Performing Miracles: The real magic behind the performance

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Abstract

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Whilst the study of magic, for many years, has examined the mechanics of legerdemain there remains the need for a reflective analytical and pedagogical framework that can be utilised for the exposition and development of the close-up magician's practice.

As a premise, if there are two magicians, Magician A has the best sleight of hand in the world but lacking in performance skills; and Magician B can competently execute ten tricks but has excellent performance – to the layperson, who is the better magician?

This text synthesises the theories of magic and performance, in order to create a new analytical tool for the improvement of the skills of the close-up magician. It takes Kowzan's (1968) *13 Point System* as its basis to formulate a new analytical tool. The *Issitt 12-point System* can be used to analyse a performance of close-up magic and assist in the teaching of performance skills. It offers that the close-up magician's set comprises three discrete areas: Technical Ability, Performance and Audience Relationship. It suggests that a close-up magician's practice can be enhanced when all the elements within the new *System* are considered.

The *Issitt 12-point System* has been tested on the writer's own practice, that of an apprentice magician, and an expert in the field of close-up magic, Fay Presto.

Practitioners in other forms of magic, other performance fields and beyond may consider the new *System* as a model which can be adapted within their own disciplines.

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And finally, a huge amount of thanks and appreciation to Fay Presto, my now close friend and magic mentor, without whom this entire PhD would not have been possible. Her generosity and friendship have guided me successfully through the World of Magic and beyond. I will be forever in your debt.

This study is dedicated to my Mother, Father, Brother, Wife and Children.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been previously submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere in this or any other form.

Introduction

This study considers the development of close-up magic as performance in the latter stages of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries within the United Kingdom, with a view to creating an analytic tool for close-up magicians. It considers the performative nature of close-up magic and offers a new *System* which can develop the practices of the close-up magician whilst creating an analytic framework as part of a reflexive practice. The study title *Performing miracles: the real magic behind the performance* is intended to signpost the performance possibilities of close-up magic and to highlight the need for further performative development in relation to the magician's practice.

Within the many libraries of magic across the world, including the library at The Magic Circle in London, there is an abundance of books on the hidden craft of magic throughout the ages. Many of these books concern the methodology of certain tricks and routines in order that the student magician can peruse, learn and incorporate these new tricks and methods into their own act. Topics within these books include card, coin, close-up, children's, stage illusion, *mathemagic* – with a small section devoted to the performance of magic. These textbooks are extensively written by magicians for magicians, and although there is little about which to concern oneself, sometimes the performative is too personal and subjective.

There is potentially an identifiable gap in the knowledge within this field in relation to an analytic tool for the development and improvement of a close-up magician's practice. This study attempts to address this gap in knowledge.

The initial supposition for this text was if there are two magicians, let us call them Magician A and Magician B, and Magician A's sleight of hand skills were the best in the world, but they lacked some of the basic performance skills. And then there was Magician B (myself for the purposes of this illustration) who has satisfactory sleight of hand skills but understands performance, which magician would be the better magician to a layperson? Although this initial supposition has since been left behind with the focus on a new 12-point *System*, it remains as part of its foundations. The study strives to create an analytic tool (a new 12-point *System*) in order that close-up magicians can identify areas for development and improve their practice.

This study initially identifies three spheres for the categorisation of magic and a Trick to Performance diagram which leads towards the main creation of a new 12-point *System* for a close-up magic set. This 12-point *System* has been extrapolated from Kowzan (1968) and years of practical and theoretical research incorporating the views of several professional close-up magicians. This study will be able to be used to highlight any issue within the performance of a close-up magician and therefore as a pedagogical tool for the continued development of their practice.

There are significant issues of privacy and integrity which warrant mention at this point. This study has the support of The Magic Circle in London but, as a Member, I must abide by their rules and procedures. The most significant of these is the *Rule of Exposure*. No member of The Magic Circle may give away any secrets on the workings of any trick or magical effect to the general public or within a public forum or format (The Magic Circle, 2018b). From the outset of this study, the notion of exposure of methods has been at the forefront of my mind and therefore this study will not expose any workings or methods of any tricks. But in order for some of the discussions to take place academically, I will explain how a trick is perceived or witnessed by the audience or performed by the magician. This maintains the magic secrets and ensures that one of the major rules of the magical society is not broken.

The limitations of this study are only in relation to the breadth of scope within the *World of Magic*. This world incorporates several different genres whereas this study is concerned with close-up magic. These initial limitations create an opportunity for further research and study into the other genres of magic and to create a working *System* relevant to their practice.

This study makes certain assumptions. They are considered in relation to the contemporary world of the close-up magician and their usual environments of performance. The first is the setting for the close-up magician: it is assumed that this would be as restaurant or wedding event; any event or situation where there are a number of seated dining guests. The second assumption is that the close-up magician would not have a silent act as the analytic tool considers the use of voice throughout.

The study is divided into two elements. The first is this text and the second is a live Viva Performance of my practice using the 12-point *System.*

One of the reasons for the development of this study is the current move towards considering the performance of magic within the world of academia. There have been several publications related to the performance of close-up magic, most notably Robert-Houdin (1878), Maskelyne and Devant (1911) and Nelms (1969). Although these publications offer some ideas and performance tips, they do not give a succinct methodology for the successful analysis of a close-up magic set and therefore, by its nature, ways and means to improve said set for the magician.

This study is divided into five major chapters. Each of these chapters take the reader through the intentions of the study, its history and theoretical background, and finally to the testing the new 12-point *System* in practice.

Chapter One considers a selection of key texts from the *World of Magic* that informs the study. In offering a review of this literature, the study identifies a gap in current knowledge, and the potential for a new system.

Chapter Two outlines the methodology of this study and why a PhD by Alternative Format was appropriate for this subject and themes.

Chapter Three considers Performance Theory within the context of this study. It looks at the emerging performance theory in the theatre and performance and demonstrates how this is relevant to the close-up magician. It highlights the work of Brook (1968), Schechner (2003, 2006, 2013) and Kowzan (1968) with a view to the creation of a new critical 12-point *System*.

Chapter Four considers the development of this new 12-point *System* for reflection and pedagogy for the close-up magician. The separate elements within the new 12-point *System* will be examined.

Chapter Five tests the *Issitt 12-point System* in relation to the author's own practice as a close-up magician, the professional practice of Fay Presto and the magical apprenticeship of Joseph Reynolds using the *System*.

The conclusion of this study will show the practical applications of the *Issitt 12-point System* for the analysis of a close-up magician's practice and considers future applications. It will confirm that this study bridges the gap between magic and performance theory and provides new knowledge in the field of the performance of close-up magic.

The practical element of this study hinged on the finding of a magic mentor to assist with my skill base, talking about magic in performance, and more importantly initially help me gain membership to The Magic Circle. I contacted, amongst other professional magicians, Fay Presto as her professional experience is without question within the world of close-up magic. Arguably, Fay Presto is one of the originators of close-up magic as practiced in the UK, and as such, she was my choice of mentor to study in order to develop my skills. Presto has extensive knowledge and expertise in this field.

During the development of this project I wanted to gain membership to The Magic Circle and to go through their examination process, and to witness first-hand their application of their own grading criteria (as seen in Appendix A). This examination is discussed in detail in chapter four when the *Issitt 12-point System* is discussed in relation to the author's own practice.

Membership of The Magic Circle is via a strict audition process. The candidate is invited to the London headquarters to perform their act of between 8-12 minutes in front of around 40-50 members (professional magicians). Three of the assembled are examiners and grade the performance and technical ability out of 20. A candidate requires a score of at least 12 in both categories by at least two out of the three examiners to pass. Details of this process will be discussed in chapter five with direct reflection on the performance of close-up magic.

The opportunities with which this project has presented me include one-to-one interviews with Derren Brown, Eugene Burger, Lance Burton, Lawrence Hass, Paul Zenon and Fay Presto. These eminent magicians have offered insights into the performative nature of the craft and commented on my developing theory and *System*. I have had the opportunity to travel to Las Vegas to deliver a conference paper[1] and to interview the American magicians named above,

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[1] Issitt, J. (2015) 'Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks', *Clute Institute, 5th International Education Conference*, Las Vegas. 10-12 October 2015.

lectured in-house at the University of Cumbria on four occasions[2], and twice at The Magic Circle[3] in London.

Magic is a complex term. It has been used throughout the world's history in relation to many different elements. *Magic* within a twenty-first century world infers more about the practice of performance magic than the world of ghouls and witches; whereas in historical terms, *magic* is part of belief systems for many cultures[4].

To facilitate further discussions within this study, magic, within all of its forms of human culture and across temporalities, can be considered according to three broad categories: The *Metaphysical Sphere*, The *Representational Sphere* and The *Performance Sphere*.

The Metaphysical Sphere includes magic as a human belief system, the spectral elements of magic; the witches and wizard; and magic as healer, magic as controller and magic as the unknown. Wizards and witches traded on the unknown and the under-developed educational knowledge of the populous to create unbelievable feats of magic and witchcraft. Magic here was something to be feared.

Even in today's modern society the notion of witchcraft and the mystical unknown still resonates in certain communities. The playful and child-like fascination in Hallowe'en is a significant holiday in the United States of America with apple bobbing and trick or treating. But there is a more sinister background to this fascination through history.

Magic as a human belief system has been categorised as astrology, alchemy and ceremonial or ritual magic and partly, the in-depth study and control of the natural and supernatural worlds under the guise of science. 'Magicians believe that by words, spells, they can alter the world' (Evans-Pritchard, 1975, p.41) and therefore have a control of power over courts, kingdoms and, inevitably, the common man.

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[2] Issitt, J. (2017) 'Pitching the Case for Performance Training for Close-up Magicians', *Cumbria Research and Innovation Conference*, Lancaster. 7 July 2017; Issitt, J. (2018a) 'Performance Tips for Close-up Magicians', *Cumbria Research and Innovation Conference*, Lancaster. 6 July 2018.

[3] Issitt (2018b) 'Performance Skills for Close-up Magicians', The Magic Circle, London. 29 May; Issitt, J. (2018c) 'Am I Speaking Clearly Enough?', The Magic Circle, London. 16 July.

[4] Vernon, M. (2009) *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs sand Religion*. Edinburgh: Harrap: p.366; Thomas K. *Religion and the Decline of Magic. London: Penguin.*

It is prudent to note at this point in the study that there are several academic studies pertaining to early magic and its development, most notably Copenhaver's (2016) *The Book of Magic*, Butler's (1998) *Ritual Magic*, Evans-Pritchard's (1975) *Theories of Primitive Religion* and Thomas' (2009) *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. These authors offer definitions of magic as a belief system within anthropological and historical contexts, and are not considered in detail for this text, given that the Performance Sphere is the main focus of this study.

It is important to note that the influential text, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) 'is undoubtedly the best-known treatise on witchcraft from the early modern period' (Mackay, 2009, p.1). This is often considered to form the basis for the popular idea of witchcraft, and therefore magic in this early modern period for the Church, with explicit interrogation techniques, the questioning of witches, the torture employed, and any punishments detailed therein.

One of the world's most significant volumes to be published in relation to this is Reginald Scot's (1584) work entitled *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Within this lengthy publication Scot does not give reason and explanation as to why and how wizards and witches exist but the complete opposite. This book is the first magic effect exposé and highlights in incredible detail exactly how the magicians, jugglers, and legerdemains of the time trick and con their audiences; and therefore, how and why magic does not really exist. 'Scot published [his book] in order to mock at them, or as we should say to-day to debunk them' (Butler, 1998, p.235).

The crossing of the paths of magic and religion are evident here, and as Butler (1998, p.vii) states 'there would appear to be no religion without some magic at its foundation, and certainly there is no magic in any significant sense without deep roots in religion'. The two are inextricably linked.

The Representational Sphere includes all pictorial representations of magic in art, sculpture, design and literature.

There is considerable pictorial evidence in history of the magician and the craft of magic, including within the ancient astrological manuscript *De Sphaera*[5]. It includes a pictorial

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[5] De Sacrobosco, J. (1230) *De Sphaera*. First published c.1455.

representation of the moon and depicts sailors, vagabonds and magicians as the archetypes for the astrological qualities of the moon; 'these qualities include fickleness and fierce independence' (Daniel, 2009, p.120).

Luna and her children (c. 1480) from the manuscript entitled *The Housebook* and much like *De Sphaera* demonstrates the astrological qualities of the planets through pictures.

Other images include *The Conjurer* (1475-1480) by Hieronymus Bosch and *The Fall of the Majician* (1564) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder[6]. Bosch's painting shows a street magician, again performing the *Cups and Balls* trick, in league with a pickpocket. Whilst the magician distracts the man the magician's confederate relieves him of his purse. Bosch is highlighting firstly, the performance skills of the magician, secondly, the art of misdirection, and thirdly, and most notably, the dishonesty of the profession.[7]

Bruegel's *The Fall of the Majician* [sic] (1564) is more grotesque in its depiction of the magician in pen and brown ink. The magician is sat at his table performing the *Cups and Balls* trick whilst evil, depicted as demons, acrobats and circus acts, engulf the scene. It is an illustration of good triumphing over evil as a saint takes pride of place to exorcise the scene. This picture has been described as 'the downfall of evil, and the victory of faith over magic' (Roberts-Jones and Robert-Jones, 2012, p.121). Magic here is seen as an evil art, a dark art of a dubious nature, requiring the cleansing and exorcism by a saint.

The art and role of the magician is also seen within the pages of literature. Notably we can chart magic and its uses in Shakespeare's plays from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through *Macbeth*[8] to The *Tempest*[9][10]. It highlights 'the significant role of magic in the plot' (Charry, 2017, p.277). Magic in literature also includes *Dr Faustus*, *Harry Potter*, *Shadowmagic and His*

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[6] This was later copied by Pieter van der Heyden in 1565.

[7] Misdirection is a key concept in close-up magic and will be considered in later chapters.

[8] Magic is at the heart of the story of Macbeth and the driving force of the narrative through the Three Witches.

[9] Prospero controls the elements to bring a conclusion to his banishment and resolve a fraternal conflict.

[10] *Shakespeare's plays mentioned above were written around 1595 for A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth (1606) and The Tempest (1612).*

Dark Materials to name a few. Magic permeates all aspects of popular fiction in the twenty-first century.

The Performance Sphere includes the modern western interpretations of magic within the entertainment industry; magic as performance.

For the purposes of this study the *Performance Sphere* is the most significant. It includes magic as performance and the development of magic away from the medicine man shamanism to a form of entertainment.

At the centre of magic as entertainment is The Magic Circle in London. It is the world's oldest magic club. In 1905, 'three enterprising magicians decided to start a society in order that they could more easily discuss their secrets in private' (Dawes and Bailey, 2005, p.7); namely Neil Weaver, Herbert J. Collings and Ernest H. Adams. There were twenty-three attendees at this initial meeting at Pinoli's restaurant on Wardour Street, London. The club continues to exist to promote and encourage the study and performance of magic. The membership to date is approximately 1500 with representatives from over forty countries and include some of the most notable magicians in magic today – Lance Burton, the late Paul Daniels, Geoffrey Durham (The Great Soprendo), Fay Presto and John Van Der Put, better known as Piff the Magic Dragon.

As this study is solely based within the world of close-up magic in the United Kingdom during the latter stages of the twentieth century and start of the twenty-first century the development of magic across the world and notably America fall beyond the scope of this text.

Even throughout this early period of performance magic in the UK, its magicians were performing predominately stage or parlour magic; the idea of close-up magic had not fully been developed. Stage magic is categorized as magician on stage performing to a seated audience in an auditorium or performance venue whereas parlour magic is more relaxed. Parlour magic is the same magician performing in an intimate space to a select number of laypersons without a stage. For the purpose of this study the elements and further developments of stage magic and parlour magic will not be discussed in favour of close-up magic.

Close-up magic can be categorized as magic that can be performed immediately in front of a spectator. It does not need to take place in a formal performance setting, with neatly defined auditorium and stage. It can occur anywhere. Contemporary close-up magic takes place in restaurants, bars, at weddings and corporate events – anywhere a celebration is occurring, or a collection of people have gathered. Close-up magic has moved away from the smoke and mirrors magic of stage illusion toward the intricate use of sleight of hand in order to entertain. It is rare in today's society that an audience would seek out a close-up magic performance but is more likely to come across one. The very nature of close-up magic changes the relationship the performer has with the audience. A seated audience in an auditorium is highly controllable and 'in a close-up situation … the environment is highly changeable' (Middleton, 2011, p.25). The complexities of close-up magic in performance will be discussed in later chapters.

It was not until the early 1980s that top female magician Fay Presto saw a gap in the market and began to perform close-up magic to tables at restaurants. As Andrew Eborn states during an online interview, Fay Presto is 'renowned for starting close-up magic in this country' (Drayson Design, 2016). Presto started taking magic into high class restaurants in order to entertain the diners in-between courses. She states that 'magic is just the peg upon which to hang the relationship with the audience' (Presto, 2010) and this performance ethos resonates throughout her magic performances. Presto performs tricks with *found items*, the items you would normally find on and around a dinner table: napkins, empty bottles of wine, borrowed money. It can be argued that Presto merely opened the door to the world of close-up magic for the rest of the magicians to follow. Presto's work at the London Hippodrome and restaurants such as Langan's in Mayfair highlighted an enterprise opportunity to be exploited but also the need for magic to develop in a new direction. As close-up magic grew throughout the 1980s, partly due to magic's popularity on the television, so did the number of close-up magicians and in turn the number of new close-up effects and tricks on offer. Although discussed at length later on in this study, Presto offers an important piece of advice to close-up magicians that assists in the categorization of the form, 'keep it simple, keep it powerful and listen to your audience' (Drayson Design, 2016).

It would be remiss not to mention, briefly, those eminent magicians who graced television. They include the madcap Tommy Cooper (1921-1984) and the gentleman David Nixon (1919-

1978). It is impossible to discuss the notable television magicians of the time without mentioning Paul Daniels. The stalwart of Saturday night television changed the face of magic in the 1980s. His primetime Saturday evening show drew a dedicated fan base. It is not without hyperbole that we can state that the modern magicians of the twenty-first century owe a considerable debt to Daniels for reshaping magic.

In the 1990s and onwards the face of televised magic changed with new magicians developing innovative ways of entertaining through their magic: these include Derren Brown. Brown[11] created his own twist on the performance of magic within his television programmes based on his combination of magic, suggestion, psychology, misdirection and showmanship.

As magic on television develops it is important to highlight a collection of magicians who assisted in its evolution predominately in the United Kingdom. Paul Zenon took close-up magic onto the streets in the 1990s before the phenomena that is David Blaine. Zenon used sleight of hand tricks in front of an unsuspecting audience on the streets of the UK in order to create a more immediate reaction to his magic, as he calls his *Street Magic*.

It is noted that in the USA, performers such as David Copperfield, Jeff McBride, Doug Henning, Lance Burton and Criss Angel have made considerable and lasting impressions on the *World of Magic*. However, for the purpose of this study such acts are firmly rooted in the stage magic camp and what one may consider to be a *Las Vegas performance magic*.

The performance of magic has a long-standing tradition in secular and performance situations. This study will analyse some of the most notable magic literature.

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[11] Derren Brown has published extensively on the subject of magic. His notable contributions include *Absolute magic* (2003), *Tricks of the mind* (2007) and *Confessions of a conjuror* (2011).

Chapter One – Literature Review

The literature within the *World of Magic* is as varied as its subcategorises. Alongside detailed and influential texts on the mechanics of magic (the methods of tricks and effects), they also comment upon*, Sleight of Hand Tuition, History of Magic, Performance Tips and the Teaching of Magic*, to name a few. Although this study is situated firmly within the performance of close-up magic, it is prudent to consider the more notable inclusions within the library of magic. While some of the more academic discussions of this genre are in their infancy, it should be noted that 'magic is one of the oldest and most widespread forms of performance art' (Macknik *et al*, 2008). This literature review seeks to identify the gap in the current knowledge and as a consequence, detects the need for an analytic tool for the close-up magician to improve and develop their craft and performance.

Understanding the *World of Magic*, requires consideration of magic fundamentals. Lamont and Wiseman (1999) detail the basic principles of a magician's skills, and how they were employed. This source highlights the theory behind the mechanics of the close-up magician and the stage illusionist. It categorises the nine elements of conjuring by defining Appearance, Vanish, Transposition, Transformation, Penetration, Restoration, Extraordinary Feats, Telekinesis and Extrasensory Perception. These are widely regarded as the basis of all magic, and Penn and Teller (AVM, 2015) substantiate these elements further by creating a list for performance. Penn and Teller categorise magic into seven principles and not nine; namely Palm, Ditch, Steal, Load, Simulation, Misdirection and Switch. Definitions of the elements from Lamont and Wiseman, and Penn and Teller are in the Glossary of Terms. Lamont and Wiseman (1999) consider the psychological aspects of magic and conjuring through an unravelling of misdirection and the mental mechanics and workings of effects and illusions.

Chapter Two of Lamont and Wiseman (1999) explains the term *misdirection* by quoting from Sachs (1980, pp. 39-40) whereby 'misdirection is the grand basis of the conjurer's actions'. The theory of misdirection is present in the majority of magic literature but most notably in Fitzkee (1945), Nelms (1969) and Ortiz (1995). Ortiz (1995, p.331) reframes misdirection as audience control and suggests that 'there are two aspects to audience control: holding attention and directing attention' while Nelms (1969, p. 196) concedes in order that the

audience does not solve the magician's methods misdirection should be employed. The magician constantly considers the audiences' eyes in order to employ effective and timely misdirection. Once their eyes move away from the important method of the effect then the magician makes their move, employs their sleight of hand. Tamariz (2007) reflects upon the use of misdirection through his five points of magic, 'The Eyes', 'The Voice', 'The Hands', 'The Feet' and 'The Body'. Here Tamariz carefully considers these points to explain how they can be used together to create a real piece of magic from a performance point of view. He is effectively creating a discourse on the physicality of the magic performer. Tamariz stresses the huge importance of these five elements and considers their synergy towards a piece of performance magic.

Performance guidance for the magician has been traditionally offered by other professional magicians eager to pass on their years of expertise either through publication or casual conversation. Although there is no doubt that these pages inform the novice magician, their limitations are numerous. When a professional magician offers performance advice to the novice, there is an inevitability that they take detail from their personal performance history. This information will, therefore, be biased and pertain only to their personal professional experiences. Each magician's practice is different: no two magicians are the same. They may watch other professionals to glean some performance tips, but ultimately, they want to create their own magic and not merely imitate. A tool for the critically reflective analysis of performance practice, which could assist the close-up magician in their development, is missing from these pages.

Often the literature on magic includes, to some degree, performance tips or guidance for the amateur magician. However, it is essential to state that this performance advice is more centred around 'handling' tips – how to hold a pack of cards or perfect a specific sleight of hand move; and little attention is paid towards the performative elements.

There are some seminal works which may be considered to form the basis of all magic theory. Robert-Houdin's (1878) work *The Secrets of Conjuring and Magic* contains specific handling tips to improve the magician's performance; it is one of the first publications to offer specific performance tips for magicians. The notion of close-up magic as we have come to recognise today had not been developed, and the magician tended to perform in wealthy and fashionable clubs, high-class functions, as well as on stage. This 1878 text is considered to be

the foundation of all magic with its author considered 'the father of modern magic' (Christopher, 1962, p.v). The text examines the history of magic and conjuring, the art of conjuring from the effect and trick point of view and some mention of deportment and costume. Although the sense of performance is implicit, there is little formal recognition of performance existing as a separate analytical element.

The noteworthy inclusions of this source for this study lie in the sections *The Art of Conjuring, The Hand, The Table, The Coat Sleeves* and *Pockets and Pochettes.* Robert-Houdin particularises some of the methodologies for sleight of hand while also offering some insights into the inner workings of the professional magician. It is pertinent to highlight that while this work does discuss some of the notable performance elements for the close-up magician, the source is firmly rooted in the 1878 'gentleman magician' persona.

It contains detailed walkthroughs of coin and card tricks while explaining how to perform them so that the method is not visible. This information for magicians is vitally important and is offered through a dissection of sleight of hand techniques. Robert-Houdin offers advice pertaining to the shuffling and handling of cards and coins whilst teaching specific tricks and sleights. The importance of this source cannot be overstated, it is one of the seminal works on magic.

Robert-Houdin (1878, p.xii) divides the art of conjuring into six elements being:

1. Feats and Dexterity
2. Experiments in Natural Magic
3. Mental Conjuring
4. Pretend Mesmerism
5. The Medium Business
6. Parlour Magic.

These subsections are the first account and discussion of performance in magic. The publication contains several routines and observations on coin tricks, card tricks, the cups and balls and the Chinese linking rings; all the basics of the art of magic. Foreshadowing the ideas of Tamariz (2007), Robert-Houdin (1878) places significant emphasis on the hand by stating that 'the hand, among the Egyptians, was a symbol of strength' and 'dexterity and manual skill' (Robert-Houdin, 1878, p.37). The hand of the close-up magician is their tool of trade. They must learn to handle magical props and apparatus along with sleights and methods in order to develop as a magician.

The explication of these elements of the magician continued with Maskelyne and Devant's (1911) *Our Magic*. This is the first publication to suggest that there is something more to the skill set of the magician outside of the sleights and handlings. The notion that performance is of equal importance is detailed throughout. Maskelyne and Devant (1911, p.6) consider that 'a real modern magician, then, is essentially an actor' and therefore forge the first link of similarities between the art of the actor and the art of the magician. This is echoed in Robert-Houdin's (1878, p.43) infamous quotation that 'a conjurer is not a juggler; he is an actor playing the part of a magician'. The term 'juggler' was interchangeable with conjurer in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The similarities between conjurer and actor are evident here.

In addition, Maskelyne and Devant (1911) considers the art of the magician with specific real-world examples. It should be noted here that the concept of the close-up magician, as seen in the twenty-first century, has not yet been realised. These theories from Maskelyne and Devant are pertinent to the parlour magician but have striking relevance to today's close-up magician. It details chapters on *Surprise and Repetition, Presentation, Rehearsal* and *Stage Manner and Personality*. These elements are without doubt performance headings which can guide the professional or amateur magician to improve their practices even though the list is not exhaustive. Although they do highlight sleights and other methodologies, they also consider the performative: 'the final purpose of the art is the presentation of its effects; and, until those effects are presented the art itself cannot be perfected, but must remain a thing of little importance in the eyes of the world' (Maskelyne and Devant, 1911, p.101); here the performance is important. The relative significance of performance and the lesser important sleight of hand is discussed by Maskelyne and Devant; to them the 'tricks and dodges are of comparatively small importance in the art of magic' (Maskelyne and Devant, 1911, p.vi). In these pages there is an emergence of the performance of magic and that tuition in performance is essential for 'artistic judgement may, to a great extent, be gained by study and experience' (Maskelyne and Devant, 1911, p.6).

