

Metamorphosis:

Body, Transformation, and the Structures That Refuse

Production Concept & Project Overview

emBODY Project Theatre · Summer 2027

Project Lead: Corinne M. Mason

Methodological Frame: The emBODY Performance Method / Practice-as-Research

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1. Project Overview

Metamorphosis: Body, Transformation, and the Structures That Refuse is a Summer 2027 fully devised physical theatre production created by emBODY Project Theatre under the direction of Corinne M. Mason. Anchored in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), the production generates its script, movement vocabulary, and dramaturgical world entirely through the emBODY Performance Method — drawing from the original text as a research container and from the specific autoethnographic body culture material of the ensemble as its primary generative source.

The production is the third of emBODY's Year One season, applying the research findings of the company's foundational thesis work — that body culture shapes performing identity — to a fully realized devised performance. Where *As You Like It* investigates what the body reveals when social constraints are suspended, and *The Bacchae* investigates what happens when individual body culture is overwhelmed by collective surrender, *Metamorphosis* investigates what happens when the body transforms beyond what its social world can recognize. It is the season's darkest and most specific research question: not liberation or surrender, but disruption — and what reconstruction looks like on the other side.

The production's specific aesthetic concept, visual world, and casting approach are held open and shaped by who joins the ensemble. The framework is fixed. The world it generates is not. What remains constant across any ensemble is the intellectual and methodological frame: the transformed body is not the problem. The social structures that refuse to accommodate it are.

2. Artistic Frame & Rationale

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is one of the most enduring and most misread texts in the Western canon. It is typically staged as a story about transformation — about a man who becomes an insect and suffers. But the suffering in the text is not produced by the transformation. It is produced by the family's refusal to accommodate the transformed body. Gregor Samsa does not die because he becomes unrecognizable. He dies because the people around him decide that an unrecognizable body is not worth the space it takes up.

This production reads the text through the lens of the social model of disability — a framework developed within disability studies that distinguishes between impairment (the physical condition of the body) and disability (the social response to that condition). In the social model, disability is not located in the body. It is located in the structures, systems, and norms that refuse to accommodate bodies that deviate from the expected. Gregor Samsa is not destroyed by his transformation. He is destroyed by the social body culture around him that has no framework for a body it cannot read.

That framework is not merely theoretical for the performers in this ensemble. Every body in the room has, at some point, experienced the social structure's refusal to accommodate something about its body — its queerness, its cultural specificity, its disability, its illness, its size, its age, its gender expression, its neurodivergence, its class, its transformation from one state to another. The autoethnographic work at the center of this production's devising process asks: where has your body been Gregor? Where has your transformation been treated as the problem rather than the social structure that couldn't hold it?

The production draws from two specific intellectual and biographical reference points:

Kafka's Biographical Body Culture

Kafka wrote *The Metamorphosis* in 1912 from inside his own experience of body culture failure. His tuberculosis transformed his body into something his family and social world struggled to accommodate. His *Letter to His Father* documents a lifetime of being treated as physically, professionally, and temperamentally deficient — a body that could not perform the expected standards of masculinity, productivity, and social legibility. His position as a Jewish German-speaking writer in Prague made him an outsider in multiple directions simultaneously — always somewhat unreadable to the dominant cultures around him. *The Metamorphosis* is not an abstract fable. It is an autoethnographic document. Reading it as such — and asking the ensemble to read it as such — is the production's primary dramaturgical move.

The Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability, developed by scholars including Mike Oliver and Jenny Morris, reframes disability from a personal tragedy located in the body to a political condition located in the built environment, social structures, and cultural norms that exclude non-normative bodies. Applied to *The Metamorphosis*: Gregor's family does not fail because they are villains. They fail because they have no body culture framework for a body that has transformed beyond their comprehension. They are, in this reading, not antagonists but a social system doing exactly what social systems do when they encounter a body they were not built to accommodate. That reading is both more compassionate and more devastating than the standard one — and it is directly relevant to the body culture experiences of a diverse ensemble devising from personal material.

