

Examining Body-Based Performance Magic as a Live Art Practice

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Submitted for the award of Master of Arts by Research

Awarded by The University of Huddersfield

University Reference Number: 2251189

Submitted on the 16th of January 2023

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Note to the reader: How to approach this document

The following chapters should be read as the contextualising and supporting text to a range of practical research outputs.

The writing focuses on my artistic practice drawing on two newly created performance works highlighted here as two case studies. The two live performances are *A Show of Hands* and *The Perpetuation Series*. Video of these performances accompany this written submission and should be watched alongside the following chapters.

The written elements delineate the wider field that my research sits within as well as detailing the practical research I have undertaken and analyzing how it contributes to those relevant academic fields. I also detail the methods with which this research was conducted and signpost the future direction of this research.

The video documentation of these live performances is in an online folder entitled *Tom Cassani - Masters by Research Submission Videos and Documentation*. Additional videos are included in this folder, these include footage from rehearsals, studio footage and different camera angles of live performance. I have included these videos so that certain sections of the performances can be viewed in isolation and in better quality.

Specific moments from the performances will be referred to in later case studies. These will be clearly signposted using the following format [name] at [time]

Video details

***A Show of Hands* performance videos**

Within this folder there are three recordings of the performance.

SOH 1 is a recording from the audience's point of view. SOH 2 is filmed from the side of the seating bank and is of better quality, however the angle restricts view at times. For this reason, I have included an additional high-quality video of a technical rehearsal titled SOH 3. This rehearsal video combines best quality and best angle, however was recorded without a live audience present.

Also in this folder is rehearsal footage of an excerpt from the performance titled SOH 4, this section is analysed in a later case study as such this video has been included.

The Perpetuation Series performance videos

In this folder you will find a folder containing still images and another containing videos. The performance video folder contains a video of one live performance divided into four parts.

Studio Videos

This folder contains a small selection of documentation of practical studio research that is relevant to later discussions. These videos are a small key selection from a larger documentation accrued during this research project. The inclusion of all studio documentation is omitted from this submission as it is beyond the scope of discussion, analysis and explanation within the constraints of this Masters by Research.

How to access video folder

- In order to access the videos, you will need internet access.
- Using headphones is advised
- The video folder is private and access to the folder should be granted before reading this document. Please contact Tom Cassani if you have any difficulty accessing the folder. Email at tom.cassani@hud.ac.uk
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Abstract

This research sets out to discover through practice what happens to our understanding of the practice of body-based performance magic when situated as Live Art and what happens when body-based Live Art is contextualised as apparently deceptive or as magic. This is realised through the methodological framework of Practice as Research in order to conduct reflective practice-based research methods. This methodology was used to; generate new findings, build on existing knowledge, conduct studio research and create new performance material the result of which was two new live performance outcomes. This methodological framework allowed me to position myself as practitioner researcher examining my own performance practice both as insider and outsider, asking questions of my own performance work and highlighting the outcomes.

The practice research is framed through the lens of performance studies particularly using existing research in the areas of; readings of the body in performance (Turner 2016), performing risk, kinesthetic empathy (Reason 2006), embodied knowledge (Nelson 2013), potential space (Winnicott 1971), symbolism (Taylor 2018), and absence and repetition.

The practical experiments conducted draw on the field of Performance Art and explore performance text, action, improvisation and repetition. Each of these areas individually contribute to expanding new territory in how we can think about performance magic.

This research argues that through colliding practices of body-based Live Art and performance magic the body is situated as simultaneously both anti-magical and magical. It further argues that; *potential magic space* is foregrounded and self-reflective text allows for reinterpretation of magic. I then identify new modes of performance magic, specifically: time-based magic. These findings are analysed through two case studies which go on to set out how they contribute to the field of performance studies and performance magic.

Introduction

This Masters by Research sets out to explore new territory in the field of Performance Studies with particular focus on the confluence of performance magic, Performance Art and sideshow. I am a performance maker and researcher, and my existing performance practice is the subject of this research. My performance practice uses performance magic and sideshow to explore authenticity and deception in contemporary performance. I refer to this practice as: *body-based performance magic*. This practice exists within lineages of both performance magic and Live Art and draws on physical skills from circus sideshow. I will go on to define these fields, and my practice in relation to these fields.

The aspects of my practice that the research is particularly concerned with are liveness and bodily experience. As such I have used a Practice as Research (PaR) methodology (see Chapter 2). Through an examination of my performance practice, I asked two closely related research questions of my own artistic practice;

- 1) What happens to our understandings of the practices of; performance magic, sideshow and body-based performance magic when they are situated as Live Art or Performance Art?
- 2) What changes in our understanding of body-based Live Art when it is contextualised as apparently deceptive or as magic?

My research draws on key contemporary scholarship on performance magic within the critical framework of Performance Studies. It also operates in dialogue with Live Art and Performance Art scholarship, particularly that which focuses on the body in performance (Schechner 2003, Johnson 2015, Schneider 1997, et al). Through artistic and scholarly research, I have learned that the body and liveness are often central to the Performance Art encounter (Reynolds and Reason 2012, Fischer-Lichte 2008, Schnieder 1997, Johnson 2015, Shalson 2018, Auslander 2008).

I have applied key theoretical perspectives from these fields of research to my practice in the process of this research project. In order to interrogate my research questions, I have focused on; readings of the body in performance (Turner 2016), performing risk,

kinesthetic empathy (Reason 2006), embodied knowledge (Nelson 2013), potential space (Winnicott 1971), symbolism (Taylor 2018), absence and repetition. My research takes a multimodal approach (Nelson 2013, Haseman 2006) to accommodate a range of discoveries emerging from overlapping components in my practice such as; time, space and relationships. The following chapters should be read as the contextualising and supporting text to a range of practical research outputs, you will find documentation of the practice linked here [Tom Cassani - Masters by Research Submission Videos and Documentation](#) (see Note to the Reader).

Six years ago I began to professionally make performance work in theatre, Live Art and cabaret contexts. The performance terrain I positioned my work in allowed me to explore experimental applications of magic, presented as Performance Art or Live Art. My work often draws on the practice of magic and sideshow but my performances are not framed as the work of a magician or sideshow performer. Situating my performances in this way meant I was able to approach the use of magic and sideshow in performance outside of traditional presentations, structures and form. By presenting work in a range of contexts I developed a clear approach and understanding of the overarching interests of my practice, those being; space, time, body, relationships (audience-performer), activity and action, object and material and notions of possibility in relation to these interests. A such this PaR study uses these interests as a framework to interrogate my research questions whilst reflecting on the confluence of different disciplines as a new mode of knowledge production in the field of performance.

Chapter 1 – Research Context and Literature Review

This research focuses on my artistic practice drawing on two newly created performance works highlighted in Chapters three and four as two case studies. The two live performances are *A Show of Hands* and *The Perpetuation Series*.

This chapter details discourse, key texts, and lineages specific to the fields that this research engages with. Here I draw on key contemporary scholarship that discusses performance magic within the field of performance studies, thus positioning my practice of *body-based performance magic* within or adjacent to the critical framework of Performance Studies. I will discuss this field of scholarship. In parallel I refer to literature that situates my practice in an historical lineage.

I will also detail how I use the terms *magic* and *sideshow*. I will explain a range of definitions of *magic* that my practice draws on and how these definitions relate to my practice-based outputs and written discussion. I will explain how I define my practice in relation to other magic based practices.

For clarity, I have divided the literature discussed in this chapter into three parts given the range of fields and subsequent definitions and terminology that this research draws on. Included in the following sections are literature reviews, key texts, specific terms and definitions. The three sections are;

- i. Performance Magic
- ii. Live Art and Performance Art
- iii. Sideshow

i. Performance Magic

Performance magic is a term I use to discuss the wider exploration and applications of what is known as secular magic in live performance. I draw on definitions articulated by Live Artist, magician, and writer Augusto Corrieri in his text 'What Is This... Introducing Magic and Theatre' (2018). He writes; 'Secular magic, or 'white' magic (again think playing cards and vanishing handkerchiefs) is largely defined in opposition to forms of

sorcery that lay claim to the supernatural ('black' magic, real magic, magick, dark arts, etc.)' (2018, p.14).

Performance magic encompasses the practice of secular magic in its many forms and does not define a particular movement in the canon of magic history unlike the terms *modern magic*, *contemporary magic* or *street magic* (Steinmeyer, 2006). Historically the practice of magic has gone through periods of technical advancement and shifts in cultural positioning. The study of performance magic is the study of secular magic as we see it in live performance.

Within performance magic there are different styles and types. These are differing forms in which a magical act, action or happening might be contained, contextualised or presented. Some examples are: stage magic, close up magic, mentalism and bizarre magic. Each of these may lend and borrow techniques from the same pool of resources but may appear quite different to an audience. For example, a mentalism routine which appears to present a performer reading the minds of an audience member, may deploy sleight of hand covertly in order to obtain secret information. On the other hand, a demonstration of card magic may visibly and overtly perform sleight of hand as the focus of the performance. The term performance magic encompasses all applications of one, or many of these types in a live performance.

My practice and this research draw on a wide range of types of magic as physical and practical disciplines. This research at times references specific aspects of differing types of magic, however I define my practice as not belonging to one particular style or type. Magic is a performance practice that informs and feeds my own practice. I do not define my practice as that of a magician but I present my work in reference to, or drawing on the many practices that all fall under the performance magic definition.

Performance magic research was born out of a distinct lack of academic discourse in the field of magic. Corrieri observes that although 'Theatre and performance studies scholars have engaged in 'critical debates around representation, bodies, gender, sexuality, forms of labour, with regards to 'popular', 'mass', or 'trash' entertainment, [...] It seems there is something about magicians [...] acting as though they can manipulate the laws of space and time, that fails to garner any serious consideration' (Corrieri, 2018, p.13) This

contributes to what we might call a form of *Anti-emagical prejudice* (which could be said to parallel Barish' highlighting of 'The antitheatrical prejudice' (Barish, 1985)) that has caused a distinct lack of engagement with performance magic in the performance studies field.

It is in the absence of this critical discourse that my research takes place. I draw on the few contemporary studies that have emerged and my research aims to address this gap in academic scholarship. Performance magic serves as rich territory for performance studies and a route to discussing wider performance study concerns as Corrieri explains 'magic's main function is to interrogate theatre: to question the illusory apparatus itself, as well as its evolving mechanics of belief/disbelief, appearance/disappearance, reality/fiction' (2018 p.14). My practice acknowledges these functions as a foundation for my research. I align myself with both Corrieri's theoretical position and his artistic lineage.

In most presentations of magic, the performance occurs between the body of the performer, the audience and each other. An example of this might be a card being selected, lost in a pack, passed out to be shuffled, then the card is 'impossibly' found again. The performer demonstrates a magical act via the cards, their hands and the audience.

An act of magic disrupts and foregrounds our collectively agreed notions of possibility. I am interested in heightening this experience and decentering the role of the magician in this moment. The notion of magic in a thematic sense, or the presence of the figure of the magician may not necessarily be apparent or necessary to a performance that falls under the banner of performance magic. This is pertinent to my practice.