Maskelyne and Devant (1911, p.8) make reference to three varieties of magic; High Art, Normal Art, and False Art but state that the 'prevalent idea is that the secrets of magic consist in tricks and dodges, connected with the manipulations and the apparatus employed in the art' (1911, p.1). As with Robert-Houdin (1878) the art or the manipulations of the professional

close-up magician can only exist within the context of a magic performance. 'Since magic is one of the ephemeral arts, which can only attain fruition in actual performance, one might say, that without adequate presentation there can be no art in magic' (1911, p.101). They continue to place performance at the forefront of the art suggesting that the magician needs 'the knowledge of how to adapt personal qualifications to public service – in other words – to present what is shown in a way that will appeal to the average spectator' (1991, p.103). They prove within this publication that the objects of presentation are personality and procedure (1911, pp.103-104), highlighting the same elements as Robert-Houdin (1878), Nelms (1969) and Middleton (2011). Maskelyne and Devant (1911) continue to highlight the need for the magician's ownership of the material, and the capacity to adapt the performance; for 'no magician should ever present, in public, any magical feat in which the procedure cannot be, or has not been adapted to [their] own personal characteristics and abilities' (1911, p.104): rehearsal and performance are important. The notion of the performative elements of the magician were being presented and discussed in early publications.

Even within the pages of this 1911 book, Maskelyne and Devant (1911, p.163) consider the idea of including the magical arts within the performing arts for,

> If we wish to prove the claim of magic to rank upon an equality with other arts, we must first of all establish its relation to recognised artistic principles and ideas, both in theory and practice.

They are signalling the significance of the improvement and development of a close-up magician's practice but, and more importantly for this study, acknowledging the need for a theoretical framework for the analysis and pedagogy of magicians.

Other notable works continue to develop the importance of the performative elements of the magician. Fitzkee (1943) echoes Robert-Houdin (1878) in his organisation of the chapters and the focus on the *gentleman magician*. Here, Fitzkee offers new insights however, into the performative qualities of the magician. Arguably, the notion of the close-up magician had not been developed at this time but Fitzkee continues to offer technique, sleight, rehearsal and performance advice. His book considers the planning of a routine, through its rehearsal and its performance. Significant time is spent on the creation of a routine with particular focus on what the audience wants. Even during this period of time, the notion of the audience as an

integral piece of the performance jigsaw is beginning to evolve. Fitzkee's (1943, 1944, 1945) trilogy are considered as the natural progression from Robert-Houdin (1878) and Maskelyne and Devant (1911).

Within the *World of Magic* there are two separate elements, one is the effect or trick (the sleight of hand) and the other is showmanship. The word showmanship appears throughout the pages of all textbooks especially since the publication of Fitzkee's 1943 book *Showmanship for Magicians*. For the first time in a textbook on magic the notion of performance and showmanship is discussed and considered. Fitzkee considers how to construct a workable routine but, more importantly for this study, it considers the performative elements of a magician. Notably Fitzkee's (1943) twenty-five chapter titles include *'Do magicians need higher entertainment standards?'* and *'Getting and holding interest and attention'* and therefore there is an understanding of the performative elements of the magician, but not specifically for close-up. Although Fitzkee's work is considered essential reading, it is obviously of its time and cannot compensate for some of the modern environments or performance anomalies that occur today. The magic of Fitzkee was based on the gentleman magician; 'a performer … should never appear in any costume other than the very latest in cut and style, with the best of tailoring (Fitzkee, 1943, p.72), performing parlour magic to an engaged audience, and not the contemporary setting of close-up magic in a restaurant or at an event.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of publications which discuss performance skills for magicians. Nelms (1969), Ortiz (1995), Weber (2003) and Middleton (2011) all consider the performative elements of the close-up magician and offer appropriate directorial and performative advice. Nelms (1969) considers the magician holistically and not merely the separation of various individual facets. He aligns the workings of the magician to the workings of the actor; here there are echoes of Robert-Houdin. These links are vitally important and as such inhabit a large proportion of Nelms (1969), but their considerations are general as supported by the publication's chapter headings which include; *Mystery without Magic, Dramatic Structure* and *The Performer and the Stage Routines.* He considers the creation of a routine, which is consistent with the writings of Robert-Houdin (1878) and Fitzkee (1943, 1944, 1945): the notion that a magic trick or effect cannot stand alone but requires time to create an audience reaction. Nelms (1969, p.221) comments that an 'illusion

does not have a real plot [but] it requires a dramatic structure'. The literature is considering the performative elements of the close-up magician and how these can be improved and developed.

It is not until 1969[12] when Nelms wrote *Magic and Showmanship: A Handbook for Conjurers* that modern thinking on performance was beginning to emerge. This was not merely a magic book full of tricks and handlings, rather it dealt with specific performative examples which most performers could achieve. We can see the initial collision of magic theory and performance theory in this book. Nelms (1969, p.2) comments that 'drama, like magic, is an art of illusion' and here he consciously fuses these two theories together. Nelms (1969, p.vii) considers as chapter titles *'deception vs conviction', 'mystery without magic', 'consistency in characterization'* and *'dramatic structure'*. There is here a clear movement towards a performative outlook within the *World of Magic*. Nelms' ideas here navigate towards a thorough understanding of performance with noted considerations on misdirection and pointing. 'The source of information is what we want the audience to watch' (Nelms, 1969, p. 182) is a clear example of the author understanding the need for misdirection from a magically orientated point of view and direction from a performative one. Magicians across the world consider that misdirection is at the heart of their stage and performance craft. However, whilst this is arguably the situation, it is not the only dynamic at play, moreover it may be thought to be *direction*, rather than simply more misdirection. For example, the magician does not misdirect the audience away from where to look – more specifically, they direct them *towards* where they wish them to look, a subtle difference.

As Nelms (1969) considers the dramatic structure of a magic performance Ortiz (1995) specifically directs his entire book to the *'Creative Showmanship for the Close-Up Magician'*. Ortiz (1995) suggests that the ruminations of Nelms (1969) are too theatrically based and magicians 'most concerned with presentation make the mistake of thinking that the point of a magic effect is to support a dramatic structure' (Ortiz, 1995, p.27). He suggests that there should be an intellectual and emotional response in the lay person and in the performer; and that 'part of magic presentation technique is narrative technique' (Ortiz, 1995, p.27). He separates his text into four parts, namely *The Effect, The Character, The Act, The Audience.*

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[12] The 2000 reprint version has been used for this thesis.

Ortiz is mindful of the creation of a full and considered magic performance and not merely relying on the effect itself but to also consider the performative elements and, most importantly, the audience. There are ruminations on character from the viewpoint of the close-up magician offering some sage advice. These statements and discussions are based on the art of the actor but do not offer practitioner linked examples. This is again a gap in this source that leads to the creation of the *Issitt System.* This is not the case in Middleton's (2011) *Performing Magic: A Handbook on Performance for Magicians.* Middleton has a background in performance holding a master's degree in theatre directing. Therefore, there is no surprise that his volume approaches magic from a performative perspective. From the chapter headings (notably, *Foundation, Structure & Detail, Performance*) Middleton details exercises and considerations from a Stanislavskian viewpoint. Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) was a Russian theatre director, actor and one of the co-founders of the Moscow Art Theatre. He 'revolutionised acting, acting teaching and theatre production' (Gillett, 2014, p. xi). Whilst Middleton considers every detail of a Stanislavskian performance, it relies on extended explanation with real magic world examples which can be lengthy to read and difficult to realise practically without specialist support. Fundamentally, Middleton (2011) is the essential reading textbook on a practically taught course. As with earlier volumes Middleton (2011) needs to be read as a whole and possibly along with professional practical performance guidance. Although there are strong links to Middleton's own practice and that of Chris Dugdale (as his theatrical director) there is a limited amount of performance theory outside Stanislavski.

There was a notable shift in the type of magic textbooks with the publication of Weber (2003) *Maximum Entertainment: Director's Notes for Magicians and Mentalists*. This is the first publication entirely dedicated to the elements of magic in performance. Weber here draws upon his decades of magic experience to share some of the fundamentals of performance theory. Weber (2003, p.54) postulates that the art of magic in performance can be categorised into six 'pillars'; namely

1. Master Your Craft
2. Communicate Your Humanity
3. Capture the Excitement
4. Control Every Moment
5. Eliminate Weak Spots
6. Build to a Climax.

As with Maskelyne and Devant (1911), the magician needs to read these texts completely in order to develop their practices; there is a notable gap emerging for an analytic tool which is simple to access and can be used in isolation of a full explanation or with detailed notes. The new *System* will bridge the gap between theory and magic.

This leads to the educational function of the magic textbooks. It is true that there is a didactic pedagogy to the majority of the sources as the performance of the magic is fundamental to the genre. Magic in front of an audience is the final stage of a lengthy study and rehearsal period. There are several publications that sell themselves as of educational value or self-help books. At this stage the literature branches off towards tricks for the amateur magician and tricks for the professional magician. There is a strand within the tricks for amateur magicians that concerns self-working tricks. A self-working trick requires little if any skill and requires not complicated sleight of hand moves to achieve a good effect. Fulves' (1977, 1990) publications detail self-working tricks performable with little magical skill; the magician needs only to contribute in their performance ability. But this study is concerned with the working professional magician and not the hobbyist who may only perform self-working tricks.

Alongside these two landmark publications is Marshall's (1980) *How to Perform Instant Magic* and Pogue's (1998) *Magic for Dummies*. Merely commenting on the titles, it is evident that these books are geared towards the amateur or hobbyist magician market and not the professional. That is not to say that the professional could not find some wisdom therein. In order to consider the educational books for the professional magician, it is essential to include Hugard and Braue (2004) originally published in 1949, Wilson (2002) originally published in 1975, and Burger (1987). Hugard and Braue's (2004) book *The Royal Road to Card Magic* is considered as one of the essential reads of the professional magician even though it was published over seventy years ago. This seminal work takes the magician through the basic mechanics of playing cards from simple shuffles, through card forcing to complicated sleights. Although the performative elements of this publication are implicit throughout it does afford the reader all of the essential magic manipulations required to become a student of the art of magic. This book can also be used to refresh professional skills.

Whereas Hugard and Braue (2004) considers card tricks Wilson (2002) considers the art of magic as a whole. His lengthy volume explains some of the relevant card sleights also detailed in Hugard and Braue (2004) but continues the instruction through card tricks, rope magic,

money *etc*. There is no argument that this is not a complete course in magic as his title suggests. For as Wilson (2002) gives specific details for the general magician to use, Burger (1987) considers the close-up magician and their practice.

As discussed later in this study, the notion of close-up magic is a relatively recent development and Burger's (1987) publication *Performance of Close-up Magic* opens discussions around this type of magic. Alongside the tricks and effects detailed in this book, Burger offers performance tips from his personal experience. The notable shift in the literature at this point is that the idea of considering the performative elements of a close-up magician's set is as important if not more important than the magic itself.

This shift occurs within the pages of the Theory and Art of Magic Press. This publishing house was created out of the McBride's Magic and Mystery School based in Las Vegas, Nevada. The school's ethos is 'to provide a safe, supportive, and inspiring place for you to work on your magic. We work with students of all skill levels and interests' (McBride's Magic and Mystery School, 2019). This signals a shift in the study of magic within the academic world. These publications with the creation of a new *Journal of Performance Magic* legitimises the subject and assists to broaden its reach.

Hass's (2007, 2015a) publications considers specific elements of the close-up magician's routine and offers suggestions for their improvement. Concurrently these effects are considered in performance whilst guiding the reader through potential issues. Hass (2007) offers suggestions in *Transformations: Creating Magic out of Tricks* of appropriate patter in performance with methodologies of moving the action of the trick along whilst cleverly guiding the audience. His (2015a) *Inspirations: performing magic with excellence* details some effects and sleights but also highlights *Presentation, Performance, Philosophy* and *Lifestyle* for the magician*.* These chapters assist the reader to build a show in the professional context whilst also considering *What is Entertainment?*

McBride's own publication (2015) is conceived as a self-help book with a pseudo-medical framework. Entitled *The Show Doctor* it creates a course of magic tuition from initial thoughts of becoming a magician to continuous professional development. It offers a symptom, diagnosis and remedy for common magic performance concerns. For example, within Chapter Twelve *Overweight* the ailment described as 'bulging pockets [and] over-filled props'

(McBride, 2015, p.63) and then offers observations, self-examination in order to provide a solution to the management of props. These remedies stem from McBride's several decades of performance experience and in excess of twenty-five years of the McBride Magic and Mystery School.

Within this school, Burger and McBride (2003) has developed the concept of the *Four Archetypes of the Magician*. McBride charts the development of the magician through four stages or archetypes; being *Trickster, Sorcerer, Oracle and Sage.* Each category highlights the personality traits through the four signs of *Air, Fire, Water and Earth respectively.* It illustrates the four stages of a magician's development much akin to Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man speech in *As You Like It*. McBride's Magic and Mystery School uses this pictorial reference to assist the amateur, the student and the professional. This is the first occasion that something strikingly visual has been produced as a representation of how to improve a magic performance and reiterates the need for an easily accessible analytic tool for the close-up magician. Within the same publication, Burger and McBride (2003) offers the Mystery School's *Seven Stages of Show Flow*.

00. Preshow
01. En-trance
02. Welcoming
03. Feature
04. Audience Participation
05. Storytelling
06. Big Vision
07. Bows/Finale.

This show flow structure is reminiscent of Fitzkee's 'certain fundamentals' (1943, pp.24-25). Fitzkee details the twenty fundamentals of the magician, considering preparation, rehearsal and performance within. They include *Music, Rhythm, Comedy, Pointing,* and *Timing.* Fitzkee continues to highlight eighteen further elements on the 'selling of the material' which is fundamentally the performance; notably *Group Coordination, Careful Routing, Efficient Pacing and Effortless Skill.* In Earl's (2017, p.xvii) *Less is More* publication he suggests that 'magic performances have three major channels of expression: the technical act itself, the verbal presentation, and the physicality of the performer'. He considers the simplicity of performance, and the need to reduce the entire magic performance to a sense of simplicity.

That is not to suggest that the tricks, effects or performance are simple, but the complexities of props, words and gesture are stripped back much akin to Jerzy Grotowski's (2003) theatrical performances.

Burger's (2017) work entitled *Teaching Magic: A Book for Students and Teachers of the Art* is aimed at students and, more progressively, teachers of the art of magic. This publication offers essays on the instruction of magic from both points of view; student and tutor. It considers what it is to be a student of the art, and similarly a teacher whilst commenting that 'the first hypothesis is that many magicians do not want to see themselves as students (2017, p.1). The teaching of magic has previously been found within the pages of many other publications through the explanation of tricks, sleights and effects and the sharing of performance experiences from fellow professional and amateur magicians. Instead Burger (2017) considers the teacher as a separate entity and addresses some of the chapters therein to the support and encouragement of educators. He suggests that 'students need to understand and appreciate the basics' and both the tutor, and the student alike must understand the need of sacrifice (Burger, 2017, pp.7-8). Burger argues that since magic is a performance art, 'there is a practical, hands-on dimension to it. And with a performance there is also immediate evaluation: an audience's enthusiastic applause or their bored indifference' (2017, p.6). He offers sage advice to the tutor and the student from practice, to creating, to performing and finally to the difficult evaluation; 'critiquing oneself is difficult because of self-deception. Self-deception might be thought of as one of the primary diseases of performer of any art form' (2017, p.25).

He continues in his seventh essay (Burger, 2017, pp. 60-61) to explain why the 'gift of failure' is the greatest gift of all. There is a deep understanding here of the need to learn, rehearse, perform and fail; and therefore, how this circle continues throughout a professional career. Burger (2017) echoes Burger and McBride (2003) in his approach to magic and quotes Hass (2015a, p.32) in his suggestion of how to create a piece of magic.

1. Find excellent material
2. Practice the parts
3. Create good words
4. Memorize those words
5. Rehearse the whole
6. Perform it (over and over and over)
7. At every step, go back and revise the work at previous

stages as necessary.

The similarities between Burger and McBride (2003), Hass (2015a) and Burger (2017) are not surprising that they are the senior management team at McBride's Magic and Mystery School. Burger continues to offer several *Performance Pieces* which are created as off-the-shelf scripted routines for the student to use verbatim. The notion of a *secret formula* to magic is also mentioned in Marshall (1980, p.9),

> 'The ABC secret formula for learning magic
>
> A.   Learn how the trick is done
> B.   Learn how to do it
> C.   Figure out how to present it'.

Although the rhetoric in 'C' is a little less exposing or formulaic, it does have the basic required ideology, even if a little too simplistic. Marshall (1980, p.12) continues to discuss the necessity of performing carefully chosen words, akin to Hass (2015a), by suggesting that 'no matter how smooth your delivery, if you do not provide an amusing narrative to go along with your actions, the trick is likely to fall flat'. '*Engaging'* can be substituted for *'amusing'* as not all narratives in magic are funny; but the necessity for the narrative to be engaging is paramount.

Tamariz (2007) aligned the presentation of magic in his *The Five Points of Magic.* He suggests that the eyes, voice, hands, body and feet can be trained to create magic of a better quality (Tamariz, 2007, p.2). The perfection of the trick in performance is considered by Tamariz (2014, p.3) who states that 'when a trick or routine has been carefully studied and resolved, when it has been well performed and you manage to astonish your audience, is it already perfect? Not necessarily. Something may be missing'. He continues to intimate that the working professional magician needs to find out how a spectator's mind works and 'determine the kind of impact produced in their minds' (Tamariz, 2014, p.3).

It should be highlighted here that the modern magician does not entirely rely on the printed word and face-to-face conversations with working professionals. There are many other outlets for betterment of their craft. Although The Magic Circle is one of the most esteemed magic societies in the world, local regional magic clubs and societies exist too, where experiences are shared verbally. Similarly, there are several magic magazines published on a monthly basis, most notably *The Magic Circular, Magic Scene, Genii Magazine and Penguin*

Magic. They offer features and promotions but significant to this paper they offer advice on all elements of magic from working professionals across the world. Burger (2017, p.49) critiques writing in magic magazines as 'descriptive ... or informational' – possibly a suggestion that they cannot simply exist together. This is not the case.

The academic world has begun to discuss the performance of magic through a new journal publication. The *Journal of Performance Magic* is an online journal published by the University of Huddersfield under the editorship of Nik Taylor (University of Huddersfield) and Stuart Nolan (Lancaster University) which has produced five volumes[13] since 2013. Its central ethos is 'intended to serve a wide and international academic and non-(traditional) academic community' (*Journal of Performance Magic*, 2019). This publication allows the academic community to contribute to this field of study. Within the five volumes of the journal articles include *The Development of Socialist Magic* (Saville, 2013), *Framing Performance Magic* (Landman, 2013) and *After the Prestige: A Postmodern Analysis of Penn and Teller* (Miller and Zompetti, 2015). A wide range of themes and academic discussions are present in this journal including a discussion of the different approaches to sleight of hand and a discussion on the reworkings of classic magic routines for a female magician. The use of the female form is much discussed in this journal. It highlights the need to be cognisant of the appalling way women have been treated historically (prised into small places, cut in two and created as an image of a servant) and how the female form as a sexual object has been used.

Saville (2013) analyses his own performance whilst considering the methodology of the performance, offering the audience an explanation of the magic effect. He also shares a different method of performing the same trick and contextualises his own magic against magic luminaries such as Robert-Houdin and Derren Brown. Saville considers how he develops his own script through necessity appose to utilising a theoretical framework.

Landman (2013) creates a '*Typology of Performance Magic'* in three sections, (1) Magic, (2) Mentalism and (3) Mystery Entertainment. He divides these into subsections to explore the following in each category; 'Typical Effects, 'Typical Materials', 'Frame', 'Contract', 'The Engagement With Audience', 'Discourse' and 'Popular Exemplars'. This new methodology

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[13] There is one issue per volume.

creates the opportunities for the magician to improve their practice using this typology, but it does not afford the magician an appropriate analytic tool.

There is a diversity of topics within the journal stretching through the above to Miller and Zompetti's, (2015) discussion that Penn and Teller challenge the metanarrative and break some of the magical performer – audience bonds, to Taylor's (2018) consideration of how Bizarre Magic is blurring the lines between performance magic and real magic. These articles consider the performative side of magic whilst highlighting the need for magic to exist either on its own terms or within some subversion thereof. Corrigan (2018) reiterates the fundamentals of magic written within all relevant publications that 'entertainment is always about the audience's emotions' and that 'a good magic trick should spark wonder'.

Throughout the literature on magic in performance and other mechanics books, there is an increasing need for the formal academic performative dismantling of a set of close-up magic. This occurs in the twenty-first century as 'performance magic [becomes] less formal' (Landman. 2018) through the development of the street magician from Zenon through Blaine to Dynamo and Troy. Magic is the art form, but the presentation of that art creates the wonder for 'magic can function as a significant means to disrupt and subvert an audience's sense of reality' (Landman, 2018). At the current time there does not exist, outside McBride's archetypes model, a fully usable analytic tool, that can be internally reflective and outwardly critical.

Chapter Two – Methodology

The aim of this research is to create a new *System* to assist the close-up magician, at any stage of their professional development, to improve their magic in performance. Kowzan's (1968) *System* for the analysis of a piece of live theatre is the starting point and basis of a new workable *System*. This was a Practice-led PhD by Alternative Format which includes a study and a viva performance highlighting the practical elements of the new *System* in action.

This study considers the methods of the close-up magician prior to, during and after a performance in order to create a reflexive arts practitioner.

The research design incorporated interviews, performance observations and reflections on the writer's own practice, whilst constantly upskilling his close-up magic practice.

The terms *Magical*, *Mystery* and *Wonder* required definition and application in relation to this study. The notion of the *Magical* exists throughout temporalities, folklore and children's fairy tales. The *Magical* 'is not limited to childhood' because 'even in adulthood magical thinking plays a role in behaviour' (Evans *et al.,* 2002). The term *Magical* can relate to magic, or something produced by magic or through a sense of mystical occurrence. For the purposes of this study, the term pertains to performance magic in relation to the physical, vocal and natural response from an audience and is not linked to the supernatural and the world of witches, hexes and medicine men. The majority of the professional magic performers 'do not argue that they wield supernatural powers' (Ryan, 2012) but possess the sleight of hand and performative skills to amaze an audience. Although aside from the mythical lands of unicorns, it is vitally important that the *Magical* retains a sense of reality; it is essential that 'the magic is made to seem plausible' (Johnston, 2015).

Mystery resides in the unknown either through a lack of understanding or knowledge, or the without definition. The word has been used through history as a marker for the unexplained. From the unexplainable nature of the Bermuda Triangle to the lost ten days of Agatha Christie the mysterious has always fascinated humans. For the purposes of this study *Mystery* is linked to the lack of explanation of the methodology of the trick or effect in the eyes of the audience; the *Mystery* of how the magician achieved that outcome. *Mystery* is inextricably linked to

Magical and *Wonder* and defines the 'inconclusively explored … [and the] unaccountable' (West, 1968, p.4).

Wonder is the manifestation of an audience's amazement especially in relation to a magic trick and is located 'in the magician's skills and craft' (Nadis, 2005, p.137). A sense of *Wonder* can be experienced either *en masse* in an auditorium or in the confines of a close-up magic performance. The magician ensures that the sense of *Wonder* is woven within their performance in order that 'a spectator's sense of wonder may be provoked … through glimpses of the previously unseen or seemingly impossible' (Nadis, 2005, p.xii). It is noted here that *Wonder* does not solely reside in the emotions of children, but within all of humanity.

The professional practices of Fay Presto were considered through first-hand observations of her close-up magic performances, and through in-depth one-on-one interviews across the entire study. Presto was contacted in the initial stages of the research via email and remained the integral part of the study by using her practices and experience as the professional industry gold standard. Presto has over thirty-five years of performance practice as a close-up and stage magician. She has several London residencies and continues to appear on the cabaret circuit. It was essential for the credibility of this study that a Member of the Inner Magic Circle (the society's highest degree) was an integral part of both the practical and theoretical elements. Presto shared her experiences with the author and mentored him through the upskilling of his professional practice, with a view to becoming a Member of The Magic Circle and to opening previously closed doors within the *World of Magic*. Arguably Presto created close-up magic within the United Kingdom[14], and therefore she was the perfect magician mentor. Although Presto has no formal performance training, and developed her magic through practical experience, she has remained at the pinnacle of her profession for over thirty-five years performing 'for the likes of Sting, Madonna [and] Elton John' (Fay Presto, 2011).

The gaining of membership of The Magic Circle was of paramount importance not only to have international recognition for the author's magic skills, but also to be able to gain access

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[14]The question of Fay Presto inventing close-up magic in the United Kingdom is discussed further in chapter three.

to their extensive library of books, periodicals, in house magazine and DVDs. The so-called *House of 10,000 Secrets*, the home to The Magic Circle, contains decades worth of magic memorabilia and a significant lending and reference library on all elements of magic. This library was utilised during this study for some of the theoretical and practical publications, including some rare seminal works.

Research within arts subjects is a relatively new concept. It considers how the artist's practice can inform their research and the extent to which the practice itself can be considered research. Finley (2007) suggests that 'arts-based research is difficult to characterize because its form and methods vary' and that it 'makes use of diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world'. By the very nature of the arts-based subjects it is impossible to create a standardised framework for research and enquiry. There is a consistent understanding in the literature that 'arts-based research involves processes of discovery and invention' (Finley, 2007) and that 'in its broadest sense, practice-led research is circumscribed by an equally important emphasis placed on the artist-practitioner, the creative product and the critical process' (Sullivan, 2014). The created artefact holds the same significance and relevance as the critical reflection of the process.

It is important to state that arts-based enquiry as research is in its infancy, and that it took time for this type of research to gain credibility. Eisner (2007) comments that art as research has not been entirely secure within academia. The arts traditionally have been regarded as 'ornamental or emotional in character'. Through the latter half of the last century and the beginning of the 21st century, practice as research (research using practical elements) develops as a 'well-established approach to using creative performance as a method of inquiry in universities' (Kershaw, 2014). This new way of researching can offer further insights into the human condition as 'in social research, performance can serve many research purposes, including consciousness-raising, empowerment, emancipation, political agenda, discovery, exploitation, and education' (Leavy, 2015, p.173). Leavy continues to highlight that the notion of performance can be used 'as an entire research method' and performance 'is therefore an investigation and a representation'. These two concepts of investigation and artefact are evident in all arts-based research and are used here.

Saldana (1999) discusses the skill set of the arts-based researcher in relation to their 'foundational qualitative research skills'. These include, 'enhanced sensory awareness and

observation skills, enabling an attuned sensitivity to fieldwork environments, and an ability to deconstruct and analyse character'. Heightened sensory skills are essential in arts-based research and of paramount importance to this study. Both practice and research are essential to the creation of the new *Issitt 12-point System* for the close-up magician. Collins (2019, p.20) states that 'research in the creative industries tends to use both theory and practice, and the research problem at hand will interact between both of these worlds'. This study utilises extant performance theory and observations of practice to create a pedagogical and practice enhancing *System* for the close-up magician.

The research paradigm for this study is interpretivism whilst incorporating visual, textual and narrative analysis. The practical nature of this study, especially in tandem with the Viva Performance element, and the art-based research rejects the positivist worldview. The experiences of both the performer and the audience have shaped this study and have become the basis of the creation of a new *System* for close-up magic. This reflection is essential in a study into the performative qualities of close-up magic. As Collins (2019, p.11) suggests 'the key concepts of a research project include a combination of critical reflection on the theory [and] critical reflection on yourself'; Collins continues to highlight the distilled nature of the critical reflection being 'theory with self, self with practice and practice with theory.' The reflective circle of theory-practice-theory is essential to the methodology of this study. The performance of the close-up magician cannot exist in isolation of performance theory as they are inextricably linked through theory and practice.