The production holds the following questions at its center:

- What does body culture do when the body transforms beyond what the social structures around it can accommodate?
- What is the relationship between performing identity and social recognition — and what happens to performing identity when recognition is withdrawn?
- How does the social body — the family, the community, the ensemble — respond when one of its members transforms beyond legibility?
- What does reconstruction look like on the other side of disruption — for the transformed body and for the social structure that failed it?

3. Research Question

Season Question:

The relationship between body culture and identity in ensemble performance, using the method to investigate how cultural conditioning shapes the performing self — and what becomes possible when that conditioning is disrupted, surrendered, or transformed.

Production Question:

The relationship between body culture and transformation in ensemble performance, using the method to investigate how the body's disruption from cultural norms collapses and reconstructs performing identity.

Season Arc:

As You Like It asks what the body reveals when constraints are suspended. *The Bacchae* asks what happens when the body surrenders to collective intensity. *Metamorphosis* asks what happens when the body transforms completely beyond what its social world can accommodate — and whether performing identity survives that

disruption. The season moves from liberation to surrender to collapse and reconstruction: a full arc of body culture and identity under pressure.

Correlation to the Text:

Kafka's text maps directly onto the research question at every structural level. Gregor's pre-transformation body culture — the dutiful son, the productive worker, the legible family member — is the performing identity the thesis research would recognize: a body shaped by social conditioning to perform a specific role. His transformation is the disruption of that conditioning: the body can no longer perform what is expected of it. The family's response is the social structure enacting its body culture norms: accommodation, adjustment, resentment, exclusion. Gregor's death is the final consequence of a social structure that has no tools for a body it cannot read. The text is not a metaphor for the research. It is a document of it.

4. The emBODY Method & Approach

The production is grounded in the emBODY Performance Method, centering three core principles that find their most specific application yet in the body culture questions of this text.

Freedom to Choose

Gregor's transformation removes him from the social structures that previously defined his choices — his job, his family role, his productivity. What remains is a body with impulses, desires, and needs that the social world has no framework for. The Freedom circuit investigates this specific condition: what does the body choose when it can no longer perform its expected social role? What is freedom for a body that has been excluded from the structures that previously gave its choices meaning? The production explores this not as Gregor's question alone but as the ensemble's question — each performer locating their own body's experience of freedom when social legibility is withdrawn.

Presence to Listen

The Metamorphosis is a story about a catastrophic failure of Presence: a family that stops genuinely receiving the transformed body in their midst and begins responding to what they expect or fear instead of what is actually there. The production uses Presence as a diagnostic tool — asking the ensemble to investigate, in real time, the difference between genuine reception of a transformed body and the performance of accommodation. What does the social body actually do when it encounters something it cannot read? The answer is often not cruelty. It is the failure of Presence: the substitution of narrative for listening.

Authenticity to Act

The central Authenticity question of this production is radical: what is authentic performance for a body that has been rendered socially unreadable? Does authenticity require an audience that can receive it? The production investigates this through the autoethnographic material each performer brings — their specific body culture transformation story — and through the Kafka text's own investigation of what Gregor's body wants when no one is watching or waiting for its performance anymore.

Autoethnographic Practice-as-Research

The autoethnographic strand of this production is its primary generative source. Each performer enters the devising process with their own body culture transformation material — a moment, a period, or an ongoing experience in which their body was treated as unreadable,

unaccommodatable, or monstrous by the social structures around them. This material is not confessional performance. It is research data that feeds into physical scores, ensemble composition, and dramaturgical structure. The Kafka text provides the container and the dramatic arc. The ensemble's autoethnographic material provides the specific and authentic body culture content. The production holds both simultaneously.

5. Production Concept & Aesthetic

The production's specific aesthetic, visual world, and setting are held open and shaped by the ensemble that joins the process. The framework below is fixed. The world it generates is not. What follows describes the production's structural and conceptual commitments rather than prescribing a visual concept that should rightly emerge from the specific bodies and body culture histories in the room.

The Text as Container, Not Script

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* provides the production's dramatic architecture: the transformed body, the family system's stages of response, the slow withdrawal of accommodation, the final exclusion. The text is not staged. It is inhabited as a research environment. The ensemble uses its structural arc — transformation, adjustment, resentment, exclusion, collapse — as a score for devising rather than a script for performance. Selected language from the text may appear in the final work, distilled, fragmented, or held in tension with the ensemble's own generated material.

