

A Happy Accident - Magic Egg Fanzine Interview with The Vessel

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ABSTRACT

The Vessel is the persona that via unaccounted for acceptance of aléa, entered into the world of Dr Mikey Georgeson. Upon becoming the mouth-piece of the performance pop-art group, David Devant and his Spirit Wife, they began to weave an emerging story of themselves as a spiritual conduit into life as an artist in Brighton. This interview agitates the stasis discursive, returning repetition of pre-given information into the repetition of a ritual extra-embodied encounter. What things mean in retrospect can be communicated as intentional when (according to the interviewee) meaning is in believing in the actual occasion of enchanting. Now thirty years later, this interview gathers thoughts about what happened when the natural consecutive forming of life circumstances was disrupted to produce a deviation of being. Catherine Malabou's, *Ontology of the Accident* has given them some way of accounting for the sudden appearance of this conduit for a dead magician,

A form born of the accident, born by accident, a kind of accident. A funny breed. A monster whose apparition cannot be explained as any genetic anomaly. A new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a biography.

The Vessel is the persona that via intuitive acceptance of the aléa, entered into the world of Dr Mikey Georgeson, who upon becoming the mouth-piece of the performance pop-art group David Devant and his Spirit Wife, began to weave an emerging story of himself as a spiritual conduit into his life as an artist in Brighton. Magic Egg is the name given to the groups self-created PR agency and imaginary fanzine. This collective of artists allowed a dialogue of coincidence to permeate their relations and as The Vessel, Georgeson found himself writing music inside a shared performative idea of life. The first three performances of the group all began with The Vessel singing from inside a magical cardboard apparatus having been sawn in two. The song was not the expected attention grabbing blast but instead a melancholic and fragile song called A Happy Accident. Now thirty years later he is gathering his thoughts about what happened when the natural consecutive forming of his life circumstances was disrupted to produce a deviation of being. Catherine Malabou's essay on the Ontology of the Accident gives some way of accounting for the sudden appearance of this unprecedented conduit for a dead magician.

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The Rock Inn Kemptown Brighton (now permanently closed)

*How many times have you reached for your lighter and found it gone?
How many times have you taken a wrong turning and discovered a short cut?
Coincidence?
David Devant... has... the answers
Laughs maniacally*

Magic Egg: Hello and welcome The Vessel and thank you for agreeing to join us for this brief illustrated discussion about your experience as a conduit for a dead magician, David Devant. I believe the above words were what you might consider an incantation delivered at the start of early performances of David Devant & his Spirit Wife in a small room above a pub called the Rock in Kemptown Brighton?



Recreation of The Vessel's head projected before a live performance

The Vessel: Thank you. Above is an image of The Vessel as was projected during the coincidence incantation. In search of an enchanting atmosphere, we became excited by the possibility of projecting a head onto smoke and although we tried it and there were edifying moments, we elected to use a paper screen instead. The projected head was filmed on Super 8 film so there was a long gap

in time between filming and being able to try it out. This disruption of time and space is woven into the events we created. At the start of the concerts the head would appear and I would lip-synch the above words from behind the screen. There was an intensity of anticipation to performing this ritual (and countless others we created) that I found transformative. My feeling of total immanence perhaps helped with my extra-embodied sense of being The Vessel for David Devant. In material terms this use of a paper screen instantly developed into a performed painting ritual.



The Vessel Screen bursts during Thames boat trip for launch of Pimlico on Humbug Records
1993

The paper screen was also key to the invocation of my shadow self and beckoning in of a region of wonder through a rupture in a physical membrane. As we see below at a show a year or so later, Cocky Young'un is now painting around my back-lit silhouette (French for I can't draw according to Iceman in the band's film *Light on the Surface*), ready for The Vessel to spring forth through the paper-thin divide between a world of conceptual literalness and the realm of extra-embodied feeling.



Cocky Young'un painting the Vessel's silhouette circa 1994

Magic Egg: The disembodied head feels like a key to your role as a vessel and there seems to be a constant interruption of the head-body relationship going on.