In order to consider the creation of a new pedagogic and analytic tool for the close-up magician, it is important to consider the nature of an interpretivist approach. This study considers the theoretical forms of theory and practice and how theory can help shape and define that practice with a view to the improvement of skills. This enhancement of a close-up magician's skill set is the progressive performer's goal in using theory to inform practice. Interpretivism affords the arts researcher the foundation and structure of their study and the interplay therein. Collins (2019, p.40) states that 'interpretivism has expanded our conception of what constitutes a valid research design'; the notion that arts-based research is a credible and academic enquiry. This collision between theory and practice is essential as Collins (2019, p.39) states 'the interplay between a conscious, meaning-making subject and the objects that

present themselves to our perception is what characterises interpretivism'. This practice of the close-up magician as performer necessitates an interpretivist approach to research.

Within an interpretive approach, this study uses the premise of practice-based research as a starting point. Smith and Dean (2014, p.5) suggest that 'the term practice-led research and its affiliates (practice-based research, practice as research) are employed to make two arguments about practice which are often overlapping and interlinked'. They continue that the creative work is a type of research and that the creative practice is essential within the model of practice-based research. When considering a research question within close-up magic it is essential to combine the creative practice with the theoretical understanding of the academic. Practice informs theory which, in turn, informs practice, and so on. This research circle not only exists to fulfil the need of each element but also to provide a critical framework of academic stability within a world of performance. The chosen approach for this study is interpretation within a practice-based research framework considering the reflexive nature of performance and inquiry alongside observations of practice and interventions. This study will consider the current practical performance ability of close-up magicians with a view to creating a new pedagogical tool and academic framework. This methodology will draw upon strands within narrative, textual and performance theories.

Critical personal reflexion is at the heart of this methodology, considering the practice of the writer, the expert and the apprentice. This academic stop to consider the practice in the field of close-up magic is essential to the creation of a new *System*. Sullivan (2014) comments that 'practice-led research … is supported by critical reflection and reflexive action'; the introspection of the performer and practitioner is essential here.

Sullivan (2014) continues that 'practice-led research makes good use of this creative and critical process and may provide novel perspectives in reviewing existing knowledge'; this study considers existing knowledge within the *World of Magic*, performance theory, narratology, play theory and textual analysis as its theoretical framework.

Kowzan's (1968) system detailed a methodology for the successful analysis of a piece of live theatre with a view to affecting change and development. The theories of Stanislavski will be used to illustrate the methodology of reimagining the work of Kowzan (1968).

Further interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis including Derren Brown, Paul Zenon, and a round table discussion held in Las Vegas with Dr Larry Hass, Eugene Burger, Lance Burton and Fielding West. These interviews were semi-structured with specific research questions and a full explanation of the *Issitt 12-point System* in order to aid discussions. All interviews were recorded. The biographies of interviewees are at the end of this study.

The writer has observed over fifty close-up magic performances including the Close-Up Magician of the Year competitions at The Magic Circle headquarters in London. The author has attended The Blackpool Magic Convention, the largest magic convention in the world, over the past five years to gain valuable experience from lectures of working professional magicians and witnessing magic in performance first-hand. He has been proud to lecture at The Magic Circle headquarters on two occasions highlighting his research. He has performed across the country in order to distil his practice and develop his magic in performance skills.

The methodology of this research study has been wide ranging not only in personal developmental experiences for the writer but also into the *World of Magic*.

Chapter Three – Performance Theory and Actor Training

Initially this chapter considers the history and development of Performance Theory and their application to the performance of close-up magic. The theoretical and practical intersection of magic and performance theory and the creation of a new 12-point analytic *System* will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

This chapter will utilise Kowzan's (1968) 13-point *System* as a basis and consider how to reimagine it for the close-up magician. It will forge links between the principles of Konstantin Stanislavski and the close-up magician. Stanislavski's *system* is the 'most important development in the history of acting in the West and [has] tremendous impact on acting and theatre today' (Whyman, 2013, p.1), and therefore it can be applied to the practice of the close-up magician.

Performance Theory

Emerging performance theory of the latter half of the twentieth century can be crudely described using Bentley's (1965) description. He states that performance is merely 'A impersonates B while C looks on' (Bentley, 1965, p.150) and although this is a rudimentary view of performance, it is wholly accurate. Whether this performance is drama or musical theatre the principle holds. Specifically, with reference to 'A impersonating B', performers rarely play themselves on stage; they are creating and performing a character. But is the magician truly playing a role or performing an extension of themselves? There is a quotation in magic circles that has fuelled much controversy and discussion in the World of Magic; 'a conjuror is not a juggler; he is an actor playing the part of a magician' (Robert-Houdin, 1878, p.43). Robert-Houdin suggests here that the magician is playing the role of magician or potentially an exaggerated version of themselves. This was the first notional comparison between the magician and the actor.

To aid in the creation of a new System, it is pertinent to chart the development of performance and actor training theory. Schechner is the natural start of this discussion. Schechner (2013, p. 2) highlights this need by describing the 'relationship between studying performance and doing performance [as] integral'. This separation of the *studying* and the

doing of performance is paramount to understand the craft and development of the close-up magician as performer. One can study performance within a theoretical context, but it only becomes validated by praxis. The practical application of the theoretical is vitally important to all types of performers and something that can be overlooked within the magic community. The ability to take a close-up magician through the principles of performance theory with a view to developing their performance practice is the ultimate goal of this study and will lead to the new 12-point *System* being redeveloped for other performance professionals and genres. Taking a magician with exceptional magical skill, dexterity, and teaching them performance practice will enhance and develop their own performance ability.

It is important here to note that the development of performance theory and the development of a system of actor training are two distinctive elements, and as such were created and developed at different periods in time. Actor training through Stanislavski was formalised in the latter half of the nineteenth century whilst performance theory is a relatively new subject developing from theories in the second half of the twentieth century. 'Performance studies is gaining in importance and acceptance' (Schechner, 2006, p.5) and continues to gain momentum.

Schechner (2013, p.1-2) separates performance studies into four categories or definitions.

1.   Behaviour is the "object of study" of performance studies
2.   "artistic practice"
3.   fieldwork as "participant observation" – adapted from anthropology
4.   actively involved in social practices and advocacies.

The 'social practices' element of this categorisation is not strictly within the scope of this study; whereas the other three are the basis for performance theory development. Schechner highlights the need for the observation of behaviours in order to replicate them in performance. The casual observation of other human beings undertaking their daily lives is the perfect source material for the actor in training, and therefore there is something to be gleaned here for the close-up magician. It is not essential for the close-up magician to observe human behaviour in the same fashion as the actor in training, but the understanding of the need to watch and observe is essential. The close-up magician must understand the nature

of performance and actor training in order to fully develop their own practices and further enhance their performances. The main purpose of the close-up magician is to entertain and there needs to be a human connection created between the close-up magician and the audience.

The second of Schechner's categories is equally as important; the need for artistic practice: the practice of the art of the close-up magician (magic) and the practice of the art of performance. This notion will be further developed in chapter four. Schechner highlights the need for artistic betterment, the need for improving one's own professional performance practice and the need to become a reflexive practitioner. This notion of the reflexive practitioner in relation to the close-up magician must manifest itself as *magician as reflexive magician* and *magician as reflexive performer*. Although these two elements may seem similar their focus is quite different. The former highlights the need for the close-up magician to consider the art of the trick or effect – the handling of the cards or the rope, for example whereas the latter requires them to examine their performance away from the mechanics of the trick. Close-up magicians are well versed in handling props and effects but sometimes to the detriment of the performance qualities of their routines.

The performer not only uses performance theory in their practice but observations of the human condition. 'A performance scholar looks at and considers everything' (Schechner, 2006, p.2), and although this study will not suggest that the close-up magician needs to consider everything as part of their performance, it is worth noting that anything can be used as a source for the performer; and that the close-up magician *is* a performer.

Goffman (1959, p.15-16) categorises performance 'as all activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants'. Goffman's theories of performance stem from his investigations into the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and its sociological viewpoint. Schechner (2013) continues this consideration of performance within eight categories. These categories encompass all elements of the human condition and therefore further assist the performance. Schechner's (2013, p.31) eight variants of performances are,

> 1 in everyday life – cooking, socializing, "just living"
> 2 in the arts
> 3 in sports and other popular entertainments

4 in business
5 in technology
6 in sex
7 in ritual – sacred and secular
8 in play.

The art and therefore performance of the close-up magician is evident in number 2 'in the arts' and in 7 'in ritual' if the methodology of the effect or trick can be seen as secularly ritualistic. The repetition of the mechanics of a trick is ritual when the magician is practicing whereas the outcome of the rehearsal is rooted in 'the arts' in number 2. There is an inherent overlapping of these categories. The ritual is the craft of the close-up magician whereas the performance elements and audience relationship are the art.

A close-up magician's performance is an amalgam of several different elements. Some of these elements pertain to the effect or methodology of the trick being performed and others to the performance itself. It is therefore worth considering these elements in relation to each other.

Kowzan's 13-point Sign System

The basis of this study is a reworking of Kowzan's (1968) 13-point system for live performance and applying it to close-up magic. Kowzan (1968) created a 13-point system to assist in the scrutiny of a theatrical performance. It is based on his analysis of performances in the theatre in the 1940s and is the foundation of a modern *System* for the performance of a close-up magician.

Kowzan (1968) asserted, at the time, that 'very little attention has been given to the semiology of art' and therefore began the creation of a sign system for live performances. He noted a serious concern, namely that the 'tendency to reduce all the problems of signs to language is perhaps the principal reason why semiology deals so little with arts'. His comments pertain to the linguistic nature of the categorisation of signs in the arts and suggested that the 'spectacle uses the word as well as non-linguistic system of signification'.

Kowzan (1968) commented that theatre is more than literature and that a new decoding system was warranted. He analysed a theatrical performance into 13 elements.

Actor	Word	Spoken Text	Time	Visual Signs – Actor
	Tone			
	Mime	Expression of the Body	Time and Space	Auditive Signs – Actor
	Gesture			
	Movement			
	Make-up	Actor's External Appearance	Space	
	Hairstyle			
	Costume			
Outside of Actor	Props	Appearance of the Stage	Time and Space	Visual Signs – Outside of Actor
	Décor			
	Lighting			
	Music	Inarticulate Sounds	Time	Auditive Signs – Outside of Actor
	Sound Effects			

Fig. 1- Kowzan (1968) *Kowzan's 13 Point System*.

Here Kowzan (1968, Fig. 1) considers signs from a theatrical performance in relation to the actor either directly or indirectly; and Fortier (2002, p.18) comments that 'on a fundamental level, much happens and many elements are at work on a theatrical stage' therefore the material is contextually rich.

His *System* was not universally positively received with later criticism centring on that 'Kowzan provides a preliminary and approximate typology of some thirteen systems' (Elam, 2001, p.45). Aston and Savona (2013, p.105) starkly criticise Kowzan (1968) as an 'early attempt to classify the sign-systems of theatre', suggesting that a development away from this system is an academic necessity. Although there were criticisms McAuley (1998) commented Kowzan 'has often been criticised but it forms the basis for nearly every subsequent analyst's attempt to list material signifiers of performance'. The creation of a workable system of decoding signs has been problematic especially as 'Elam presents elaborate charts to account for signification in the theatre and for the structures of signification in dramatic discourse' (Fortier, 2002, p.24). Kowzan is an appropriate starting point for the creation of a new system for close-up magicians and 'the value of Kowzan's work is that it was the first attempt to more beyond the vaguely descriptive level of personal response to something more analytical' (McAuley, 1998).

Linking these elements to the performance of a close-up magician is challenging especially in relation to the situation or performance venue issue. As stated previously, the venue or environment of the close-up magician is the restaurant or wedding venue. When considering Kowzan against the performance of a close-up magician, there are elements which are irrelevant. The decoding of elements 10 through 13, which are related the stage performances, is not pertinent to this study. The close-up magician does not *per se* employ specific lighting, music or sound effects (on the whole) in their performance because of the immediate nature of that performance.

The significance of the other elements in Kowzan remain. The textual elements to the close-up magician's performance through the use of script and patter is of the utmost importance. Rarely is a close-up magician's act silent. The expressions of the body are equally as imperative. These performance elements form the basis of this study's reworking of Kowzan (1968) into a workable decoding *System* for the close-up magician.

In order to reimagine Kowzan (1968), the separate elements of their performance are categorised thus: Technical Ability, Performance, and Audience Relationship. A close-up magician requires all of these elements. Each of these sections can then be realised into four subsections.

The magician's skill set includes Technical Ability, Performance and Audience Relationship, and their related sub-categories. Breaking down a magician's performance into these elements further aids us in the creation of a working approach to performance through analytic and pedagogic reflexion. These separate elements will be detailed in chapter four of this study. The inclusion of Kowzan's table above (Fig. 1) serves as an aid in developing the study baseline argument before further analysis.

Although performance theory is relatively new in academic study, the study of actor training has more of a rich history. Aristotle began the academic discussion on the topic of the theatre and performance citing that the text and plot were more important than the characters and characterisations by the actor (Aristotle, 1997). Aristotle 'dismissed performance as unnecessary for tragedy's effect, making the play text the chief object of the study of theatre' (Zarrilli *et al*., 2010, p.65).

Stanislavskian Theory and Actor Training

Stanislavski was the designer of the first modernist actor training system. His system carefully navigated actors through exercises to instruct them how to build and develop a character. The creation of the system 'established acting as an art, rather than a craft' (Whyman, 2013, p.1). Arguably, actors and magicians are different, and arrive at performance through slightly different routes, but some of the fundamental elements are similar.

A magician is an actor as Robert-Houdin (1878, p.43) explained and therefore it should be possible to mirror an actor training system, such as that of Stanislavski's, for magicians.

There are seven basic principles in Stanislavski's actor training system. They are listed on the left-hand side of the table below (Fig. 2). Important parallels can be drawn from Stanislavski's system and these seven basic principles to codes for the close-up magician. These seven basic Stanislavski elements (left hand side) can be extrapolated to five principles for the close-up magician (right hand side).
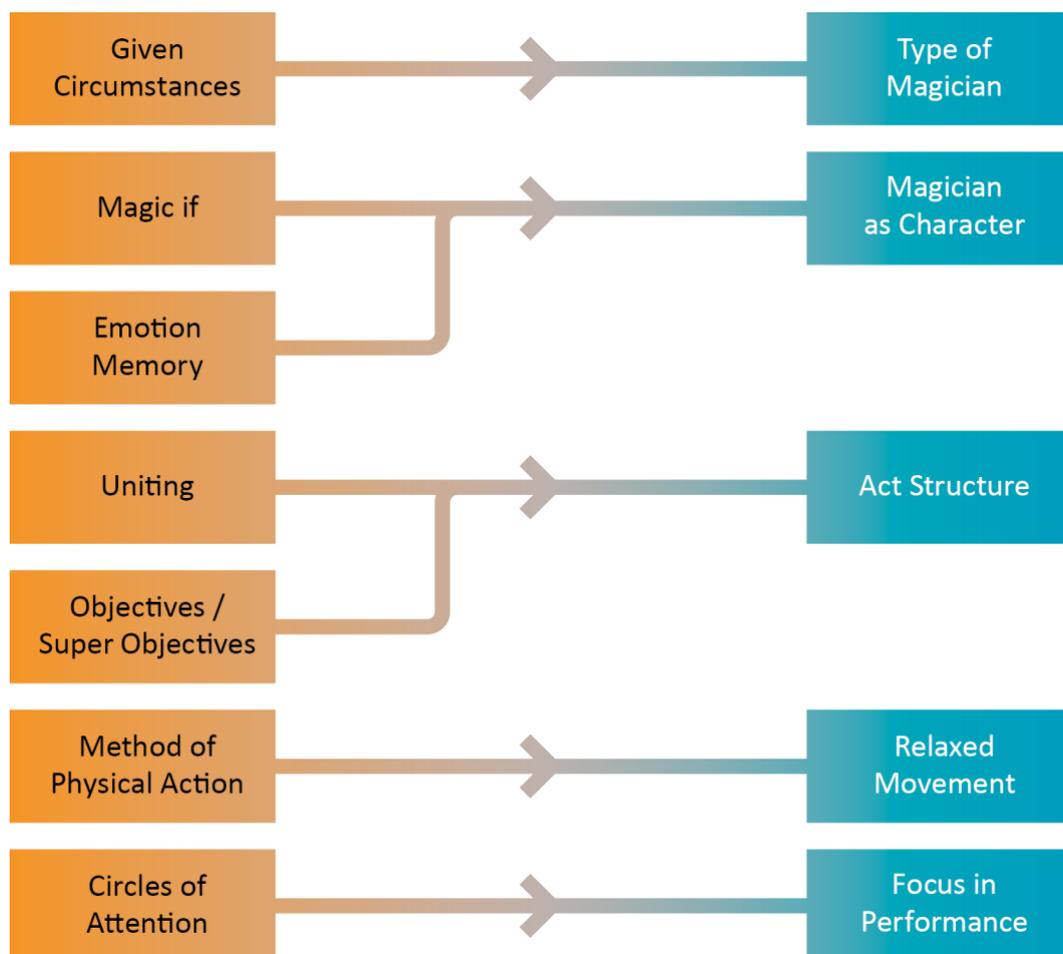
Fig. 2: *Development Towards a Close-up Magician's System*

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The importance for the close-up magician to practice their effects and routines is explicit and relates directly to the need for actors to develop and practice their art. Stanislavski's system is on practice; his works highlight the incremental stages of this process – *An Actor Prepares* (1937), *Building a Character* (1950), and *Creating a Role* (1981). The systematic development of a role for a stage production is at the heart of his system; as is the case for the close-up magician.

Given Circumstances prompts the actor to delve into the play text to extract through detailed textual analysis, the character traits and essential elements of information about their role. As Merlin, (2010, p.101) states, 'the given circumstances are your springboard into the text'; the conditions given to the actor through the play text, the playwright, and given by the director – the setting and staging of the piece. These elements form the basis for character development. Although there is no sense of the rigidity of text for magicians outside of their own patter and script, there are strands of *Given Circumstances* that can aid the magician. The magician needs to determine what kind of magician they are (Self-Knowledge in the *Issitt 12-point System*) – their *Given Circumstances*. Although there are some subtle differences here, it is important to remember that the *Given Circumstances* are the 'basic pieces of information that the writer has given you' (Merlin, 2010, p.101). and although the close-up magician is not gaining information from a text but formulating their own text through their own creation of a routine.

Stanislavski's principles of *Magic If* and *Emotion Memory* are more concerned with the presentation of the performance; the ability to access previously felt emotions (*Emotion Memory*) and replicate them on stage at the appropriate moment. *Magic If* requires the actor to consider what they would do in exactly the same situation as their character. The importance of an actor to be able to access raw and complex emotions at any given time on stage is paramount. Although these two principles are not prescriptive for a close-up magician, there is a parallel that can be drawn. These two principles can be grouped together to form Magician as Character or Magician in Persona (Geoffrey Durham's magical persona of The Great Soprendo). The creation of a character for the magician should not seem any different from the creation of a role through the Stanislavski system. It is merely that the access of *Emotion Memory* is not required to the same level or depth within a close-up magic routine. It is true that the close-up magician could need to portray basic emotions during their

set, but these are unlikely to be complex and may be more exaggerated or comic, as prescribed by the nature of the contemporary magic performance outside of naturalism. The close-up magician needs, through consideration of Type of Magician, to create a base layer for their magician as character, and then through the use of Magician as Character flesh out this character.

The principles of *Uniting* and *Objectives and Super Objectives* link directly to the magician's overall performance. Moving away from the rehearsal methodology or craft of the magician, these principles are centred around the performative elements in *Issitt's 12-point System*. *Uniting* is the method of breaking down a play text into manageable shorter scenes that are then given titles. These shorter scenes aid the actor's memory and the titles give them an additional aide memoir. The *Objectives and Super Objectives* are in relation to the character on stage. Each character in every play has a super objective; something they wish to achieve during the timespan of the play. In order to achieve this larger super objective, several smaller objectives are considered as steppingstones to the final motive. By using the united shorter scenes, an actor can create an objective for their character in each unit – thus helping them to chart the character development. It is true that these strict units and objectives are not required in the same way for the close-up magician but there are some similarities.

These elements can be metamorphosed into Act Structure for the close-up magician. The structure of an act is of paramount importance and can directly affect the audience relationship. For example, place an excellent final trick (one with a large finish which facilitates a considerable audience reaction) in the middle of a close-up magic set and the audience will be wrong-footed with the flow and pace of the set altered. Place this same trick at the end of a magic set and it creates a lasting moment for the audience, cements the magician-audience relationship and creates a talking point for the rest of event away from the magician.

The final two principles transpose to the realm of the close-up magician more explicitly. Methods of Physical Action discusses the need for every movement on stage to be, not only considered and rehearsed, but also with purpose. Every action must come from a moment of truth. This can relate directly to the close-up magician and their movement. Moreover, the magician might be concealing an object about their costume or in their hand. In order to achieve this, especially in relation to a palmed object, the magician needs to ensure that their

arm and hand muscles are not taut. This could give the impression to the audience that something *is* concealed in the apparently empty hand. This understanding of how the body moves and reacts is important to the close-up magician. If the magician is feeling comfortable, then their body language will be communicating the same and the audience will be blissfully unaware of a concealed item.

The concept of *Circles of Attention* gives the actor a point of focus in a scene. This is especially relevant in conventional fourth wall theatre. This type of theatre occurs under the notion that the action is taking place within a room and one wall has been removed to house the audience. In this situation, the audience is never acknowledged or referred to. It creates a more believable situation and can, if successfully achieved, enhance characterisation and performance. The principle of *Circles of Attention* allows the actor to chart their shift in focus during a scene and therefore change their circle of attention from one other character to potentially several. This constantly shifting point of focus defines that actor's performance and creates a frame of reference in the play. Although the focus of the close-up magician is different in the aspect of an acknowledged and participating audience, the principles can assist them. The notion of focus in performance is relevant to any performance in any field. With the close-up magician, the focus is squarely towards their audience. They must be aware of their audience and give the focus to the entire table throughout the performance. This is a question of focus. Therefore, the Stanislavski principle of *Circles of Attention* can become Focus in Performance for the close-up magician.

The basic principles of Stanislavski can therefore be adapted for use for the close-up magician and potentially used with the same exercises as actors in training. The depth of an actor's practice in relation to the creation of a character is fundamentally based on the notion of truth. One must find the truth within a performance in order for the characterisation, and therefore the scene, to hold some kind of significance to the audience; the same can be said of a close-up magician's performance. Although complex layering of characterisation, such as in an actor's practice, would not necessarily be required for the close-up magician there is a need for a basic understanding of character and how to develop and enhance this. The reworking of Kowzan (1968) twinned with the modification of Stanislavski's principles begins to formulate a methodology for the close-up magician. This methodology will suggest how a

magician can train or practice performance elements in relation to improve their practice out
and away from the trick or effect.

Chapter Four - Creation of the New Analytic Tool

The creation of the *Issitt 12-point System* will aid the close-up magician in highlighting the important elements within their set and potentially bring to the foreground some of the more overlooked and neglected elements. This new close-up magic *System* is intended to be an analytic tool for self-reflection and pedagogical criticism. It should be used as a foundation upon which to improve their work, and to start a discussion of practice with the close-up magician. A new process diagram will be created in order to further illustrate the *Issitt 12-point System*, and to assist the close-up magician directly in relation to their own practice.

There are three elements that require discussing at this point; rhetoric, semiotics and communication theory in relation to this new *System*, the audience's suspension of disbelief and the two stories created by the close-up magician for performance. These three components are synthesised to form the theoretical foundation of the *Issitt 12-point System*.

Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* is a treatise on the 'art of persuasion, of convincing other people that what you are saying is true' (Benedetti, 2005, p.7), effectively creating a firm basis for the future academic discussions of oration, performance and magic. He created a hierarchy of elements for the actor to consider; plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song. Without doubt he 'laid the foundations for the study of theatre and performance' (Benedetti, 2005, p.8) with the plot of the play at the forefront. Aristotle (1997, p.112) believed that plot should not be a mere copy of real life but an imitation.

For the purposes of this study, there is a crossover here between semiotics and communication theory, especially in relation to the close-up magician. Modern performance, as categorised as not being situated in the classical form, is concerned with the coding of signs on the stage in order that an audience can decode them during performance. Both elements are equally significant for the semiotician. As Elam (2001, p.29) states 'the semiotician of theatre, in brief, will be equally concerned with modes of *signification* and with resulting acts of *communication*' (Italics in original). The significance of the information being signed in performance is as critical as the method of communication and the receiver's decoding. The *Issitt 12-point System* aligns with the semioticians who believe that 'everything on stage that is presented to spectators is a sign of something else' (Zarrilli *et al.*, 2010, p.452); and with

Littlejohn (1992, p.41) in that 'a *system* is a set of objects or entities that interrelate with one another to form a whole' (italics in original). The newly created *System* for close-up magicians is, at its heart, a checklist of significances to use to improve their set and, in turn, their performance. The semioticians above discuss theatre in a more traditional proscenium arch setting but nevertheless the notion of any space is a performance space (Brook, 1968) directly relates to the close-up magician. The modern close-up magician and the 'modern theatre artists seek to coordinate all of the sign system in a production' (Zarrilli *et al.*, 2010, p.452) even though a close-up magician's staging and setting are theatrically unconventional[15].

The Creation of Two Stories

The close-up magician crafts two stories within a temporal structuralist approach in their performance. The close-up magician needs to interact with the public, the laypersons, to achieve a reaction. This is therefore a structuralist approach to performance, which has 'the advantages of emphasizing the subordination of all contributory elements to a unified whole' (Elam, 2001, p.6): both of the stories are needed to create the 'whole' of the performance. Blackburn (2008, p.365) explains that structuralism is 'the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations', and the basis for the close-up magician's performance is the interaction with members of the public.

Storytelling and the creation of a narrative is at the heart of the human condition. From the earliest creation of language through the retelling of experiences and to the explanations of our daily lives, storytelling is an important facet of our existence. As Thomas (2016, p.4) confirms that 'narrative … is perceived as basic to who we are as human beings, fundamental to exploring how we process time, how memory works and how we come to conceive of our own identities'; at some point in every human's life the need and desire to tell stories will emerge. Performance is no different; plays, musicals and dance create a well-constructed narrative to educate or inform for it is 'an important part of our oral and written culture' (Thomas, 2016, p.1).

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[15] As discussed previously, the performance space of the close-up magician is not a formal stage, or corded off area, but rather a restaurant setting or event.

Aristotle's theories of narratology in his *Poetics* (384-322 BCE) forms the basis of academic discourse on narrative. Aristotle 'offers a taxonomy of elements essential to good storytelling, and presents them as timeless principles of quality and effectiveness' (Mittell, 2017, p.14). He considered the use of plot, character, reasoning and diction for a performed piece of drama, notably tragedies, and noted their hierarchical structure. This theory considers that plot is of paramount importance as it is the 'soul of tragedy' (Aristotle, 1996, p.12), closely followed by character. The structure of a tragedy rests in the creation of a workable plot for performance; a form including a beginning, a middle and an end, and in this strict order. 'A beginning is that which itself does not follow necessarily from anything else, but some second thing naturally exists or occurs after it' (Aristotle, 1996, p.13) hence the relative structural importance of a start and well-constructed beginning. The close-up magician creates stories of character and sleight of hand to create a workable narrative in their performance. Aristotle (1996, p.14) comments that 'when constructing plots and working them out complete with their linguistic expression, one should so far as possible visualize what is happening'. This is essential for the close-up magician; the performance needs to create magic whilst considering the audience's point of view and what is happening. Even though this process is storytelling through magic the importance of the creation of a narrative arc is significant. Collins (2002) further develops this by stating that 'very few writers understand that a story has an arc, not just a beginning, a middle and an end'. In relation to close-up magic, the magician must consider their creation of the narrative arc through the creation of a beginning, a middle and an end whilst shadowing the Story of the close-up magic with the well-crafted Story of the character.