The Autoethnographic Score

The production's primary devising material comes from each performer's autoethnographic investigation of their own body culture transformation experience. This is not limited to dramatic transformation events — it encompasses any experience in which the body became unreadable to or unaccommodated by the social structures around it: coming out, illness, disability, cultural displacement, weight change, aging, pregnancy, neurodivergence, grief, transition of any kind. The specific body culture transformation material that emerges from this ensemble cannot be predetermined — it is entirely contingent on who joins the process. That contingency is the production's specific strength. The social model of disability lens ensures that whatever material emerges is framed as an investigation of structural failure rather than individual tragedy.

The Transformed Body and the Social Body

The production does not stage one performer as Gregor while others play the family. The relationship between the transformed body and the social body — the system that refuses it — is distributed across the ensemble. Multiple bodies inhabit the transformation. Multiple bodies inhabit the social structure's response. The production investigates both sides of the body culture dynamic from the inside: what does it feel like in the body to be unaccommodated, and what does it feel like in the body to be the social structure doing the refusing? Both are body culture experiences. Both are research.

Casting Shapes the World

The specific visual world, setting, and aesthetic of this production emerge from the bodies and body culture histories of the ensemble. A production devised by an ensemble whose transformation material centers disability will look and move differently from one whose material centers queerness, or cultural displacement, or illness, or gender transition — even though the research question, the Kafka text, and the social model lens remain constant. This is not a

limitation. It is the production's methodological commitment: the work is specific to the bodies that make it, and that specificity is the research.

Physical Score Generation

All movement vocabulary is generated through the emBODY Performance Method rather than choreographed from outside. The transformed body is not represented through costume or effect — it is generated through specific physical research into what the body does when its social legibility is disrupted. The social structure's response is also physically researched: what does accommodation look like in the body? What does resentment look like? What does exclusion look like? The collision between these physical vocabularies is the production's primary staging language.

6. Source Material & Devising Strategy

The production draws from the following source materials:

Primary Text

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915) — public domain. The text is used as a structural container and dramatic arc rather than as a script. Selected language may be distilled into the devised score.

Biographical Context

Franz Kafka, *Letter to His Father* (*Brief an den Vater*, written 1919, published posthumously) — public domain. Used as a secondary dramaturgical lens on Kafka's own body culture and the specific dynamic between a body that fails to perform expected norms and the social structure that documents that failure.

Theoretical Frame

The social model of disability (Oliver, Morris, and related disability studies scholarship) as the primary lens for reading the text, framing the research, and ensuring the production's treatment of transformation is politically grounded rather than tragic or ableist.

Autoethnographic Material

Each performer's own body culture transformation material, generated through structured autoethnographic practice in the early rehearsal period. This material is confidential to the ensemble unless individual performers choose otherwise. It feeds into physical scores and devised composition but is not directly confessed or narrated in performance.

The devising strategy involves:

- Autoethnographic investigation as the opening phase: each performer locates and begins to physically research their own body culture transformation material before the ensemble begins working with the Kafka text
- Encounter with the text: reading and physical exploration of the Kafka text through the lens of personal autoethnographic material — where does the text speak from and to each performer's body?
- Physical score development from the collision between personal material and text: what does the transformed body do? What does the social structure do? What is the physical language of accommodation, resentment, exclusion, and collapse?

- Ensemble composition: building a cohesive devised score that holds both the Kafka structural arc and the ensemble's specific autoethnographic material in productive tension
- Ongoing PaR documentation through movement journals, structured reflection, and documented physical scores

7. Process & Rehearsal Structure

Phase 1: Orientation, Autoethnographic Investigation, and Text Encounter

- Introduction to the emBODY Method, shared rehearsal ethics, and the social model of disability as the production's intellectual frame
- Autoethnographic body culture investigation: each performer identifies and begins to physically research their own body culture transformation experience
- First encounters with *The Metamorphosis* and *Letter to His Father* through physical exploration rather than dramaturgical analysis
- Establishment of consent protocols for autoethnographic work: what each performer chooses to bring into the room, how it is held, and how it does or doesn't appear in the final work is always the performer's choice
- Establishment of movement journals and structured reflection practices for the full rehearsal period

Phase 2: Physical Score Development and Ensemble Composition

- Development of the transformed body's physical vocabulary through the Freedom and Authenticity circuits
- Development of the social structure's physical vocabulary: accommodation, surveillance, resentment, exclusion
- Collision work: what happens when the transformed body and the social structure's response occupy the same physical space?
- Ensemble composition: building the devised score from generated material, structured around the Kafka arc
- Ongoing autoethnographic check-ins: how is the personal material being held? What care is needed?

