

Post-Cartesian Telepathy, March 2016



Post-Cartesian Telepathy took place as part of the UCC Theatre Department Postgraduate showcase, *On the 71st day of the Year: A Postgraduate Research Sharing* at the Granary Theatre in Cork, Ireland. In this performance – still collaborating with Margot Fox – we showed uncharacteristic physical, comical, and sartorial restraint, no longer foregrounding the theatrical elements of the performance. Adopting a theoretically plausible academic and materialist approach to so-called telepathy, I presented a distorted reflection of pop-psychology TED Talks and examined ideas of extrasensory perception as they relate to the known senses extending beyond the classical five. After my 15-minute lecture on the topic, I spoke at length about the Deans, and our accolades, before introducing Maggie to the stage. At that point, we performed a brief and limited demonstration of our “post-Cartesian” approach to telepathy.

This performance was not presented *as a performance*, but rather, as a lecture/demonstration. From my perspective, however, it was no less a performance than our previous shows had been. The theatrical elements, however, were no longer foregrounded. In fact, these elements were purposefully concealed. The framing of this performance as a postgraduate showing of work allowed us to advance the dark TED Talk approach which I had explored previously in the Doctoral Showcase.

Our anti-costumes were discreet; selected not to look like costumes. Maggie wore a retro olive green 1940s style dress with leopard print pumps. I wore a navy suit with a black necktie and leopard print pocket square. Again, we alluded to our previous explorations of leopard print; and again, we struck a retro aesthetic. On the whole, however, we endeavoured to simply dress as we might for a holiday party or cocktail reception. As we stepped entirely away from comedy and began to quite seriously claim to demonstrate genuine abilities of invisible or non-physical communication, the chauvinism implicit in the adoption of a retro aesthetic began to surface more firmly. The more elaborate and clinical blindfolding process involving cotton gauze and a leopard print blindfold which I myself tied tightly around her head – both items having been first inspected by the audience – took on a more clinical, if not sinister, tone.

Our demonstration was also clinical in nature and restrained in scope. Rather than perform an apparently impossible demonstration such as the transference of a word, we performed a simple – and deceptively plausible – test with a six-sided die. We performed the test six times consecutively while Maggie was blindfolded. By guessing, Maggie should have been correct only one time out of six attempts, statistically speaking. She was correct six times out of six on the first night of this performance, and five times out of six the following night.

As previously noted, all performances are contingent upon audience reception. The performance of mentalism is additionally contingent upon audience reception with regard to levels of belief. The post-performance discussion conducted with audience members, as well as the private discussions which followed, *all* revolved around the legitimacy and implications of my research, as well as the personal exceptional experiences of audience members along the lines of my presentation. While some expressed scepticism toward my claims, others were supportive, and many were no doubt somewhere in between.* In this performance, through the use of the dark TED Talk approach, I created a context and frame which – much like the circus approach – directed attention away from associations with conjuring, deception, tricks, and entertainment, and offered a frame for audience expectations and mindsets along the lines of psychological and parapsychological phenomena.

* ‘Discussion following Post-Cartesian Telepathy.’ See appendices:
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/676366/676367>

The Superstar Approach

In *Post-Cartesian Telepathy* – as I continued to push the boundaries of the dark TED Talk approach – I also began to experiment with another paraperformance strategy: *the superstar approach*. This new strategy was loosely inspired by *Warhol's Superstars* – a clique of New York personalities discovered and popularized by pop-art icon Andy Warhol – and involves shamelessly engaging in self-indulgent behaviours both on stage and off. During my praxis, I became struck by certain elements of celebrity culture, reality show performances, “Z-list” celebrities, as well as the modes of self-expressive performance which media personalities, social media personalities, and “celebutantes” adopt while in the public eye. This attitude – one might also call this a lifestyle – was embodied in an article in *The New York Times* entitled ‘For the Spotlight? Ryan Lochte Was Ready to Do Anything.’¹