Academic research in the field of performance magic such as those published in *The Journal of Performance Magic* (Nolan, Taylor 2013) and the book *Performing Magic on the Western Stage* (Coppa, Hass, and Peck, 2016) begin discussions of decentering the magician and start to discuss the body in relation to this dynamic. For example, Taylor's article '*Magic and Broken Knowledge; reflections on the practice of Bizarre Magick*' (Taylor 2018) takes a reflective stance on his own performance magic practice. Taylor analyses instances of his performances and how different framings of his role within them as either magician or facilitator inform how magic is interpreted by those present. Taylor's

analysis explores framings of 'real and performed magic' (Taylor, 2018, p.1) decentering the role of the magician in magical performance with particular reference to bizarre magick and mystery performance. Taylor's position in this article, his ongoing research and observations were a key starting point for my research. Taylor reflects, stating;

'this article is very much a thought exercise in considering what might happen if the magician were less concerned with the notion of explicitly or implicitly being 'the magician' and rather focus on facilitating a magic experience that resists disenchantment and might even be seen as real.'
(Taylor, 2018, p.1)

His discussion opens wider discourse around how magic may operate in performance outside of the strict confines of the magician's traditional role. My research aims to continue and expand his discussion by similarly taking a reflective stance on my own practice with particular analysis focused on re-interpreting body-based magic.

Similar to practices of bizarre magic, my work seeks to 'blur the distinction between the real and performed.' (Corrigan, 2018, p.2). I draw on Corrigan's writing to identify this as a recognisable trope of body-based performance magic. My practice goes on to take steps to acknowledge and foreground the mechanism which I use to 'blur this distinction,' (2018, p.2) making it clear that a deception is taking place whilst exposing the construct of a performed deception. Bizarre magic blurs the real and performed to allow audiences to have an experience of self-enchantment. (Taylor 2018).

Michael Saler discusses experiences of magic in reference to notions of enchantment. According to Saler, 'Modern enchantment often depends upon its antinomial other, modern disenchantment, and a specifically modern enchantment might be defined as one that enchants and disenchants simultaneously: one that delights but does not delude.' (2006, p.720). I define my practice in a continuum of this definition of modern enchantment. My performance work begins to be self-reflective in its approach to magic as it identifies moments where self-enchantment and self-enactment occur, highlighting these experiences for spectators and myself.

The experience of body-based Performance Art has parity with Saler's discussion of experiences of enchantment. Body-based Performance Art also 'delights and does not delude' (2006, p.720). Body-based Live Art enchants and disenchants simultaneously in this same way. Body-based magic practice is betwixt magic and Live Art and draws on the capacity for self-enchantment, disenchantment, enactment and reflection all in one.

Michael Mangan's book; *Performing Dark Arts – A Cultural History of Conjuring* (2007) is one of few texts that examine practices of magic in the context of performance studies. He observes and analyses how body-based magic such as the work of David Blaine is produced and received. This academically informed critique of body-based magic is good territory for my research to build upon. Equally, *Performing magic on the western stage: from the eighteenth century to the present* (Coppa, Hass and Peck, 2008), is a collection of writings by authors from diverse academic fields. It positions performance magic as a performing art, profiling its intersection with a range of cultural forms and practices. Examining my practice within the lineage and cultural discourse articulated in the chapters of this book will allow me to begin to unpack my performance practice in reference to key contemporary discussions.

In Brian Rappert's book '*Performing Deception*' (2022) he describes the field of magic as 'an art based on esoteric information and embodied know-how, with little in the way of established instructional institutions or accreditation procedures,' (p.15). In this research I consider myself a practitioner drawing on this 'art' with 'embodied know-how' (p.15) and as a scholar. Rappert's study is the analysis of his own knowledge gathered from learning the practice of sleight of hand magic with no prior experience of magical performance. I found it useful to consider magic and my own reflective practice with reference to Rappert's experience. My research from this position culminated in the creation of my performance entitled *A Show of Hands* which is discussed later in my case studies.

Rappert defines magic as a 'deft contrariwise performance' and explains why, stating that 'approaching conjuring as deft contrariwise performance, I intend to signal how the undertaking of magic can be understood as dynamic interplay; that is, as a relation of varied considerations that are taken to complement and oppose each other.' (p.15).

His approach highlights my shared considerations of relationships between bodies and people present, as well as magic as a body-based practice. His study articulates magic as a complex amalgamation of shifting contradictory elements that do not sit within a singular identifiable mode of learning. My work *A Show of Hands* similarly positions myself within and outside the learning process of sleight of hand.

Elizabeth Turner's article '*I Am Alive in Here*': *Liveness, Mediation and the Staged Real of David Blaine's Body* (2016) in *The Journal of Performance Magic* she discusses how magicians like Blaine and Houdini approach different modes of staging their bodies in instances of performance magic and endurance performance. She examines tactics of; re-contextualisation, liveness, performed risk and dynamics of possibility, all in relation to the performer's body in magic.

My practice research draws on similar norm-breaking approaches to using magic in performance, particularly my durational hair suspension performance entitled *The Perpetuation Series* discussed later in my case studies. Discussing David Blaine, Turner explains how 'mediated street magic is a tightly controlled encounter, but one that attempts to evoke spontaneity and possibility through engaging the rhetoric of liveness.' (2016 p.8). My body-based performance magic also 'evokes spontaneity and possibility through engaging the rhetoric of liveness.' (p.8) within a controlled encounter, as does body-based Performance Art. She quotes David Blaine saying in this TV special *Street Magic* 'I wanted to present a different kind of magic than people are used to seeing on TV. I don't work with fancy props, there's no beautiful showgirls, no fancy sets. I work with people and it makes the magic spontaneous.' (1997).

Turner explains how 'this statement draws a link between the foregrounding of the body and a return to a stripped-down, unencumbered authenticity, emphasising the body's powers of signification.' (2016 p.9). Similar to body-based Performance Art, she examines how Blaine's magic foregrounds the body to seek out 'unencumbered authenticity' (p.9). My practical work *The Perpetuation Series* engages in practice with Turner's discussion of the body, magic and liveness and the parallel between liveness in magic and in Performance Art.

Francesca Coppa's chapter in *Performing Magic on the Western Stage* (Coppa, Hass, and Peck, 2016) entitled *The Body Immaterial: Magicians' Assistants and the Performance of Labor* helps to explain how exactly I approach and understand the performing body in relation to magic and performance studies. She explores the locating of magic's power in relation to audience, body, performer dynamics, explaining how performance magic is a demonstration 'of perfect control over self, others, and audience.' (Coppa et al., 2008, p.91). She locates the power of magic 'not in secrets but in the magician's claim of "Made you!" directed at all of the bodies in the act, including the audience's, the assistant's, and the magician's own.' (Coppa et al., 2008, p.91). How Coppa locates magic 'in discipline' is pertinent to my investigations. She observes that all present in an instance of performance magic 'are disciplined, trained, controlled, subordinate, and subordinated, performing their correct role in the spectacle.' (Coppa et al., 2008 p.91). Coppa's specificity and dissection of where magic and power lies gives a foundation for my approach to exploring body-based deceptive practice and my discussion of it in reference to Performance Art. My practice explores the active reconfiguring of roles within participation of a *spectacle* without total absence of spectacle itself. I explore how magic occurs when all bodies in a space come together. My practice makes this apparent, by centre-ing the body as a site of magic.

My practice emerges from a lineage of what might be defined as stunt magic, that is; performances by people identified often as magicians who are performing acts which may or may not be illusions which involve some apparently risk laden or dangerous degree of body centered action or endurance (see appendix 1). I identify these performances as existing in two parallel trajectories, that of performance magicians like Houdini and David Blaine and durational body-based Live Artists like Yann Marrusich. I am choosing to position aspects of this research work between these two cultural lineages of performance work.

Elizabeth Turner's discussion of David Blaine's stunt *The Dive of Death* (2008) focuses on readings of the body and spectacle. She discusses Blaine's body in performance with reference to 'the classical body, specifically the ideal relation of 'gazing up', to borrow Walsh's term, which is the product of distance from the spectacle.' (2011, p.11). Turner

compares Blaine's work to similar instances of performative stunts where 'a spectacle which incites terror in its audience due to its overwhelming dangerousness' operates 'without the beholder necessarily being in physical danger' calling it 'a kind of Burkean sublime' (2011, p.11). Turners 'Burkean sublime' (2011, p.11) offers a starting point to discuss my work, particularly my performance *The Perpetuation Series* in relation to other performances that bridge the gap between performances of risk and magic centred in the live body.

ii. Live Art and Performance Art

Here I explain how I intend using terms Performance Art and Live Art. I go on to unpack what specific aspects of these fields of study are important to my research and how these inform and contextualise my practice. I will discuss key texts and subsequent theories relating to Performance Art and the body in performance and why they are relevant to my research.

I will be discussing my work in reference to the terms *Performance Art* and *Live Art*. The term Live Art is defined by Dominic Johnson as 'a wide range of performance practices in programming at cultural institutions in the UK, and to some extent in Europe. It also describes a busy sub-discipline of teaching and scholarly publication in theatre, performance and visual studies.' (Johnson, 2012, p.4). Johnson draws a distinction between Performance Art and Live Art stating that 'The key difference between the terms 'Performance Art' and 'Live Art' today – despite being so often used interchangeably – is that in the UK, Performance Art is a formal tradition, while Live Art is a sector.' (p.4). Within this research I define my performance work as both Live Art *and* Performance Art. Johnson goes on to say that;

'Live Art 'invokes a particular way of looking at work', a 'frame' through which audiences and critics perceive an implicit vocabulary among diverse and seemingly unrelated formal activities. While Performance Art did not fall out of favor entirely as a term, it in fact persists as a designated set of recognizable stylistic practices that circulate within the material conditions created and sustained by Live Art.' (Johnson, 2012, p.4)

Understanding this allows me to position my practice, research and practical outputs as both Live Art and Performance Art interchangeably. Live Art is 'a network of venues, development agencies, festivals, and related programming circuits sustains the sector, bolstered by national arts funding programmes and imperatives in academic research and teaching.' (p.7) within which Performance Art is being supported and presented.

As an artist 'who present(s) their work in Live Art venues and festivals' I too consider myself as an 'itinerant boundary-crosser(s)'. Johnson points out the importance to 'ground analyses of Live Art in the precise ways the term is used in programming, and by artists, to ensure that the academic frameworks that are deployed are closely tied to the material conditions of production in the cultural sector.' (p.7). I consider myself both a Performance Artist and Live Artist, and my public performances are defined differently depending on venues and context, but I widely consider them as instances of Performance Art and Live Art (often in conjunction with other defining terms like theatre, sideshow, magic or cabaret).