The structuralist approach to narrative has 'become commonplace in many humanities subjects, as well as in the social sciences' (Thomas, 2016, p.28). Todorov (1971) outlines five basic stages of narrative, and although these were not conceived to reside within the world of performance theory there is significant cross over, especially for the close-up magician; they are,

1. A state of equilibrium at the outset
2. A disruption of the equilibrium by some action
3. A recognition that there has been a disruption
4. An attempt to repair the disruption
5. A reinstatement of the initial equilibrium.

Although these five stages were created to expand on the role of narration in literature there is a significant link to close-up magic. If the five stages are taken with reference to magic it is possible to see how the close-up magician uses basic narrative theory to construct their act. Todorov is offering that narrative theory takes an equilibrium, breaks it, and then repairs it back to the same initial state. In short, this is the process of a magic trick. If we consider the *Rope Trick* in Appendix D, then it is possible to reattribute the five stages of narrative to the five stages of this magic trick. It is true that not all magic adheres to this rule, but a significant proportion of close-up magic uses the same narrative thread. Firstly, the magician shows a piece of rope which is complete and not broken, the rope is then broken by the lay person using scissors, the disruption is acknowledged as something has gone wrong. At this point the magician restores the rope to its initial manifestation. The stages of Todorov exactly match the stages of this trick and can be attributed to the majority of magic. Presto's creation of her rope routine perfectly mirrors Todorov's five stages to excellent effect.

Considering Appendix D, Presto's *Rope Routine* at the Champions of Magic UK Tour, we can see at the outset of the video Presto creates a relax atmosphere through the creation of a fantasy-based narrative. Presto also presents the apparatus of the trick; a piece of rope and a pair of scissors. Todorov's disruption of the equilibrium occurs through the initial cutting of the rope. It should be noted here that many magicians perform a rope routine (sometimes called the Professor's Nightmare) but very few of them allow the participant to cut the rope themselves. Presto acknowledges that the correct outcome has not been achieved – the rope lengths are different. These are points two and three in Todorov. Within Appendix D, there is an attempt to re-join the pieces of rope together with a final reinstatement or flourish. Even though this was not Todorov's intention there are striking similarities to the presentation of the magic trick.

The close-up magician crafts two stories prior to and whilst in performance mode. Story Alpha is the story of performance, the character of the magician; whilst Story Beta is the story of the sleight of hand, the manipulation of the props. Both stories exist during the performance

of the close-up magician and travel throughout the close-up magic performance colliding during significant moments[16].
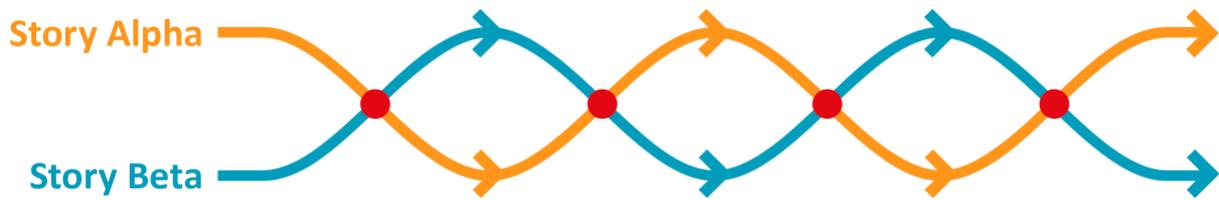
Fig. 3: *Intersections of the Close-up Magician's Stories*

Fig. 3 highlights the trajectory of the two stories (moving from the left to right) and the collision points as the two stories intersect. These collision points are hugely compelling, but in order to explain the collision it is important to highlight the significance of the two stories and their functions within the set of the close-up magician.

The stories have been categorised as Alpha and Beta (Fig. 3) for a specific reason. This diagram is from the viewpoint of the audience. The audience whilst watching a piece of close-up magic see the character and the performance of the magician prior to the technical ability. Story Alpha appears first to the spectator in the performance of close-up magic although it is not created first. Story Beta continues along with Story Alpha but in a supportive capacity. Although Story Alpha occurs first for the audience it is Story Beta that the close-up magician must first attend to in order to create Story Alpha.

The story of the sleight of hand of the magician is the basis for Story Beta. This is the foundation of all magic; the close-up magician must first learn how to handle a pack of playing cards, how to shuffle and how to control cards in the pack effortlessly prior to being able to practice more complicated sleights. This initial practice stage occurs long before any thoughts of performance or thoughts about the creation of a set. They must hone their craft by practicing. This practice and rehearsal stage are vitally important to assist in the creation of a workable and well-received close-up set. The magic set must have structural integrity. As

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[16] Story Alpha and Story Beta both start on the left-hand side of the model as shown in Fig. 3 and travel from left to right during the performance.

Hugard and Braue (2004, p.9) point out, 'to perform card tricks entertainingly you must not only know how the tricks are done, but also how to do them'. This notion of 'how to do them' is fundamental – the desire to practice hard. Many books on magic highlight the need to dedicate hours and months to practicing. This is true for all performing artists regardless of their discipline.

Sleight of hand cannot happen in isolation. Merely showing a sleight of hand move to a member of the public would garner little more than apathetic indifference. The sleight needs to be contextualised. But prior to the inevitable contextualisation of the sleight in a performance setting (Utilising Story Alpha) it is essential to consider other elements within this story.

This is the story of the impossible; the story of the unbelievable. Teller (2012), in an interview, states that 'magic is a form of theatre that depicts impossible events as though they were really happening'. This idea of impossible events feeds directly into Story Beta, the story of the sleight of hand. Without the sleight of hand there would be little with which to amaze or entertain an audience. Story Beta encapsulates several other elements apart from the sleight of hand, namely the manipulation (physical), the trick or effect and the creation of the magic moment of wonder. Within all of these elements is the notion of timing and rhythm. Any performer whether a film actor, a contemporary dancer or an operatic singer will agree that timing and rhythm are essential elements to their performance. The idea of timing is linked to many other professions most notably music. The concept of timing in music is essential, not only for the soloists (voice or instrument) but also for the conductor and the listener. The notion of rhythm and timing is evident in our everyday lives, 'as you pace up and down, or go for a stroll round the block, there's a rhythm you fall into' (Green, 2009, p.38) and not forgetting the constant drum beat of our heart. There is an obvious link here from rhythm to music, but this can also be applied to close-up magic. The magician needs to understand that there is rhythm in magic. Sometimes merely understanding this concept is sufficient, as Green (2009, p.108) states that 'connecting with the pulse of music can be as simple as being consciously aware of it'.

The element of timing and rhythm exists throughout the rehearsal phase and the performance of the close-up magician. Timing is evident in the trick or effect itself; when to perform a sleight of hand move, when to force a card, or simply how many beats a certain

trick has[17]. Timing is also evident in the performance of the trick or effect – the magician must consider the length of time a trick takes. This should be considered and tested in front of an audience.

In the rehearsal phase, the need and importance of repetition is essential. Only when a sleight of hand move, or the workings of a particular trick are second nature (that is to say can be performed without looking at the apparatus or *cognitive awareness* of the movements) then the need for repetition lessens. And the linking of this level of repetition to the performance phase is simple, the better the preparation the better the delivery (performance) of the trick. As Green (2009, p.112) states, 'the power of rhythm is the power of repetition': the close-up magician needs time to improve their manual dexterity in order to fully create Story Beta. The reality of performance of the magic trick can only exist after the close-up magician has created Story Beta and then Story Alpha.

Practice versus Rehearsal

There are two terms which seem to be interchangeable in some of the literature but require definition for this study: Practice and Rehearsal. Usefully, Burger (2017, p.12) confirms that 'rehearsal is different from practice'. Practice leads to Rehearsal and therefore to performance. Practice is skill based whereas Rehearsal is performance based. The close-up magician practices the sleight of hand moves that are the foundation of the craft in isolation; and this repetition leads to improved magic skills, whereas the repetition of Rehearsal leads to improved performance. As McBride (2015, p.55) describes, 'the more you practice and rehearse, the better you will become as a magician'. McBride confirms that these two elements although separate in the skill set of the magician are conjoined in the search for perfection in performance. Burger (2017, p.12) defines 'we practice the parts, we rehearse the whole'; an excellent demarcation of these terms.

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[17] The rule of three is strongly evident in magic performance. Many tricks have three elements to them which, arguably, can create better and stronger audience reactions. The best example of this would the Brainwave Deck – a trick with three reveals which become increasingly more amazing.

The Practice for the close-up magician is 'akin to religious prayers and sacrifice' (Mauss, 2001, p.16), with the constant repetition of sleights and moves at the altar of the mirror, reflecting and emphasising the errors for immediate correction.

'Practice is a vital ingredient of human expertise' (Sloboda *et al.*, 1996) and McBride (2015, p.55) continues with the notion that in order to improve one's skill set in close-up magic, a magician should 'make this practice a regular part of your life', as with a musician's constant repetition. Musicians need to practice regardless of their amateur or professional standard. 'It has been established that amount of practice is a crucial determinant of the acquisition and retention of skills' (Sloboda *et al.*, 1996) and although Sloboda *et al.* are directly speaking about classical musicians, the same can be said for close-up magicians. They continue to discuss the relevance of practicing in isolation and argues that 'practising on its own may be insufficient to produce the highest levels of mastery' (Sloboda *et al.*, 1996). The mastery here is linked to the performance of the close-up magician: the idea that hours of practice will not necessarily manifest themselves as a first-class close-up magic performance.

Many sleights and close-up magic moves require the magician to consider their bodies in a different way – to train their hands or fingers to move unnaturally or to contort. This conditioning of the magician's fingers and hands is essentially the muscle memory of a dancer. Malina (2017) defines muscle memory as 'a subconscious process where the neuromuscular system memorises motor skills' which is aligned to the practice of a close-up magician. Malina continues to discuss the embedding of a movement pattern within the brain to access later and to signify why 'it is possible to learn a skill and be able to return to it at a later point without having to start the entire learning process from the beginning'; here the remembrances of sleights of hand.

As McBride (2015, p.53) states, 'one of the most common challenges for modern performers is their desire to perform material that is inadequately rehearsed and practiced'; the magician needs to practice their manual dexterity (sleight of hand) and routine until they are not concerned about the movements anymore. Again, the Practice comes prior to the Rehearsal which leads to the Performance.

Once the fundamentals of the craft have been practiced then the close-up magician can consider rehearsal for performance. Burger (2017, p.39) accurately comments that 'practice

will make me a better performer [but] rehearsal will help me advance as a performer', the former leading to the latter. The magician must consider the systematic creation of a routine of tricks to create a whole performance. This may only consist of six or seven tricks because of the nature of their performance venue. Ortiz agrees with this and speaking to the magician comments, 'you must have your technique so well perfected that you can perform it with no conscious thought so your mind can focus' (Ortiz, 1995, p. 366).

Successful rehearsing of a magic set can be just as laborious as practice, but it ultimately leads towards a performance. All magicians and theorists agree on the need for worthwhile practice as this can lead to an outstanding audience reaction and Maskelyne and Devant (1911, p.viii) explain perfectly that the magician's 'art does not consist in the things [they] use, nor in the trade secrets and technical process [they] have at [their] command, but in the employment of those facilities with adequate efficiency'.

Character as Persona

The essential facet of performance is character, whether within the Stanislavskian, Brechtian, post-dramatic sense or other, and as such actors needs to consider that characterisation. Close-up magicians are no different. Some magicians create bold characters as the conduit for their magic. The most notable are Sylvester the Jester, Piff the Magic Dragon, The Great Soprendo and Rudy Coby. Although these magicians mainly work on stage and not in close-up magic conditions, their creation and commitment to their characters is noteworthy. John Van Der Put created Piff the Magic Dragon whose aim is to steal as many princesses as possible; Geoffrey Durham's creation of The Great Soprendo worked extensively in television and on stage as an over-enthusiastic Spanish magician; Rudy Coby as a mad scientist; and Sylvester the Jester, a madcap and zany cartoon character for the stage. Although these personas are individual to the magicians, they all must conform to the notion of commitment in performance. But there must be clarity. It is true that character needs to lead the performance whether in acting or magic but there needs to be that commitment to the character as a whole not merely as an addition. Zenon's and Presto's characters in performance are exaggerated versions of themselves. On the importance of character in magic, Zenon (2017) remembers that when considering his magic character, he thought 'I need a jacket … [so] we came up with the leather jacket idea and it kinda stuck'. Character

does not necessarily lead to a complete and detailed costume or change in persona, one's character can rest on a jacket, an accent, a wig or anything.

Considering that the close-up magician can mirror the techniques of the professional actor, as discussed in chapter three, where character or persona is an important factor. In performance everyone performs, that is to say that they portray either a completely different character, as in actors, or a slightly altered version of themselves. As Cohen (2013, p.17) comments that 'it is utterly obvious that the actor is at the centre of his or her character' therefore the magician's persona must include an element of their own personality. The creation of a character is essential and this 'process of creating a character is at the heart of acting and theatre' (Kemp, 2012, p.93). But there is an important distinction between a heightened version of their own personality and the creation of a persona. As the actor fully prepares their characterisation for the stage the close-up magician should consider their characterisations in performance. It is possible for the close-up magician to merely enter performance conditions as themselves but even in this situation there exists an altered version of self. Merlin (2010, p.20) highlights the role of the actor; 'your job as an actor is to prepare a character that you can present to an audience' similarly for the close-up magician. The nature of performing expects a commitment to that performance and the energy to project their character, and magic, to their audience. The security of character, whether exaggeration or persona, allows the performer to react in character or persona to any situation in performance. As the close-up magician's auditorium is a dining table, they need to be responsive to the lay persons. Merlin (2010, p.135) accurately states that the actor 'need[s] the ability to embrace what's happening both on the stage and in the auditorium at one and the same time'. The importance of spontaneity in the performance of close-up magician is essential but the ability to adapt and react requires a solid character foundation – be that exaggerated character or persona.

Audience and Magician Relationship

The relationship between an audience and performer is sacred. It is driven by the performer as 'the audience receives what the performers give' (Leach, 2013, p.182). Audiences in the twenty-first century are 'no longer thought of as merely passive' (Leach, 2013, p.182), they have their part to play in the performance especially within close-up magic. The importance

of the audience is highlighted by Grotowski (1968, p.32) as he suggests that 'at least one spectator is needed to make it a performance', which is confirmed by Bennett (1997, p.228) in that 'the relationship between actor and audience is fundamental to the concept of drama and performance'. Freshwater (2009, p.1) comments that 'the presence of an audience is central to the definition of theatre' and that the relationship between audience and performer 'is indispensable' (Freshwater, 2009, p.2), and therefore for any performance even close-up magic. And this relationship for the magician is essential, not only for the magician in the pursuit of creating and performing Story Alpha and Story Beta but also for the engagement of the audience. There is nowhere to hide as a close-up magician in performance. The unique magician / audience relationship consists of a level of open deception. The magician explains by the nature of their existence that they are going to attempt to subvert reality and make something astonishing occur.

The audience in the setting of a restaurant or wedding venue falls into three categories; a *lay person*, an *audience* and a *participant*. There are subtle differences here. A *lay person* is a member of the public with no knowledge of magic tricks or effects; an *audience* is a group of observers who can react to the performance but take no physical part therein. And finally, a *participant* is the willing, or not, volunteer who interacts directly with the magician from the duration of the trick or routine. It is important to mention that although a *lay person* has no magical knowledge, they will understand what a magic trick is. Leach (2013, p.184) indicates this by postulating that 'no spectator ever comes to the theatre with absolutely no knowledge of how the performance will operate'. Although there is a marked difference between the diner who is approached by a magician and a conventional theatrical audience, the sentiment still relates to both. This unique relationship consists of acceptance of the magic, the persona of the magician and the role of the audience in performance.

Play Theory and the Acceptance of the Game

Neither story can hope to exist in the performance of close-up magic without two other concepts: play theory and the willing suspension of disbelief. The human race are *homo ludens* – 'game-playing man' (Huizinga, 2002), we have an innate need to tell stories. Storytelling is fundamental to our existence. Remembering the important factor for this study

is that the audience, *per se*, have come to the venue for a meal[18] and not expecting any professional entertainment at all; it is therefore fair to state that these two factors of play theory and suspension of disbelief must come into existence.

Once the close-up magician has approached the table of the unsuspecting diners, then an offering and acceptance of the *game* needs to take place. The close-up magician in engaging with the diners is offering a chance to play a *game* with them, a *game* in which the magician will lie and cheat and hopefully show something amazing that may defy logical explanation. As Nelms (1969, p.196) states, 'a successful conjuring theme baffles logic by providing a false frame of reference', and although the frame of reference is false the layperson must enter into an agreement to play the *game*, for 'all play is a voluntary activity' (Huizinga, 2002, p.7). Once the acceptance of the *rules* has been obtained then the close-up magician can continue with their set. It is vitally important that the layperson enters into the subterfuge by willingly accepting the terms of the *game*, namely that the magician will lie and cheat. The *game* will be played from the moment of acceptance until the end of the close-up magician's set because 'play begins, and then at a certain moment is "over"' (Huizinga, 2002, p.9).

The close-up magician's performance space is the table at the restaurant, and nothing more. There is no need for external lighting, extravagant scenery or staging as the close-up magician creates their own performance space. 'In a close-up situation, the environment is highly changeable' (Middleton, 2011, p.25) as the spaces primarily function as restaurants. By the very nature of the close-up magician entering the personal space of the diners they are creating their own performance space on and around the specified table. The close-up magician can demark this position by the suggestion of moving any diners to the side to create a little more performance space or to move crockery or cutlery to create practical table space. It is vitally important that the close-up magician delineates their performance space, and although Huizinga here is discussing non-secular magic it is still pertinent to close-up magic today; 'the magician … begins his works by circumscribing his sacred space' (Huizinga, 2002, p.20). To the close-up magician, the tables is their sacred performance space.

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[18] Using the assumption that the venue for a close-up magician is a restaurant.

Acceptance of the *game* is the notion of accepting the terms of *play and game* intellectually as well as physically. The *game* in question is the observance of a close-up magician, an acceptance of the terms of *play* and a suspension of disbelief. *Play* has to include the intellectual and not merely physical engagement. 'In acknowledging play you acknowledge mind, for whatever else play is, it is not matter' (Huizinga, 2002, p.3) and within this idea is the suspension of disbelief.

Willing Suspension of Disbelief

Suspension of disbelief is an important concept for the close-up magician. The performance of a close-up magician is not within the realm of reality perceived or otherwise; it is sited somewhere betwixt reality and fantasy. That is not to say that the performance in question is pure fantasy at all, but something that does not fully lie within a known reality. We know that within the performance of close-up magic the normal rules of matter and existence are blurred by the legerdemain. They intentionally invite the audience into their form of subverted reality where the impossible can appear possible.

The ideology of a *willing suspension of disbelief* stems from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. Coleridge (2009, p.270), whilst discussing lyrical ballads, comments that poetic faith creates the necessity for a suspension of disbelief in order to create a response to the artefact: the need for the reader of poetry to understand the poetic. The nature of the art form and the reader's willing suspension of their disbelief is at the heart of Coleridge's coining of the phrase. Tomko (2016, p.1) further develops this ideology stating that 'in common parlance, it is used to describe our acceptance in art of the most fantastic worlds whose premises, actions, or outcomes we would question or reject in reality' whilst Davis (2007) details the shift of usage 'to refer to the conditionality of theatrical reception'. The audience within this construct are required to pause their appreciation of the logical in favour of *entertainment deception*. Uddin (2014) states that the 'willing suspension of disbelief means the suspension of an analytical function of the mind by the reader himself, as a preparation for believing things he is reading.' The same is true for the lay person watching a piece of close-up magic. Their phenomenological response to the piece of close-up magic creates a false memory which creates truly unbelievable magic. The recollections of the close-up magic trick must

reside in the mind of the audience ultimately because the trick resides within the consciousness of the audience.

Brecht continued the academic critique of a willing suspension of disbelief within a theatrical performance. Barnett (2015, p.74) comments that Brecht proposed 'that the theatre submits everything we hold to be natural to scrutiny'. Brecht considered that his audiences should remain distant from the on-stage actions and that they should have the capacity for a cerebral response to the performance. He wanted to remove the emotional response from his theatre allowing his performance plays to act as propaganda and pedagogical tools. This contra-response to the theories of Stanislavski detailed that his 'actors should not "live" characters but "demonstrate" them to spectators'; as 'Brecht sought a radical separation of actors from characters enabling each to operate independently' (Martin and Bial, 2000, p.5). Within the *World of Magic,* the audience's suspension of disbelief is essential to the subterfuge of the close-up magician's performance. This theory highlights the need 'to perceive reality without collapsing it to fit particular agendas' (Barnett, 2015, pp. 76-77). The concept of the narrator in a Brechtian performance is to foster a cerebral link between the actors and the audience has striking similarities to the close-up magician. In close-up magic the magician acts as their own narrator creating a dual narrative of the two stories in order to create a moment of wonder. By the close-up magician's use of a 'direct and indirect use of a narrator' (Brooker, 2008) as in Brechtian theatre they can disguise their sleight of hand and employ misdirection. Barnett's (2015, p.77) comment about Brechtian theatre could be redefined for close-up magic; he considers that Brechtian theatre is 'making the familiar strange'.

As adults, we suspend our disbelief throughout our daily lives. Be it the glimpse of something impossible or strange out of the corner of our eyes, or the watching of a film, or during imaginative play with our children, the idea of the suspension of disbelief is not new to us. When watching an animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) for example, we are aware that the narrative and characters exist in the world of fantasy but we accept these falsehoods as irrelevant in order to enjoy the film – this willing suspension of disbelief occurs without careful consideration, it is an audience's gift to the performance.

When we engage in imaginative play with our children, we see the rising volcanic magma seeping through the carpet in the living room and the monsters next to the television set, but we accept these as *normal* within the parameters of the *game*. Close-up magic is no different,

the spectators need to suspend their disbelief to some degree during the performance; for magic in performance is no different to theatre in this regard as 'theater is often said to require the willing suspension of disbelief' (Isherwood, 2013).

A layperson watching magic may allow the performance to overtake them and their enjoyment shine through or alternatively they may try to work out how the trick or effect was realised. Considering the fact that 'a trickster's chief aim is to deceive his audience about the way his tricks are done' (Nelms, 1969, p.19), most adults will have an eye on working out how the effect was achieved. If an 'actor on stage is wholly absorbed in his playing but is all the time conscious of "the play"' (Huizinga, 2002, p.18) then the same is true of the close-up magician. Although they are absorbed in their performance, they are also conscious of their deceptiveness. This is where Story Alpha and Story Beta come into significance. Story Alpha is the close-up magician being absorbed in their own performance, characterisation and *World of Magic* whereas the underlying technical ability (dexterity) of the magician, Story Beta, is somewhat hidden but the close-up magician is fully aware of its existence during performance and the same can be said of the layperson.

Although the magician has offered the layperson (the audience) the rules of the *game* in the acceptance of their magical skills, it is not the end of the layperson's engagement outside of the suspension of disbelief. There is a significant belief system running through the layperson during a magic trick. They are aware that the magician is trying to fool them and therefore are accepting the rules of *play* and deception, but they understand that they are watching a magic trick. This duality creates a juxtaposition in the mind of the layperson: they understand that the world of the magician is *magical* and that potentially some actions may not be able to be explained, but they are also aware that these tricks are occurring in the real world, and hence are bound by the laws of nature. The close-up magician who makes a ten-pound note float in mid-air is not summoning up the powers of levitation to cheat the audience, but merely engaging the audience on an entertainment level and challenging them to find the method, and conversely enjoy the moment. The notion of suspension of disbelief, and therefore misdirection, is paramount and is the driving force behind the existence of these two stories.

It could be stated that an audience member is changing their attention. The layperson has accepted the *game* and enters into the performance whilst suspending their disbelief, but as

the trick progresses the layperson will jump out of the suspension of disbelief at the collision points in Fig. 3. That is to say once a climax or denouement of the trick has been performed, the layperson reacts, hopefully, with wonder, which in turn jolts them out of the suspension of disbelief to a more critical mind-set. At this point of the trick the layperson, for however a brief amount of time, will search for practical answers to the problem of the magic trick. The most important element is that the close-up magician is aware of this constant switching between realities and exploits them.

To paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, when the magician eliminates all other possibilities in their act, then whatever is left, however impossible, must be true. 'The job of the magician is to trap the spectator in this logical conundrum' (Haydn, 2009, p.6) and the more they search inside themselves for the solution or the reality of the moment, the more they move further away from the reality of the effect. Ortiz (2006, p.37) considers this moment as,

> 'Magic can only be established by a process of elimination. There is no way that you can directly apprehend that you're witnessing magic. You conclude that it's magic because there is no alternative. Therefore, the primary task in giving someone the experience of witnessing magic is to eliminate every other possible cause'.

Logic dictates that magic is impossible, so the magician tries to create a world, or a moment, when the impossible is the only remaining answer to the conundrum.

These two stories have been set against the creation of a new analytic *System* for close-up magician to assist with their performance.

The Importance of Performance

Weber (2003, p.103) accurately states that 'performance trumps trick every time', therefore the performative elements are of paramount importance. The trick cannot survive on its own, it needs the magician's knowledge of technical abilities, performance qualities and the relationship with the audience in order to exist. This is its oxygen. Presto states 'magic is the peg upon which to hang the relationship with the audience' (Presto, 2009); this relationship is vital and therefore the need to create a method for its accurate analysis is timely. It is the

close-up magician's goal to entertain and to ensure that the audience can experience something truly magical again: 'you must never lose sight of your primary goal: to make your audience experience mystery' (Ortiz, 1995, p.19). Hass (2015a, p.13) reframes the consideration with a direct request to the magician, 'more practice and rehearsal, please! Less exposure through ineptness'. It can be extremely difficult and challenging for a close-up magician to orchestrate a situation wherein the audience experience a mystery, but this is their primary goal. Its creation is directly linked to the audience's willing suspension of disbelief and their potential need to work out the methods. As magicians, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that magic is amazing; unfortunately for too many magicians, magic is contrived, monotonous and everyday – but this should never be the case especially in performance. Magic is amazing; stage illusions are astounding but the uniqueness of close-up magic creates a small miracle in the palm of the spectator's hand. Brown (2017) agrees, 'magic is unusual in that it happens entirely in the minds of the people watching or taking part'. This moment in time when a close-up magician interacts with an audience member 'can be an experience so memorable that the spectator will literally remember it for the rest of [their] life' (Ortiz, 1995, p.17). Close-up magic is a one moment entertainment event, it cannot be repeated: 'the experience of magic is only what you as a magician provide at that moment' (Brown, 2017). And again, this new *System* can assist the close-up magician achieving that memorable moment, to create the narrative of the two stories and a memory of the trick.

