

IPractice Magazine

November Edition



**Let The Material Speak
for itself**

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One of the biggest reasons why magicians argue whether magic is an art form is because many magicians don't treat it like one. In fact, the average magician is more likely to think magic is not an art because of the way so many magicians perform. It's hard to look at a clumsy, middle-aged man doing subpar walkaround magic and go, "Yup, that's art."

Yet at the core of this logic lies a fallacy. Magic is not an art because its practitioners don't treat it like one?

That makes no sense. If you receive a gift and proceed to smash it on the ground, it's not the gift's fault.

The reason this fallacy persists is because it's easy to believe. It's comfortable and comforting. It removes the responsibility of having to be an artist and take up all of the crosses involved in making art. If we believe magic is not an art, then the bar is so much lower, and thus we can more quickly and easily achieve gratification and praise.

The hard truth is that magic is an art and that most of us are doing it badly. We're the equivalent of eight-year-olds with crayons trying to draw the Mona Lisa. That's because art is hard. To do anything well is hard. To share magic in an artful way demands much more time and effort than what many magicians are willing to sacrifice. In order to do art, you need to live an art life.

Now, I don't consider myself to be some endless fount of knowledge on magic

or art, but I have spent a lot of time thinking about all this. What follows are a few observations about what it means for magic to be an art and how we need to view ourselves as magician-artists.

The Fundamental Nature of Art

Usually, when I see discussions between magicians about whether magic is an art, the same rebuttal comes up. It goes something like this: "Well, art can't even be defined, so it's useless to think about." Oh, how magicians

love fallacies that allow them to justify their mediocrity.

While this argument does make sense, it's also a lazy way of thinking. You should constantly be asking questions and seeking to learn more, and this argument prohibits such opportunities. Of course, it also avoids risk, and it prevents you from encountering the scary possibility that maybe you aren't the best magician you could be.

To truly grow as a magician, you need to ask tough questions

about magic and art. And to even have a chance at understanding art, you need to grasp its fundamental nature, which is human expression. That's it. Art is a vehicle by which we can use all kinds of tools to tell stories and share our experiences. That's why Pollock's paint splatters and Duchamp's Fountain can exist as legitimate art alongside more obvious masterpieces like *Starry Night* or Michelangelo's David. Art does not need to be put into boxes for us to neatly understand; in fact,



that only restricts art. Every piece of art communicates something about the human condition and experience.

Art is also a mindset. The artist's mindset is one of continuous effort and improvement. It's not simply

about sharing something—it's also about creating something meaningful and meaningfully. As Robert Henri put it in *The Art Spirit*:

“Art when really understood is the province of every human being. It is simply a

question of doing things, anything, well. It is not an outside, extra thing."

We can then loosely define art as "communicating the human condition and experience in a meaningful way." As broad as this definition is, it gives us an insight into what "art" as a concept actually means.

The Art Life

In the documentary *David Lynch: The Art Life*, the titular filmmaker talked about his philosophy of living an "art life," which is connected to

Henri's conception of the "art spirit." Lynch took that idea and rolled with it:

"The art spirit sort of became the art life...basically, it's the incredible happiness of working and living that life."

When one fosters an art spirit, one is able to live an art life. This is not so much about making art as it is living in an artistic way. It's about viewing life itself as art. And if we return Henri's definition of art being the act of doing things well, then we can see

that "the art life" is really about living life well.

It is this sort of life that any artist must lead. By viewing life itself as art, that outlook will seep into everything you do, from magic to cooking. And suddenly the question "is magic an art?" no longer matters, because everything is art.

The real question is how you can do things well. How can you approach something in order to fully give yourself over to

it and, in turn, get the most out of it?

The Magic Life

To be an artist, you must live an art life. And thus, to be a magician, you must live a magic life.

I find it funny that magicians—the people who are supposed to be experts on all things magical—rarely give themselves over to a true sense of wonder. They're too busy trying to reverse engineer what another magician is doing or too caught up in thinking about methods. So

many magicians look for inspiration only within the magic community, and that's a big reason why there is so much stagnation.