In *Documentation disappearance and the representation of live performance* (2006) Matthew Reason examines the ephemeral nature of live performance. He goes on to explain that 'While commercial performance may involve forced replication, live art asserts an absolute presence and realness whereby performance and performer are inseparably rooted within the physical body' (Reason, 2006, p.18). By using my body as a site of deception, my practice research aims to expand and problematise Live Art's notion that realness is 'rooted within the physical body' (Reason, 2006, p.18) Reason's research into kinesthetic empathy, which he later developed with Dee Reynolds in their book entitled *Kinesthetic empathy in creative and cultural practices* (2012) is discussed later in relation to my work *A Show of Hands*.

Erika Fischer-Lichte details and articulates what Performance Art is and can be in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance* (Fischer-Lichte 2008). She goes on to explain how Performance Art that centres the body is often not concerned with the experience of the 'art event' as opposed to traditional forms of performance that foreground the need for interpretation. Engaging my practice with what she calls a 'New aesthetic' (Fischer-Lichte 2008) of performance allows me to articulate the experience of

my practice and its functions as a live performance event that is not bound to traditional structures of performance like theatre or traditional magic. Fischer-Lichte describes how physical action in Performance Art reconfigures authority and the notion of success in the performer-audience dynamic. Since the emergence of Performance Art, definitions of *performance* and *performative* had to be modified and re-articulated in order to understand what Performance Art is and importantly what it is not. Fischer-Lichte pinpoints moments in the emergence of work canonised as Performance Art that instigated the need for this new articulation. She goes on to discuss what could qualify Performance Art and how it may be defined.

In analysis of Marina Abramovic's 1975 performance entitled *Lips of Thomas* at the Krinzinger Gallery, Fischer-Lichte explains how Abramović instigated a shift in how we may consider *performance* or *the performative* beyond the boundaries of traditional theatre or dramatic forms. In a gallery space Abramović performed a series of actions which included self-flagellation, eating a jar of honey, smashing a wine glass in her hand and cutting her skin with a razor blade. Similarly, to instances of my performance work, 'the artist and the spectators created an event that was neither envisioned nor legitimized by the traditions and standards of the visual or performing arts.' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, p.11).

My performance practice emerges from this shared desire to not create a 'fixed and transferable work of art that could exist independently' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, p.11). Similarly, the foundations of my performance practice are not concerned with 'playing the part of a dramatic character' (p.11) but also draw on the non-representational. However, my research and practice diverts at the moment the Performance Artist is 'actually harming herself, abusing her body with a determined disregard for its limits' (p.11-12) and problematises this notion in Performance Art with the presence of deception and use of magic. My practice seeks to extend our understandings of what is *actual* in relation to the body in similar performative instances.

Fischer-Lichte discusses performance in relation to the 'bodily co-presence' (p.32) of audience/spectator and performer. She explains how co-presence generates

performance and how the terms of a performative engagement are determined by all present. On spectatorship she explains

‘their bodily co-presence creates a relationship between co-subjects. Through their physical presence, perception, and response, the spectators become co-actors that generate the performance by participating in the “play.” The rules that govern the performance correspond to the rules of a game, negotiated by all participants – actors and spectators alike; they are followed and broken by all in equal measure.’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.32)

In different ways, through discussion of two performances in which my body and magic are central, I will go on to explore ‘the terms of this participation’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.32). Considering my body-based magic practice in terms of Fischer-Lichte's ‘New Aesthetic’ and ‘co-presence’ will allow me to expand and explore performance magic as a Performance Art and Live Art practice. My practice research explores how actions defined by ‘bodily co-presence’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.32) combined with deceptive practices like performance magic may generate performative moments that simultaneously did and did not happen through ‘physical presence’.

iii. Sideshow

As a term *sideshow* has its origins in North American circus and touring carnival tradition of the early twentieth century (Nickell 2008). In these places the term was used to describe a tent in a touring carnival that may have small scale live acts, the sideshow. *Sideshow* was, and is also used to describe a type of performance, acts typical of being seen in the sideshow tent. These acts are now more likely to be encountered in cabaret bars or variety performance events (Nickell 2008).

My practice draws on an extended repertoire of sideshow acts that were originally known as *working acts*. Working acts were demonstrations such as sword swallowing, walking on broken glass and lying on a bed of nails for example. (Nickell, 2008) I will be using the term sideshow to refer to acts, actions and physical performance skills that come from this lineage of *working act* performance. Sideshow acts are often body-based, involve

apparent risk or danger to the performer's body and/or an overcoming of that apparent danger or pain. My research focuses on the bodily nature of sideshow performance.

Many sideshow acts incorporate elements of deception. My practice examines this alignment of apparently real bodily acts and deception that we see as part of sideshow practice. The presence of deception in sideshow is often not apparent to an audience unlike that of the performance of a magician, this difference is key and important to my practice. I am interested in the tactics of sideshow and how certain sideshow acts navigate and negotiate real bodily function in performance in conjunction with deception. I draw on sideshow as a performance form from which some of my performance material is derived, and informed by. I am interested in how my performance work teases out what sideshow acts do performatively and how they may operate in a similar way to that of contemporary body-based performance practices and vice versa.

I will discuss hair suspension as a sideshow act in this research. Traditionally in circus, the hair hang act would not be found in the sideshow tent. However, my modification of the act through my use of duration and setting lends itself to the act acquiring what I might call *qualities of sideshow*. The act of hair suspension is body-based, demonstrates overcoming of apparent pain/danger, and in my case presents an intimate staging of a real bodily stunt. How the hair hang act operates in performance is further discussed in the case study of my performance *The Perpetuation Series* in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2 - Research Questions and Methodology

This chapter proposes to lay out the chosen methodology, model and how it will be applied to this research project.

In this chapter I first lay out what the research project is (i), what my specific research questions are and the aims of the project (ii). I go on to define my chosen methodology which is Practice as Research (PaR). In order to situate the practical aspects of this research I detail how PaR is the most relevant methodology and why it has been chosen. I go on to explain my use of Robin Nelson's 'Arts Praxis' Model (Nelson, 2013, p.20), and how I intend to map my research onto this model in order to meet my aims. I give examples of practical research work carried out and how that practical work sits within the PaR methodology and Nelson's 'Praxis' model (Nelson, 2013, p.5). I conclude by discussing how these practical outputs seek to engage with my research questions and aims.

i. Research Questions

As previously stated, this research aims to expand understandings of experiences of authenticity, impossibility, possibility and deception in live performance through a practice-based examination of performance magic, body-based Live Art and sideshow. By doing so, I set out to produce greater understanding and expand ways of thinking about the practice of body-based performance magic in relation to both the fields of performance studies and performance magic.

Through an examination of my established performance magic and sideshow practice, within the discourse of body-based performance studies I asked two closely related research questions of my own artistic practice. They were:

- 1) What happens to our understandings of the practices of; performance magic, sideshow and body-based performance magic when they are situated as Live Art or Performance Art?

2) What changes in our understanding of body-based Live Art when it is contextualised as apparently deceptive or as magic?

By posing these questions I seek to explore and observe changes in understandings of body-based Live Art practice in the established field of performance studies, and to observe and articulate the shifts in understandings of fields of contemporary performance - in this case performance magic and sideshow. As my practice is the subject of the research, I am both positioned as subject and researcher.

For this research study, I apply conceptual terms from the field of performance studies and Live Art to my practice thus I am able to re-imagine ways of talking and thinking about performance magic. Re-positioning performance material from the fields of magic and sideshow within a Live Art body-based context also allows me to problematise our understanding of the body as a measure of authenticity in performance.

Examining the lineages of performance magic, sideshow and body-based performance practice and positioning my research within certain discourses that these fields engage with, equips me to engage with the new discussions that arise from the intersections that my practice occupies.

ii. Methodology

Practice as Research (PaR) is the methodology with which I have conducted this research. PaR ensures that the outcomes are communicated clearly for public access and the wider academic field. I ensure that the knowledge created through this research can be disseminated throughout the fields of performance studies and performance magic.

This PaR inquiry aims to interrogate how body-based performance practice can create new understandings of concepts that currently are mainly applied to performance studies such as liveness, ephemerality and presence. In performance research these particular concepts have not yet been applied specifically to practices of body-based performance magic. My investigation aims to explore this perceived gap in existing research. I engage

with the practice of my artistic field as my main method to 'Address a problem, find things out, [and] establish new insights.' (Nelson, 2013, p.3).

Using a PaR methodology has allowed me to 'develop and deepen the abilities [I] already possess to make reasoned, autonomous and often professional judgements.' (Freeman, 2010, p.57). The newly generated research and findings produced from posing my research questions to my arts practice are presented here in the form of live performance works which articulate the body as an unreliable measure of truth and authenticity in performance. The newly generated performance work and accompanying studio research is my practice research and as such is submitted as the main body of findings for this research project.

As my practice is multimodal and exists within intersections of multiple fields and draws on self-taught physical exploration, I see a methodology that gives space for this expansive approach to research vital to the success of this research project. As John Freeman says,

'Contemporary approaches to performance research are multifaceted, paradoxical and constantly evolving; and the new theories and often generative processes that stem from and through practice and its role within university research are having a profound impact on the ways in which our subject develops.' (Freeman, 2010, xi)

It is in these 'generative processes' (xi) where I locate my research findings and explore the questions I ask of my practice. In my research some of these generative processes look like the trialing of performance magic material in new forms, exploring sideshow acts in durational form or studying coin sleight of hand as a body-based discipline. As a practitioner working interdisciplinarily (with magic, Live Art and sideshow) it is clear that using processes that 'stem from and through practice' (Freeman, 2010, xi) is vital to the development of this emerging field of research (Performance magic) and is the most appropriate.

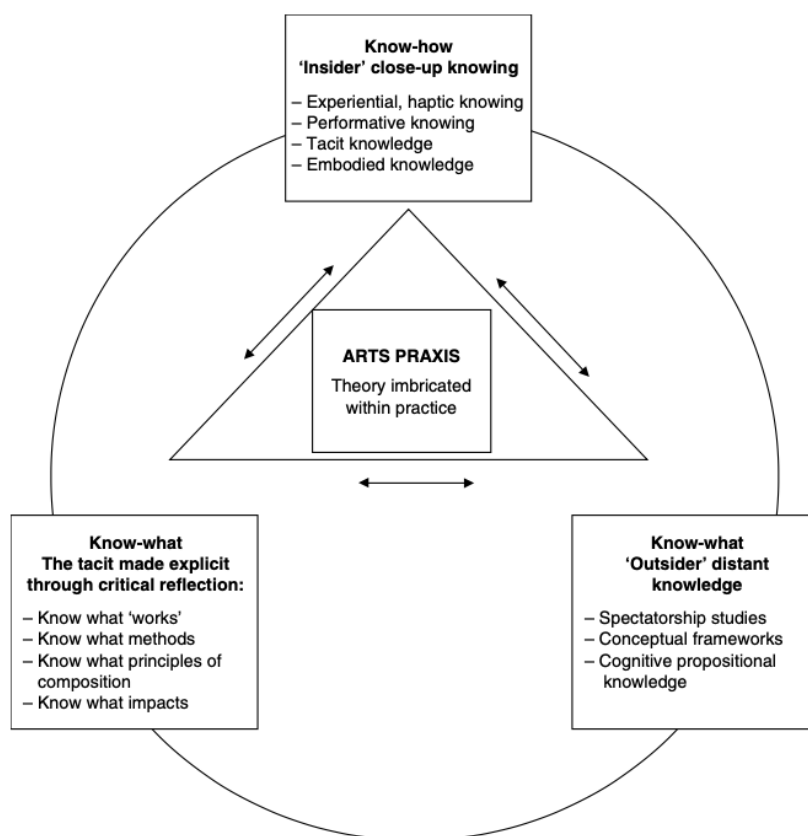
PaR allows me to continue working with the practical aspects of performance making (e.g., studio work, performance sharing and physical training) whilst engaging with my

findings through a reflective lens, communicating the knowledge that emerges from the practice. This affords me the ability to identify new knowledge. This research is concerned with communicating knowledge located in my body-based practice and articulating that 'insider knowledge' (McCutcheon, 2014) within creative processes and live public performance.