The Vessel: I think this is a way of transforming me into a conduit but at the same time functioning as an entertaining aesthetic lure. We never made a verbal agreement but there was an understanding that what we were creating was more of a ceremony akin to a spiritualist meeting than a pop concert. You cannot deny the entertainment of spiritualism and likewise the transmission of affect in entertainment is in excess of the function to deliver amusement. In a spiritualist meeting the lead singer logically becomes a medium.



The Vessel singing from inside the Cabinet of Swords

This emerged from naming the band after a dead magician and my personal desire to respect the dead. Becoming the conduit for David Devant was something that happened around me in a realm of hyper-coincidence created by wanting to weave myself into the fabric of a real story.¹



Only remaining image of the lino-print "David Devant & his Spirit Wife" the band took their name from.

Magic Egg: So are you saying you didn't know what you were doing as a conduit?

The Vessel: I was recently reading A. J. West's *Spirit Engineer* and thought there is a precedence for medium as naïve figure, not cognitively in control of a process they have become involved in. My relationship to naivety and wonder is something I am constantly trying to move through. However, I'm more comfortable thinking about how I am *The Vessel* in these terms than a Machiavellian concept of being a vessel for audience transference. What really struck me looking at the gathered collection of images is how much of our collective process seemed to disrupt and layer identity. I have often reflected

¹ This became more real than anticipated when Director Ashley Hames' flat was destroyed by fire the day after *The Vessel* ritualistically burnt his Elvis wig in his lounge as a finale to a channel 4 documentary about the band. The image above of the original lino-print, is from Hame's film showing the moment of discovering the destruction of his archive of DD&HSW material kept in the front room.

upon my experience of the band as a kind of interdimensional collective perception.



Programme from the band's first performance featuring facsimile of the original lino-cut



The Spirit Wife circa 1992 (venue unknown)

Magic Egg: Interesting. This layering of identity both individually and collectively calls to mind Bergson's ideas about the reciprocal implications of life as experience,

Who can say where individuality begins and ends, whether the living being is one or many, whether it is the cells which associate themselves into the organism or the organism which dissociates itself into cells. (Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, 1907)

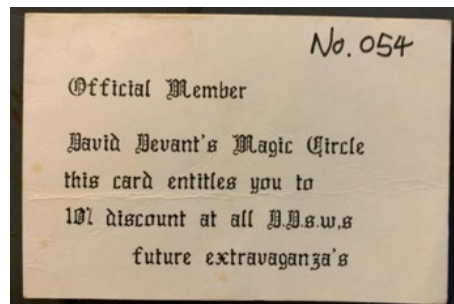
I'm aware we agreed to avoid too much theory so can you talk about the image above? Is it a whimsical joke about ghosts or something else "betwixt jest and earnest"²

The Vessel: Yes, I think it was done to excite both laughter and a sense of dislocated wonder. It's The Spirit Wife as she would appear at the end of

² A notion coined by Thomas Browne (1672) in *Pseudodoxia or Vulgar Errors* and recalled by Nik Taylor in *Magic and Broken Knowledge; reflections on the practice of Bizarre Magick*. By coincidence David Devant and his *Spirit Wife* recorded a theme tune to *Deadly earnest* a film made by Philip Reeve the creator of *The Immortal Engines* series

concerts during the climax to the song Goodnight. Earlier in the set the song Madame Devant established that we were in fact trying to contact the Spirit Wife. Part of what I consider as my role as The Vessel is a weaving of post-rational truth and the reality of an emerging story. David Wighton took his stage name from a French classical painting “David Devant Goliath” and we named ourselves after my print of him.

The Vessel: The Spirit Wife was always a fictional persona even in Devant’s original stage show but her manifestation is no less real because of this. Seeing this photo reminds me of how those first performances or collective rituals were some of the most really real moments I have experienced. The show’s were in the upper room of the pub (in the basement there was rumoured to be a mortuary slab) and there was only one exit so we spontaneously stood beside the door and shook hands with every departing audience member in what now feels like an act of transmission and earthing combined



This is a membership card that attendees of the first two concerts received. I think we were trying to create something like an actual occasion out of the process of imagination. Years later someone did turn up with their card though I’m not sure they received the discount.