If we want to give the most to magic and receive the most from it, we must see the magic in everything. We must see magic in the way light plays off a window, in a poem about lost love, in conversations we have with friends. Ideas and opportunities are everywhere, but you have to know to look for them.

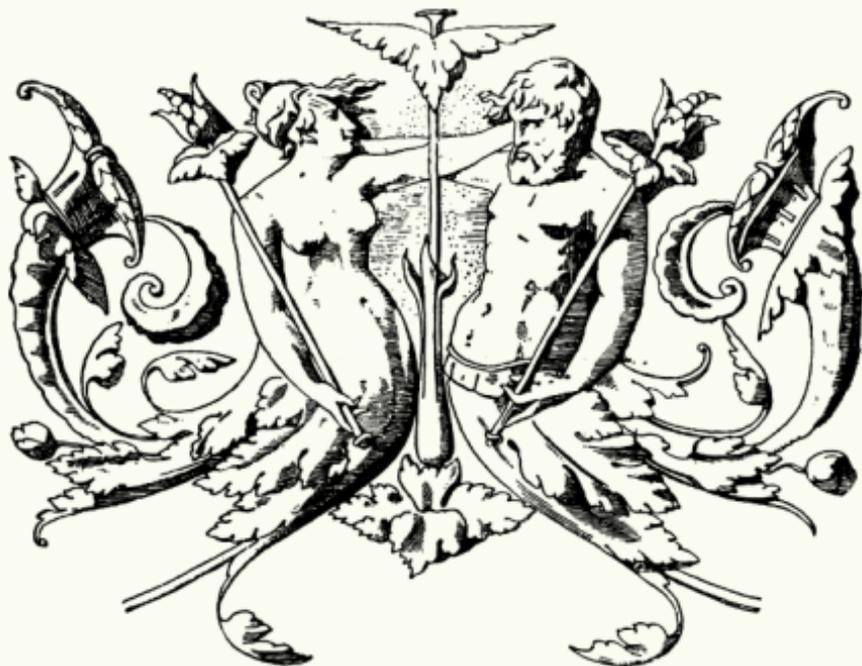
This completely changes what magic means. When one lives the magic life, "magic" ceases to be merely cards and coins and returns to being what it actually is: an experience. If we see magic in everything, then everything can be magic, and we can uncover and apply ideas that we would have otherwise ignored.

This is no doubt tough, especially if you've lived with a narrow definition of magic for years. But it is worth it. The most beautiful and impact-

ful magic rarely comes from viewing other magicians—rather, it comes from creating something that communicates the human experience in a way that only magic can communicate.



What are we aiming for?



By Chris Wood

What are we aiming for?

Wonder? Amaze-
ment? To Impress?
Emotional Release?
Surprise? Adulation?
Puzzlement? Enter-
tainment?

*(from my Lecture
Notes Vol. 4)*

“Communication is that which elicits a response” Alan Alan For Alan, it was all about the big C. Communication. But as always with Alan, he had distilled his thinking into a simple phrase that takes a lot of unpicking. In this

essay I’m trying to hone in on what response it is that we are trying to elicit from an audience and how to evoke it.

Now what I’m not saying is that any one of the aims listed above is better than the other. Magic can trigger all of them and any performance may include a mix. However it helps to know what it is you are primarily aiming for. It doesn’t always have to be the same focus. You can present your magic as you like and I feel the more variety an overall set has, the

more sustainable it is. Each outcome has its own character and although I certainly don’t present my thoughts below as definitive on the subjects, I find it useful to consider what it is I really want my audiences to experience from any given effect and how I might achieve that. This is only my current thinking, I’m aware there is so much yet for me to discover and learn from on my journey.

The more stimulated an audience is the more wonder you generate:

I think that without the imagination being stimulated at the start of a routine from either music, script, context, lighting or any of the other theatrical tools, you don’t stand much chance of eliciting a sense of wonder in an audience. Just seeing a visual effect on its own fails to generate a feeling other than bafflement and maybe intrigue. I often take a historical route here as ancient history

helps evoke a sense of awe and wonder before the effect has happened. It's a slow burn. Start them off, kick those imagination neurons into life with an evocative context and then you can build upon it.