The creation of this new *System* will aid the close-up magician in highlighting the important elements within their set and potentially shine a light on usually neglected elements such as performance. This new *System* is intended to be a working analytic tool for self-reflection and pedagogy through critical engagement. It should be employed during the selection of a new trick, the rehearsal phase and the eventual performance. It should be used as a scaffolding to improve their work.

Kowzan's 13 Point System

In order to successfully analyse Kowzan's (1968) 13-point *System* and reimagine it for close-up magicians, it is important to consider the separate elements of the *System*, to understand a structuralist approach to performance in order that a close-up magician can benefit from the new analytical tool.

There is a growing need for the development of academic discussion around the performance of close-up magic. Although there have been several seminal works on the subject such as Fitzkee (1943), Weber (2003) and, more recently, Middleton (2011), they have all been written by and from the point of view of the practicing magician, or magician as performer, and not from the point of view of a performance academic. This is redressed with the creation of *the Issitt 12-point System*. The academic inquiry into performance magic has already begun in the *Journal of Performance Magic*. Thousands of books exist on the creation of a magic routine, sleight of hand, secret methods and effect rehearsals, but little that directly makes a case for the importance of performance theory in the world of the close-up magician. Presto and Brown both agree that the performance is of paramount importance. Presto (2017) has sage words for the close-up magician, 'you may be concentrating on the magic too much and may not be concentrating on the audience hard enough' and Brown (2017) continues with this sentiment, 'the trick is ultimately not always as important as people think'.

Throughout history magic has been categorized as supernatural or unexplained, and therefore there is a wealth of knowledge around the subject of magic as supernatural within academic circles; but the same cannot be true about the acquisition of knowledge about the performance of close-up magic specifically.

Kowzan's (1968) system was specifically constructed for the analysis of a piece of live theatre or performance, and therefore there would inevitably be several changes, omissions and additions to create a new 12-point *System* for close-up magicians.

Kowzan (1968) remarks that 'everything is a sign in a theatrical presentation', but, in this context, what constitutes a theatrical presentation? A close-up magic performance, within the constraints of this study, is focused in a restaurant or function room – not a traditional performance theatre or presentation arena. Magic, therefore, does not follow the idea of a traditional performance space, for the close-up magician can occupy any space and utilise it as their performance space. Brook (1968, p. 11) purported that

> 'I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged'.

Brook's theory is true, and it can be assumed that any space can house a performance – with or without a staged or prescribed platform. Although a close-up magician does not perform on a traditional stage but takes the *stage* with them per se, there is no doubt that any remark about a theatrical presentation must include the work of the close-up magician.

It is appropriate now to consider semiotics and coding in relation to the close-up magician. Sebeok (2001, p.4) confirms that it was Hippocrates that first coined the term semiotics as a branch of Western medical science on the study of symptoms. Symptoms here being signs; things to be observed. He continues, 'the physician's primary task, Hippocrates claimed, was to unravel what a symptom stands for' (Sebeok, 2001, p.4). Effectively this was the predecessor to coding and decoding in theatrical performance: asking the audience to seek out the meaning of the symptom on stage, the sign, and then to extrapolate its meaning across the rest of the performance.

There are limitations to Kowzan's (1968) *system* especially in relation to the twenty-first century performer. Elam (2001, p.42) comments that 'such a mode of analysis has the advantage of its flexibility but does resolve the question posed of Kowzan of defining multi-levelled units specific to theatrical discourse'.

There are omissions within Kowzan, as Elam (2001, p.45) highlights that 'it is notable that Kowzan does not include architectural factors (the form of playhouse and stage) and omits occasional technical options such as film and back projection'. There is an inevitability that as technologies develop and improve then any theatrical system must advance accordingly. The mobile phone, the internet, three-dimensional mapping, sound and virtual and augmented realities have developed at a striking rate. Obviously, a new form of Kowzan must take these elements into consideration. Kowzan (1968) acknowledged this further development and suggested that 'clearer sections could be made by reducing the number of systems to four or five; a much more detailed classification could also be made', but he did not realise this development.

Within Kowzan's system (Fig. 1, p.36) make-up, hair-style [sic] and costume (elements 6,7 and 8) are separated into their own discrete sections. Within modern theatrical practices it would be appropriate to move hair-style to within the remit of make-up. Esslin (1988, p.55) poses the same question: 'why … should the hair do of the actors be a separate system and not be

regarded as merely one aspect of make-up'. Any future reworking of Kowzan's *system* must take these factors into consideration. Although the new *Issitt 12-point System* does develop this *System* for close-up magic, it has been borne out of Kowzan and not merely adapted.

Kowzan starts his thirteen-point system with *Word* and *Tone* (elements 1 and 2) and suggests that all theatre performances not only start with text but are measured by this element. These thoughts are inextricably linked to Aristotle's view of plot as the main driver in performance. Although this can be true for the majority of mainstream theatre, in the world of performance *Word* and *text* is not always either at the centre of the performance or even used at all. His system considers mainstream drama at the expense of other emerging performing arts: dance, juggling, performance art and, of course, magic. Elam (2001, p.45) states that 'neither Kowzan nor later commentators have attempted to define the signifying units of each system or to explicate its syntactic and code rules with any degree of rigour'. Other semioticians have created their own systems using Kowzan (1968) as the basis. Esslin (1988, pp.103-104) takes Kowzan's 13-point system and develops it into his own twenty-one question-based taxonomy. His five sectioned system covers *Framing Systems, Sign Systems at the Actor's Disposal, Visual Sign Systems, The Text and Aural Sign Systems.* Many of the elements within Kowzan appear in Esslin's development but the noted inclusion is, as stated before, the place of play. This element includes architectural framework and ambience surrounding the performance, title, generic description, pre publicity and prologue, title sequence, epilogue. There is no counterargument to the importance of space, publicity, framing and textual/movement play framings.

The creation of a system was further developed by Pavis (2005) who offered a detailed questionnaire pinpointing the essential elements of a piece of live performance. Pavis (2005, pp.92-94) suggested fifteen elements, in the form of questions to assist the analysis of a performance;

1. Mise en Scène
2. Stage design
3. Lighting design
4. Objects
5. Costumes
6. Actor's performance

7.　　　Functions of music, sound, silence
8.　　　Rhythm (pace) of performance
9.　　　Reading of the show
10.　　Text in performance
11.　　Spectator
12.　　How to notate this show
13.　　What cannot be semiotized
14.　　What special problems should be looked at
15.　　Any other comments.

There is a marked similarity between Pavis' Questionnaire and Kowzan's system. Whereas Kowzan offers a grid of semiotic elements with no detailed explanation, Pavis offers detailed sub questions within his system.

A notable inclusion of Pavis (2005) is *Spectator* at number 11. This inclusion details who the spectators are, their expectations, their role in the performance and their reactions. The audience as a sign is omitted from Kowzan and merely resides between the 13 elements. The importance of the audience in performance cannot be overestimated, and within the *World of Magic* the spectator (lay person) is fundamental to the performance. The audience are and always have been an essential element to a performance within any genre.

Another limitation to Kowzan (1968) is that an equal weighting is placed on each of the elements. Looking at his system (Fig. 1), he has placed similar levels of weight against each element: Tone is equal to Hairstyle and so to Lighting. Obviously, the initial size of the box they inhabit has no relation to their physical importance as Sound Effects occupies a large box because of length of phrase. It therefore suggests that time used to ensure the clarity of one element pre-performance is the same amount of time employed on another. The hours set aside for the creation of the sound in the vocal delivery of the actor is the same as the time allowed for the Hairstyle. Here are the limitations of Kowzan's system. It could be argued that in contemporary performance that rehearsing one's voice for performance cannot be equated to Hairstyle: Kowzan's system mirrored the important performance elements of its time.

Using Kowzan's original numbering system to highlight the relevant sections, we can see that numbers 1 and 2, namely *Word* and *Tone* are verbal communication words and include elements such as script writing, patter, vocal delivery, pitch, pause and pace etc. and to the

communication through the voice. Numbers 3,4 and 5 (*Mime, Gesture* and *Movement*) are given over to the physicality of the performance and communication through the body and not the voice. Numbers 6, 7 and 8 (*Make-up, Hairstyle* and *Costume*) are character driven decisions on the external appearance of the actor and character. Numbers 9 and 10 (*Props and Décor)* are concerned with the properties and external dressing of the stage to evoke a sense of time and place; *Lighting*, which is element number 11 in Kowzan, is again in relation to the appearance of the stage but through the effective lighting thereof. And finally, numbers 12 and 13 (*Music and Sound Effects*) are there to enhance and develop the action on stage through the use of atmospheric music, be it live or recorded, and the employment of specific sound effects to add credence and a sense of reality to the piece.

To develop the *Issitt 12-point System*, it was important to chart the relevance of Kowzan's elements across to the world of close-up magic. Since this new *System* is specifically for the use within a close-up magic setting it is important to consider which of Kowzan's original 13 signs are irrelevant. As the play area of the close-up magician is not a defined performance area in the classical sense, there are certain restrictions in place. A restaurant or wedding breakfast setting is a dining or conference room based around the notion of eating and celebration. Therefore, there is no specific stage or raised platform for performance, nor is there any specific performance lighting.

Kowzan's elements 1 to 9 inclusive have some direct link to the world of the close-up magician whereas elements 10 through 13 inclusive are outside of the close-up magician's control although the magician can work within any formal decoration constraints should their set require it. The colour of the carpet or the setting out of the restaurant is somewhat irrelevant; assuming that there is sufficient space to move between the tables for performance. Similarly, the lighting in the venue cannot be changed and therefore the close-up magician has to work within this constraint. This can prove a significant problem in relation to brightness of lighting: too dark and the audience will not be able to see the important elements of the trick and, inevitably, too bright and the audience may see the intricate workings of certain tricks or illusions.

This therefore highlights an important feature of the close-up magician – the notion of improvisation and adaptability. Unlike a stage illusionist, for example, the close-up magician does not approach a table with a set full routine to perform. They are much more likely to

have five to ten tricks that they have successfully created Story Beta and woven in Story Alpha, but these tricks and effects are not in a specific order: an immoveable order like the stage illusionist. The stage illusionist relies on large, heavy props and cleverly choreographed routines – all created to misdirect the audience away from the real method. But more importantly due to the complexities of the stage illusionists' routine the same tricks must remain in the same order every time they perform. The same is not true for the close-up magician. They can perform any trick from their repertoire at any point in the proceedings without knocking the house of cards of their set down. This level of improvisation around the table, or more accurately termed adaptability, is one of the more important elements of the close-up magician's set. They may have to change the order of a trick in their routine due to sight lines in the performance space (the dining table) or because a similar trick was not well received by the same table earlier on. The close-up magician must be aware of their entire surroundings in order to make informed judgements about their performances, the environments and the people (audience).

Kowzan's elements 12 and 13 are specifically in relation to the creation of external live sound which is outside of the control of the magician (and rarely employed in these circumstances) and therefore, in this setting, irrelevant. All of these elements have been removed from the *Issitt 12-point System*, and the remaining elements have been placed within the new elements 6, 7, 8 and 9.

The Background of the Issitt 12-point System

The Magic Circle (2018b) states that in order to gain entry to the society the auditioning magician is first interviewed to check magical knowledge and enthusiasm for the craft, and second is measured against Magical Ability and Technique and Presentation during a physical audition of their magical skills at the society's London headquarters. The auditioning magician has between eight and twelve minutes to present a well-rehearsed set of their magic in front of forty to fifty (approx.) professional magicians and members of the Circle. A set of grading criteria is used to judge whether the auditioning magician is sufficiently skilful to gain membership. The full grading criteria for entry to The Magic Circle are reproduced in Appendix A. This grading criteria formed the basis of my reworking of Kowzan's (1968) system for the professional close-up magician.

To achieve this, The Magic Circle (2018a) has split the necessary requirements for the perfect close-up magic set into Magical Ability and Technique, and Presentation. For the purposes of the *Issitt 12-point System* Magical Ability and Technique has been renamed Technical Ability, and Presentation has been renamed Performance.

Within the *Issitt 12-point System* three master groups are created to house therein the different specific elements. These are

- Technical Ability
- Performance
- Audience Relationship.

Although the criteria for membership of The Magic Circle only mentions Technical Ability and Presentation, it is of paramount importance to include the relationship with the audience in the new *System*. 'Many of the key experiments in modern drama have been attempts to reframe or refashion the relationship between the audience and the stage' (Mangan, 2013, p.280); therefore, the close-up magician must consider this notion of reframing the audience, especially as the audience, *per se*, are not a traditional audience located within a traditional performance setting.

Arguably the relationship with the audience should occur in the presentation/performance section, but this is not the case. It is of such significant importance that it requires a dedicated section. As stated earlier, Presto (2009) believes that 'magic is the peg upon which to hang the relationship with the audience' – therefore the audience is paramount and at the centre of the *system*. Technical Ability is concerned with the practical detail and application of the magician's craft; their magical skill and is part of the close-up magician's Story Beta. Performance is concerned with the performative elements of the close-up magician's set (notably the voice, character) – the building blocks of performance, and is part of the close-up magician's Story Alpha, and finally Audience Relationship is the link between performer and audience, and how this can be created and manipulated, which lies within both Story Alpha and Story Beta.

Technical Ability is the *behind closed doors* elements; the selecting, planning, reading, rehearsing, blocking and realising of a close-up magic set before anything is played in front of an audience. The close-up magician must have a propensity for magic: an initial set of skills

for the management and handling of props. It takes a considerable amount of time to develop these skills. There obviously is no specific set timespan for this development, and it is at the discretion of the individual, their natural ability and their available time. Effectively this is the hours of painstaking practice, rehearsal and refinement of the magical effect, and then the weaving of this effect in the magician's set. Within this main category are *Manual Dexterity, Effect Rehearsal, Self-Knowledge* and *Ease Under Pressure* – all of which contribute in their own way to the Technical Ability of the magician.

The Performance category has been divided into *Character, Voice, Timing* and *Movement* for effective analysis of the performative elements of the close-up magician's set.

The final category is Audience Relationship – the most important element for an entertainment profession: 'entertainment is broader than amusement' (Nelms, 1969, p. 252). This category is therefore split into *Appearance, Approach, Communication* and *Experience.* The two stories of the close-up magician fit into this *System* also. Story Alpha relates to the *Performance* and *Audience Relationship* sections, and Story Beta relates to the *Technical Ability* section.

Creation of the Trick to Performance diagram

The 12 points within the new *System* do not stand alone within the framework of this analytic tool. Each of the elements interrelate. A future diagram of this *System* could conceivably be three-dimensional and show exactly how each element interconnects. In order to assist in the development of a new *System* for the analysis of close-up magic, a new model has been created to chart the pre-performance journey of the close-up magician. This model, Fig. 5, is entitled the Trick to Performance model. By using this new model, we can therefore discuss how each element of the new *System* fits into the working practices of the close-up magician and what it directly affects.

In order to create a Trick to Performance chart, an established reflective diagram was used as its basis. Kolb's (2015) *Experiential Learning Cycle* was an excellent base from which to work to develop something similar for close-up magic, especially in relation to the need for reflection after experience.
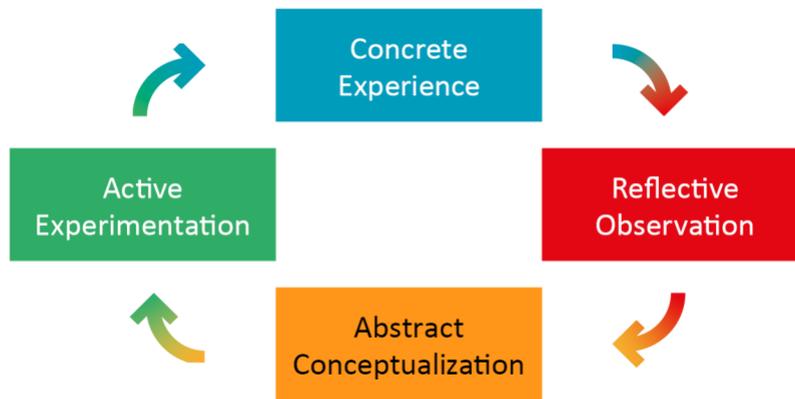
Fig. 4: Kolb (2015) *The Experiential Learning Cycle*.

Although Kolb's learning cycle (Fig. 4) is primarily useful to workers within industry there are some elements that can be used as a basis for the creation of the Trick to Performance diagram (Fig. 5). The importance of a reflective model, whatever it may be, is highlighted by Morrison (2012, p.154) that 'workers need the process of structured reflection'; a statement that is entirely true for the close-up magician and all performers. Reflection usually falls into either a structured approach or an unstructured approach, and it is important for the reflector or engager to realise the difference. A reflective cycle that is not structured can lead to misunderstandings of their craft. For a close-up magician to reflect with a structured approach is considerably better because 'everyone … benefits greatly from engaging in the process of reflection' (Burke, 2013, p.317).

The diagram below entitled *Trick to Performance* (Fig. 5) is based loosely on Kolb's Learning Cycle. This diagram charts the process of selecting a trick and its development through stages of refinement to its eventual performance. The process continues to circle around from Effect Rehearsal to Further Refinement and so on until the moment when the piece of magic is sufficiently perfected and rehearsed. This is an unquantifiable period of time and strongly depends on the dexterity of the magician, the experience of the magician, the complexity of the routine/effect/sleight and the time available to the performer. It is not suggested here that the Performance Ready box reflects the scale of the performance or the number of onlookers. Performance Ready could simply be that the new effect or routine has been sufficiently rehearsed that it could be shared with a collection of close friends. Each performer will deem when they have reached the optimum level of rehearsal against the model and

therefore turn to the performance stage. The potentially endless rehearsal period prior to the performance stage is perfectly summed up by Fitzkee (1943, p.82) in that 'a finished routine is possible only through tireless, unending, monotonous, incessant rehearsal'. Although this seems derogatory towards the rehearsal process, the sentiment is accurate. The close-up magician needs to rehearse endlessly until the trick has been perfected, as Fitzkee (1943, p.82) confirms, 'this grinding rehearsal is necessary to make every detail of the act habitual with you'.
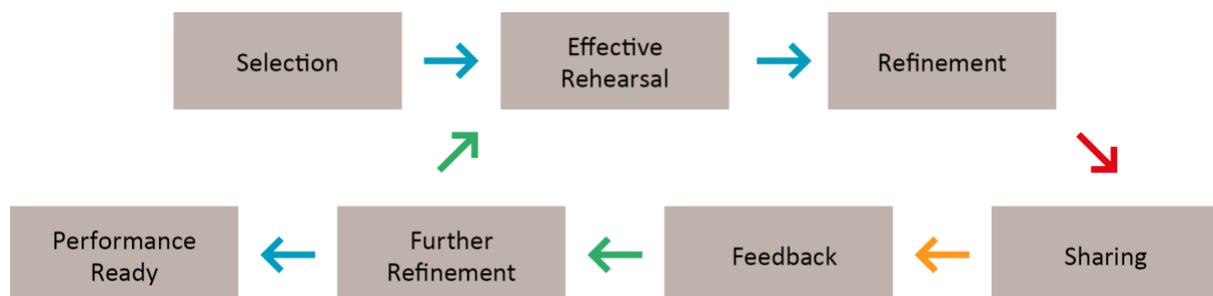
Fig. 5: – *Trick to Performance*

In Fig. 5, the Selection of a trick is the start point. This enables the magician to choose their own tricks and effects to use within their performance set. After the Selection of the tricks and any material (patter) required, the close-up magician then enters the Effect Rehearsal stage. This stage requires the magician to use their natural and developed magical and performative abilities to rehearse the trick, effect or routine, so that they can replicate this without thought or concentration in performance. As Burger (2017, p.11) states 'with learning magic, then, practice (and rehearsal) are necessary and crucial elements in the process' and these are absolutely true. Naturally the five elements in the centre circle formation are inextricably linked (Effect Rehearsal → Refinement → Sharing → Feedback → Further Refinement → Effect Rehearsal, and so on). The close-up magician must employ their own judgement on their performance or seek further guidance from an expert. This threshold is a value judgement by the close-up magician potentially with substantive assistance from external practitioners.

The performer could continue to circle this model until either they ran out of time, if a performance was date dependent, or it was felt by the magician that the effect was ready for performance. It is essential here that the close-up magician is reflexive. This can be achieved through the involvement of another party as a critical friend. As Hass (2017, p.49) observes that magicians 'need someone who has the ability to see us as we are, the sensitivity to see what we are not yet, and the skilful craft to help us close the gap': every performer needs a critical friend.

There is an understanding within this process that feedback would have to be gained by someone external to the rehearsals. This then brings up the question of whether a trick should be shown (tried out) on another close-up magician or a layperson. There are arguments for both in relation to whom and when. It is understood that the close-up magician would want to share their handling of a trick or effect with another confidant magician in order to develop their own practice with sage advice from a more senior performer, but these tricks and effects are not intended to fool another magician, but members of the public. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that these tricks and effects are shown to members of the public to gauge responses and make any necessary immediate tweaks or changes. The close-up magician shares his Story Alpha and Story Beta with an audience to see if they work and exist independently and collide at the appropriate moments for the climax of the effect. It is important to remember the reflexive elements of the *System* and that the magician recognises critically that the performance is ready.

We can define the stages of the Trick to Performance model as; Selection is the choosing of effects and tricks to be placed within a magician's close-up magic set with a view to performance; Effect Rehearsal is the period of time used to practice and perfect tricks and effects with a view to performance; Refinement is the constant repetition of specific difficult or challenging sleights or effects with a myopic attitude to mistakes or errors[19]; Sharing is the act of showing a trick or effect to someone else; Feedback is the method of receiving constructive and/or critical reflection on the performance of the trick and/or handling of the effect or trick; Further Refinement is the even closer investigation of specific difficult or

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[19] This is the close-up magician's muscle memory akin to the musician or athlete, and as such is equally as important.

challenging sleights or effects after receiving constructive feedback; and Performance Ready is the trick or effect having been sufficiently rehearsed that it is primed for a performance environment. When speaking about magic in performance Presto (2009) defines this as 'the ability to keep the brain going at one speed and the mouth going at another' – the notion of tapping your head whilst circling your stomach. It is also important that a magic trick is similar to a story, it must be constructed in order to present it effectively; 'a trick must have a beginning, a middle and an end' (Presto, 2009; Thomas, 2016, p.2) and the new Trick to Performance model assists here. Presto (2009) is inadvertently commenting on the two stories created by the close-up magician. To 'keep the brain going' and 'the mouth going' effectively (Presto, 2009) at two different speeds is the manifestation of Story Alpha and Story Beta in practicality.

The Creation of the Issitt 12-point System

Throughout its development, this *System* has been shared with some members of the magic community for comment and improvement, whilst being implemented into my own practice as an analytic and pedagogic tool.

This reworking of Kowzan's (1968) *System* includes old and new elements. The *Issitt 12-point System* is organised into a four column – twelve row table. Three subsections house four elements each. These sub-sections are then aligned to Story Alpha and Story Beta. Finally, the original twelve elements are aligned to either the magician's internal ability, their expression of the body, or the spoken text. The *Issitt 12-point System* is reproduced below for clarity.

Technical Ability	Manual Dexterity		Magician's Internal Ability
	Effect Rehearsal	Story Beta	
	Self-Knowledge		
	Ease Under Pressure		Expression of the Body
Performance	Character		
	Voice	Story Alpha	Spoken Text
	Timing		Expression of the Body
	Movement		
Audience Relationship	Appearance		Internal Ability
	Approach	Story Alpha and Beta	
	Communication		Expression of the Body
	Experience		

Fig. 6 – *Issitt 12-point System*

Technical Ability Subsection

The different elements within the *Issitt 12-point System* will be considered in relation to the two stories created by the close-up magician, the importance of the element and professional comment. All of the elements within this section are employed to create Story Beta primarily.

Manual Dexterity

Manual Dexterity is the ability to move objects in a hand (or hand to hand) using the fingers and thumb. This may also be called sleight of hand. Pogue (1998, p.343) defines sleight of hand as 'the secret manipulation of props (usually by the fingers) to generate a miraculous effect'.

Within close-up magic, the ability to move objects through sleight of hand is essential; it is an essential basic skill Nelms considered that this 'technique has two elements. The first is the method of deception' (Nelms, 1969, p. 10); the methodology of the trick (Story Beta) and that it also 'covers the conjurer's manner of presentation – how he moves, how he speaks, what he says, his timing and the skill with which he conceals any devices that may be necessary' (Nelms, 1969, p.11) (Story Alpha).

Even the simplest of card manipulations requires time to perfect; hours of practice and handling of cards or props is needed to develop a close-up magician's skill. As with any new acquired and developed skill it takes time to learn the techniques required to perform for an audience, because inevitably a lay audience would expect a magician 'to be dexterous and likable' (Tamariz, 2007, p.1). *Manual Dexterity* is akin to Technique for the training actor. The performer, magician or otherwise, 'has to invest in training in order to have a sustained career' (Cannon, 2016, p.23) but it is significantly more than this. 'As an actor, dancer or singer how could you possibly think of getting up and performing without putting in the time to prep and train' (Cannon, 2016, p.20) and the same is right for magicians. Cannon (2016, p.23) continues to explain that 'training will ultimately make you much more hireable and should leave you with confidence and discipline under your belt'. A magician needs to train their magic technique (*Manual Dexterity*) and their performance technique to create a well-founded performance.

The technique or *Manual Dexterity* is the foundation of a good performance. Powell (2010, p.31) comments that 'technique helps you to focus on specifics rather than get stuck with generalisations, to explore lots of choices rather than take instant decisions, and to recognise the complexities and contradictions of being human'. Although Powell is discussing technique for the actor there are strong links to the close-up magician. The need for good technique is important as it can help the performer make informed, considered performance choices. Exemplary manual dexterity and technique can be found in Appendices D and F.

The handling and management of props resides in this element. As Hass (2015a) states that 'handling mechanics is different from sleight of hand'; Hass' handling of mechanics is prop management. This handling is the start of the process for the close-up magician, and the start of the creation of Story Beta: the story of the sleight of hand. Hours of practice are required before any thoughts of presentation. Hass (2007, p.6) shares his mantra for magic which is 'tricks become magic through powerful presentation', and there is no argument that this is true. Practice is essential to create a performance.

Effect Rehearsal

Effect Rehearsal and *Manual Dexterity* are inextricably linked. Rehearsal in any field within the performing arts is essential. The subtle differences between practice and rehearsal were discussed earlier in this chapter. Here there is an assumption that hours of practice have taken and will continue to take place in order to enhance the *Effect Rehearsal*. As Maskelyne and Devant (1911, p.109) concur that 'no matter how great may be natural ability … [the magician] can only achieve artistic success by means of great and persistent effort'; both practice and rehearsal are fundamental. Rehearsal is the only way to develop and improve their skill set in their chosen field towards performance. Panet (2010, p.94) states that

> 'the rehearsal process can be compared to the making of a jigsaw: after the first look at the picture on the box, we break it up into small pieces, each of which has its own place and must be joined to all the pieces around it. As rehearsals progress to the performance, each of the separate pieces must be joined together seamlessly to form the correct picture'.

Panet's approach of breaking the large form into smaller sections can assist the magician to formulate their act and therefore rehearsals. Although this is directed at the actor, the theories are apposite for the close-up magician.