Magic Egg: Ok let’s stay on topic. Can we go back to summoning the Spirit Wife please?



Upstairs at the Rock Kempton Brighton 1991

The Vessel: Yes this is The Vessel performing Madame Devant. In the song The Vessel is summoning her (The Spirit Wife) and she is the one who knocks once for yes and knocks twice for no in the song's funkily sensuous outro. It's also apparent when she does finally appear at the frenetic climax of Goodnight, in a paradoxically chaste Victorian nightgown, that there is a sense of sexual congress between my embodied self and the extra-dimensional female entity. I invite the audience to "join with us in the spooky noises... oooooh ooooh oooooh aaaaah aaaah".*³

The arc of the show's ceremony was, in some respects, to summon the Spirit Wife. I see it now as a return to the feminine aspect in a cosmos where feeling or *felt understanding* is a powerful wisdom rather than a suspect form of intelligence. My role as the vessel for David Devant himself was more quotidian. I am a vessel for him in an exchange deal whereby his entertainment legacy lives on and I get access to the saturated wonder of his magic.

Magic Egg: But the image is clearly of a nightgown on a long stick, so what do you mean when, as you have often done, you declare it to be really real?

The Vessel: I'm sorry you want to put things in crude terms. Fans of our rituals might politely, yet erroneously, call it escapism. I think of it as remembering the present. Through the collective experience of a re-enchanting ritual we find ourselves aware of life as an emerging event inside the mind of ubiquitous

³The incantation was perhaps derived from a children's folk song, "Woman at the Churchyard Gate" Georgeson's two older sisters enjoyed singing to find a pleasurable and dis-embodied terror as children.

consciousness. It reveals a myth of separation not through the code of conceptual connections but by allowing our bodies to know.



Collaged cover to the band's first cassette release, Don Spirit Specs Now! 1992

Magic Egg: This is an arresting image that seems to operate through extra-textual assemblage can you please tell us about it?

The Vessel: This is a cover from a cassette sold at early concerts, combining a video screen shot with photocopied type, made with impatience and domestic wonder. The assemblage feel captures how much we thrived on recreating and re-invoking ourselves as a memory in the present. It is a photo taken inside the room where we would have sold the cassette. It says look here we all are in a re-enchanted region. A use of self-generated ephemera is nostalgic for a present of felt intensity we were joyfully generating. Becoming The Vessel completely changed how I felt as a person and performer, shifting me into becoming an extra-embodied non-entity.⁴

The Vessel: I became a conduit for David Devant's Élan vital. This is Bergson's spirit of aliveness and his conceptualisation of a co-mingled cosmic identity is contemporary to Devant's emerging use of the spiritual realm in stage magic. On my organ above you can see a DDV logo, which was part of us invoking a potential or virtual dream of being on television in a hyper-aesthetic low-budget schedule in our collective imagination. Later when this did start to

⁴ The concept of the non-entity is explored through the theories of Gabriel Tarde in a performative keynote speech, *Dr Who? And the Non-entity*, created by Dr Mikey Georgeson and Professor Tony Sampson for the virtual #Sensorium 4.5 symposium in 2020 <https://youtu.be/fDpeVGphQ5E>

happen on real-life terrestrial TV, it felt like part of the same ceremony of re-enchantment. This was an empowering and pleasurable experience but could be jarring to my sense of self when confronting the more representational framework of the media.



The Vessel on Sky TV and with Gail Porter (the Spectral roadies in silhouette)

Magic Egg: Knowing that you wrote a song called This Rough Magic (I Abjure), I would like to conclude by directing you towards B. J. Corrigan's

research into the collective perception of performative magic, in his paper for *The Journal of Performance Magic*, “This Rough Magic I Here Abjure. Performativity, Practice and Purpose of the Bizarre.” Corrigan posits that, “these forms of ceremony, re-situate the magic moment into an atmosphere of genuine acceptance and even belief.” This idea appears to be profoundly relevant to your search for a means of explaining the shift in your identity and experience of life does it not?



