

Metamorphosis review – playful spin on Kafka for the Zoom age

Available online

Gregor Samsa's sudden bodily dislocation becomes a means of exploring digital-era dilemmas in Hijinx's irreverent adaptation



Mark Fisher

Sun 22 Aug 2021 10.31 BST



A few days before the first lockdown, Glasgow's Vanishing Point

opened – and quickly closed – an adaptation of *Metamorphosis*. With its themes of lockdown, isolation and fear of the unknown, it could not have been more prescient.

It would be unreasonable to expect Cardiff's *Hijinx* to be as far ahead of the curve with this version of Franz Kafka's story – and if anything, its Zoom-based antics seem rather 2020. But, in its vision of communication breakdown, atomisation and an indifferent bureaucracy, it has a similar understanding of the tale's haunting power.

Not that "haunting" is the word you'd use to describe Ben Pettitt-Wade's production. Streamed live with optional audience interaction, it is predominantly playful and funny. It also has a healthy irreverence for realism. Actors appear in bad wigs and false beards, a guru offers dodgy spiritual advice from a bathtub, and Gregor Samsa, the downtrodden worker who finds himself morphing into an insect, is played by someone new every time.

It's a good laugh, but there's a purpose behind it too. Shown as part of Summerhall's Edinburgh fringe programme, this *Metamorphosis* repeatedly asks us to put ourselves in Gregor's shoes. Haven't we all, like

him, been made to feel excluded when the technology won't let us log on? Haven't we all suffered unstable wifi connections that are the equivalent, in our digital world, of an unstable body? And if we did wake up, transformed like Gregor, what would we do? (We get an online poll to answer that.)

The clash of comedy and terror – one minute a series of amusingly over-the-top auditions for the key roles, the next a flickering reflection of a mutating man – reminds us of the fragile balance between order and chaos.

Fringe Online 2020

Metamorphosis

Hijinx Theatre



Review

Metamorphosis, Hijinx Theatre's latest theatre production, directed by Ben Pettitt-Wade, performed remotely late August at Green Man 2020 in the UK, and is about to be produced by USA's [The Red Curtain International's The Good The@ter Festival & Awards](#), with shows available remotely on 28 November 2020.

Hijinx Theatre, from Wales, UK, has created a deliciously freely adapted play based on Kafka's novella from 1915, The Metamorphosis – that starts with Gregor Samsa, a fellow who woke up one day after a bad night's sleep transformed in to a verminous bug!

The fact that Samsa is unable to continue his life as he knew it – he can not meet friends or family, or go out to work or even leave his house – is prescient of our lives today, during the pandemic. It is also a brilliant story for a new theatre production, while we are all living through some sort of shelter in place or isolation – actors and audiences included.

Communicating remotely via Zoom or another online platform is how many of us are working or visiting friends and family, these days. It is no wonder, then, that the arts and their companies and organisations have adapted to be able to keep artists working and creating by producing plays, concerts, exhibitions and more online. The arts nourish the soul and we need this in our lives now more than ever, so experiencing these events is most welcome.

Hijinx Theatre productions are always creative, entertaining and thought provoking and their *Metamorphosis* fulfills these elements 100%, through witty crisp dialogue, physical theatre, interesting characters, absurdist humour, and some very effective darker macabre scenes supported by beautifully haunting lighting.

While this intricate snappy interactive play is produced remotely, there are also fascinating interactions that make the audience feel like they are in the bar of the theatre before the show. No spoilers here – but you will see for yourself!

The cast of actors in *Metamorphosis* play different characters in ever-changing scene combinations with astute timing, a range of emotion, raw humanity and dynamic physical action, supported by a well tuned creative and production team.

The story and scenes veer a little – well, quite a bit really – from the novella into dramatic and hilarious activities for this company of actors, such as hectic auditions, tender and eerie moments of privacy, chaotic situations and one or two Zoom clichés, all accomplished with equal charm, gusto and tongue in cheek verve.

Hijinx Theatre's *Metamorphosis* is compelling and outstanding Zoom theatre, under Pettitt-Wade's smart direction it is well devised and performed, with imaginative quick change locations, building to a wonderful ending with fresh witty abstract choreography infused with Hijinx humour. Highly recommended!

Published November 28, 2020 by [Jo Tomalin](#)

REVIEW THE_CRASH.TEST, HIJINX THEATRE BY BARBARA HUGHES-MOORE

MAY 14, 2022 BARBARA HUGHES-MOORE



The award-winning Hijinx, one of Europe's leading [inclusive theatre companies](#), is always pushing the envelope on what 'theatre' is and what it can be. *the_crash.test* – in partnership with Wales Millennium Centre, Pontio and Theatr Ffwrnes – is Hijinx's latest experiment in '[hybrid theatre](#)', fusing performance and technology in an immersive experience like no other. Branded as a *Frankenstein* for the tech age, the show explores the responsibility we have as humans: to each other and to the things we create.