Phase 3: Refinement, Design Integration, and Performance

- Locking of production structure and full physical score
- Integration of design elements — lighting, sound, any scenic or costume elements — that emerge from the ensemble's specific world rather than being imposed from outside
- Technical rehearsals and public performances with optional facilitated talkbacks
- Final PaR documentation and research synthesis for publication and method book contribution

8. Ensemble, Space, and Community Context

The autoethnographic foundation of this production makes the ensemble's specific composition the most significant artistic variable. The production actively seeks performers whose lived body

culture includes experience of transformation — bodies that have been rendered unreadable, unaccommodatable, or monstrous by the social structures around them — because that lived knowledge is not supplementary to the research. It is the research.

This does not mean performers must have experienced dramatic transformation events. It means the production centers people who know from the inside what it feels like when a body exceeds the social structure's capacity to accommodate it. That experience is widely distributed across identities, bodies, and communities. The specific combination of those experiences in any given ensemble generates a specific and unrepeatable production.

The autoethnographic work requires a rigorous care infrastructure: consent protocols for what material is brought into the room, how it is held, and how it does or does not appear in the final work. Performer wellbeing is not separate from research rigor in this production. It is the same thing. The social model of disability lens applies to the rehearsal room as much as to the text: if the room cannot accommodate what a performer's body needs to do this work safely, the problem is the room.

The production is rooted in collaboration between:

- A cast of performers and movers whose lived experience of body culture transformation informs the research from the inside
- A directing and dramaturgical team aligned with the emBODY Method's somatic, ethical, and social model commitments
- Designers and collaborators whose aesthetic approach emerges from the ensemble's specific world rather than imposing a predetermined visual concept

9. Timeline

Pre-Production

- Finalization of production schedule and performance window
- Casting of emBODY ensemble for Metamorphosis with intentional attention to body culture diversity and lived transformation experience
- Auditions — March 27, 1–5PM · 95 Washington Street, Canton, MA

Rehearsal Period — April 27 through June 3

- Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays 6–10PM
- Autoethnographic investigation, text encounter, physical score development, and ensemble composition across the full rehearsal period

Technical Rehearsals — June 5 through 10

- Integration of lighting, sound, and any design elements emerging from the ensemble's world
- Final physical score refinement and performer care check-ins

Performances

- June 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20
- Optional post-show talkbacks with ensemble and audience, facilitated through the social model of disability frame

10. Anticipated Impact

Metamorphosis: Body, Transformation, and the Structures That Refuse aims to:

- Complete the Year One season's research arc alongside *As You Like It* and *The Bacchae*, producing a three-production body of evidence about body culture and identity under conditions of liberation, surrender, and transformation
- Demonstrate how the emBODY Performance Method generates devised work that is simultaneously rigorous as research, specific to the ensemble that makes it, and grounded in a justice-conscious intellectual frame
- Apply the social model of disability to physical theatre devising practice in a way that is transferable — any practitioner working with transformation, illness, or body culture disruption as material can use this frame
- Produce autoethnographic PaR documentation that contributes to the emBODY Method book and to the broader field of practice-as-research scholarship in physical and devised theatre
- Create a production that speaks directly to audiences whose own bodies have been treated as unaccommodatable by the social structures around them — not as representation but as research in which the social model's political argument is made physical and specific
- Develop a touring-ready physical theatre production that requires minimal built scenography and can travel to diverse venues as a complete, body-centered work

The production treats *The Metamorphosis* not as a parable about one man's tragic transformation but as a precise and unflinching document of what social structures do when the body stops conforming to what they were built to accommodate. The ensemble does not perform that argument. They have lived it. The production asks what it looks like when you bring it into the room, find the others who have lived it too, and make something together from what none of you were supposed to survive.