The musician knows their instrument and the venue but if they have not performed there before they are unsure of how the instrument will react to the environments. The stage magician is aware of their props and has rehearsed with their assistants in a practical space mimicking that of a theatrical stage, but the close-up magician is slightly different. It is true that most restaurants and wedding venues are very similar but there are performance specifics that can manifest themselves as considerable constraints. The close-up magician can only approximate what the conditions for performance are, and therefore can only make fully informed judgements once they arrive at the venue. Therefore, the close-up magician can rehearse the effect or sleight, the trick, but cannot fully gauge what the performance space will look like. They are not merely rehearsing but rehearsing the effect; hence *Effect Rehearsal.* There are striking similarities with site-specific performance. Pickering (2010, p.170) commenting on some of the extreme natures of site-specific theatre states that 'there is no designated, paying audience and a spontaneous group of spectators', which is fundamentally true for the close-up magician. Their audiences are *found* audiences and not

audiences that have arrived at a venue with the intention of watching a magic show. The nature of the venue for the close-up magician creates this sense of site-specificity in the performance.

There is an unspoken truth in rehearsals which transcends to performance that 'all of the most successful showman – conjurers agree that you must believe in your own magic; you cannot hope to convince an audience unless you first convince yourself' (Nelms, 1969, p.152). Making the audience think about the trick or effect and transcend the notion of magic is a goal of the close-up magician. Weber (2003, p.102) highlights this by saying, 'they may later recall your dexterity … or your humor [sic], but your overriding goal is to … be something or communicate something wonderful'. Middleton (2011, p.196) goes further and states, 'you must do as much preparation as you can to ensure a good performance. A high level can only be reached on a foundation of strong detailed work'. This strong and detailed work in Middleton's eyes is the hours of preparation (practice and rehearsal) but there is somewhat of a conflict here since, as I have mentioned previously, Brown (2017) stated that 'the trick is ultimately not always as important as people think' and Zenon (2017) initially considers the audience before a trick; 'I am as interested in getting laughs or surprise reactions than I am at actually baffling anybody'. Although the need for practice and *Effect Rehearsal* is important it should not overshadow the real purpose of the close-up magic in the first place: to entertain. Zenon (2017) agrees 'my licence is to entertain, and it doesn't matter how you do that' whereas Presto (2017) comments that 'the problem with magicians is that they think it's all rehearsal'. There is evidence of the notion of rehearsal seen in performance especially related to the entertainment value within Appendix C, Presto's Chinese Linking Rings routine. The above comment reiterates the need for such a *System* for many reasons but possibly most of all to inform the close-up magician that it is not all about the *Effect Rehearsal*. Presto (2017) summarises her point about the performance of magic as a whole and not merely the utilisation of props; she comments that 'acting is not about the words. Any idiot can learn the words. It's about the gaps you put between them'. *Effect Rehearsal* is important but cannot work in isolation.

Self-Knowledge

The knowledge of themselves as performer and as magician, and their knowledge about their own identity and limitations, are the foundations for this element. These limitations could be physical, humorous and/or verbal. This element exists through the self-reflexive nature of the close-up magician; to consider their abilities, both physically and performatively, and make necessary alterations.

It is important to note that *Self-Knowledge* is not the admission of lack of ability but a consideration about the ability of the individual which can therefore help shape the type of magician they wish to be. Presto (2017) neatly asserts that 'Derren Brown without the certainty of what he does, and Presto without the uncertainty would not be Presto or Derren Brown' – our performance differences can shape our character; effectively no two magicians should be the same. This certainty is their *Self-Knowledge* – the knowledge of themselves as performers. Presto highlights this within her performances; she hands the magic to the audience member. Presto is acknowledging her *Self-Knowledge*, and the understanding that a magic trick is more powerful when it occurs in the hands of the participant. Within Appendix F, Presto allows the young child to cut the piece of rope and comments that it was 'enthusiastic but inaccurate' – a real understanding of her own *Self-Knowledge* and the years of performance experience. And noting the reaction for the young participant, it works.

Potentially any physical, intellectual, spiritual or performative limitation may cause concern to the magician and therefore guide them towards a certain type of magical performance. Verbal limitations may be down to their vocal qualities, whereas the physical may be the inability to perform complicated card sleights. Some magicians choose to be stage or parlour magicians with silent acts. This is not necessarily down to their vocal qualities, but this may be a factor. These limitations *(Self-Knowledge)* can help to shape the type of close-up magician the individual wishes to become. These decisions inform the type of magician and are directly linked to the element of *Character* that will discussed later. 'Self-Knowledge … is not only something that one ought to work at; it is something that can only be had by working at it' (Jopling, 2000, p.17); *Self-Knowledge* is not immediate but arrives in time after self-investigation through internal and external reflexion. Essentially the close-up magician needs to consider which type of magician they are, for as Presto (2017) comments that 'you need

to know the sort of person that you are and that influences your choice of material' and ultimately which type of magician they become.

Self-Knowledge is so termed as an appreciation of the magician's own abilities. But this term, *Self-Knowledge*, goes further to delineate the reasons why they wish to occupy such a position in the *World of Magic*, and if they have the necessary skills. *Self-Knowledge* is also a frank and personal skills audit as magician in order that the performer can position themselves effectively within the marketplace and *World of Magic*; and that they can seek out the necessary further training and development they require to progress in both worlds.

This element sits in the Selection and Effect Rehearsal stage of the Trick to Performance model earlier in this chapter.

Ease Under Pressure

The final element in the Technical Ability category is *Ease Under Pressure*. *Ease Under Pressure* is somewhat unteachable and develops from the experience and expertise of the professional performer. It is not concerned with stage fright, nor the ability to continue when the performer's internal nerves increase to unmanageable levels. Every performance environment is pressurised. The ability to go out on stage, or in front of an audience, however large or small, and deliver a perfect performance stems from years of practice, rehearsal and a natural ability. This element is linked to *Self-Knowledge* in the way that the magician needs to understand their own abilities in order to recognise past experiences, *Effect Rehearsal* through set rehearsal and *Manual Dexterity* through practice.

This element may be the difference between amateur and professional standards. The more performance experiences a close-up magician gains, the more situations they will have witnessed, and therefore they should be ready for similar situations in the future. It is important at this point to highlight that the performer has a natural desire to connect with their audiences; and that this need and ability to do so should not detract from the ease under pressure in performance.

There is a link between *Ease Under Pressure* and *Experience* (a later element in this *System*) in relation to the magician. The importance of *Ease Under Pressure* should not be disregarded

as mere experience. As professionals in any sphere, we can have experience in terms of years or situations, but still not work well under pressure. There is a specific set of skills which assist their adaptability whilst performing part of the magic set. This is highlighted in Appendix F when Presto improvises a magic wand which is seamlessly worked into the performance. Having lost her magic wand, Presto quickly improvises a wand out of a reshaped coat hanger: the perfect example of ease under pressure.

Ease Under Pressure is one of the elements of the *System* that does not and cannot appear in the Trick to Performance diagram as it exists within the audience relationship and therefore within the performance.

Even from this first category of *Technical Ability* it can be seen that the *Issitt 12-point System* can assist in knowledge and structure of the craft. All of the elements within this section highlight Story Beta that the close-up magician needs to create. The elements become the building blocks for Story Beta and help it to exist outside of the close-up magician.

Performance Subsection

The work within this category is dependent on secure work having taken place in the previous category: *Technical Ability*. Although excellent work and dedication does not necessarily translate to performance, an understanding of the *Performance* elements secures the necessary foundation of future practice and performance. The close-up magician needs to be able to execute Story Beta without errors in order for Story Alpha to exist. An audience's suspension of disbelief is founded upon the creation and successful demonstration, or performance, of both Story Alpha and Story Beta. Once Story Beta is complete, the close-up magician can move towards Story Alpha and *Performance*. The understanding of both of these stories can lead the magician to the creation of misdirection within their performances; the ability to direct the attention of an audience member away from the gimmick or secret and towards an area of less significance.

Character

Character, within the *Issitt 12-point System*, relates to the work undertaken in *Self-Knowledge*. The close-up magician needs to consider what kind of magician they are in order to develop their practice. Out of these decisions derives the first performance element: *Character*; essentially what type of character do they wish to be, through conscious consideration, or the character they develop to be through performance practice? This can manifest itself as magician as an exaggerated version of themselves through to magician in persona. *Character* always includes a minor or major part of ourselves. Even if an actor is playing a character from Shakespeare and has successfully layered their characterisation in order to create a fully realised and believable character on stage, it will always have a small piece of their personality attached. Gillett (2014, p. xiii) comments that actors 'recreate human experience and draw on [their] full human make-up'. The close-up magician is no different. The actor layers elements of the found character and their own sensibilities (assuming they are appropriate to the characterisation) to create a believable character on stage. The close-up magician does exactly the same thing. They take elements of themselves and combine with external and found elements to create their version of a magician. A magician could create a stylised version of themselves, exaggerating some of their character traits in order to develop a warmer, more likeable, stronger character. Famously Geoffrey Durham created his character of The Great Suprendo, a Spanish magician who would constantly get his words muddled up, in one evening. He created the catchphrase for this persona, 'Piff, paff, puff' (50greatestricks2, 2008). Both options are fully justified as long as the close-up magician has made these decisions based on the work from the first category of *Technical Ability*.

Character is the basis of all performances; be it musical theatre, opera, busking, acting, dancing etc., there is always some sort of characterisation portrayed. It is not beholden to text or story and can exist in isolation. *Character* is the starting point for the development of a magician's close-up magic set, and therefore is important to consider. The remainder of this category of *Performance*, namely *Voice, Timing* and *Movement*, all link to *Character*, but they have been separated in order to highlight their individual importance.

Zenon (2017) uses this element as a starting point for his magic; 'I have always tried to do things that are personality or character based'. Zenon has identified that the characterisation

is at the heart of his role as magician. *Character* becomes the firm foundations of all the elements in this section.

The word *Character* is an industry standard phrase and one that stems from the Greek period (Aristotle, 1997). It has also been used throughout history to portray the type of person or persona donned by an actor; a magician is no different.

Character is one of the building blocks for the performance as a whole and something that the close-up magician needs to consider early in their process as many other decisions, both technical and performative, rest on the character of the magician in role. Lest we forget that Robert-Houdin (1878, p.43) famously stated that 'a conjuror is not a juggler; he is an actor playing the part of a magician' and therefore, *Character* exists in all boxes within the Trick to Performance model.

The notion of the character can force magicians to look for the gap in the market in order to exploit it. Zenon (2017) states that it is important 'to look at what isn't out there and to create a character'; Zenon's starting place for his magic is entirely character based which then leads to the audience connection. Zenon asserts that the character can lead to a complete realisation of performer; 'create character first and then fit the material around them' (Zenon, 2017). But Brown (2017) took the element of *Character* a little further and asked, 'where's the humanity?'. Brown (2017) commented that it was important to maintain a healthy understanding of the humanity of the close-up magician's performance and character, 'to me it's not losing sight of that [humanity]'. The concept of humanity is considerable and has been discussed in many philosophies. Within this study the notion of humanity refers to 'the virtues involved in relating to another – the interpersonal strengths' (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p.46); for humanity exists in moral philosophical thinking as a characteristic of virtue (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p.25). The sense of humanity within the performance of a close-up magician is to create an interpersonal bond with the audience.

The question of a missing element within the *Issitt 12-point System* has been discussed with some of the world's leading magicians and Brown (2017) feels strongly that this missing element is humanity: 'Humanity is the ghost in the machine' (Brown, 2017). This extra element does not require a box to itself because it is inherent in all of the twelve elements.

Brown (2017) agreed that humanity was evident in the lines connecting the *System* – essentially the cement that binds them together.

Voice

Voice is the second element in the *Issitt 12-point System* under the category *Performance*. The importance of the voice within a close-up magician's set is paramount to the audience connection.

The creation, sustaining, maintenance and control of a healthy performance voice is part of any performer's toolkit and the 'more responsive and efficient the voice is, the more accurate it will be to your intentions' (Berry, 2009, p.7). It could be argued that because the close-up magician does not inhabit a world on a traditional stage that they do not need a sustained performance voice, and merely a speaking voice is necessary. Performing at any level requires a level of understanding of the human voice in order to not strain or damage it. Performance is a strenuous activity which can take its toll on the voice of the performer. Throughout an actor's training the voice remains a fundamental component and one that is developed from their initial education to their final performances. Most people use their voice in their everyday lives but rarely for a sustained period of time. The performer needs to understand how the voice works, how to create sound safely, how to maintain this sound and how to vocally travel through the human emotions in their character. In order to assist their vocal performance, actors develop a vocal regime that assists them in creating and sustaining a voice in performance, the close-up magician must consider a similar regime. All orators need to maintain a healthy voice.

Although an understanding of the voice and what can be achieved with its effective use has been gained by the actor in their training, the magician has not been through this extensive instruction. They have not taken part in hours' worth of physically and emotionally demanding classes prior to their professional status and have not, fundamentally, been given the toolkit in order to continue to develop their vocal practices throughout their professional careers as actors have.

It is easy to consider that the element of *Voice* is simple and something that occurs naturally to virtually every human, but this is far from the case. As Tamariz (2007, p.25) states as a

performer 'everyone must hear you' but whether they can or not depends on sufficient training and practice. Voices need to be developed and looked after. Magicians should consider their voices in a similar way to actors. They are both performers and as such should have a vocal regime. The professional close-up magician must include a vocal warm-up as part of their pre-performance ritual. As stated by Barton and Dal Vera (2017, p.14), 'there are nine crucial [ingredients] for voice' and they are tempo, rhythm, articulation, pronunciation, pitch, volume, quality, word choice and vocal nonverbals. Each of these ingredients directly relate to the practice of the close-up magician as with any performer. They have a direct causal link to their performances, and therefore are considered as essential. As non-trained actors, it is easy to consider the voice as one element, but it is important to realise that these nine ingredients need to be considered in isolation to develop their vocal practices.

The nine ingredients that form the building blocks of a good vocal performance are in short; tempo – your voice in time, rhythm – your drum beats, articulation – shaping the sound, pronunciation – standard, regional or eccentric, pitch – notes on your sheet music, volume – filling space, quality – creating the sound core, word choice – your own lingo and vocal nonverbals – snap, crackle and pop (Barton and Del Vera, 2017, pp.14-21). Each of these elements requires specific attention in order to create a sustainable voice in performance. The vocal performance of a close-up magician can elevate a mediocre performance into an engaging one. And if the magic is merely the relationship peg (Presto, 2009) then the capacity to create and sustain a healthy and engaging voice in performance can strengthen the bond between magician and audience.

Merely knowing the list of the nine ingredients, as detailed above, is insufficient for a prolonged vocal performance or a healthy career in the preforming arts. The health of the voice is paramount, including avoiding certain situations and food stuffs; smoky conditions can damage the vocal folds. It is often the element of performance that is overlooked. 'Smoking, working in smoky environments or where there is a lot of dust, stage fog, hairspray, perfume, or allergens and irritants, can make it hard for you to speak' (Barton and Del Vera, 2017, p.47). Luckily for the close-up magician the introduction of the smoking ban and the non-stage environment means there are unlikely to be many of these issues in a typical contemporary restaurant in the UK.

As with all other performances, the importance of a silence is significant; the moment when all noise, voice and/or music cease to leave a void of sound. This is not a cease in communication, more to the contrary for as Lunberry (2014, p.xiii) comments that 'there is no such thing as silence'; a well-placed silence can communicate volumes. Welton (2012, p.14) agrees, 'theatrical silence is, of course, no real silence at all, but a tangible thing', it is something to be created. As audience members, our senses are heightened during a silence, for 'in a silence alive with the potential for sound, our awareness continues to expand and our acuity of perception for sound, our awareness continues to expand and our acuity of perception increases' (Knight, 2012, p.6). Presto (2017) comments on the use of silence in her close-up magic set, 'there are those lovely moments when you just lean back into silence and just count it down. Where you just shut up'. The power of these vocal silences as described by Knight (2012) can be seen to work in practice with Presto (2009) and practically in Appendices E and F; here the silences are golden.

In order to develop their voices successfully, the close-up magician should choose a vocal studies book and work through it, such as Barton and Dal Vera (2017) or Knight (2012). A close-up magician needs to understand the need for rhythm and tempo in their vocal deliveries. Nelms (1969, p. 275) mentions that 'a monotonous voice is a major liability and can disengage an audience immediately'. The close-up magician needs to modulate the voice's rhythm and tempo to create an engaging close-up magic set and to assist in the creation of Story Alpha.

Timing

The third element in the *Performance* category is *Timing*. This element relates to the timing of a trick or effect, the delivery of lines and the use of time in performance; or the rhythm of the trick, the rhythm of the performance and the rhythm within the performance.

Timing within close-up magic is particularly complex as it touches upon a significant number of the other elements within the *Issitt 12-point System*. There is a temporal structure to the set of close-up magicians, which is dictated by the trick in relation to its rhythm and timing, which also pertains to the creation of the narratives of Story Alpha and Beta.

The close-up magician has to consider not only Story Alpha, the rhythm of the narrative in performance and the vocal rhythms, but also Story Beta; the rhythm of the climaxes and the mechanics of the trick, alongside the internal trick rhythms in performance. A lack of concentration in relation to either of these rhythms within the two stories would lead to a collapse in performance, and possibly, in the magic. The rhythms above work together in a close-up magician's set to hide the truth about the effect whilst crafting a narrative for the audience to engage with: the narrative of the magician's performance.

The timing or rhythm of a close-up magic trick or effect is crucial. Performing a certain move or sleight slightly out of time may reveal the method of the trick: something upon which The Magic Circle frowns. A lack of timing can collapse Story Beta (the sleight of hand narrative) which, in turn, will collapse Story Alpha: in short, the magic disintegrates.

Throughout this *System* and the performance of the close-up magician it is essential that the magician maintains the narratives within Story Alpha and Story Beta, as this can be the convincing element for an audience. Nelms (1969, p. 152) comments that 'the secret of convincing yourself is the same as the secret of convincing an audience – consistency', and this level of consistency develops from the *Effect Rehearsal, Stage* and *Timing*. Without doubt the most crucial element to the close-up magician is the notion of convincing the audience that magic does exist, or at the very least that they have just witnessed something impossible and outside natural law. *Timing* can directly affect the audience's experience of the magic. If the timing of a secret move, or the rhythm of the narrative, collapses then the magician is potentially revealing the secret to the magic trick, or collapsing the fictional world it inhabits.

Weber (2003, p. 102) considers the notion of timing through the management of the magical props; 'the props and the methods are your slaves. Master them', thus highlighting the need to engage with the props and methods and therefore to conquer their timing. Weber (2003) is stressing the importance of timing and rhythm, and the need to ensure that everything within the performance of the close-up magician is practiced and rehearsed in order to maintain the illusion of illusion.

The temporal nature of the close-up magician's act requires significant emphasis to be placed on *Timing* as it is present in all elements of the Trick to Performance diagram and directly affects all of the elements within the *Issitt 12-point System.*

The order of the tricks within a magic set, the length of the overall set and/or the timing used in performance must also be considered. The former stems from *Self-Knowledge* and *Experience*, as does the timing of the set as a whole. The mastery of ordering tricks (their running order in performance) can aid the magician in creating an excellently timed set. This could be highlighted as knowing that three similar card tricks back to back may be boring in performance and that the interjection of some alternative effect may break up the performance rhythm. Similarly, for the singer, three ballads sung consecutively would be seen as boring to an audience; and for the circus performer three feats of strength consecutively. The rhythm of the set as a whole is vitally important: the order of the tricks within the close-up magician's set or at the very least the tricks therein.

The reading of the audience is essential and is linked to *Timing*. The experienced close-up magician will instinctively know that three card tricks back to back is not engaging for the audience and the interjection of a coin, rope or other effect would be more entertaining. Fielding West speaking in Hass (2015b) comments that 'there has to be a purpose and a timing' to the magic; and therefore, it needs to be considered as important. But there is also the timing of the performance in actuality to consider also.

Script and patter timing should be kept in mind by all close-up magicians and forms the basis of Story Alpha and verbal misdirection. Many close-up magicians will not have written a script to accompany their close-up routine but merely *go with the flow*. This lack of preparation can lead to the dissolving of their act and the perception of poor preparation and professionalism by their audience. *Timing* is an element that should be woven through the script writing process. Although it is impossible to fully predict where an audience will laugh, it is possible to gauge the speed of the delivery of the magician's lines linked to the trick being performed.

This example outlines a more fundamental temporal aspect of the magic performance. The direction and control of the audience's perceptions is crucial, since the magic trick depends on at least two perceptual registers. There are two temporal structures at work and if they are conflated the trick collapses. For example, when using the Rope Trick (Appendix B and F), the pause prior to the first climax of the rope being restored to one piece of continuous rope requires a moment before the climax. To merely say as magician *"and the rope is restored"* and release your grip quickly to show the restored rope does not consider the audience, their thinking time and therefore their reaction.

Clear markers that indicate the rhythm of the performance can structure the set (almost like percussion structuring a musical performance). Audiences require and *need* think breaks. This break in this context is the period of time that a layperson requires to process a magical moment. The close-up magician needs to understand that the layperson thinks and reacts to magic at a different speed to the professional magician; similarly, the professional musician reacts differently to a change in key in a piece of music. This magical moment does not need to be performatively dramatic as some of the simplest of effects can require a moment of thought to create some clarity in the audience's mind.

The release of the rope at this moment in the rope trick routine, and the pause creates an air of tension. The close-up magician is using the narratives created in Story Alpha and the dexterity from Story Beta to create a perfect theatrical moment. The close-up magician creates a temporal shift from the narrative in Story Alpha (the verbal and character narrative) to Story Beta (the sleight of hand) to share a magical moment (the rope has suddenly joined back together). This is one of the fundamental deceptions of the close-up magician. The false sense of security that Story Alpha creates for the audience is temporally broken by the interjection of Story Beta as the rope re-joins. This can only occur with exemplary use of timing and rhythm.

The close-up magician must give the audience a moment to pause and process the fact that the magician has just joined two pieces of a rope back together in front of their eyes. It is easy as magicians to consider moments like these as second nature and irrelevant, but it is vitally important to consider them from a layperson's viewpoint. We must not as magicians underestimate the ability or intelligence of our audience but allow them time to process a magical effect. This can elicit a large and more sustained audience reaction. This is an example of building tension and then its release. Similarly, in classical music, there is a build-up of tension musically and a release, a climax. The close-up magician creates a similar moment at the intersection of Story Alpha and Story Beta.

Brown (2017) comments on the development of one of his tricks and the importance of review; 'the final routine and the reading of the prediction, it has gone through various incarnations, because you have one [climax] after another after another. And it doesn't make the magic stronger. There are diminishing returns'. Showing an audience that the close-up magician has found the chosen card of the *Seven of Diamonds*, and that it then appears on a

screen, and then it appears underneath a chair, and then it is written in today's newspaper is entirely pointless. The magic of the situation has been shared in the first and, maybe, the second moment. All climaxes thereafter are pointless and become more about the ego of the magician and nothing about their audience. Remember that magic is about the audience and not the magician (Brown, 2017).

There are also the natural moments in the performance that are not magically bound; for example, the riding of laughter. All performers need to understand that 'pause builds suspense and tension' (Stebbins, 1990, p.52) but some do not realise the need to employ a pause during audience laughter. 'All good comedians learn to wait until the laughter has just peaked out and is beginning to fall into rapid decline before delivering their next line' (Wilson, 1985, p.58) and close-up magicians are no different.

Many performers are taught that riding laughter is essential to the performance whether in pantomime, a piece of naturalist drama or close-up magic. The sole performer especially needs to consider the reactions of the audience, not only magically but comically. If we consider that the close-up magician here is a comedy magician and that a considerable amount of their set is comedic, then laughter is inevitable and contributing to the rhythm of deception and climax. As the performer, they must be aware of the laughter in the room and react accordingly. To speak over laughter does not give the audience time to enjoy the moment, similarly it creates a timing break in performance. By riding the laughter, allowing it to exist and then taking control of the moment as the laughter begins to wane, is essential. The antithesis is also true that if the performer allows far too long for the audience laughter to exist then the vocal space can be silence creating a palpable awkwardness. This awkwardness would obviously have an adverse effect to the *Timing* of the trick and the performance as a whole.

Movement

The final element in the category of *Performance* in the *Issitt 12-point System* is *Movement*.

Movement within this *System* includes the magician's physical movement between the tables in a restaurant, the movement between tricks and the physical movement around a table within a venue. *Movement* here must include carriage and deportment for the close-up

magician. 'Movement is an action with the body by which an actor communicates what the character is thinking, feeling, or doing' (Jones, 2014, p.106), therefore the close-up magician, as performer, must understand how important it is to stand, hold something in their hands and move effectively, efficiently and without arousing suspicion.

The close-up magician, as discussed earlier, is creating and narrating two separate stories simultaneously: Story Alpha and Story Beta; and movement is at the heart of these stories in performance. The close-up magician is verbally telling the audience Story Alpha whilst facilitating Story Beta and trying to conceal their methods. The twofold story contains what is shown by the close-up magician to the audience, what is shared through climaxes of the tricks and what is concealed. The concealed elements here is Story Beta – the story of the sleight of hand – the years of practice and preparation for performance. These concealments and revelations are cleverly orchestrated by the close-up magician through the use of the elements within the *Issitt 12-point System*, but most notably through the use of choreographed movement and voice. The movement and voice are used as tools of misdirection. This misdirection then creates the performance tensions leading to magical climaxes.

As noted previously, the manual dexterity of the close-up magician is the basis for their art and performance, but there is an ancillary element under movement which needs to be considered: the methodology of holding one's hand or arm when loaded. Loaded means that the magician is concealing something in their hand; palming. The carriage and deportment at this point in the trick is vitally important in order to maintain an effective level of misdirection. The magician must conceal the item in their hand without tensing any of the muscles in the hand or arm as they may look unnatural and alert the audience to the concealed item. Holding a palmed playing card in the magician's hand must look relaxed without any tension flowing through the hand and arm. The audience's perception is key. Audiences notice physical cues signed by the performer. Audiences 'can usually tell by watching a person's body communication, if your character is happy, excited, sad or agitated' (Jones, 2014, p.126), therefore the close-up magician must be aware of their physicality throughout their routine and ensure that the correct coding is communicated to the audience. They need to not reveal magical elements before the performance climaxes.

As with an actor, there needs to be purpose to any movement. Stanislavski created within his actors' toolkit the notion of Method of Physical Action[20]. The purpose of this theory was to focus the mind of the actor in training to their physical movements in character on stage. He comments that every action on stage should have a purpose – therefore not be without meaning. 'Acting demands the co-ordination of the entire organism' (Stanislavski, 2008, p.109), so the physicality of the magician cannot be ignored. The close-up magician's purpose for their action is to recount Story Alpha whilst concealing elements of Story Beta.

Toporkov (2008) recalls a comment by Stanislavski, 'you cannot master the method of physical action if you do not master rhythm. Each physical action is inseparably linked to the rhythm that characterises it'. And Nelms (1969, p. 190) agrees here, 'make no movement without a purpose'; a direct link to the early nineteenth century theory of Stanislavski. Nelms continues, 'every action must be clearly motivated, and the motivation must fit the performer's assumed character'. There is a synergy here with the *Character* element in this category of *Performance* and the entirety of the *Issitt 12-point System*. There is a causal link too in that the clarity of Story Beta must be intact and concealed in order for the narrative of Story Alpha to continue through the action and not lose the performance.