Directed by Hijinx's AD Ben Pettitt-Wade, *the_crash.test* asks you to imagine a world in which your digital self could live for you (think the Bruce Willis movie *Surrogates*, only better). This is the promise of tech start-up Figital, led by preening CEO Michel LeCoq (Benjamin Victor), who zooms in from a wellness retreat in Bali to put the finishing touches on the 'Fing-a-me-Bob', or 'Bob' for short: a digital crash test dummy whose burgeoning sentience is about to throw a serious spanner in the works for world domination.



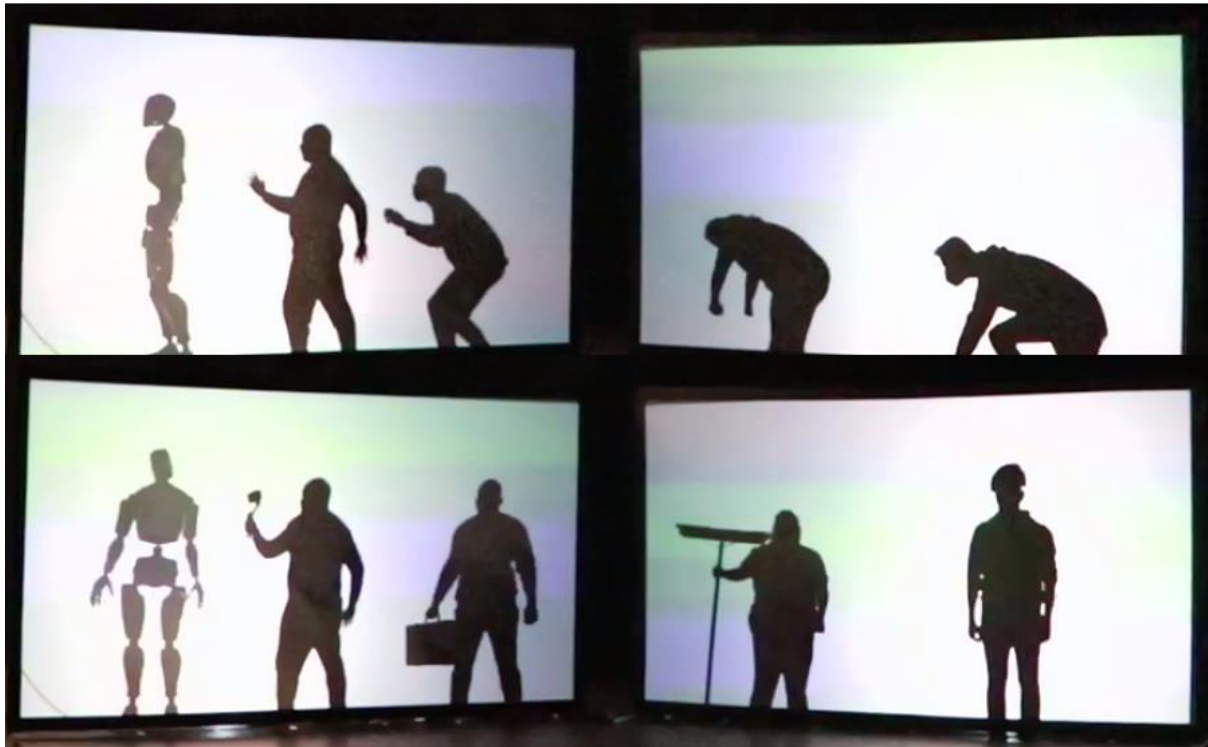
The show itself is a marvel of creativity and collaboration, devised and driven by a cast of performers on stage and via video link. The space is filled with two huge screens onto which is projected everything from a tropical paradise to a molecular wonderland, underscored by Tic Ashfield's evocatively unnerving soundscape. The motion capture puppetry for 'Bob' is especially impressive, and Owen Pugh and Lucy Green, who alternate the role, really bring the character to life. Pugh carries much of the drama as both 'himself' and as 'Bob'. Green is also hilarious as one of Figital's increasingly concerned shareholders, zooming in alongside Richard Newnham (be-wigged, bothered and bewildered – to fantastic effect) and Lindsay Foster as the feather boa-ed investor riotously reaching the end of her tether.



Benjamin Victor conducts the show with a skittish charm, joyfully skewering the Elon Musks and Mark Zuckerbergs of the world. Bethany Freeman steals scenes as the beleaguered cleaner Betty, whose interactions with Bob are genuinely moving. Meanwhile, Matthew Mullins is responsible for some uproarious moments as the cameraman watching everything slowly devolve into chaos. In a time when zoom call 'comedy' has become rote, Hijinx have found a way of making it feel fresh, new and funny – and when they go dark, they don't pull any punches.