Eddie Argos deputises as a Spectral Roadie at Dingwalls, Camden with The Vessel and the Colonel

The Vessel: indeed as The Vessel I do believe I summon the Spirit Wife. There is a speculatively speaking, a scientific truth to joining-in as part of a cycle of creative-destruction inside the story of Bergson’s reciprocal idea of the cosmos. From Whitehead through to Karen Barad⁵, Thomas Nagel and Catherine Malabou there emerges a conviction that the Enlightened human decision to remove the subjective or experiential from our objective scientific concept of reality is collectively traumatising. In our seventh performance, at the Brighton venue Komeda, we decided to make the audience disappear and we needed

⁵Karen Barad’s *ethico-onto-epistemology* in her book *Meeting The Universe Halfway* invokes the indigenous region Georgeson has experience inside the event of David Devant and his Spirit Wife.

the audience to verify this. The audience were shown a frame through which we could see them and then invited onstage to behold that they had indeed disappeared. (see image below)

Magic Egg: And indeed this embodies how Corrigan concludes his paper giving us further clues to the nature of your identity's happy accident,

The audience, however, is in a different situation. The storyteller's clothing is an effective disguise, and the magician hidden beneath will work what now appears to be a real miracle upon the minds of his spectators.

The Vessel: Thank you, may I say that although I find it tremendously enlivening to the creative process to find myself surrounded by coincidence, I have never in my life sought it. David and I shared the nickname of Monkey Face and he was born in Holloway where we rehearsed intensely for the first LP. Camden, where his heritage plaque is, was central to the Britpop music scene we happened to find ourselves given a place in. The Camden scene was the furthest thing from our minds when we started to create a performance magic stage-ritual. It's hard not to believe I'm conduit when our path was shaped by wanting to immerse ourselves in the chance decision to shape a performance for a dead magician. The visceral experience of the Spirit Wife at the climax of Goodnight is really real and my speaking and performing as David Devant during our performances is too. We didn't set out to prove scientific truths but to immerse ourselves in disruptive acts of re-enchantment. Equally the pursuit of scientific truth could be said to be a technically complex ritual created in order to feel a belonging to the cosmos. *The Vessel growing visibly diminished* I am V... I am your vessel... Are you in yet?

Magic Egg: Thanks so much for our brief chat The Vessel. I'm guessing, that like that of many readers, my jury is still out.



Polaroid photo of a lone sceptic witnessing the audience in liminal region of non-disappearance



The Vessel crouches ironically before his burning wig in Ashley Hames' Channel 4 documentary The Other Side 2000

MAD FOR IT!

Why David will drive you crazy

If there is such a place as the Merrylyes Flat Home For Criminally Insane Pop Stars, then call the cops — David Devant has just escaped.

You can just imagine him, sat in his rocker, sipping magic mushroom soup with Julian Lage and Alice Cooper, devising a plan, master digging a tunnel, consulting the escape committee about what the Man is wearing on Top Of The Pops these days.

And then he's out — released, a pop star unsuspecting public like the musical equipment of a mass bomb drop of laughing gas.

For David Devant — And his Saint Wife — are totally sane.

I saw them in Manchester a little while back. Like most of the audience, I didn't know what the hell was going on — but about three gigs with overbooked bookings.

This is showbiz in its most garish and unadorned form. David did not appear on stage until one of his glamorous assistants painted his silhouette on a license canvas. He then leapt through it to jangle us with leather, superdickin and an additive pop in superpowered Pete Dinklage-style pop songs.

The star lanes include several carrots being grated on someone's head to illustrate the song Ginger, a



wind-up be detector and a kettle boiling live on stage.

Plus projections of every hackneyed phrase your mind ever even considered writing ... like 'tidy your room, it's a pig sty'.

With all this, it's easy to assume the songs take second place — and to some extent they do. But there's enough of the ritual genius in these tracks to make them gross all of their own. The music

without the show is like gin without tonic — just as effective, but nowhere near as glamorous.

Nuff said. You can see Mr Devant and his ghostly masses at the Lomax tonight.

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Diagnosis from the Liverpool Echo 1996