My research repositions myself within my practice as a 'practitioner researcher' (Nelson, 2013, p.29). This enables me to continue working with my established practice whilst identifying key research moments, lines of questioning and investigation that emerge from it specifically related to my research aims.

My research questions are concerned with embodied knowledge, and the learning that happens in live performance as understood by me the practitioner and insider. I am interested in 'the ideas of embodied knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge through the body and through experience itself' (Nelson 2009; George 1996, p21). My research is 'concerned with the improvement of practice, and new epistemologies of practice distilled from the insider's understandings of action in context.' (Haseman, 2006, p.3).

I have modelled this PaR using Robin Nelson’s Model for Arts Praxis. Nelson’s model delineates a cycle of ‘theory imbricated within practice’ (Nelson, 2013, p.5) within which we see tacit knowledge harbored within a practice made explicit.



'Modes of knowing: multi-mode epistemological model for PaR' (Nelson, 2013, p.37)

Nelson’s model focuses on three different modes of knowledge: ‘know-how; know-what and know-that’ and employs ‘tacit, embodied-cognition’ and ‘performative’ as ways of knowing. (Nelson, 2013, p.38).

My artistic practice is interdisciplinary and bridges fields of research. The collision of the disciplines; performance magic, sideshow, body-based Live Art is the territory of the research project. What happens when these fields collide is key to the findings of this research.

My performance practice is made up of physical skills that have been learned over a long period of time, knowledge of physical methods and knowledge of historical and cultural context of these methods and physical practices. For example, principles of stage illusion,

training of body-based sideshow stunts like walking on broken glass and experience of audience performer relationship and perception of such acts. My practice is the sum of these parts. These parts are also different modes of knowing. PaR allows me to work within this ever-shifting venn-diagram of modes of knowing.

Embodied cognition, sleight of hand, physical skill or training is the 'Know How' (Nelson, 2013, p.41) of my practice. Through praxis I have moved this 'Know How' into 'Know What' (p.44) by making and articulating methods, analyzing, and introducing new composition, noting and noticing what 'works' (p.37). This has in turn fed the academic knowledge, conceptual frameworks I choose to work within, this new 'Know That' (p.45) was reflected back into my practice and informed the new 'Know How' (p.41), the 'performative knowing' (p.37). This cycle took place in a rehearsal studio, in live public performances, in video and reflection, in reading and writing and in discussion with other practitioners and academics.

My live performances to date (see appendix 2) and practical research *A Show of Hands* and *The Perpetuation Series* make central questions of possibility in relation to the key components of my body-based practice. This research tests how specific aspects of Live Art performance and body-based practice affect our understandings of these components. I explore questions centred around physical endurance and possibility in relation to sideshow acts and performance magic. I deconstruct the intentions of sleight of hand to foreground the body and object as an experiential dynamic. I de-centre the role of the magician to reposition the intention and aesthetic of a magic routine. This research is concerned with knowing/understanding through doing and witnessing, playing with experiences of the 'real and unreal' and the 'possible and impossible'.

In order to engage with this range of possibilities I have applied specific variables: conceptual frameworks and strategies from performance studies and Live Art to the constants of my practice (my key components). Situating my practice within established frameworks allowed my understanding to expand and develop through the creation of new physical techniques, structures, forms, framing and new audience relationships. These are demonstrated through performance.

Performance in this project is key as it allows for experiential and experimental possibilities of communicating knowledge. John Freeman explains

‘that in performance it is the work – the practice – that comes first (...) and that where it doesn’t, it should. Contemporary performance remains at the forefront of developments in current art, crossing, dissolving and exposing as false many of the boundaries between seemingly discrete disciplines. In this fashion, performance is able to offer a range of aesthetic, applied, conceptual, critical and experiential possibilities.’ (Freeman, 2010, p.xiv)

My practice-based research inquiry takes place alongside writing and documentation. These written reflections have become two case studies that assist in tying together and making clear the links between tacit knowledge and cognitive propositional knowledge.

As Nelson describes often, for practitioner researchers, know-how will be inscribed in the body. ‘Perhaps most obviously, a ballet-trained dancer holds his body and moves in specific ways, but ‘embodied cognition’ is today a broader category which admits many modes of knowing which are inseparable from our being in the world.’ (Nelson, 2013, p. 42). Like a trained dancer I work with precision techniques; sleight of hand magic, body-based sideshow techniques such as hair suspension and broken glass walking. The practice of these body-based physical techniques is where I locate my processes of ‘embodied cognition’ (Nelson, 2013, p.45)

The following examples describe how specific practical research projects and activities work within Nelson’s Praxis model. The examples are a series of practical investigations that approach my research questions from different starting points, and all draw on different components of my existing arts practice to different measures. These examples are:

Firstly, *The Perpetuation Series* is a structured improvised performance that uses hair suspension as a medium for the physical exploration of the relationship between my body and three materials. The materials are broken glass, smoke, and sound. I interact with each of these materials whilst being suspended from my hair for 20 minutes each over 1.5 hours. Hair suspension is the suspension of one's entire body from just the hair from

the head tied around a metal ring. It has its origins in circus but is a rare act and performed by few worldwide. The knot is a secret and is passed down by mentors.

The Perpetuation Series takes the components of my practice such as a physical act from sideshow, an illusion like walking on broken glass and an unusual physical feat and explores them in a specific framework aligned with live art practices such as body and material improvised interaction and durational action.

Through this research activity I yield new understandings in how we experience the body in performance when problematised by the deployment of deception, illusion and magic. This framework created new tensions and constructs in my practice and this generated new knowledge and insights. Through this method I build greater understanding of aspects of performance such as space, time, body and audience performer relationships within the contexts of a body-based magic practice. This recontextualising of the act of hair suspension endeavors to expand my relationship with this rare physical feat and to expand our understanding of body-based magic when combined with real bodily feats in a durational Live Art situation. This work explores how performance informs my physical exploration and interaction with materials and the act of hair suspension itself and raises questions as to what defines performance magic, what is real/possible when real bodily feats happen simultaneously with deceptive acts.

My second strand of investigation was the creation of the performance *A Show of Hands*. *A Show of Hands* is a solo performance for a theatre space that explores sleight of hand, my relationship with my hands and the vocabulary of movement I have built up through learning sleight of hand magic. The performance uses self-reflective and self-referential text to deconstruct traditional magic routines. The performance sees demonstrations of a spectrum of types of magic ranging from card cheating demonstrations to mind reading like predictions which all centre around my hands and what they can do. It is an act of self-reflection through performance.

In the creation of this work, I sought to acquire new understandings of what sleight of hand can do when deconstructed live through a Live Art theatre performance format. By approaching sleight of hand as a choreographic or body-based practice, I explore what it

can offer the performance studies field. The show goes on to question what performance magic should do and should look like.

Using the model of a close-up magic show combined with self-reflective and self-referential material, to distance from theatre and traditional magic tropes, I open a dialogue with my embodied cognition. Demonstrations of different deconstructed magic routines help make explicit the insider/outside dichotomy of my relationship with my practice of sleight of hand. Therefore, I position myself as practitioner and researcher all at once.

The aim of this research performance was also to expand the relationship between myself and the actions my hands can perform as well as to extend the possibilities of sleight of hand in performance. By specifically using the components of coin and card magic routines, reconfiguring them to foreground the bodily aspects of magic action, this project sought to elevate our understanding of the body's presence in magic. Highlighting how the body in magic acts similarly to that of choreographed bodies in other body-based performance fields like dance or Live Art. This research activity was a controlled physical self-reflection wherein I take tacit knowledge and make it explicit using techniques of deconstructed theatre and Live Art. *A Show of Hands* makes clear the conceptual frameworks used alongside the performative knowledge held in my practice of sleight of hand to date.

These project strands *A show of Hands* and *The Perpetuation Series* allow me to consider and articulate what happens to our understandings of the practices of; performance magic, sideshow and body-based performance magic when they are situated as Live Art or Performance Art. They also enable me to address the question of what changes in our understanding of body-based Live Art when it is contextualised as apparently deceptive, or as magic.

Chapter 3 - Case Study 1: *A Show of Hands*

Introduction

A Show of Hands (hereafter abbreviated to SOH) is a 30-minute end on solo performance designed for a small theatre space.

The full performance can be watched by following the link via the *Note to Reader* section. Follow the link to - Tom Cassani Masters by Research submission video and documentation – *A Show of Hands*:

- SOH 1
- SOH 2
- SOH 3
- SOH 4 (final sequence only)

In the show I directly address the audience. In this intimate setting I discuss my relationship with playing cards, coins and my hands within the context of my training in sleight of hand magic¹. In the show I perform sleight of hand with playing cards and coins whilst discussing learning processes and my relationship with practicing.

At the start of the show an audience member is asked to look at my empty hands, think of an image and keep that image to themselves. They share what they thought of at the end of the show. A song containing lyrics that match what the audience member describes is played immediately after they speak, demonstrating an impossible prediction. A final routine of hand gestures and magic is performed to this track containing gestures from previous routines in the show. This final sequence illustrates that the audience members thought was somehow pre-determined.

Additionally threaded through the show is a Russian roulette style game. Many identical paper bags are mixed on a table, one contains an upright metal spike. To exemplify the audience's agency over my hands the audience votes periodically (by a show of hands)

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary (2011) defines '*sleight of hand*' as "manual dexterity, typically in performing conjuring tricks" or 'Skillful deception"

as to which bag, I blindly crush with my hand. The final bag remaining untouched is shown to contain the spike as the finale of the show.

Overall, the show has spoken text and recordings of my voice. The text in the show shifts between different registers and language style throughout the show. The text includes rewritten magic performance instructions, confessional text about my relationship with the objects used and lists of dreamlike images.

Aims of *A Show of Hands*

The creation of *A Show of Hands* has three main aims that I will discuss. *A Show of Hands* firstly aimed to foreground for myself and audience my relationship with inhabiting *potential magic space* through discussing and demonstrating my hands in a training and learning process. *A Show of Hands* also aims to explore symbolism and embodied knowledge of sleight of hand technique in my performance by combining text and sleight of hand in non-traditional ways. In discussing training and learning I also aim to demonstrate and foreground how my hands learn and inhabit magic *live*. I discuss these aims in the following sections.