The more engaged an audience is the more impressed they will be:

So you've shuffled the pack and dealt 5 hands of cards and you have a royal flush. This can be the most deadly and dull thing in the world or it can be the most im-

pressive thing they have ever seen. So they have chosen a card and you find it. *Zzzzzz*. Forget about method for a second, although that is important, the key is that they have to pay close attention. They need to be watching you like a hawk in order to be impressed. That only happens when they care, so you have to make them care. Challenge them, bring them in, explain what they are going to see in advance so they have a chance to watch for it. Explain the level of difficulty. Get them on the edge

of their seats. Then if impressing them is what you are after, their level of concentration is converted to their level of admiration.

The more convinced an audience is the more amazed they will be:

It was Darwin Ortiz in "Strong Magic" that first drew my attention to this truth and I've found it to be a valuable one. The state of an audience's conviction is directly related to the level of amazement when their convictions are



upset. Having the audience shuffle the pack to lose a card is far more convincing to an audience no matter how competent your false shuffles. Anticipating their thinking and cancelling out methods as Tamariz describes leads to the conclusion of impossibility, but a state of firm conviction is what leads to amazement. I saw a great example of this from Danny Buckler who presented a simple rope effect everyone does. The ends of the rope are placed in the pocket and the middle is held in the

other hand and magically they change places. Most magicians simply use this effect to ditch the spare end and so pay it no real attention. Danny put the ends in his pocket, paused, took them out and put them back. He did this 3 or 4 times for comedic effect predominantly but the result was utter conviction in the audience of the state of play. When the effect happened, gasps resulted.

The more involved an audience is the more emotionally affected:

It may be that you want your audience to be affected by an emotional release regardless of the magic. Stories and context can help this. By the end of the routine, those emotions are released or brought to a peak. Copperfield has long trod this route with stirring music and all the theatre he brilliantly commands. Also tapping into common wishes and desires is a useful tactic, so too is sharing

personal stories. A performer that can get the audience to empathise with their emotions is a rare thing in magic, but that's the key I think. To achieve that there needs to be sincerity and vulnerability. This is often at odds with the essence of being a magician, someone who is supposed to be above the normal and a master of the arcane. It's not impossible though and perverse magic, where the magic happens despite you, is but one example. It's exemplified by Fred Kaps in his Homing



Card routine. What we are really talking about is the ability to act and emotionally connect.

The more preoccupied an audience is the more surprised:

There is an example of this in “Solid Deception” where the spectator is drawn into a self congratulatory mind set of thinking they have spotted a method, which is then upset, and then an effect happens totally unrelated to all that train of thought. Orchestrating their thoughts helps

strengthen the surprise element (as well as being of great importance for misdirection). You can preoccupy an audience with a false trail (as in the prior example) or you can simply tell a great story they get caught up in, develop a good rhythm in your presentation that is then broken or you can direct their expectations to a different effect. E.g. “Now I’m going to float this in the... sorry I’ve no idea what that coin is doing there...” Now a lot of magicians will use something unrelated to the effect, a

“kicker” if you will to achieve surprise. This works because the audience thinks the effect is over and has relaxed. I don’t think this is quite as effective as upsetting a train of thought where the audience are still keenly paying attention. Additionally an extra ending can detract from the original effect and be superfluous or it is sometimes an attempt to try and bolster a trick that wasn’t good enough in the first place. Personally I prefer the surprise to BE the effect. That’s why in my cup and ball routine I

get to the end fairly quickly and don’t stretch out the sequence with the balls. It’s all about the surprise ending.

The more an audience roots for you the more adulation they give:

Adulation isn’t merely praise, it’s more akin to hero worship. If you are after that response from an audience (and why not) you need them to cheer for you and you can’t really achieve that if they don’t like you as a person. They have to be on your

side and willing you to succeed. If you are doing a poker deal this is unlikely unless you are performing blindfolded with one arm behind your back. You need to be given difficult conditions/challenges that you have to surmount. It’s why Houdini was so successful, what Alan Alan aimed for and what David Blaine and Derren Brown have tapped into. Personally I’m not comfortable with adulation but I often organise my final piece under conditions designed to evoke the biggest re-

sponse of the set. It’s good theatre.

