

## Letter from the Editors.

### Magic in the time of COVID

In March 2020 the UK saw its first lockdown, after a brief ' re-opening, a second followed in November followed by a gradual re-opening in 2021. Lockdown was uneven, with small freedoms delivered and taken away At the time of writing (December 2021) a new variant brings with it more uncertainty. As we have seen and lived, everything did not stop, it shifted or paused. People innovated, some sang, some stretched, and many of us moved online.

As editors, academics and performers COVID treated us differently:

#### Stuart Nolan

I was in the first year of a PhD researching the cultural history of mentalism and neurocentrism when the UK first entered lockdown. The PhD was 50% practice and planned to include muscle reading workshops, performances, and visits to neuroscience labs worldwide. However, in a lockdown, these activities became problematic and potentially dangerous. In particular, the muscle reading workshops involved getting groups of strangers in a room to touch each other, not something that would get ethics committee approval during a pandemic.

I restructured the research to be 100% written and focussed on a single kind of neurotechnology, direct-to-consumer EEG Brainwear. These devices are used in several ways: to control devices such as wheelchairs, prosthetics, and drones; to play games with one's mind; to practice meditation and mindfulness through neurofeedback; and to measure psychological performance metrics such as focus, attention, and stress. Thus, they are a form of technological mentalism. I'm researching them partly through an autoethnography, wearing one every day for a year to explore its potential.

Alongside this, I've been researching the roots of theatrical mentalism. We tend to believe that theatrical mentalism grew out of Spiritualism, and there is some truth in this, but my research points to a more significant influence. I will be writing about this unexpected discovery at a later date.

## Nik Taylor

I found my summer bookings for our Séance shows cancelled, later we shifted emphasis and rewrote the work as a short film

<https://youtu.be/uSrVlylhRRo>.

Being away from the studio rehearsals/practice took other directions. I turned to coding to programme (in Python) the steps of magic tricks into a microcontroller. My question was, do the succinct or even complex workarounds we have to make when coding have an affect on what we can do when we get back into the space? The plan now is to re-enact the code as live performance.

I headed into virtual spaces. I experimented by mapping my experiences in a VR 3d space. I was able to walk through my ideas, juggle with them, push and pull, link and explore.

I also made a photographic record of my childhood magic tricks. This *Abandoned Magic* tells an autobiographical journey. Within these photographs I see loss, people, times, energy

Issue 6 of the Journal of Performance Magic is an attempt to part capture the agile innovations magicians made to perform, examine and innovate their art. The two featured articles in this issue examine two experiences of lockdown and magic. Brain Rappert discusses how the global pandemic saw a shift in how magicians might reconsider the ways they engage with audiences and how this engagement raises question on the aims of the art itself. While Augusto Corrieri examines the film *The Disappearing of Vincent Gambini* (2021) made in response to theatre closures in the first lockdown. It examines how we can use notions of disappearance and erasure in our work.

In addition, and as a break from our traditional format, we also offer three contributions by practicing magicians on their experience of lockdown Andy Copper discusses how lockdown not only presented him with a shift to a new way of working, but how it also afforded new opportunities, Careena Fenton talks about the practicalities and approaches needed when performance in the 'new normal', and finally Phil Tilston discusses how magic can be performed as a 'no touch experience'.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Nik Taylor, Stuart Nolan & Madelon Hoedt

(Editors)