To foreground for myself and audience my relationship with inhabiting *potential magic space* through discussing and demonstrating my hands in a training and learning process.

I propose that magic in performance happening specifically within the space of a performer's body activates 'potential space.' (Reynolds, Reason, 2012, p.55) Drawing on discussions of the body in performance particularly in reference to dance allows me to examine how I approach sleight of hand as a somatic practice. Reason discusses 'potential space' in reference to the dancer's body. Paraphrasing Donald Winnicott, Reason explains: 'Winnicott called a 'creative space (that) mediates between what is consciously known and accessible to verbalisation, and what is symbolically encoded and part of implicit knowledge' a 'potential space'. (Reynolds, Reason, 2012, p.55).

The use of sleight of hand in SOH specifically foregrounds a 'potential space' (p.55) in performance that is activated by magic. In using my body as a site of apparent deception I suggest my body becomes a space that I call a *potential magic space*. As my hands become the site of apparent deception, we see the space they occupy become liminal. A space which is both understood and a space of potential impossibility (not understood). This understanding of how we interpret other bodies in movement helps towards foregrounding and exposing how I relate to magic in performance and what my hands do within that relationship.

The site of the body in conjunction with magic presents us with things that are 'known and accessible' (p.55) such as: playing cards being indistinguishable from one another when face down, coins being solid objects that cannot pass through a closed fist without movement, a general knowledge of how hands and fingers interact with objects and that we cannot see through an opaque paper bag.

The body and magic also offer something new, a puzzle to be understood, something we see me do that moves past what we can currently understand. For example, a coin appearing to vanish. We see me take a coin with one hand place it into my other hand then moments later open that hand to reveal it is no longer there. The action of a coin vanishing within this bodily space is not *actual*, it is an action that is 'symbolically encoded' (p.55) with a vanish happening.

I don't have magic powers nor am I attempting to convince an audience that I do. Nor do I request through narrative that the audience plays along with this notion for theatrical purposes. SOH explores *potential magic space* in such a way that it allows us to consciously re-interpret the symbolic gesture of a coin vanish, and consider the wider implications of live performance magic.

One way I explored this was through; repetition, magic routines, actions and gestures. The repetition invites us to engage with the gestural and symbolic quality of my sleight of hand giving us time to reflect and re-interpret the potential that a gesture or trick might offer. Through repetition and the time for re-interpretation that repetition gives us, the viewer acquires agency to think about *how* we think about the performance of magic and the performance of the seemingly impossible.

In this instance the audience mirrors my position as practitioner and engages in a dialogue with the training and learning of magic. Repetition being reflective too of years spent watching myself in the mirror. My relationship with the physical practice of sleight of hand magic is foregrounded in this opened up *potential magic space*. Here I consider the performance of sleight of hand as a body-based practice through which magic is signaled and not centered.

Exploring symbolism and embodied knowledge of sleight of hand technique with text and speech

Here I dissect how symbolism operates on many levels in SOH and how specifically text in conjunction with magic presented in a non-traditional form may reconstruct how magic is received and interpreted.

There are different levels in which symbolism operates in SOH. I have identified some of them as:

- What the objects do symbolically and performatively in the space without me touching them. Playing cards referencing games or gambling for example.
- What they represent as I manipulate them, my skill, my practice, my dexterity, time spent, the magician, the family member who knows a magic trick, that wedding magician you saw once etc.
- What I say about those objects that goes onto symbolise the autobiographical nature of my relationship with the objects, the history I have with those objects and what they mean to me.

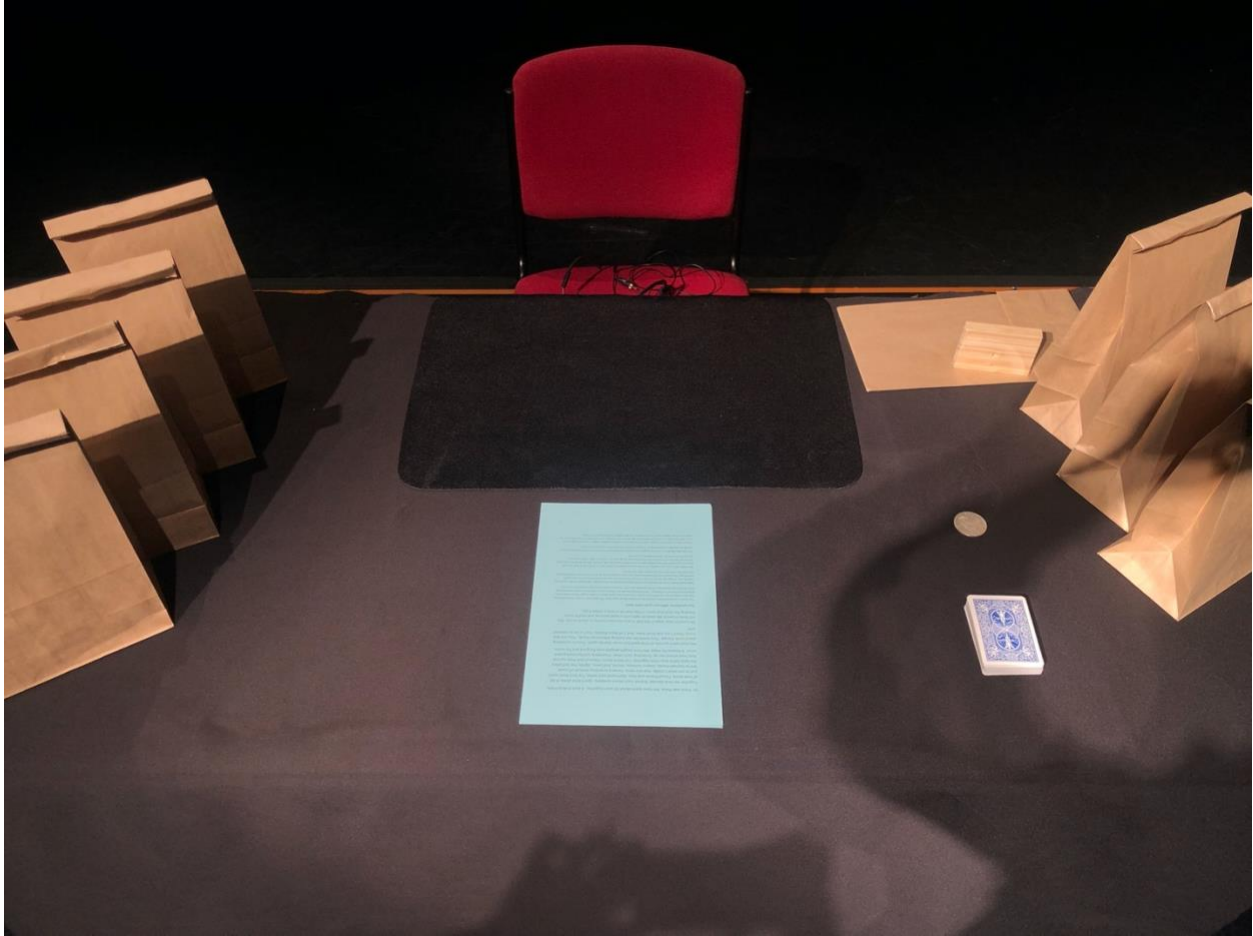


Table and objects used in *A Show of Hands* prior to performance

The objects when activated through live performance take on this set of multitudinal simultaneous shifting symbols. The semiotics of SOH are carefully considered and observed but always offered for interpretation.

In SOH the figure of the magician is referenced in multiple ways. Visually we see the man sitting behind the covered table, playing cards, large coins are handled, physical gestures of showing of the hands empty repeatedly, we see a felt mat on the table.

Through text in SOH, I expand and modify the symbolism and signals of the practice of magic. Unlike many traditional approaches to writing text for magic I have chosen to embrace the use of written text as a performative act in its own right. In SOH the performance of text and speech becomes as ever present as the actions and magic my hands do. Reading and speech become performance as opposed to a traditional

magician's script where it is often secondary or supportive to the physical action. (Hugard, 2018)

In the performance I am heard saying *'We all know the routine with a coin, we have all seen it before, that one, that move, that trick, that uncle, that other hand, that ear, that fake thumb.'* [See video SOH 3 at 20:30, SOH 1 at 20:23 and SOH 2 at 29:08]



Still from video documentation of *A Show Of Hands* [SOH 2 at 31:07]



Still from video documentation of *A Show Of Hands* [SOH 2 at 23:33]

The self-referential text combined with different types of magic (sleight of hand and mentalism) work to dismantle and modify the symbolism inherent in a traditional magic show and maybe goes as far to re-encode the recognisable aspects of the show with new meaning. I have text printed out on blue card that is read out in performance. Reading live from a page on stage demonstrates an initial decoding happening, I read, I process words, I speak.

In the development and subsequent final version of SOH I found myself in moments of performance 'landing' certain moves (shuffling, moving, cutting, holding cards) on certain spoken lines and words. In these moments I noted an active play with text and action in performance. A play that occurs through improvisation.

I found that embracing and trusting the knowledge in my hands' ability to deliver the shuffling sequence allows me to embrace the performance of text to equal measure. Here the trust in my embodied knowledge allows me to fuse this approach to performing text. The traditional hierarchy of sleight of hand and supportive script is dismantled and a new way to perform text with magic emerges.

Fischer-Lichte describes a similar transformation of text in her analysis of the durational performance of *Iliad* by the performance group Angelus Novus (Fischer-Lichte, 2008,

p.20). Fischer-Lichte articulates how a change in the reader draws a listener's attention to the act of reading as performance. 'Moreover, the attention of the listeners was directed toward the specific materiality of the respective reading voice with its timbre, volume, and intensity, which stood out unmistakably whenever one reader was replaced by another.' (p.20). I suggest that through reading in collision with embodied knowledge and improvisation I create a similar instance in which the performative act of reading becomes present and foregrounded. The impact that text, speech and reading has on how magic is received and how the performance of magic affects performance of text becomes apparent.

Fischer-Lichte goes on to say that 'The particular difference between reading literature and listening to it being read – between reading as decoding a text and reading as performance – became evident here.' (p.20). Through a similar strategy I too position myself and the audience in such a way that we must consciously acknowledge how I am reading and how the text is being performed whilst also interpreting and processing the words I say and their relation to action they see. Through a constant shift in context, accompanying action, style of language and imagery SOH changes our understanding of how text can be performed and received alongside sleight of hand and magic action.

The text becomes performing of itself, self-reflective, illustrative and autobiographical all at once. The performance of text in SOH is therefore ever present and persistent. The deployment of text in conjunction with magic action makes the recognizable construct of the scripted magician elusive. The figure of the traditional magician is amorphous and questions may arise that lead us to not view the performance as a magic show but frame it as something other, bringing about questions like: is this a confessional? Is this Performance Art? Is this poetry? is it *actually* autobiographical? is this a performance lecture? This approach to text attempts to make the bounded nature of the discipline of magic permeable and frames the practice of magic as Live Art.