The more an audience have conditions ruled out, the more puzzled they are:

Now there is a place for puzzles and bafflement. I know that if you are trying to achieve that illusive magical experience, merely trying to work out how something is done is the lowest rung of the ladder. Of course you can’t achieve magic without that first rung but to create that magical experience requires so much more. That

doesn't mean puzzles in and of themselves can't be entertaining or amusing. As long as you are aware that is what you are aiming for, that's all you present it as. The classic Chinese Sticks is a good example as are many baffling mathematical tricks or you can justify any strange props this way. Puzzles can be intriguing and an interesting way to set the ground for moving onto something more impossible. (See the Pen through Coin). Tamariz deals with cancelling out methods and the more

solutions you disprove, the more baffling something becomes. If you are after an audience I prefer the approach where you repeat an effect and progressively eliminate theories or add extra conditions as opposed to simply establishing everything up front at the start. It heightens their intrigue as the trick continues. Of course you have to be careful you don't just simply annoy them!



The more an audience is taken out of their world, the more entertained they are:

Being entertained is not synonymous with laughter. It's really anything that makes us forget the troubles of this world. It can be drama or tragedy as well as comedy. (See Ken Weber - "Maximum Entertainment"). Magic is pure fantasy and on the face of it, it's incredibly suited to escapism, however so often Magicians simply demonstrate that they can fool you.

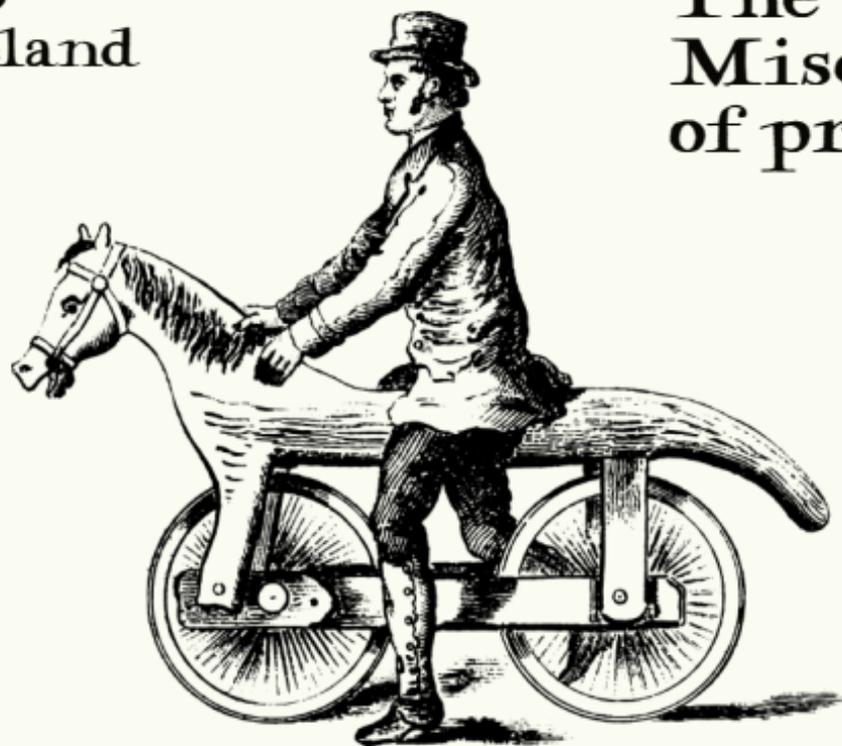
They don't bring you into their world in the same way as music, dance or a good comedian does. The trick is the be all and end all of their performance. They forget about selling themselves, they forget about generating atmosphere and merely demonstrate their latest puzzle. If it was merely presented as a puzzle (see above) I've no problem with it, but if entertainment is what you are primarily aiming for, then we need to take the audience on a journey to a world where different rules

apply. You could go the route of establishing a new norm. Need a pack of cards? Produce them. Need a card selected? Have it float to their hand. It's not about packing in effects. It's about creating a consistent world. You can take other routes as well. One effect, but dressed up with light, sound and story can transport an audience away from reality. A great personality can also draw you in and make you forget where you are. The point is that the effect itself is momentary. It's not entertainment

in and of itself. It's eye candy. It's merely the excuse for you being there.

