

Joys of Magical Performance

Magic excites me, it makes me wonder if my senses are doing what they are supposed to be doing. When I was 15, I watched a live performance by an English magician named Dynamo. The stories he told about his life using magic as way to tell his story was amazing. Sat down in this huge theatre I was amazed; I remember trying to think how he could have done certain tricks kind of like Robert-Houdin's debunking of the performers in the Isawiyya trance ceremony 11/17/2022 9:55:00 AM I began explaining to my friend who was sat next to me one of my theories. He looked back at the stage, then looked at me and said "Maybe there is a way to perform the trick, but it's more fun if you just believe in the magic." Sitting down in that chair I decided to just believe and it was wonderful, I really experienced the wonder of the performance of magic.

Over the quarantine period whilst on campus during covid I got into watching magic videos as a pastime on YouTube and discovered Shin Lim, a world-renowned magician that has fooled Penn and Teller multiple times and has won America's Got Talent twice. I saw his slight of hand card trick for the first time and had no idea how to perform it (*Shin Lim, AGT, n.d.*). I was reminded by my earlier experience of magic but this time with the new found time I had on my hands I actually wanted to learn something. A trick that could spark the same wonder in other people that makes them also second-guess their senses and understanding of the real world. This led to me going on YouTube to see if there are any card tricks that I could also do. I quickly found one that looked super cool and was meant to be easy to learn. When I watched the trick before it being explained, I really didn't know how to do it I was once again amazed and in disbelief that I could also perform his trick. Then I saw the instructional component of the video, I watched the magician break down the trick into steps and everything became clear, as though scales fell from my eyes. There was a secret behind the magic and it played on our senses, using natural human tendencies and assumptions against us in order to create the illusion of the supernatural. "Ah the trick has been exposed, it was a complete sham" I thought, but I was still so impressed by the intelligence behind the cunning tactics to deceive.

The process of learning the jumping card trick was quite easy but it took many repetitions in order to clean up and make it consistently effective. My fear when first trying the trick was that for every 3 times I would do it right there would be 1 time I would mess up. If I wanted to have this actually work, I needed to improve my success rate significantly. What that would take is a lot of practice. I quickly got

bored repeatedly practicing the same trick so I scoured YouTube again looking to increase my magical arsenal and quickly realized that all tricks would take time to master. I selected a few cards tricks I would learn and began practicing them, going from one to the other and watching more magic videos to gain motivation to keep learning. Unlike Jones I did not have a community of learners to grow my skills with, I had to do it myself. From watching multiple YouTube magicians do the same trick I picked up on the nuances that made some tricks better than others. For Jones he had expert magicians to correct and inform him on these things (G. Jones 2011, 60).

But I never forgot my true motivation, the thing that I really wanted more than anything else was to show everyone what I could do. I wanted to be the magician and no longer the learner. This is quite like how Nemo as a child would want to show his family his magic tricks and the desire behind the months of practice that Jones did for his performance in Paris (G. Jones 2011, 48–51). There is a great feeling being able to perform in front of people and to see the wonder in their eyes. I share this feeling with many other magicians (Rappert 2021, 4).

I was once again practicing my card trick before a zoom call I had with some friends and realized, “this is my chance”, right here I can showcase my skills to a willing audience. But I didn’t want to perform the jumping card trick on camera, it would be a waste to do it over zoom. Instead, I had just learned a switching card trick performed from slight of hand, this is the trick I would show them; this will blow their mind is what I thought. I asked them to perform the trick and then I showed it to them and it was a failure. The trick itself was fine, I did the switch and they didn’t know what had happened, I was even surprised I had gotten the camera angle so great. But the clean-up... I realized I had not practiced the clean up and it left for a messy recovery exposing the trick. In that moment I realized that tricks can be wasted if I am too hasty to perform them. I must wait and improve so that my excitement to perform the trick turns into joy and not embarrassment. The big difference I noticed from the reading however is that Jones even though seeing his trick in Paris being successful he still wanted to perfect and improve it. As I was such a beginner in this trick, I never got to develop what Rappert describes in “Pick a Card any Card”. Rappert explains how complex the performer-audience interactions are and how the different thoughts and emotions the audience experiences during the performance (Rappert 2021). My trick was performed very quickly and with no build up, not giving the audience the time to enter into the performance.

I continued to practice the jumping card trick and have now performed it in-front of at least 3 crowds. Some people always want to try and give theories of how the trick is performed, and most of the time they are wrong. Furthermore, they definitely cannot reproduce the effect even if they know how it is done. This experience was my version of being instructed on how to perform clear card tricks and how to deal with different types of people during the performance. Jones had more direct instructing than what I and Rappert experienced. How the instructors would purposely do things they know might ruin the trick to make Jones consider the exact language he uses when directing the audience of his trick (G. Jones 2011, 53). Both I and Rappert had to start anticipating the audiences reaction to things and incorporate them into our act (Rappert 2021, 12).

Those are my experiences performing magic, I really enjoy learning the method of a trick and eventually performing it in a way that produces the same awe and excitement in others. I want to learn more tricks and I probably will, as my life goes on. I'll slowly increase the number of tricks I have up my sleeve so I am ready for the time someone hands me a deck of cards and asks the age-old questions: "Ya know any good magic tricks?"

Jones, G. 2011. *Trade of the Tricks: Inside the Magician's Craft*. University of California Press.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=LUJkU5rZAQwC>.

Jones, Graham M. 2010. "Modern Magic and the War on Miracles in French Colonial Culture." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52 (1): 66–99.

Rappert, Brian. 2021. "'Pick a Card, Any Card': Learning to Deceive and Conceal – with Care." *Secrecy and Society* 2 (January). <https://doi.org/10.31979/2377-6188.2021.020208>.

Shin Lim, AGT. n.d.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E598_IU0lxs&ab_channel=America%27sGotTalent.

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