While the ending is genuinely spectacular, the show can be a little uneven at times, and the meta-narrative doesn't quite pay off – but it is always dynamic, clever, and darkly funny, and whenever the focus is on 'Bob' and their increasing sentience, it really soars. Bob's creators aren't sure what he's 'for' – but what are any of us 'for', at the end of the day? That sort of capitalistic thinking gets very dehumanising very fast: if all of us have worth based on what we can offer, then what does it truly mean to be 'human'?



The interactive parts of this show are a lot of fun and it's exhilarating to be able to explore ethical dilemmas alongside the characters. The audience can join in-person or online, and whichever you choose, do bring your mobile phone with you if you can as you'll be asked to vote on certain moments, starting with 'what colour should Bob be?' and escalating to high-stakes questions of mor(t)ality. It might even be worth exploring asking the audience to 'justify' their ethical decisions.

The level of talent and creativity on display is staggering. *the_crash.test* is playing at the Millennium again tonight, and there are plenty of chances to see it again: at the Millennium on 24 June, Pontio Bangor on 29 June and Ffwrnnes Llanelli on 2 July (all as part of [Hijinx's Unity festival](#)). Innovative, imaginative and totally immersive, *the_crash.test* is bonkers in the best way and something you simply have to experience for yourself.

Buzz Magazine

THE_CRASH.TEST: Hijinx's digital Frankenstein is a puppetry marvel

May 26, 2022category: [reviews](#), [theatre](#)region: [south wales](#)



the_crash.test is the latest immersive theatre experience from [Hijinx](#) to dive headfirst into the wonderful world of digital puppetry. Using hybrid platforms to captivate its audience, it tells the story of fictional company Figital and their artificial intelligence creation, named Bob. Bob develops affection for an emotionally brittle member of the Figital team: much like Frankenstein's monster, this robot hasn't had the rich tapestry of unspoken rules concerning human nature explained to him.

All told, this was one of the most interesting, strange and amazing stage experiences I've had for a long time. Watching *the_crash.test* via livestream, I enjoyed the ability to participate alongside the live performance via polls that sway the narrative and allowed the crash test dummy to be controlled by more than one actor. This was despite elements of it being present in many performances I've seen before, such

as breaking the fourth wall (as seen in [The Lehman Trilogy](#)) and using one actor to represent more than one character – which also makes for a safer COVID-era working environment. The use of technology to give a performance a digital platform is also something we saw a lot through lockdown.



The tense relationship between characters Ben and Owen, and the comic relief of Betty, was hugely beneficial, ensuring the play's seriousness was augmented by humour. The transitional music was helpful, too, ensuring any silences during the performances were covered. This was interspersed with propaganda regarding Figital's business proposal: with the business worth £8 billion, under no circumstances can the investors learn of its teething problems.

A personal issue I had was that the main narrative undercuts this business proposal, leaving the audience interested in how this seed of an idea might bloom. I was optimistic, to begin with, that this might be a happy ending – but with *Hijinx*, we are never delivered the story we expect. Instead, we watch as Bob is unable to comprehend the unlawful action he commits to help someone, one that will ultimately make him “happy”. Bob

is always learning and listening to try to help those he deems worthy, despite any legal obligations.

Using screens as a way to explore voice and connection allowed us to be more involved in ways we haven't since before COVID. There were cutaway scenes backstage, and it was interesting to see the inner machinations of the cast – like watching a blooper reel as things started to fall apart. The most interesting part was the ending statement: trying to co-exist with this ever-learning robot. Much like Frankenstein's monster, Bob is an evolving entity, unshackled from the rules of society and asking questions that we as adults have already learned. The focus on being downloaded onto an ancient system ended the piece in a much more psychological and psychedelic way than I was expecting, but was well worth it.

The simplicity of *the_crash.test* is a complete marvel. It strips away any artifice and focuses wholly on its value as improvisational theatre at its best.

Links to supporting videos

1 Are You OK? – “Devising in Lockdown” Making of video: <https://www.hijinx.org.uk/are-you-ok/#:~:text=Are%20you%20OK%3F%20is%20a,available%20to%20watch%20on%20demand!>

2 Grumpy Unicorns - Video from Fresh Variety Live - <https://www.hijinx.org.uk/grumpy-unicorns/>

3 Eye See Ai - Behind the scenes video: <https://youtu.be/98Vn9DydkHg>

4 Hijinx Mobile digital platform - www.hijinxmobile.com

5 Meet Fred Trailer - <https://youtu.be/Ua56ND58xGc>

6 Metamorphosis trailer - <https://youtu.be/X7RviC5n2IY>