Rico
Weeland

The
Misconception
of presentation



What is a presentation? Very often it is believed that presentation is the slurry of words that someone uses combined with delicate pauses and tone of voice.

While it's true that all of those elements are part of the presentation, it is not the only thing that presentation is. Those elements are part of great storytelling, they are tools that can help us to capture an audience, to pull them in, and to make them forget everything else in the world, however, it is not the only part of

a presentation. An easy way to see that is when we take a step away from magic and move into the realm of music.

In music, a guitarist can have an amazing presentation, yet he doesn't say a word. The presentation is in the way that he plays the notes and the feeling that he has while playing those notes. What does that tell us about presentation? It tells us that the behavior and the emotions of the performer are a big part of it, and not the emotions that you have to force to play a

sad piece. We are talking about authentic feelings at that moment. The moment that a performer is truly grounded and he allows you a look behind the curtain of his emotions, then start to look at a truly authentic experience.

Now that we know this it begs for the question of whether it is wrong to tell a story in magic, and this definitely isn't. If you are a good storyteller and you have a captivating narrative, then a story can be amazing and wonderful. However, we don't

need a story for a magic trick just for the sake of it.

Magic can speak for itself. This being said that doesn't mean that we should start the narrator role, or we should just let people pick a card and do everything without context. You can aid the magic to speak, you can make certain moments more and others less important, you can learn how to stress the initial, and final situation and how to masterfully show someone what you want them to see.

I think that the advice of devising an entertaining presentation for a routine is often misinterpreted. I feel that a lot of people interpret that as “You have to make a story for this trick”. But what if the trick can be presented entirely without a story? What If you being you and masterfully executing the routine, exaggerating the magical moment, and being present with the audience can be all the presentation that the trick needs?

Try this for an exercise, see how you can

present the trick without any words, and then see how you can do the same thing with words, but not telling a story.

Try to shine through the trick and make it your own, share your human essence with the spectator and beautiful things will start to happen.





Bio Ian

Ian Chandler is a writer and magician from Ohio. He is currently coauthoring a theory book that's due to release in 2022.

Bio Chris

Chris is an accomplished full time performer who created and runs the highly successful "Close-Up @ The Magic Circle" show. For the last 7 years he has also produced the show in a variety of theaters, performing every week alongside others with an aim to showcase quality close-up magic. He has been a long term director of the charity "Centre for the Magic Arts" whose aim is to preserve the heritage of The Magic Circle and educate the public about magic as a performing art as well as being a former secretary of the Magic Circle itself.

To find out more about Chris you can

visit his website: <http://>

www.chriswoodmagic.co.uk

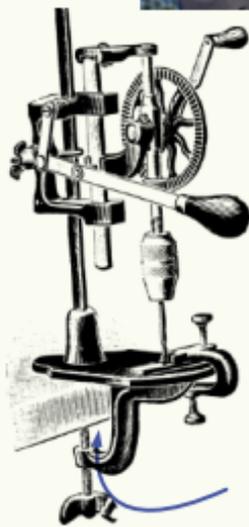
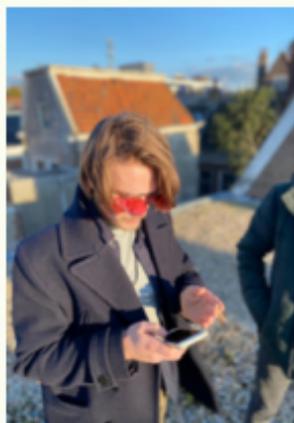


Bio Rico

Rico With a R is a magic fanatic, student, teacher, philosopher and the editor of this magazine based in the Groningen area in the Netherlands. Rico has lectured in multiple countries such as Poland, Italy and The United Kingdom.

Currently he is 22 years old and if you catch him at a convention than feel free to invite him for a beer.

You can find Rico on Instagram with [@rico_weeland](https://www.instagram.com/rico_weeland)



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