Tamariz (2007, p. 39) has a more succinct way of explaining the need to consider movement as a magician – 'avoid quick movements'; and Nelms (1969, p.190) agrees that 'when you rehearse by yourself, you may find trouble in eliminating meaningless movements'.

Aside from the deportment and carriage of the magician during a trick – attempting not to reveal a method – there is also the magician's physical movement around the table in a restaurant. This also can include the handling and management of the space in a non-performance environment. With no formal staging, the close-up magician must create their performance space. Therefore, the space of the restaurant has to be transformative within the boundaries of a restaurant setting. The close-up magician needs to be flexible in their approach in order to facilitate the function of the restaurant and the function of the magic.

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[20] Stanislavski's work was translated into English by E.R. Hapgood, amongst others. His seminal works relating to this study are *An actor prepares* (1936), *Building a character* (1949) and *Creating a role* (1961).

Within a restaurant, the employees have very different agendas than the magician. They are serving food and drink as efficiently as possible and need not concern themselves with the magician. It is important that the close-up magician becomes part of the furniture of the establishment quickly and not a health and safety hazard. This requires an understanding of how a restaurant works and when diners would be receptive to close-up magic performed at their table. Presto (2017) comments that 'there's the moment round the table to get ahead of the food or to be in position as the plates get cleared'. Presto acknowledges the need to watch the restaurant as well as the audience.

A simple analysis of the event helps to solve this issue. To generalise, starters at the restaurant can be hot or cold food, main courses are hot food and desserts usually cold. Diners do not wish to be troubled by a close-up magic performance during any hot food. Therefore, there are four main opportunities for a close-up magician to approach a table; shortly after ordering, once the starters have been removed, once the main course has been finished by the entire table and whilst the desserts are being eaten. In essence, the close-up magician is 'fighting against the conditions of [their] environment' (Brown, 2017). There is a link here to *Approach*.

The role of this movement and physicality around the table and the setting is purely to focus the audience's attention and expectations. The close-up magician must manage these expectations and take the audience on the journey through the magical presentation. The close-up magician must consider *Movement* in light of all of the elements within the *System*.

Audience Relationship Subsection

The final collection of four elements in the *System* reside under the title *Audience Relationship*. A solid and good working relationship with the audience is essential in any form of the performing arts, but especially in close-up magic as 'people are different everywhere' (Presto, 2017). Close-up magic is a solitary art form by the nature of the practice and rehearsal in isolation, and in performance. Therefore, the need to foster a strong audience relationship is paramount. There are striking differences between this need for a close-up magician and an illusionist. An illusionist works on a stage with lighting and large props, and assistants for misdirection, creates their audience relationship in a very different way. Smoke, mirrors and

the utilisation of distance are the main factors that influence the audience in a stage illusion performance. The close-up magician needs to create a different relationship with their audience immediately. The following elements within this *System* help to create a positive first impression in front of their audience.

Appearance

The element of *Appearance* is directly linked to the *Character* element in the previous sub-section. *Appearance* is the physical appearance of the close-up magician as they approach the table. It should be noted that the method of approach will be discussed later in this chapter. Therefore, this pertains to the clothing worn by the close-up magician during their set. A close-up magician should never be unkempt. Their appearance is an extension of the character that they created earlier in the *System*. This may entail the wearing of a suit, a jacket and jeans or some other signifier. The importance of semiotics and the significance of certain signs within the performing arts is linked to the type of clothing that the close-up magician chooses to wear. A dinner jacket may sign a gentleman magician to the audience and jeans and tee-shirt may sign a young, hip or casual magician. It is vitally important that the close-up magician chooses appropriate clothing which directly correlates to their character in performance. Although Geoffrey Durham was speaking about his character creation for the stage, the sentiment is the same. Durham commented that '[he] invented the whole thing in about thirty seconds in the middle of the night. [He] suddenly woke up and thought [he] could call yourself The Great Soprendo, [he] could have mustachios, … a black wig, … stupid costumes and [he] could laugh all the time' (50greatestricks2, 2008).

Appearance is the first impression. The close-up magician has to engage the audience quickly; they do not have the advantage of lengthy performance time in order to fully engage their audience members. Therefore, the need for the close-up magician to consider their appearance is vitally important. They must also remember that good grooming is essential as they are up close to their audience whilst performing. For example, a close-up magician's fingernails should be kept perfectly clean at all times. As Brown (2017) comments, he has 'never forgotten Eugene Burger talking about the dirty fingernails' and the importance of correct hygiene.

This element could have been named costume to align with Kowzan's (1968) original system but the term costume does strongly suggest a theatrical production. The term *Appearance* therefore encompasses the clothes of the close-up magician, their hair, how well they are groomed, and a level of professionalism. Although there is no dress code for the professional working close-up magician, it is important to remember that the clothes of the magician will directly relate to their chosen character and signal the first impression to an audience. There is a casual link to *Character.*

The essential element of a close-up magician's attire is the proliferation of pockets. This poses no problem with the gentleman magician as their clothes come with pockets: the jacket, the trousers, the shirt etc. But this is a huge consideration for the female magician. Their attire does not necessarily come with pockets. Some of the pockets are ornamental and not functional, therefore the female magician must consider how to adapt their clothing in order to create pocket space for effects, gimmicks, etc. Presto has all of her performance clothing specially made with extra pockets – the perfect solution. The close-up magician also needs to consider how a laden pocket looks to their audience, as McBride (2015, p.63) observes,

> 'if you perform close-up, simply carrying too many bulky props can cause an overweight condition. Beginner magicians often feel that need to carry absolutely everything in order to insure [*sic*] that they won't run out of material. More experienced close-up magicians learn how to do more magic with fewer props'.

Therefore, it is essential that the close-up magician carefully considers their costume and personal grooming.

Approach

The second element within the category of *Audience Relationship* in this system is *Approach*.

Approach is twofold; there is the physical approach to the table prior to the commencement of the magic, and the method of the initial communication by the close-up magician: their opening line to the table. Assuming that the magician is travelling between tables at a restaurant, then the *Approach* is the physical way they walk to their next table. This is directly linked to academically recognised communication theory, as Mehrabian (British Library,

2018) stated that 55% of communication is visual communication; therefore, our body language. Our physical being can alter audience's preconception. They will judge the close-up magician from those initial moments, in the same way as all human beings make initial judgements about each other from those initial exchanges and their physical being. Close-up magic audiences are no different. Burger (1987, p.51) comments that 'in close-up magic, as in life, it is very often our approach – the impact of our initial appearance, presence and manner – that determines whether our efforts will be successes, failures, or complete disasters'. All of these elements need to coexist.

Twinned with those initial visual moments is the initial verbal moment: the magician's opening line. Although this does sit squarely within the elements of *Voice* (*Performance*) and *Communication* (*Audience Relationship*) there is no doubt that the magician's opening line sets the tone for the encounter. Presto (2009) comments that in a restaurant setting an American table and a British table are wanting two very different things. From Presto's thirty-five years of experience of close-up magic she has observed that when a close-up magician approaches a restaurant table in the US the diners want them to win, but the UK table wants them to lose. There is a different mind-set borne out of cultural differences; therefore, for the purposes of this *system* the approach opening line is hugely important. As Presto (2009) comments, 'in this country the last thing you can do is go up to a table and say 'Hi, I'm your local magician, would you like to see some magic'', Presto (2009) continues with a suggested audience response of 'do you mind, we are having a nice time. Go away'. Zenon (2017) feels that 'establishing your character as soon as you can' is vitally important; 'whether that is through your accent or the props that you are using, or the body language, or costume'. A slight difference of opinion but in general agreement, the initial moment shapes the audience reactions for the rest of their set. Fielding West speaking in Hass (2015b) comments that 'the audience has to find a reason to like you the first time that they see you' and underpins the notion of *Approach* in the context of this *System*. Brown (2017) believes that there is a link to the humanity of the magician here. He states that 'it's our humanity because it's how we approach people. Do you approach someone with a sense of I'm better than you or you're better than me? That affects your attitude'. Brown (2017) believes, as does Fielding West (Hass, 2015b) and Presto (2009), that the first impression is of primary importance to the close-up magician. He states that 'there is nothing wrong with turning up to entertain or to

do a trick. There is a million ways of doing that wrongly. Getting off on the wrong foot from the start'. Three experienced magicians all concur that *Appearance* is an essential element within the *System.*

Communication

This element within the *System* is a little complex as it collides with many of the other elements. *Communication* is intrinsic to all of the elements within the *System*. The term *Dialogue* was considered instead of *Communication,* but the two-way nature of *dialogue* conveys the idea that an audience is required to communicate back for the relationship to work. This is not the case, and therefore the term *Communication* is apposite.

Under the guise of *Communication* is Mehrabian's 7-38-55 communication model, communicator and receptor theory, and the inclusion and working with a script and patter. Mehrabian's (British Library, 2018) theory of communication is split into three sections. Mehrabian suggested that all human communication can be split up into 7% verbal communication, 38% non-verbal communication and 55% visual communication. It is implicit that communication theory is at the heart of the *System*. Even so, the close-up magician needs to be aware of their *Communication* separately to the other elements within this *System*, so they can develop the relevant skills to improve it. For the purposes of this element, *Communication* will consider the verbal and visual sections of Mehrabian's theory as the non-verbal section rests within the Voice element of the *Issitt 12-point System*.

The verbal section of Mehrabian's theory is rooted in the words that are used to communicate information and ideas. This verbal communication only represents 7% of how we communicate. For the performer, the verbal communication is the script or patter of their act; an actor uses a script to convey the emotion and meaning of a character in a situation written for them, whereas a close-up magician needs to develop their own material and patter. Here lies an issue. Magicians who work on a stage, performing parlour magic, stage magic and/or illusions will craft a script together because of the formal nature of the performance constraints. This is not necessarily true for the close-up magician. They might have certain ways of delivering a trick or effect and therefore will use the same lines of script each time, but they do not hold themselves to the rigid nature of actor's scripts. There are

two schools of thought around the need for scripting close-up magic. One believes that scripting of material is essential in order that nothing is missed out, that their characterisation is solid and that the effect or trick has the correct beats and pauses in order to elicit a good audience reaction: the other believes that improvised scripting and off the cuff remarks are best placed for close-up magic. For the purposes of this *System*, a need for some scripting is presumed.

The preparation of scripted material for the close-up magician can create a sense of structure to the performance. That is not to say that banter and improvised moments cannot occur. The close-up magician needs to be prepared to handle both opportunities well. The close-up magician should create a script for each trick or effect and a transition line or two to link them together. These lines should be learned simultaneously with the workings and sleights of the trick. It is essential though that the close-up magician does not maintain rigidity on their script as improvisation is highly likely to be required (as seen in Appendix W). The nature of the environment in which the close-up magician works is not a rigid performance venue. The setting of the restaurant and wedding breakfast is dynamic; each of the tables, for example, are not at same point in the celebrations. Courses arrive and are removed at slightly different times throughout the event; this can be a benefit to the close-up magician. It does go with saying that all scripted material and off the cuff remarks should be pitched at the appropriate level of the guests in the performance environment. Risqué material should not be used when children or vulnerable adults are present; that is assuming that their character or magic persona needs to use risqué material at all. The notion of clean family entertainment should be the close-up magician's watchword in relation to this element.

Consider the use and involvement of laypersons as participants in the magic, they should (and must) be treated with respect and not used as a comedy vehicle for the magician. Throughout the development of modern entertainment magic, the use of laypersons is essential to create the bond with the audience and to give someone a magician's eye view of proceedings. All members of the public should be treated with respect and talked with and not down to. The close-up magician should be mirroring a high level of professionalism at all times. Unfortunately, through observations, this not the case across the board.

The close-up magician needs to consider the knowledge base of the average layperson. This detail sits firmly within the *Communication* element in the *System*. As with every subject and

vocation there is a myriad of specialist terms and phrases which all other magicians understand but can alienate a layperson audience. The close-up magician must be careful here not to over-compensate and begin to condescend to their audience but just be mindful of some simple facts. Few households possess a pack of playing cards today. Through the writer's experience as a close-up magician, not all laypersons are aware of the four suits within a pack of cards, for what the J of Jack stands, and what *cutting the cards* means? This can be realised by allowing the think pause or break, discussed earlier, within the sequencing of a routine and the writing of the script.

Close-up magic is not, in this setting, impromptu and therefore the close-up magician should carry themselves with an air of professionalism at all times. Some consideration of the scripting of words during and between tricks and effects is essential to the audience relationship. Communication is one of the fundamental foundations of performance in any media.

Experience

Experience is the final element within the *Audience Relationship* section of the *Issitt 12-point System*.

Experience, for the purposes of this study, can be broken down into two further elements. There is the experience of the close-up magician in relation to the number of years practice and their expertise, and then the physical experience of the moment by the audience and the close-up magician. The former can be cross interpreted as *Ease Under Pressure* as highlighted earlier alongside *Self-Knowledge*; but *Experience* here is the knowledge of personal professional experience as a close-up magician.

The experience of the magician and the audience are essential to weave the rest of this *System* together. Within close-up magic there is a moment of collective experience as the collision of the two stories occurs and the climaxes of the tricks. These moments create positive experiences for the audiences and the magician.

The close-up magician must be self-reflexive after each performance. The professional performer will stop in order to analyse their performances and change anything appropriate.

The close-up magician is no different. They must consider the experience of the audience in the moments of magic and their own phenomenological response.

In order for the *Issitt 12-point* System to gain credibility it is essential to test it against several different markers. These markers are highlighted in chapter five through the detailed analysis of the writer's, the professional's and the apprentice's practices.

Chapter Five - Testing the *Issitt 12-point System*

The current need for an analytic tool within the professional world of the close-up magician has been highlighted in the previous chapters. The *Issitt 12-point System* is measured against my close-up magic performance as an early career professional magician and academic researcher, the professional expert practice of Fay Presto and the apprentice's practice, Joseph Reynolds, as he attempts to gain membership to The Magic Circle. Presto has been at the heart of this study not only with her expert insight into the *World of Magic* but also in the upskilling of the writer's practice. As discussed, Presto arguably can be credited with the creation of close-up magic in the United Kingdom and therefore has the appropriate key knowledge and experience of this form of magic. Joseph Reynolds, the apprentice for the purposes of this study, is an ex-student of the writer and was approached to test the new *Issitt* 12-point *System* in relation to his upcoming audition for The Magic Circle in London. It is essential that any new *System* is placed 'up against various kinds of physical or mental processes' (Parmentier, 2016, p.69) for validation.

This was the opportunity to consider the *System* not only from an internally directed reflexive tool to an externally directed critical tool to improve his overall performance skills. The first person will be used in relation to the author's own practice for ease throughout this chapter.

The Writer's Practice

This section will consider my audition to become a member of The Magic Circle and then how I changed my practice over the subsequent years. This section will then conclude with an analytic discussion of the writer's close-up magic viva performance. It must be noted that any reflexion is problematic as Forrest (2008) states that 'with this type of reflection, we see things from one point of view: our own'.

My first aim in relation to professional practice as close-up magician was to gain membership of The Magic Circle[21]. Gaining membership of this society is a rigorous process involving a 1-

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[21] The Magic Circle is the world's premier magical society with '1,500 [members] stretching across 40 countries of the world' (Dawes and Bailey, 2005, p.7).

2-1 interview and an audition at the London headquarters in front of approximately 40-50 professional members, three of whom mark the candidate. The grading criteria for this is attached as Appendix A.

The initial interview went well and therefore I was given my audition date of the 22nd June 2009. I worked with Fay Presto on my 8-12 minute routine to polish the performance and to improve some of the handling of the props. On this first occasion I failed to gain membership due to manual dexterity and presentation issues.

When a candidate fails to pass the audition, The Magic Circle offers some critical feedback for further improvement. My written feedback cited that there were two sleight of hand moves that produced an audible clink from one of my finger rings onto the magical props during two different tricks, and a long explanation that my final trick duped the audience. I had effectively failed to gain entry into The Magic Circle because of some prop management issues and the strength of my acting and, in hindsight, the lack of detail in relation to Story Alpha.

The following section of this chapter will use descriptive terminology and structure to fully convey what occurred in this audition.

The finale of my audition consisted of a fabricated routine entitled *The world famous three card tricks at the same time*, this was created for comic and dramatic effect. Unfortunately, no video evidence exists of my audition as this contravenes The Magic Circle rules. I asked an audience member to choose a card, which I then attempted to find but failed; four new audience members were then asked to join me on stage as we collectively tried to find the four Aces out of a pack of cards without me as magician touching the pack. A final member of the audience chose a different card at random to create *three tricks* to solve. Whilst each stage of the four Aces trick was being directed by me and performed by the audience members, I kept returning to the initial audience member to ask them to remind me what their card was. I then pulled out random cards from my waistcoat in an attempt to find theirs; which obviously failed, whilst also trying to find the final audience member's card. The close of this routine is the successful finding of the four Aces and the final audience member's card, followed by a false finish until a realisation that I had not found the first lost card. I apologised to them, closed my set and gave an applause clue as I took off my jacket and turned around to reveal a huge picture of the lost card sewn onto the back of my waistcoat.

The main response from my examiners was that the audience felt duped into feeling genuinely sorry for me when I could not find the initial card and as it seemed that I had messed up the trick. As the reveal was at the very end of the routine, effectively during the final audience applause, the examiners felt as though I had purposefully misled the audience and therefore, I could not pass my audition. The irony here was that my acting skills and my strong characterisation failed to engage the audience in the way I had expected. My years of acting had affected my performance. I had created such a rigid and lifelike Story Alpha that the audience believed my performance entirely. Although there would have been moments of suspension of belief (from a magic point of view), they had believed my version of Story Alpha so completely that they had not understood or seen the comedy within the performance. It was evident thereafter that I needed to exaggerate this comic persona in order to create the necessary atmosphere.

After weeks of self-reflection, I realised that I needed to allow the audience into my Story Alpha more; allow them to realise that I will find the card eventually, and that the routine exists for comic effect and entertainment. The *three card tricks at the same time* closer remained with just three small performance adjustments to create a stronger finish.

The first change was in my first reaction to not finding the initial card. During the first audition, I had convinced the audience too perfectly that I had ruined the trick, therefore for this second audition attempt I injected a little more humour with the phrase *"Don't worry, I am sure it'll turn up somewhere. I've got it somewhere"* – leading the audience to the final big climax later on in the set.

The second change involved the audience member who chose the first card. Instead of asking that audience member to say the name of their chosen card each time, I returned to them on several occasions requesting that they shout out the name of their card – thus creating a moment of audience interaction. All of this still took place whilst I tried to find this lost card from the cards being pulled out of the waistcoat. I purposefully fail to find it. This constant repetitive gag allowed the atmosphere of the audience to grow and foster a strong bond.

The final change affected the final climax. Instead of revealing the card on the back of waistcoat, somewhat *after* the trick had concluded, I returned to an earlier trick for the climax. I performed the *Chop Cup* routine which involves revealing a small crocheted ball, a

lime and then a lemon underneath an empty cup. This effect is described as 'the ball is placed under the cup endless times, yet it continuously vanishes and appears in your pocket, or it's placed in your pocket and appears under the cup' (Macmillan Magic Limited, 2018). Immediately after finishing this trick I produced a grapefruit and commented that I had tried for hours to get it to fit underneath the cup, but it was impossible. This was a moment of comedy for the room. The grapefruit was then left on the table in front of the audience throughout the remainder of the routine. The final climax was to ask the audience member (whose card I could not find) to come to the front, take the grapefruit and slice through it. It should be noted here that the magician does not handle the grapefruit after the start of the final routine. Their card was inside the grapefruit. A better ending of the trick than previously.

This successful reworking of my audition set, and these changes, led to me passing my second audition and becoming a member of The Magic Circle in November 2009.

The experiences gained in these two auditions have set the basis for the creation of the *Issitt 12-point System.* A strong initial frame of reference for the *System* was created, linking it back into praxis; along with a fixed point from which to develop my own abilities. These auditions assisted in the creation of the twelve separate elements within the *Issitt 12-point System* and, most importantly, gave a personal experience of magic in performance upon which to build whilst not relying on primary or secondary anecdotal practice and knowledge.

There were tricks and moments throughout my practice when the *Issitt 12-point System* was employed to analyse my own practice, most notably in relation to *Timing*. The rope trick which can be viewed in Appendix B is the perfect example of changing *Timing* to benefit the performance. After the initial cutting of the rope by the layperson[22], the magician reconnects the rope back together into one single piece of rope with a flourish[23]. The *Timing* of this climax (two pieces of rope joining together to make one piece) was too fast, in my practice, and did not allow any magic or wonder to be created from the point of view of the audience. Once I had the rope reconnected, I used to show this climax fairly quickly, to a limited response from the audience. Once I considered *Timing* from the *Issitt 12-point System*, I realised that this

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[22] This is the cutting of one long piece of rope into two equal halves by the layperson.

[23] This moment can also be viewed in Appendix D.

was a magical moment that required punctuation. Geoffrey Durham speaks about punctuation in his own practice 'discovered that over the years, if you tear up the newspaper and blow … and then have it immediately come back again nobody much cares, but you pause' (50greatestricks2, 2008). Durham is talking about the *torn and restored newspaper* trick[24] and his understanding of the pause for the audience. His pause is the previously discussed *think pause*. This moment is echoed in Presto's own practice including her thoughts on *Timing* that it 'is so excruciatingly important' (Presto, 2017). Presto talks about the need to include *think pauses* for the audience, to allow their brains to catch up. The close-up magician must be wary of the speed of their act especially in light of pausing. They need to allow that pause moment to exist on its own without the complexities or scaffolding of speech; as Presto (2017) comments that 'there is a moment when you must say nothing'. Both of these moments are documented in Appendix D.

Presto's (2017) comment about silence is also applicable to my second illustration of the mechanics of using the *Issitt 12-point System*. I noticed through informal feedback from The Magic Circle that I tended to speak a little too quickly at moments throughout my set. I was purposefully filling the silences between moments in each trick in order not to create or allow a silence to exist. This was a mistake. Once I realised this through using the *System* as an analytical tool, I consciously altered my vocal practice to accommodate a slower vocal delivery. My role as magician developed into a comedic magician role – the character and therefore the connection with the audience is more important than the trick. Brown (2017) states that 'the trick is ultimately not always as important as people think' and this agreed with my practice.

Many of the *Performance* elements of the *Issitt 12-point System* were being created and analysed intuitively in my practice. It was refreshing to look back at my practice and be truly analytical. The *Issitt 12-point System* focused my ruminations and gave me a blueprint for reflection.

It was interesting considering the *Manual Dexterity* element within the *System* in relation to my own practice, as I cannot complete some of the more complicated sleights and moves.

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[24] This is a classic of magic. The magician tears up a newspaper in plain sight of the audiences and then flicks the paper to produce a restored newspaper with all of the original papers intact.

This therefore made me more aware of the limitations to my own practice (within the Self-Knowledge element in the *System)* and how I could therefore change my practice for the better. The realisation that you as a performer may not be physically able to perform certain magic sleights leads to a deeper understanding of the *Character* in your practice. These limitations should not stifle understanding and development but 'create freedom and breed creativity' (Graham and Hoggett, 2014, p.16). This was only possible because of the creation and utilisation of the *Issitt 12-point System*.

I noticed a change in the way I developed my practice in relation to new material in light of the *System*. Historically I would have seen a new trick or routine and considered if I had the skill and dexterity to perform it, but after the creation of the *System* this changed. My focus was no longer on the *Manual Dexterity* but the *Character*. Asking myself, "*would my character perform this type of trick";* and the majority of time the answer would be negative. The *System* has helped me change my practical focus away from the negativity of physical limitations to the practical application of new material in relation to my type of character as magician. Graham and Hoggett (2014, p.39), when speaking about the process of devising theatre comment that it 'is not about exposing people's limitations or putting 'bad' actors and 'bad' dancers on stage' and the same is true for the close-up magician: an improvement in practice is paramount.

The Expert's Practice

The *Issitt 12-point System* is now set against the professional practice of Fay Presto.

Presto is famous for bringing magic to the restaurant scene in London and continuing this throughout the past thirty plus years. She has had a London restaurant residency at *Langan's*[25] in Mayfair during this time, with some diners ensuring that they book on a Thursday evening for a chance to see her in action. Presto also has a residency at one of the new London venues called *The Ned*[26].

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[25] Details of *Langan's* restaurant can be found at www.langansbrasserie.com.

[26] Details of *The Ned* can be found at www.thened.com.

John Lenahan[27] in the documentary *50 greatest magic tricks* comments that 'if you're in a restaurant and someone is wandering around doing tricks, you should hope it's Fay 'cos she's great' (50greatestricks1, 2008). The opinion of the magic community is echoed by Darcy Oake (2015, p.146) 'Fay Presto is a genius of close-up magic – her *Bottle Through Table* trick will make you believe that a solid object can easily pass through a piece of wood'. He continues to highlight one of the many reasons why Fay is held in such high regard; 'she involves the audience, asking them to help her push the bottle slowly through the table. It is really a masterclass' (Oake, 2015, p.146).

In order to highlight some of these elements and confirm that the *Issitt 12-point System* is effective, footage of Fay Presto's practice will be used[28].

To analyse Fay Presto's practice, I will be relating her work to the *Issitt 12-point System* and primarily the *Performance* and *Audience Relationship* categories. This is not to say that I consider the *Technical Ability* of Presto to be second class or inferior, much the opposite, but her style and uniqueness of practice is best highlighted through these two categories.

Within *Audience Relationship* is *Appearance, Approach, Communication* and *Experience*. The best example of how these four elements work together is in Presto's opening trick *Take Charge* (Appendix E). This trick is a short opener that is intended to gain the audience's immediate attention as she approaches the table cold. It should be remembered at this stage that the table of diners is not necessarily prepared for a magician to entertain them at the table and therefore the approach is vitally important.

Presto lights a piece of flash string[29] to gain the table's attention as she approaches them. This communicates that Presto is a close-up magician immediately and gives the table the impression of the type of magician Presto is. After the flash string is lit it changes to reveal a necklace or some jewel. This is an excellent example of *Approach* within the *Issitt 12-point System*: the magician uses a striking element (the flash string) to gain the audience's attention

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[27] John Lenahan is a magician and Member of the Inner Magic Circle who in the 1997 fronted *Stuff the White Rabbit* on BBC2.

[28] This footage has been generously shared by the documentary maker Hanna Aqvilin.

[29] Flash string is treated with a flammable liquid which lights bright and burns fast and leaves no residue.

and to make a statement explaining what is about to occur. This all takes place without a complex exchange of words. *Take Charge* brings together the majority of the elements within the *Issitt 12-point System* and illustrates how they can work together to create a perfect magical moment.

The second example from Presto's practice is the sharing of the re-joining of the rope (Appendices D and F). This shows Fay joining the rope back together and then pausing before the sharing of the joined piece of rope is slowly extended. This is an example of *Timing* from the *Issitt 12-point System* and of how the four elements work cohesively. The pause before the sharing, as evidenced in Appendices B, D and F creates a wealth of tension, anticipation and ultimately power in performance. With the addition of one brief moment, the magician can alter the state of the audience and potentially elevate a good trick to be an epic trick. This is the perfect example of first-class Timing in practice.