I also explore how the content of the text works to similarly reframe the magic in SOH. We see magic text decoded in SOH in its unexpected applications and deviations. For example, in the text spoken:

'We know what this one looks like. It's in one place then it's not, it's in the other places, there's a finite number of places it could be and would we just rather it wasn't in any of them? Would we rather we were doing something else, or on our own, or just knew how it all worked.' (Text from SOH script)

This text is reflective of how an audience might feel watching a coin vanish, it is also intentionally ambiguous and almost self-deprecating. The self-reflective strategy is compounded by the seemingly autobiographical theme. I go on to discuss my relationship with the objects on the table, I talk about my family and friends, losing a special coin and I discuss the process of learning certain techniques. [SOH 3 at 20:43]

In this self-acknowledgment I take ownership of assumed symbols of magic and re-interpret them. I play with known forms and reference points of the magician's script, play to and invert expectations. Here I am positioned both *as* and *as not* the magician through this reflective strategy. At times positioning myself as the *Performance Artist* working with magic as a material, I invite the audience to look inwardly at my practice with me.

Foregrounding my relationship with training, learning and inhabiting magic through discussing and demonstrating my hands in that process.

Here I discuss how visual and physical aspects of the show also become self-referential and reflective. SOH attempts to reinterpret the physical vocabulary my hands have learned over fifteen years of study and practice through exploring a range of types of magic and the actions they require.

Towards the latter part of the show, I perform sleight of hand actions without objects, I repeatedly show my hands empty, and I perform gestures reminiscent of those that may accompany a trick. This can be seen in the video SOH 2 at 37:40. This final sequence can be seen in rehearsal in the video SOH 4.

The sleight of hand here becomes about itself as well as about what else it can offer performatively. New meaning can be ascribed to what we see as there is distance from the action and expectation of magic. This creates space also between the performer and *the magician*, myself and my hands, the magic practitioner and what magic is expected to do in a theatre space.

Through gestures that reference sleight of hand accompanied by the text discussed earlier SOH offers a new visual and textual territory for the magic to sit within, giving agency of interpretation and meaning to the viewer as opposed to the *magic* acting purely illustratively, metaphorically or demonstrative of skill. In the show I demonstrate different ways to hold a deck of playing cards, different ways to deal cards onto a table. I perform a range of ways to pass or appear to pass a coin from one hand to the other. Sections of the final movement sequence are exact choreographies of a coin trick however without the coin present. For example, pinching an imaginary coin between fingertips and placing it into the other hand, slowly rubbing the fingers together as if the coin were crumbling to dust. Tossing an invisible object in the air and waiting for it to land. [See SOH 4 at 00:16]

Like a dancer the presence of my body is foregrounded through this constant reinterpretation of physical vocabulary. First it is instructed, we hear my voice describing how to hold a playing cards in a certain way. [See SOH 3 at 09:15] We then see me performing with some of the hand positions previously described. We go on to see coin routines and *moves* repeated. In foregrounding physical vocabulary of movement in my sleight of hand I explore the audience performer dynamic and how this foregrounding effects notions of possibility.

Matthew Reason details how John Martin analysed the viewing of a dance performance. Reason explains how Martin claimed that;

‘inner mimicry of dance movement had a physiological dimension, involving movement memory, anticipation and associated changes in physiological states. Controversially, he also proposed that inner mimicry of a dancer’s movement allowed spectators direct access to dancers’ feelings’ (Reynolds, Reason, 2012, p.19)

Transposing this onto the physical discipline of sleight of hand I propose that magicians may function at times to lead viewers to ‘imitate their actions with our faculty for inner mimicry’ (Martin 1939, p.53) in order that we may experience the *magicians’* feelings. SOH explores this empathetic response through a range of modes of movement and how *possible* action may become *impossible*.

A sleight of hand magician performing may also function at times to lead us *not* to imitate but to experience actions that are *not* happening so that we may experience the impossible. A sleight of hand coin vanish is done such that our faculty for inner mimicry clashes with our ontology. In this moment our ontology must be questioned as a result of a 'kinesthetic empathetic' response we go through, an 'embodied simulation' (Reynolds, Reason, 2012, p.19).

I will discuss specific instances in SOH that actively investigate how this collision of ontological questioning through empathetic response may occur with the absence of *direct magic*. I explore how SOH may create moments of magic, using sleight of hand but without visibly impossible things occurring.

I define *direct magic* as an instance in a performance where the hierarchy of action, intention, and speech all serve to make the viewer experience specific magical or impossible moments. I rewrite the priorities, hierarchies and purpose of sleight of hand in order to explore new modes of magic. Modes where the actions, intention and speech are reconfigured to expand how time and the body can affect when and how we experience magic. These modes are Absent Magic, Long Magic, Half Magic, Durational or Time-based Magic e.g.;

- Absent Magic

I define absent magic as the use of magic technique without an explicit apparent impossibility happening, this can be referred to or not. This includes the use of sleight of hand as a choreography and/or using it to create a sense of the uncanny.

Absent magic for example might look like appearing to place a coin in one hand however retaining it in the first hand but then never going so far as to reveal it wasn't transferred.

The action used to simulate placing a coin in one hand is visually reminiscent as the start of a sequence of actions in which we do see a coin vanish, however this doesn't happen. In this instance sleight of hand, attention, intention all signal magic, however a magic effect never occurs.

(Absent magic aligns with a lineage of works by other performers that use magic to simulate possible action, I have collected a list of these works which can be found in Appendix 3).

Absent magic makes us engage with our expectations in relation to watching a performer's physicality and how we respond to that. Absent magic is successful when this awareness is heightened. Context and conditioning help with this. Previously seeing a full direct magic routine with the same gestures contributes to the success of a moment of absent magic. Absent magic can only exist alongside direct magic or a context which suggests this. [See again the video SOH 4].

Gestures of absent magic lead us to perceive those actions as having a quality of the magical but with a different purpose. The hierarchy of how we interpret the body in magic is reconfigured. We are allowed through repetition, and absence of magic to interpret what we are seeing in multiple different ways. We are given permission to pay attention to the physical qualities of my hands which are involved in attempting to make a coin vanish. We see absent magic in conjunction with repetition in video SOH 3 at 21:00. Another example of this explored is in the studio video Absent magic 1 in the studio video folder.

- Durational/Time-based Magic

I define durational/time-based magic as either:

an *impossible* act performed repeatedly, or, for a period which it is not usually conceived of. This may extend beyond the form of a traditional magic show, it may take place over years or multiple performances.

or

A *possible* action that through repetition becomes magic or thought of as impossible. See the video Absent magic 1 in the studio video folder.

SOH explores through repetition and recognisable gestures how an experience of magic and the impossible emerges through actions that in isolation are not inherently

impossible. Through observing how in experiences of magic we may, like observing a dancer, 'covertly and unconsciously simulate ourselves performing the movement,' (Reynolds & Reason, 2012, p.21). Repetition in SOH re-iterates this unconscious simulation, exploring where and when magic might occur and how this may happen using actions which appear to be non-magical.

A particular moment of exploration is a repeated moment of an absent magic trick. A coin is seemingly placed into another hand. Both hands drop down behind the table for a moment. When the hands come back into view the coin is in the original hand. This sequence lends itself to the uncanny as we do not witness or visibly see *magic* occurring.

[See video Underpass 5] This repeated action acts as an invitation to imagine *the impossible* without attempting to demonstrate it. The interpreting power here is handed over to the audience through lack of narrative and absence of magic. The possibility that I might just have multiple coins behind the table is present but the time between each gesture is so short it becomes unlikely this is the case. Mangan as quoted by Elizabeth Turner would call this a 'non-matrixed' magic performance as it is 'abandoning narrative and concentrating on the fact of its own being to the extent that the spectator seems to become irrelevant' (Mangan pp. 188-189 in Turner, 2016, p12). In my approach the spectator is not entirely irrelevant however, the goal to entertain or do an impossible action is relegated and replaced with an invitation to analyse and dissect what we are seeing and experiencing which is the practice of magic by a practitioner researcher.

Using half magic and repetition [See video Underpass 5] the spectator becomes aware of and 'consciously acknowledged' repetition in this instance as 'a condition for perception' that gives space for a moment of reflection. Repetition here acts to 'modify participants' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.20). The use of repetition (and self-reflective text) reveals and acknowledges the keeping of secrets almost to the point of exhaustion (like saying a word over until it just becomes detached from meaning) yet still without exposing a method. Francesca Coppa discusses secrets in relation to performance and magic stating that 'all secrets involve some level of performance ('showing-doing' (Schechner, 2002, p.4) rather than merely 'doing,' to adopt Richard Schechner's vocabulary), so

arguably magicians are not just keeping secrets, but showing-keeping them.' (Coppa 2008, p.90)

The sleight of hand in SOH using different modes explicitly demonstrates the 'showing doing' (Schechner, 2002, p4) of keeping secrets in the practice of magic. The sleight of hand in SOH here is framed as a body-based Performance Art practice and other than simply a magician doing magic. Here we see mechanics of deception exposed, the performativity of secrets laboured, and the learned or learning body centered. All whilst still (sort of) making a coin disappear and reappear. These experiments which draw on the field of Performance Art and explore performance text, action, improvisation and repetition, each individually contribute to expanding new territory in how we can think about performance magic.

Chapter 4 – Case Study 2: *The Perpetuation Series*

Introduction

'*The Perpetuation Series*' is a modular performance. Its duration and sequence of events are not fixed and can adapt to different spaces and settings. The instance of the performance I will be discussing took place at The University of Huddersfield in Studio 2 of the Patrick Stuart Building on the 29th of June 2022. The total performance lasted one and a half hours followed by a Question-and-Answer session. The audience was in the round, and free to come and go as they pleased.

The performance is in three parts. Using hair suspension and three different rigging set ups I interact with three different "materials" through improvised movement and action.

- Material 1: *Sound*

A Shepard Tone, a Shepard Tone is an audio illusion. It is a sound which appears to be descending in tone but never ends in its descent. For this section I used three different rigging points at different heights which I clipped my hair to, starting low to the ground progressing to fully standing height.

- Material 2: *Broken Glass*

A heap of clear broken glass bottles in the center of the space. Using a 2-1 pulley system directly above the glass I could lift and lower myself from the hair with a range of approximately 3 metres. This set up also allows for different dynamic movement away from the central space, I can *reel* myself towards the glass.

- Material 3: *Smoke*

Using two smoke machines either side of the stage and a nicotine free vaporizer (vape), clouds of smoke are produced from the machines and my mouth filling the space. I returned to the original three staged rigging set up for this section.

Each rigging and material change-over between sequences is made visible and explicit, the new equipment is introduced into the space in full light and view, myself and a technician can be seen adjusting and fitting the new materials and equipment.