This article discusses Olympic swimmer Ryan Lochte’s spotlight grabbing behaviour at the Olympic games in Brazil. For instance, the ‘free-spirited’ and ‘diamond-studded grille[d]’ Lochte, who had previously sustained injuries while ‘riding a motor scooter, break-dancing and falling off a skateboard’ spoke publicly about making ‘himself sick gorging on free Big Macs.’² The 27 year-old Lochte was featured for one season on an E! reality show entitled, *What Would Ryan Lochte Do?*³ I was particularly struck by the conclusion of the article in *The New York Times* which featured an exchange between Lochte and his family ‘caught on camera during his reality show’ in which Lochte discussed ‘a future in Los Angeles.’⁴ According to Lochte, ‘I see me being a designer, I see me being a model, I see me being a TV star.’⁵

Although this was a random article which I only happened upon by chance, to me it was the essence of what I described as “superstar” behaviour, and which I would later explore in conjunction with the *rock star* aesthetic. I was also intrigued by the “superstar” behaviour of people far less talented and successful than Lochte. For instance, *Instagram*, *Snap Chat*, and *reality TV* celebrities are among what has been referred to as *the Celebrity Z List*; people famous for being famous. The

¹ Crouse, Karen. ‘For the Spotlight? Ryan Lochte Was Ready to Do Anything.’ *New York Times*. 18 Aug 2016.

² Crouse, Karen. ‘For the Spotlight? Ryan Lochte Was Ready to Do Anything.’ *New York Times*. 18 Aug 2016.

³ Crouse, Karen. ‘For the Spotlight? Ryan Lochte Was Ready to Do Anything.’ *New York Times*. 18 Aug 2016.

⁴ Crouse, Karen. ‘For the Spotlight? Ryan Lochte Was Ready to Do Anything.’ *New York Times*. 18 Aug 2016.

⁵ Crouse, Karen. ‘For the Spotlight? Ryan Lochte Was Ready to Do Anything.’ *New York Times*. 18 Aug 2016.

Celebrity Z List was described in *The New York Times* as: ‘the barely famous, a class of people who are just unpolished, desperate and savvy enough to act mad, sloppy and sexy.’⁶

During this period of creation, I attended the one woman show of Ireland’s national treasure, drag queen Panti Bliss, where I witnessed a superb demonstration of superstar behaviour. In this show, entitled *High Heels in Low Places* – which took place at St. Luke’s Church in Cork, Ireland – Bliss humorously referred to herself as a ‘national fucking treasure’ dozens of times over the course of the performance. She spoke of herself, her history, and related insider information about Madonna. Near the end of the performance, she told a humorous story about her fraudulent appearance on *The Maury Povich* show, before screening footage from that appearance. I was inspired by the construction, artifice, and superstar behaviour on display in Bliss’ one-wo(man) show.

In the mentalism world, *the Amazing Kreskin* has a similar reputation for self-indulgence on the stage. Kreskin is known as a charismatic showman who, during the course of his performances, sings, plays the piano, name drops, tells anecdotes about celebrities, performs hypnosis, and gives demonstrations of pseudo mind-reading and hypnosis. I took note of mentalist Bob Cassidy’s observation that during his stage show Kreskin ‘...spends most of his time name-dropping and telling stories about the old days on *The Tonight Show*, apparently wanting to establish himself primarily as a television celebrity.’⁷

In this regard, Kreskin helped to define the superstar tactics and paraperformance approach which I would apply both onstage and off. Cassidy goes on to explain that by observing Kreskin, one may learn an important lesson. Namely, according to Cassidy, that ‘a good performer should be able to entertain an audience for 20 minutes or more without doing any “tricks” at all. Mentalism is NOT about the tricks, it’s about the performer and the overall experience that he provides to the audience.’⁸ Kreskin is discussed further in the appendices of this dissertation. * Hoping to advance the significant shifts in approach which we explored in *Post-Cartesian Telepathy*, we began creating our next practice-led-research performance which would be driven by both the dark TED Talk approach as well as the superstar approach.

⁶ Hess, Amanda. ‘A Celebrity Z-List? Yes, It Exists.’ *The New York Times*. 31 Aug 2016.

⁷ ‘Can you be a magician and mentalist??’ *TheMagicCafe.com*. 30 May 2016.

⁸ ‘Can you be a magician and mentalist??’ *TheMagicCafe.com*. 30 May 2016.

* ‘Kreskin: Television Personality.’ See appendices: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/676366/676367>

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