It is worth commenting on Presto's construction of Story Alpha and Story Beta. Presto is the first to admit that her technical magical skills (Story Beta) are not the best in the world but her understanding of performance (Story Beta) and the audience relationship are. As stated, Presto believes that, 'magic is the peg upon which to hang the relationship with the audience' (Presto, 2007) which in practical terms leads her to the creation of a robust Story Alpha.

The Apprentice's Practice

This chapter has analysed some elements of my own practice and highlighted areas of improvement and development in relation to the *Issitt 12-point System* and has considered the professional practice of Fay Presto. For the final section in this chapter, I will consider how the *System* was used to assist an early career magician.

Joe Reynolds, an ex-student of the University of Cumbria contacted me for assistance in passing his audition for membership of The Magic Circle. He engaged me as his magic mentor. With his permission, we used the *Issitt 12-point System* to analyse some elements of his practice in order to better equip him for the audition in London. Reynolds has been involved in magic for many years but only recently has felt that his practice warranted membership to The Magic Circle.

It was decided that the best way of improving Reynolds' practice was to use the *Issitt 12-point System* and some laypersons for feedback. The methodology was to use a qualitative approach in relation to the grading criteria for The Magic Circle[30]. Seven stages were agreed; there were as follows:

- *Stage One* – Initials discussions around the *Issitt 12-point System* with Reynolds and Issitt (Appendix G);
- *Stage Two* - 1st version of Reynolds' magic set (Appendix H);
- *Stage Three* – Post 1st set discussions (Appendix J);
- *Stage Four* – Rehearsal and direction with Reynolds and Issitt (Appendix K);
- *Stage Five*- 2nd version of Reynolds' magic set (Appendix L);
- *Stage Six* – Post 2nd Version Comments from initial two lay people (Appendix M);
- *Stage Seven* – 2nd Version of Reynolds' magic set performed to a different audience (Appendix N).

The Trick to Performance diagram (Fig. 5) highlighted earlier, was employed to focus work with Reynolds. Our work resided in the *Sharing* $\rightarrow$ *Feedback* boxes initially and then onto *Refinement* $\rightarrow$ *Sharing* $\rightarrow$ *Feedback* boxes. Appendix H is the initial sharing with the lay people (the *Sharing* box), Appendix J is the initial *Feedback*, with Appendix K being the *Refinement* through discussion and rehearsal or pertinent sections of Reynolds' close-up magic set.

In order to test the validity of the *Issitt 12-point System* I will analyse some of the more pertinent moments in this process. By using the *Issitt 12-point System*, we pinpoint the elements in the *Technical Ability* section which were to a very good standard and which other elements needed more immediate attention. Effectively his Story Beta was evident to a very high standard and in line with the grading criteria on The Magic Circle documentation (Appendix A), but there were some missing elements within his Story Alpha.

Highlighting the need to look deeper into Story Alpha moves our attention to the *Performance* section of the *System*. Most notably the *Voice* element was of most concern. In Appendix H, it is noticeable that his vocal delivery is considerably fast and there are moments when the

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[30] The Grading Criteria for entry into the Magic Circle can be found in Appendix A.

audience do not fully comprehend his comments or requests[31]. This leads to the discussions in Appendix J and the analytical rehearsals in Appendix K. This moment to reflect on the vocal performance allowed us to analyse the weaker aspects of Reynolds' voice and to work specifically on his pace of delivery. It is interesting to observe this element (*Voice*) seems to be often overlooked by professional close-up magicians. Presto (2017), for example, comments to the close-up magician that '[they] have to get [themselves] some voice training'. The importance of the voice to a vocal performer of any sort is paramount because 'voices do magic. They operate so far below awareness that they are frighteningly powerful' (Barton and Dal Vera, 2017, p.3). Voice work should not be overlooked. The required vocal adjustments in this performance were discussed and made in Appendix K. The improvement in this element can be seen in Appendix L especially in relation of the speed of the delivery of the lines.

After successfully using the *Issitt 12-point System* in the rehearsal room to highlight important elements for development and practice, Reynolds auditioned at The Magic Circle successfully and gained membership.

The importance and relevance of a new analytical tool like the *Issitt 12-point System* cannot be overstated. It has been evidenced that the *System* has greatly improved the practice of the writer (further to analysis of the Viva Performance below); tests well against the practice of a full-time professional close-up magician and, possibly most importantly, that the *System* works as a practical pedagogic tool to assist in the development and progression of the skill set of a novice magician.

The Viva Performance

To further investigate the efficacy of the *Issitt 12-point System,* a Viva Performance was created. This performance took place on 16th May 2019 in the upstairs room of an Italian restaurant in Lancaster, England, UK. The space was configured as a normal restaurant dining room (Fig. 7) with one table reserved for the examiners. It was essential that the performance

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[31] This moment is highlighted and discussed in Appendix G.

was as close to the real-world environment of the close-up magician. It should be noted that the diners during this performance arrived fully aware of the evening's entertainment.

All performers need to be reflexive. This reflective pause creates the possibility for improvement. It is essential that they consider a reflective, an internally directed consideration, and a critical, externally directed, to gain sufficient information to support and develop their own practices. The reflective element here requires an analytical approach to self for 'we see things from one point of view: our own' (Forrest, 2008). Although this is the most difficult mode of reflection is important to consider this during and after the performance. Forrest (2018) considers 'that the process of thinking through an event after it has been completed and, if possible, discussing these thoughts with a mentor or supervisor' is crucial to the development and betterment of self as performer.

Fig.7 – Viva Performance Restaurant

Preparations

The close-up magician's preparations for a performance rarely alter through time; ensuring that all the props are in working order, rehearse any new scripting or patter, and run through any new tricks or moves. My preparations for the Viva Performance were the same, and these

pre-show checks created an immediate example of the necessary adaptability of the close-up magician.

Minutes prior to the start of the show one of the tricks malfunctioned during my pre-performance checks at the venue. Therefore, this particular trick / effect was unusable, as I did not have sufficient time to fix the issue. Although the sense of adaptability is not explicitly present in the *Issitt 12-point System,* it does exist within some of the other elements. Within the *Technical Ability* subsection, adaptability resides within *Self-Knowledge* and *Ease Under Pressure.* The experience of performing close-up magic for many years teaches the close-up magician how to handle certain situations and to adapt to the environment. This trick had to be removed from the set at each table.

The removal of a trick could have caused serious issues for a naïve or young performer as the rhythm of their set would have significantly changed; this could have a negative effect on their performance. The alteration of the tricks within the set has the potential to greatly affect all of the elements within the *Performance* subsection. If a close-up magician has learnt a considerable amount of their script by heart, then the removal of a small section of their text could cause a crisis of confidence which in turn could lead to a breakdown in the telling of the narrative arcs within Story Alpha and Story Beta.

The adaptability of the close-up magician was evident here in my own practice as this trick was removed from my performance set without creating a sense of negativity over the performance.

For the purpose of this analysis of my Viva Performance I will highlight moments in the video and photographic evidence which assist to further explain the *Issitt 12-point System* in practice.

Audience Control

Any performer has a certain level of control over their audience, be it direct or indirect. A musician can emotionally move an audience with a song, or a pantomime villain can generate booing from an audience; essentially, they are all controlling the audience in relation to performance. The close-up magician is no different, they rely on that audience relationship

to assist in the creation of meaning. McAuley's (2000) notion that 'the specificity of theatre is not found in its relationship to the dramatic … but in that it consists essentially of the interaction between performers and spectators in a given space' is aligned with Presto's (2010) observations of audience.

Within the Viva Performance there are several moments when the controlling of the audience and the focus upon the close-up magician is evident. The level of audience control can be seen in *Figures 8, 9 and 10* holding the audience's attention. The control of the audience's gaze is of paramount importance to the close-up magician and resides within several elements of the *Issitt 12-point System.*

Fig. 8 Writer Performing the Rope Trick 1

Fig. 9. Writer Performing the Rope Trick 2

Fig. 10 Writer Holding Group's Attention

Through the use of verbal and non-verbal communication you can successful direct your audience to react accordingly to the magic being performed. The close-up magician needs to mask Story Beta (the manual dexterity) with the narrative of Story Alpha (the characterisation) in order to create a sense of wonder in the eyes of the audience. This creation of the audience relationship, as seen in the *Self-Knowledge, Character, Communication and Experience* elements in the *System,* is evidenced in Appendix P. Here the magician creates and fosters a positive performance relationship with the audience. The magician must constantly be observant within their own performance in order that they can select the perfect moment to perform a 'magical sleight'. This should occur when the audience is not looking directly at the method. Essentially if the audience is looking at my right hand, because of effective direction thereto, then the close-up magician could figuratively bring on an elephant with their left hand and the audience would not notice because misdirection is 'broadly defined as manipulating people's attention, thoughts and memory' (Kuhn and Martinez, 2012); ultimately the control of the audience.

Suspension of Disbelief / Misdirection

As discussed earlier in this study, the notion of misdirection, or indeed direction, is an essential skill for the close-up magician. The magician can also subvert the notion of magician and the creation of magic by highlighting certain moments. As seen within the Rope Trick at the Viva Performance, I share this moment with the audience when the misdirection occurs, allegedly. With reference to Appendix Q I am asking the audience member to create a *scissors cutting action* with their fingers in order to cut the rope. As the spectator attempts the cutting action with their fingers, my arms are dropped with the rope and I exclaim that the audience member has a "good action". Immediately thereafter I highlight the moment of misdirection explicitly with the phrase, "misdirection, I'll even tell you when I'm doing it". This is evidence of misdirection in practice, but moreover *informed* misdirection. The audience member is told that misdirection is taking place. At this point the audience member's suspension of disbelief is altered. The close-up magician is explicitly highlighting that there is trickery occurring and that the audience member is being controlled and misdirected away from the important moment or sleight. This utilisation of Brecht's technique, as explained in a previous chapter, continues to allow the audience

member to remain within the world of the trick and therefore suspending their disbelief but also allowing a break of that disbelief to occur within this moment of magic. The audience member is reminded that this is a magic trick and that the magician will deceive and cheat their way to magical success. It should be noted here that this moment of misdirection as stated in my performance actually is not a moment of misdirection: the audience member is being misdirected by the magician who explains that this is a moment of misdirection.

Suspension of disbelief is revisited in the Viva Performance during the *Chinese Linking Rings* routine. This can be viewed in Appendix R when I explain to the audience the "dangerous moment" in this ring routine. I am allowing the audience into the world of the magician by inferring that there is a hole, or gap, in the upper ring in order that the second ring could link on to it. This moment is designed to wrong foot the audience. Although the close-up magician is opening the door to the *World of Magic* a little, it is immediately banged shut when the top ring is dropped onto the lower ring and spun. A moment of real magic. The audience are misguided. Misdirection upon misdirection and false truths are employed here to steer the audience away from Story Beta and towards Story Alpha. Several elements within the *Issitt 12-point System* are working together to achieve this result, most notably *Manual Dexterity, Self-Knowledge, Ease Under Pressure, Character, Timing, Movement, Communication and Experience.*

There is an alternative moment within this Viva Performance when an insight for the spectators is created. This can be viewed in Appendix S. This trick involves eight small plastic sheets, each with some playing cards printed thereon. The audience member is asked to select a playing card, at random – avoiding the Joker - and are instructed that every time their chosen card appears on one of the plastic computer cards they then remove that plastic computer card from the table. I then state that whilst they are completing this task, I will look in the other direction "as if it means something". At this point, I look directly at one of the other audience members and shake my head. This is another example of allowing the audience into the *World of Magic* just a little in order to create a reaction later on.

The control of an audience throughout a routine is essential but increasingly so in the final moments or climax of a trick. This can be witnessed during the final moments of the Rope Routine. After cutting the rope in half, and trying, in vain, to put it back together, the final discarded pieces of rope are melded back into the original length of rope. This is evidenced

in *Fig. 11* when I am apparently concealing the extra pieces of rope within my hand along with the middle of the length of rope.

Fig. 11 The Final Moments of the Rope Trick

The story here is that these smaller pieces of rope will melt back into the longer length. I allow the two audience members with an end each, to pull the rope taut revealing that the pieces have melted back into the length of rope. This is not accepted by the audience members as my hand is still clasped shut and has not been opened. I then state that the pieces are definitely not in this closed hand whilst opening it to see an empty hand. This climax can be seen in Fig. 12 to good effect. This is another example of several elements of the *System* working together to control the audience.

Fig. 12. The Climax of the Rope Trick

Comedy moments driven by the audience / adaptability

Comedy is used by some magicians to guide and control an audience. This use of comedy resides within the *Character, Communication and Experience* elements of the *System*, as this is an example of Story Alpha and Story Beta working in tandem. In Appendix T, we can see that I perform a false exit away from the table in order to create a moment of comedy. This use of the comedic moments can also be seen in Appendix U where I ask the table audience, "does anyone know what is going on, does anybody care?". This in turn breaks a moment of tension and reiterates to the audience that this is a comedic magic performance. Using comedy to create and sustain a relationship with the audience creates a positive performance situation which, in turn, can foster a positive audience relationship.

The close-up magician can also manufacture a comedic moment. This can be seen in Appendix V when I fan a pack of cards faced down to a member of the audience and ask them to choose one. After they have completed this, I ask them to tell me if I am right or wrong when I name their card. I then name a random card – this is truly at random as at this point, I do not know which card they have selected. Obviously, this rarely works, and therefore the named card is incorrect. This leads to a perfect comedic moment when I state that "one of these days that trick will look amazing!". This moment creates a bond between the magician and the spectators by allowing a comedic pause to be created. The reaction of an audience member can be seen in Appendix V. This moment is not created through magic but through an understanding of the performer – audience relationship and how to foster and develop this in a positive way.

Comedy is very personal and different things make each of us laugh. Within my practice as a close-up magician I have to gauge the table in order to see what kind of jokes would be appropriate. This is not to suggest that any of the patter is overtly inappropriate but merely that some of the lines could be double entendres intentionally or otherwise. There is an example of this in Appendix W. Here I deliver a slightly risqué joke and follow this up with a comment that they asked for the more risqué material. This immediately creates a further bond between magician and audience and a Brechtian sense of breaking the fourth wall. It highlights the working of the two narratives (Story Alpha and Story Beta) in conjunction with the performative elements of the *System*.

Giving the magic to the audience

Throughout my practice a fundamental element has underpinned my development: the notion of giving the magic back to the audience: allowing the magic to happen in the audience's hands. This idea is so powerful and can lead to true moments of wonder.

If for a moment we consider the Rope Trick, in Appendices B and D, the first cut of the rope is performed by the audience. By cutting the rope the participant is now an integral piece of the performance, part of the narrative, and has agreed to the rule of play. This moment also creates a deeper sense of amazement as the audience member themselves cut the rope and not the magician. It is significantly easier to conceive the magic taking place in the hands of

a trained magician, but if the magician gives this back to the audience member than a deeper and longer lasting reaction will be seen.

The *Issitt 12-point System* has been tested against my own practice, the practice of a world-renowned professional close-up magician, the development of the magic apprentice's practice and more formally in a Viva Performance. It has been highlighted that the *system* is credible and can be applied to the practices of magicians at any stage of their amateur or professional development.

Conclusion

Magic is an art form. The constant evolution of gimmicks, sleights and performance skills are the strategies and methods by which magic can, and must, improve and develop. 'Magic cannot stand still. It must either advance with the times, or fall behind' (Steinmeyer, 2005, p.297). As it has been noted in this study, magic needs to concern itself not only with the developments in the world of science and technology but also in the world of performance. There is clearly a need for the close-up magician to develop their own practice and this is the study that opens up the academic discussion in relation to the performance elements within a close-up magician's set.

In the context of scholarship within Performance Studies from the late twentieth century, this study demonstrates why and how the performative elements of magic as a craft need to be carefully considered by the practitioner, *the Issitt 12-point System* addresses all twelve elements beyond simple effects. The consequences of this study, and its contribution to new knowledge includes not only the capability for the *Issitt 12-point System* as a reflective and analytical tool for self-reflection, but that it can also be an effective method of learning and teaching for close up magicians, being accessible for all stages in a magician's career. This has been shown through the testing of the *Issitt 12-point System* against the author's own practice, the expert's practice and the apprentice's practice. Hence this study is a ground-breaking piece of work in the world of performance magic and reaffirms its efficacy.

Close-up magicians should strive to improve not only their technical ability but their performance skills and their audience relationships. We know that 'witnessing a close-up magic performance can be an experience so memorable that the spectator will literally remember it for the rest of their life' (Ortiz, 1995, p.17), and the *Issitt 12-point System* allows the performance as a whole to grow and achieve this sense of amazement in the audience.

The dynamic between the audience and the performer is at the centre of this new *System* – and it is by attending to this context, rather than a simple focus on the efficacy of the trick, that makes the social contract that is the performance.

Taking the work of Kowzan (1968) the *Issitt 12-point System* reimagines the necessary elements required for a first-class close-up magic performance; and brings both

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performance and audience relationship to the forefront. The study has used Kowzan's 13 system (1968) as the basis for further development in relation to the close-up magic practitioner whilst considering the performance needs of the modern magician. It has referenced the early insights into the *World of Magic*, both secular and religious, with a view to charting the progression towards magic as performance.

There is a fundamental need that the initial trick is magically effective. But in order to achieve this it must deceive the audiences, or at the very least make them question something. Close-up magicians must not lose sight of the other elements in the 12-point *System*. Only by using the *Issitt 12-point System* in its entirety, can the close-up magician improve their performance and refine their art.

This *System* allows magicians and academics to continue the discussions into the required elements for a close-up magic set, and potentially draw in other magic forms.

The *Issitt 12-point System* has been used in the professional world too. It has used during the recent UK tour of The Champions of Magic[32]. This tour consisted of five world class illusionists in one full scale theatre production. Each of the magicians had their own specialisms; a manipulation act, a pair of stage illusionists, a mind reader and a close-up magic specialist. The *System* was used as a basis for professionally noting many of the performances in order to improve the product. This tour has 'been seen by thousands across the world' and is 'one of the world's biggest touring illusion shows' (Champions of Magic, 2018). This show continues to tour America and Canada.

The producer of The Champions of Magic show commenting on the author's work with the production;

> 'We asked [the author] to work with the *Champions of Magic* team having seen first-hand his commitment to and extensive research into the art of magic. As a performance consultant, he worked with our cast and crew to create a more uniform production and raise the level of the show as a whole. He was instrumental in inspiring new material and getting it bedded into the existing script' (Jarrett, 2016).

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[32] The tour in question was the 2016 UK leg of the Champions of Magic tour.

Therefore, the *Issitt 12-point System* has been utilised and tested across several aspects of the performance world to prove its effectiveness in delivering a positive change to performance practices. Several magic luminaries have commented on its appropriateness including Fielding West, Eugene Burger and Derren Brown as an analytical tool.

The future implications of this study are wide ranging. Although this study has been limited to the world of close-up magic, the *Issitt 12-point System* has the potential to be reimagined for other types of magic performance. There are strong links between the *Issitt 12-point System* and stage illusion, for example. This would offer a new insight into the workings and potential improvements which could be made to the performances of stage illusionists. It is important to state that these two worlds are very different, not merely because of the performance space they inhabit. As this study, has highlighted, the stage for the close-up magician is transient, it changes throughout a close-up magic performance because of the geography of the space. Close-up magic performances, as stated in earlier chapters, are predominately in restaurants or banquet/event spaces. This creates an opportunity for the close-up magician to take their stage with them, figuratively, as their performance space changes as they move between dining tables. This is not the same for the stage illusionists. The stage illusionists have a prescribed performance space which is immoveable and cannot change from its physical perspective. Essentially, they have one performance space with all of the advantages and disadvantages there linked.

The performance space for the stage illusionist warrants a reworking of the *Issitt 12-point System* initially prior to the reimagining of the other elements therein. It is vitally important that any reworking of the *System* commences from an audience point of view, a magician point of view and considers any limitations prescribed by the performance space. This is also true for street performers. A reimagining of the *System* for stage illusionists would be a relatively easy development.

The *Issitt 12-point System* can also be reimagined for all of the other magic types which are too numerous to list. There are strong links between the new *System* and children's magic and parlour magic. At the heart of this new *System* is the idea of communication with an audience.

There are further potential implications of this study within and without the world of performance. The *System* can be reimagined further for stand-up comedy, musical theatre and dance. Other non-performance worlds could also benefit from the structure of this new *System*. The writer has been approached by the University of Central Lancashire to reimagine the *System* for the effective teaching of undergraduate doctors, and to highlight the need for these undergraduates to develop their own communication skills in their clinical practice. Therefore, there is no end point to the potential scope of the *Issitt 12-point System*. It could be utilised in many other fields of study and be adapted as appropriate.

This study will be offered to The Magic Circle in London to be included in their magic library in order that future magicians can use the *System* to improve their own practices.

The study will drive positive change in the performance world of the close-up magician, continue to develop the academic discussion around magic in performance and allow others to develop younger performers to be the magicians of the future.

Appendices

Appendix A

https://themagiccircle.co.uk/join-us/joining-process

GUIDELINES FOR MARKING

Examiners mark candidates out of 20 in each of two areas. The guidelines below outline what we would expect to observe, in each area, at four key marks.

Candidates must earn 12 (18) marks, from two of the three examiners, in both areas to gain MMC (AIMC). However if an examiner judges that a candidate is so proficient in one area that they should be accepted as MMC (or AIMC) despite failing in the other area, they can make that recommendation on the mark form.

MARK (OUT OF 20)	MAGICAL ABILITY & TECHNIQUE	PRESENTATION	EXAMPLES OF SLEIGHTS
9	• Effects were performed with little fumbling although a lack of confidence was evident • Although secrets were not exposed it was clear at times that something had been done • Prop management was sometimes untidy and there was little evidence of routining	• The delivery was unsure and there was several dead spots • Spectators were handled courteously but instructions to them were not always clear • Presentation and patter were not original and no consistent personality was evident	• Thumb-Tip work • False transfer • Tidy shuffling of cards • Concealing a coin or sponge ball in the hand
12 M.M.C	• Effects were performed without fumbling although there might be signs of nervousness • Misdirection, sleights and moves were used effectively • Thought had been given to routining the effects which built to a natural climax	• A fairly confident delivery with few, if any, dead sports, presenting a likeable personality • The audience as a whole was acknowledged and volunteers put at ease • There was an attempt to move away from standard presentations and patter	• Card control • False count of ropes • Double lift • Loading cups • Elmsley count • Coin switch • Classic Palm
15	• Effects were performed confidently without visible signs of nervousness • Moves and sleights were covered by natural movements and gestures • Routining was good with a natural climax and with applause cues clearly pointed	• A confident delivery with no dead spots • The audience as a whole was engaged and unexpected comments handled competently • Presentation and patter was rehearsed and matched the personality	• Top change • Shuttle pass • Triple lift • Bill switch • Hamman count
18 A.I.M.C	• Effects were performed effortlessly and with great confidence • Sleights, moves, misdirection and timing were second nature • Routining was excellent – the effects flowed in a polished professional manner	• A very confident delivery without arrogance – a sense of enjoyment was conveyed • Good audience engagement with unexpected comments handled confidently • Presentation, patter and appearance matched a consistent performing persona	• Sleights need not be more advanced than for 15 but will be more smoothly executed • Some originality is expected in effect, presentation or persona at this level

Appendices B – W

Available at: https://vimeo.com/417771728

Password: 12point

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Close-up Magic	Magic that can be performed directly in front of the spectator without the need for any staging or lighting effects
Closer	The final trick or effect at the end of an act
Convincer	The convincing element within a trick that convinces the audience that something is true when it is not
Effect	What the audience perceive to be happening
Gimmick	A specially designed gadget which makes the magical effect possible
Layperson	A member of the public with no magic skill or knowledge
Legerdemain	Late Middle English word for trickery, deception and sleight of hand
Out	A potential end to a trick or routine; utilised when the performed trick has failed but a satisfying ending can still be achieved.
Patter	The script and/or words communicated by the magician
Reveal	The moment when the magician reveals the end of the trick which also can create a 'wow' response from the audience
Routine	The series of magic tricks as a whole
Set	Same as a routine
Sleight of Hand	The manipulation, during a trick, which is either unseen or realised by the spectator.
Suits of Playing Cards	The broad categories of the playing cards namely, hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades.

Penn and Teller's Seven Principles of Magic (AVM, 2015)

Palm	To hold an object in an apparently empty hand
Ditch or Dump	To secretly dispose of an unneeded object
Steal	To secretly obtain a needed object
Load	To secretly move a needed object to where it is needed
Simulation	To give the impression that something that hasn't happened, has
Misdirection	To lead attention away from a secret move
Switch	To secretly exchange one object for another

Types of Conjuring (Lamont and Wiseman, 1999)

Appearance	An object appears where it was not
Vanish	An object disappears from where it was
Transposition	An object changes position in space
Transformation	An object change form
Penetration	An apparently impossible case of matter through matter
Restoration	An object is damaged then restored to its original condition
Extraordinary Feats	The appearance of extraordinary mental ability, strength or invulnerability to ostensibly harmful effects
Telekinesis	The apparent ability to control movement of objects without physical contact
Extrasensory Perception	The acquirement of information not known to others apparently via extrasensory means.

Biographies of Contributors

Fay Presto is a leading UK Close-up and Cabaret magician. Her over thirty-five years of experience has led her to perform across the world. Presto has performed for Elton John, Paul McCartney and Her Majesty the Queen on five occasions. Presto continues to perform magic in her residencies at Langan's Brasserie and The Ned in London. Presto inspires the upcoming magicians and offers sage advice on performance. Presto won the prestigious The Magic Circle Close-up Magician of the Year 2012.

Derren Brown is one of the most recognised figures in the entertainment world in the latter stages of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century. He 'began [his] UK television career in December 2000 with a series of specials called *Mind Control*' (www.derrenbrown.com). Brown has appeared on stage and television with his own brand of magic and psychological illusion and states at the start of all of his performance that his entertainment uses Suggestion, Psychology, Misdirection and Showmanship. His unique insight into the use of close-up magic, wherever the performance setting, was an essential part of the creation of the *System*. Brown commenced his magic career as a close-up magician and moved into television work soon after.

Dr Larry Hass is a psychology Professor and Dean of McBride's Magic and Mystery School in Las Vegas. Hass is a performer of magic and an author. He has written several books on the performance of magic, some of which are referenced in this study. Hass recently gave a TEDx talk on "What is the Art of Magic?". Hass has published extensively on magic from a theoretical point of view to a performative one. His understanding of the *World of Magic* twinned with his knowledge of academia was of paramount importance to this study.

Eugene Burger was a 'mesmerizing performer, insightful philosopher, provocative writer and inspiring teacher' (Magic Beard, 2019) and hailed by the *Stagebill* magazine as 'universally recognized as perhaps the finest close-up magician in the world'. He was also the previous Dean of McBride's Magic and Mystery School. Burger taught magic and performance skills throughout the world and was regarded as a talented performer. His pedagogical standpoint was vitally important to this study.

Lance Burton is a close-up and stage magician having headlined in Las Vegas for 31 years, with a wealth of magical knowledge and understanding of the performance of magic at all levels.

Fielding West is a comedy magician who has headlined in Las Vegas and tour the world with his comedy magic routine.

Paul Zenon is a street and cabaret magician who has produced several television series over the past twenty years in the UK. He has recently devised and produced a one-man show entitled *Linking Rings* for the stage. Zenon's unique way of constructing a character was important to this study.

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