The full performance can be watched in by following the link via the *Note to Reader* section. Follow the link to - Tom Cassani Masters by Research submission video and documentation – *The Perpetuation Series* – *The Perpetuation Series Videos*

The Aims of *The Perpetuation Series*

The Perpetuation Series aims to explore the sideshow act of barefoot broken glass walking and hair suspension in a durational improvised form. This work also set out to use duration to expand the time and space in which questions of possibility occur, highlighting the body as a site of apparent impossibility with particular focus on the performance of the body at risk.

Exploring sideshow, hair suspension and barefoot broken glass walking, in a durational improvised form.

In the piece I explore how combining hair suspension, the sideshow act broken glass walking, audio illusion and duration aims to allow performer (myself) and spectator to together reconstruct notions of possibility over a period of time.

Through this durational approach to magic *The Perpetuation Series* removes the need for narrative and becomes self-reflective. Elizabeth Turner describes David Blaine's lengthy endurance performances as; 'abandoning narrative and concentrating on the fact of its own being to the extent that the spectator seems to become irrelevant' (2016, p12). With my approach to lengthy performance, however, spectators are not entirely *irrelevant* but are offered a new way to encounter magic and sideshow. The extended duration allows spectators to observe a process that both I and they go through. We experience a progression and physical journey *through* our bodies without the additional layer of narrative which is often the way through which magic performance is received or

interpreted. *The Perpetuation Series* 'abandons narrative' (Turner, 2016, p.12) in order to foreground physicality and corporality.

***The Perpetuation Series* aims to use duration to expand the time and space in which questions of possibility occur in performance**

This performance uses duration to shape how the act of hair suspension is perceived by both myself and the audience. This 1.5-hour structured improvisation acknowledges that duration is a 'condition for perception' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008 p.20) and therefore this work expands the scope of how we can begin to understand what a sideshow or magic act can be and do.

Similarly, Fischer-Lichte explores how time affects perception of performance in her analysis of the durational reading of Iliad by the performance group Angelus Novus. She says:

'the time factor shaped the performance. The lengthy period of 22 hours not only modified the participants' perception but also made them aware of this modification. The passage of time was consciously acknowledged as a condition for perception that triggered reflection' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.20).

Similarly, as *The Perpetuation Series* performance progresses the audience and I must consciously reposition ourselves in terms of our beliefs and understandings of what is taking place. It is in this 'triggered reflection' that the terms of 'bodily co presence' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.20) are constantly reconfigured and revised. Extended duration is what allows this to happen. We see the effects of watching a sideshow act elongated and expanded allowing us to understand more of what happens when magic and sideshow is framed as a body-based performance practice.

Highlighting the body as a vector for the seemingly impossible

I frame my body as a 'heroic body' (Turner, 2016, p.3) and then destabilise that identity in order to highlight the body as a vector for the seemingly impossible. *The Perpetuation Series* references the 'heroic body' that we so often see in short spectacle-based circus

acts. We also see me 'survive' or 'endure' (2016, p.3) like the endurance artist. Spectacle is often described as something with visual impact (Simpson,1991). To be a spectator we may visually consume something. A traditional aerial circus act could be said to be the epitome of a spectacle. It is visually striking and impactful; it has suspense and risk. In *The Perpetuation Series* the parameters of a successful act, time and spatial aspects of circus like spectacle are reconfigured. By presenting an aerial act for a duration lasting longer than a few minutes I draw on the aesthetic and visual vocabulary of the sideshow act but go on to modify and to disrupt its traditional reception. Instead of enduring just a few minutes of discomfort or danger as we might see in traditional sideshow form, we see me negotiate much more than that in an intimate staging. My body is not far above the audience or at great distance. It is metres away, often within reach. We see me slowly explore and navigate different positions and movements in response to being tethered by the hair and at different heights. We can see this exploration happen over time and it is visible in the progression of movement in response to the material I am interacting with.

Over time we see the way I use my body in *The Perpetuation Series* dismantle the notion of the effortless trained circus artist, we learn that I do not have a trained body in that way, I do not try to move with accuracy and elegance. The improvised aspect and liveness is key, as it assists in the destabilisation of the heroic and spectacular skilled performer. We do however see me simultaneously survive and endure. However, this is more likened to *Performance Art* than to the *endurance art* of magicians like Blaine and Houdini. I go on to discuss later this duality of the Performance Artist and the magician coexisting in my body.



Hair suspension and broken glass walking in *The Perpetuation Series*

Unlike the traditional sideshow spectacle this performance is not structured to reference the historic training that I may have undergone to succeed in performing such acts. However, here we see me going through an apparent process of learning and responding live. The parameters of performance here do not serve to contextualise the event as the outcome of physical training. There is no discernable routine or sequencing to my physicality, nor is it purely demonstrative of things I have learned to do with my body (like

an acrobatic handstand sequence or fire eating for example). Through the structure of a durational act *The Perpetuation Series* foregrounds the figuring out, the 'thinking doing' (Schechner, 2002, p4) that happens when I am, for example, holding myself up with a pulley tethered by the hair, barefoot above broken glass.

- The anti-magical body

In this performance my body is positioned both as magical and anti-magical. In the following I expand on how my body may be positioned as anti-magical. I examine how this positioning informs my alignment of practices of body-based performance and magic and sideshow.

My untrained movement in duration signals the pedestrian, the training, the learning mode within which my body operates. This positioning works against me and my actions being understood as deceptive which in turn aids the deceptive elements of the performance (I will unpack this later when I discuss the magic body). The performance involves physical labour. We see labour located in sustained action through time as well as in moments of greater physical exertions seen dotted throughout the performance. The magician's body can be said to be labouring, in enduring training processes as well as performing escapes or stunts for example. In my work labour is made visible through an anti-magical positioning. As Coppa says;

'Houdini's most famous performances were thus almost antimagical in that the last thing he wanted his audience to suspect was that there was a secret to his escapes. Instead, regardless of the escape's difficulty, Houdini made sure to emerge sweating and panting, the very picture of physical effort.'
(Coppa 2016, p.90).



Hair suspension above broken glass using pulley system in *The Perpetuation Series*

In line with Houdini's approach to performed labour, I too sought to own labour in this work and to foreground the labour of maintaining and creating lasting potentially impossible images. Coppa goes on to say how Houdini presents 'himself as a vulnerable body, Houdini is almost an anti-magician—or, put another way, the secrets to Houdini's escapes were genuine (as opposed to open) secrets' (2016, p.90). Borrowing this tactic of the anti-magician I will now pinpoint how key aspects of *The Perpetuation Series* make visible my anti-magical labouring body and how these parts of the performance begin to explore the simultaneity of the labouring and the magical body in this performance.

- What smoke makes visible

Using smoke allows us to see the labor and expulsion of breath my body goes through whilst in motion. At moments I choose how to breathe the smoke, I choose when to inhale and exhale but the physical effort of moving and hair hanging is visibly in conflict with this bodily control. As I move, I cannot help but breath out the smoke. [See video Part 4 at 2:50 and at 7:50]. In using the material of smoke vapour, I visually illustrate the range of control or lack thereof I have over my breath during my physical exertion. The product of which is lingering images of a body almost impossibly moving through a cloud of smoke of its own making.

- A conversation with sound

The movement sequences in response to sound result in long moments of suspension where my entire body weight is taken just by my hair. Within this section I am negotiating through time when to place those moments of held suspension (and for how long) both in response to my own stamina but also dramaturgically.

In understanding this the performance became for me a direct conversation between myself and the practice of hair suspension, it's a conversation which constantly fluctuates between 'concealing and revealing' (Williams, 2014, p.12) my body as magical. Taking advantage of the lack of knowledge around how hair suspension feels, functions and is endured I use the body to illustrate itself and its own seemingly deceptive or magical capabilities whilst simultaneously being in a laborious situation. [See video part 3 at 1:40]

- Defying expectations, slowly

Walking on broken glass as magic performance invites the possibility of physical harm yet defies this expectation. Durational glass walking attempts to allow spectator and performer to sit with this expectation and possibility. This is similar to Yann Marrusich's performance *Bain Brise* (2010), in which over 1.5 hours we see a performer's naked body emerge from a bathtub full of broken sheet glass. (See appendix 4)

In Marrusich's performance and *The Perpetuation Series* we are allowed to see the performer's body navigate and negotiate the materiality of broken glass to a greater extent than in the context of a sideshow or cabaret performance. Yet in all instances the bodies emerge relatively unscathed. My body in this situation begins to reference the aesthetics of the Performance Artist, the magician and the sideshow performer all at once. We see the body of an artist negotiating a material and the magic body defying expectations simultaneously.

Exploring the performance of the body at risk

Through the use of deception in *The Perpetuation Series* I explore the labour of performing bodily risk. In the following, I explore the parallels and differences in how risk is present and perceived in *The Perpetuation Series* through the collision of body-based Performance Art practice and sideshow acts. I go on to examine where magic might be placed or be identifiable in this collision.

The Perpetuation Series occupies multiple cultural domains simultaneously providing multiple routes through which an audience can consume and interpret what they are seeing with particular focus on the body and risk. The performance draws on practices of sideshow and action-based Performance Art. Fischer-Lichte separates these cultural domains but draws parallels between them as domains in which risk of bodily injury is 'allowed' (2008. p14).

Fischer-Lichte references the 'fairground spectacle' as another domain in addition to that of Performance Art 'that allows for bodily injury or risk thereof' (p14). (Where Fisher-Lichte says 'the fairground' I interpret this to mean *the sideshow*).

She explains that the fairground is a place where:

'tricks that would 'normally' lead to serious injuries miraculously seem not to harm the artists themselves, such as fire eating, sword swallowing, or piercing the tongue with a needle, to name only a few. On the other hand, the artists perform extremely hazardous actions, exposing themselves to real dangers. The mastery of the performers lies precisely in their ability to defy this danger.' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008 p.14)

Fischer-Lichte goes on to say:

'This is the moment the audience fears most and which it yet feverishly awaits. Its deepest fears, fascination, and sensationalist curiosity are unleashed in this moment. These spectacles are not so much about the transformation of the actors or, even less so, the spectators. They rather seek to demonstrate the unusual physical and mental powers of the performers, and are intended to elicit awe and wonder from the audience. We are talking here about precisely the emotions that also took hold of Abramović's audience.' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.14).

Walking on broken glass whilst hair hanging without permanent damage to the body demonstrates 'defying being hurt' but unlike the 'fairground spectacle' the actions in *The Perpetuation Series* allow us to perpetuate this 'sensationalist curiosity' through the acts extended and improvisational form going as far to affect the audience in a similar way to that described by Fischer-Lichte in an instance of Performance Art. Similarly in *The Perpetuation Series* what the 'viewers perceived affected them in an immediate, physical way.' (2008 p.18). She details how Performance Artist Marina Abramović's evokes a sense of 'awe and wonder' (2008 p.18) through mastery of bodily injury and risk within the domain of the Performance Artist.

Walking on broken glass barefoot requires prior preparation and knowledge of how to interact with the surface of broken glass in order to not be harmed. The exact mechanics of a hair suspension knot is a secret and how pain is managed is often not understood by a viewer. The absence of this information is the axis where, what is *actual* and what is *perceived* differs. In the case of *The Perpetuation Series* what is perceived may affect an audience in an immediate way, but what is being perceived could be considered as false or incorrect. This is not to say that my body must not overcome discomfort and take on great physical exertion but that the extent to which an audience understands this discomfort and risk is disproportionate to my actual experience. Similarly, to Abramović, I am not passive in this situation.

With deception in play, I maintain the position of 'an active perpetrator' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.28) however what is being perpetrated is different for me than what is being

perceived by an audience. Fischer-Lichte explains that Abramović 'did not suffer the violence, the pain, and the ordeals she inflicted on herself passively. On the contrary – she remained the active perpetrator at all times.' (2008, p.28). My approach is more in line with that of the magician and is in fact the tactic a magician deploys for the success of a trick. Here we observe the tactic of the magician activating the experience of risk we might see in an instance of body-based Performance Art.

Like the practitioner of bizarre magic Corrigan explains that;

'through the theatrical application of defamiliarization (ostranenie) the performer of 'bizarre' magic seeks to achieve an 'illusion of reality' which transcends the traditional performance-magic desire to deceive and rather create a long-lasting impression in the minds of the spectator that artistically confabulates, instilling a realistic memory spawned of a pretended reality.'
(Corrigan, 2018 p.9).

Corrigan explains here how bizzare magic de-centers magic's need to deceive. As with bizarre magic, in *The Perpetuation Series* we see my body positioned as *at risk* and *magical* all at once whilst in the domain of Performance Art.

Duration in *The Perpetuation Series* acts as a similar tactic to Houdini's framing of the body as vulnerable and laboring. Duration in *The Perpetuation Series* feeds the anti-magical but simultaneously frames the body as magic and labouring. One question that arises here then is, where is the magic in *The Perpetuation Series*?

The Magic Body

In this section I examine the implications of reading my body as magical in a work framed as Performance Art or *other* than a magic or sideshow performance. Unlike the Performance Artist I do not cut myself on the glass, I do not perform until the point of exhaustion, I do not present this work in a gallery or non-theatrical space.

However like the Performance Artist each aspect of the performance is visible, the technical set up is not hidden, the maintenance of my hair is apparent, I wince and pant, we see the communication with the technician about what happens next. All these details

are intentional and deployed in order to explore what it is to inhabit the *magical body* without the presence of *the magician* or tropes of magic theatre performance.

Francesca Coppa articulates the essence of magic as

‘Unlike the panting, sweating Houdini, the essence of magic is the effacement—or perhaps more accurately, the displacement—of labor. If the illusion is successful, the spectator should not even realize who on stage did the trick, let alone when or how it happened. The exhibition is one of perfect control over self, others, and audience.’ (Coppa, 2016 p.91).

Similarly to Houdini, the magic in *The Perpetuation Series* may occur in maintaining the structure of the performance. Magic here then appears not in questions like *how is he suspended from his hair?* but modified here into *how is he suspended from his hair for so long? and why?* Everything is made visible, in the round, the glass is real, you are given time to watch all aspects of the performance but still no secrets can be uncovered.

Coppa argues that ‘magical power actually derives from the body’ and that ‘having a female assistant actively performing as “the body” within the traditional magic act prevents the male magician from being seen as a body, allowing him to conceal his true source of magical power.’ (2016 p.87).

Throughout *The Perpetuation Series* I use the performance of my own body to misdirect, to negotiate and explore sideshow, deception, possibility and real bodily action. Sideshow acts such as swords swallowing, walking on broken glass and fire eating often position ‘the body’ and the ‘magical power’ (p.87) within one person’s body on stage. The sideshow performer is their own assistant. The actions themselves often prevent the performer from being seen as a body. Hair hang and glass walking traditionally function as actions that perform the body as well as conceal its power, making ‘the difficult’ seem effortless whilst arguably inhabiting the almost impossible.

In *The Perpetuation Series* I explore what it means to disrupt this established function and make visible this corporeal source of power and the magical body simultaneously. I attempt to foreground this contrast and simultaneity. The structure of the performance ensures that I must constantly renegotiate how much I aim to perform my body functioning

and how much I am passively allowing my body to inhabit the situation I have put it in. The structure of this performance centres the dynamic I have with the actions I have set myself, thus bringing my relationship with the source of magical power to light.

In performing hair suspension, broken glass walking, and strenuous physical activity I actively situate myself in a position of discomfort and stress from which I finely tune my response throughout the performance. The performance sees me explore a space of discomfort without going as far as to damage myself permanently. However, I appear to get close to this boundary so that it must evoke some response for me and an audience to process. [See video Part 3 at 4:50]

In line with the Performance Artist my actions too refer to historical and contemporary possibilities. As Fischer-Lichte describes with reference to the work of Marina Abramović her work 'oscillated between historical (flagellation practiced by nuns) and contemporary (punitive and torture procedures or sadomasochistic sex practices) possibilities.' (2008, p.28). In the case of *The Perpetuation Series* my body is situated as simultaneously both anti-magical and magical, in reference to historical practices such as; magicians levitating, the fakir walking on broken glass, the sleight of hand artist vanishing something in a cloud of smoke, the endurance artist, the escape artist and the Performance Artist too. *The Perpetuation Series* also 'did not restage a historical pattern through mere repetition.' but also goes as far as to 'modify them significantly' (p.28).



Photograph of the final suspension in *The Perpetuation Series*

Conclusion

In my analysis of SOH and in the process of this performance's creation I identified that activating and foregrounding *potential magic space* allows us to engage with how performance magic operates as a body-based Live Art practice. SOH as practical research evidences how self-reflective text and a modified approach to performance magic allows us to observe and interpret performance magic as Performance Art. This research has enabled me to articulate new modes of performance magic, specifically: time-based, absent and repeated magic. My exploration of this new territory has allowed me to begin to expand the intersection of performance magic and body-based performance practice.

The case studies discussed in this thesis address specific research moments and how they came about. Reflecting on my practice in this way has allowed me to now understand there is overlap between the subjects these different performance works explore. I have noted the different levels of complexity and ranging degree of scholarship that is needed to develop this research and I want to unpack this further in future research.

In the creation of *The Perpetuation Series*, we see evidence that duration allows practitioner and audience to re-interpret sideshow acts as body-based Performance Art. We see that when colliding performance magic and practices of Live Art we are able to credit the body for the work it does in generating questions around possibility in live performance. On reflection I now identify *The Perpetuation Series* also as an extension of my exploration into time-based magic.

By exposing the performative nature of a magic act using devices and performance structures such as duration and repetition taken from Performance Art practices, I was able to identify that my practice too makes 'secrets irrelevant, defining magic as 'collaborative work' and making that collaborative work visible' (Coppa, 2016, p.88). In doing so I allow for new understandings and applications of magic in performance to emerge and to be articulated.

The practical work I have made reconstructs how my body is read and what my body is read as within performance. When centering the body as a measure of the performative, my body begins to perform itself. I have identified how using tools of performance magic can make deceptive action become read as Performance Art. By centering my body between me and the audience the 'collaborative work' (Coppa, 2016, p.88) of performing magic becomes visible much like the enactment of an audience witness to body-based Performance Art practice.

In conducting this research, I discovered the inherent trickiness and difficulty in gauging and observing audience response to forms of performances that sit betwixt fields that are primarily concerned with liveness, possibility and deception. The Question-and-Answer sessions which directly followed each performance (included in the documentation) begin to explore this area. These sessions, however, needed to be limited due to the secretive nature of aspects of the performance works. The research presented in this thesis is focused mainly on the nature of self in performance and concerned with my experience of these relationships more so than the audiences. My work and research is concerned simultaneously with authenticity and deception as such to look at the specifics of audience reception is beyond scope of this thesis. However, I identify that there is a layer of further research into this audience relationship which needs to be unraveled and examined in further research.

Through this research I have discovered different modes and dynamics of magic in space and time. I have identified potential to expand the performance of magic in contemporary performance practice that will allow it to move beyond traditional forms and demonstrations. I have learned and exemplified how body-based performance magic offers similar performative questions to body-based Performance Art, questions around liveness, authenticity and enactment and allows us to access experiences of the apparently impossible through possible action.

This research project evidences a wider scope and field of research that I would like to pursue. I am excited by the potential for further research into the effects of repetition, duration and deconstructed magic performance.

Most of these findings could be said to be about information exchange and context. We read things as magic because we understand the performer to have a background working with deception. Further research will explore instances of performances where actions are not contextualised with the language of magic or illusion, but are presented as apparently real.

The constraints of a Masters by Research using PAR as its methodology mean that some of the volume of research produced cannot be included here with detailed analysis. Further research is emerging that is beyond the scope of this project. This stems from the practice research I have undertaken and includes areas such as:

- Developing the study of sleight of hand choreography, exploring the full scope and applications of sleight of hand contextualised as Performance Art and as *other* than magical performance.
- Qualities of sideshow.
- The cultural figure of the magician.
- Navigating a practice that draws on magic but isn't that of being a magician.
- Further defining and articulation of the anti-magical prejudice.
- Explore use of magic to simulate body-based risk contextualised solely as Performance Art action.
- Develop further performance examples that overtly demonstrate open secrets and 'showing doing' (Schechner 2003) in my practice.

By applying Nelson's model of Arts Praxis (2013) I have been able to critically reflect on and embody the new discoveries that have emerged from examining my body-based performance magic practice. The research has also raised exciting new questions and lines of enquiry in the fields of performance studies and performance magic.

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Appendix

1. Stunt magic and related performances

- David Blaine *Buried Alive* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QerrOKc0qw&ab_channel=DavidBlaine
- Harry Houdini *Straight Jacket Escape* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3r8qr-p9z5g&ab_channel=AllAboutMagicians
- Yann Marrusich, Performance Artist - <https://yannmarussich.ch/perfos.php?p=14>
- Brett Loudermilk, Sideshow performer - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qP4VzGtMNrg&ab_channel=America%27sGotTalent
- Chris Angel, Illusionist - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrZBGXbCbhs&ab_channel=A%26E

2. Tom Cassani previous work to date

- All major shows - <https://www.tomcassani.com/performances>,
- Performance videos and documentation - <https://www.tomcassani.com/video>,
- Social media - <https://www.instagram.com/itsstrangeboy/>,
- Cabaret Show Reel - [Strange Boy](#),
- Show review - *Someone Loves You Drive With Care* https://issuu.com/lflaredaily/docs/flare_daily_sat_8th/2,
- Performance for camera – Hand Dance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL3f6EqydDc&ab_channel=TommyNuca

3. Collection of examples of magic used to simulate possible action

- Vincent Gambini *8 Hidden Movements* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNMtghpBIQQ&ab_channel=VincentGambini

- Penn and Teller *Looks Simple* -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G30vNCmMP1k&ab_channel=LopezTonight
- Lennart Green - *Optical Deal* -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_oa8m5Oq00&t=748s&ab_channel=TED

4. Yann Marrusich Bain Brise performance -

https://vimeo.com/535893792?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=104652027