



AR
Roberto

Copyrights

Copyright © 2009 by Roberto Giobbi

Published by Lybrary.com – <http://www.lybrary.com>

All rights reserved.

Allowed Usage

This ebook is for personal and home use only. Renting or public viewing of this ebook is strictly prohibited. Any other use of this ebook — including reproduction for purposes other than those noted above, modification, distribution, or republication — without the prior written permission of Lybrary.com is strictly prohibited. We have a special arrangement for libraries. Please contact us for details.

Disclaimer

Lybrary.com used its best efforts in preparing this ebook. However, Lybrary.com makes no representation or warranties (express or implied, including, but not limited to, warranties of title, non-infringement, merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose) with respect to the accuracy, applicability, fitness, or completeness of the contents of this ebook. The information contained in this ebook is strictly for educational purposes. Therefore, if you wish to apply ideas contained in this ebook, you are taking full responsibility for your actions.

Crime Watch

Please help us to identify criminals. At the end of the day illegal copying will increase ebook prices for you or make such products impossible altogether. If you encounter suspicious activities, please contact us at crime@lybrary.com or any of our other email and mailing addresses. We reward any tips and information, which lead to the conviction of illegal copying activity with 50% of the punitive damages placed to our credit.

Feedback

Please send error corrections to errors@lybrary.com. We appreciate if you let us know about any typos, errors, or any other comments you would like to make.

CONTENTS

1. Injog Overhand Shuffle (Erik Arfeuille)	4
2. Presentation Ideas (Richard Green)	
3. Three Card Monte (Andreas Sucker)	6
4. How to Study (Philip Green)	10
5. Staystack (Benedikt Grundmann)	12
6. Fear of starting to perform (John Holt)	
7. Memorized version of Out of Sight Out of Mind (Eric Fry)	22
8. Think Of A Card Routines (Joe Mckay)	24
9. Gilbreath Principle (Samuel Wheeler)	27
10. Magician is only an actor playing the role of a magician (Tadej)	35
11. Too Perfect Theory (Ian Isenbart)	38
12. How many effects? (Alfonso Vallarta Compean)	42
13. Creative Process (Christopher Brown)	44
14. Bottom Deal Applications (Ben Long)	50
15. Philosophy of Magic (Robert Nadeau)	54
16. Trick That Can't Be Explained (Tim Gaffney)	57
17. Origin of Display Pass (Yuki Kadoya)	61
18. In Spectator's Hands (Elan Levitan)	66
19. Vernon's Travellers (Michel Andenmatten)	71
20. Effect Categories for Cards (John Cox)	75
21. Why do Magic? (Norn Bichan)	88
22. Ten Best Card Effects (Achim Goertz)	91
23. Practice (Nikodemus Siivola)	102
24. Best Self-Working Card Trick (James Hendrix)	105
25. Starting with Card Magic (Clint Jean Louis)	108
26. Tabled Faro/Riffle Shuffle (Dean Bodenham)	112
27. Delayed Setup (Giorgio Tarchini)	116
28. Program Construction of an Act (Fred King)	119
29. How To Prepare For A Competition (Craig Longhurst)	128
30. Dirty Cards (Joseph Hanosek)	134
31. Constructivism (Jeff Siegfried)	140
32. Favorite Card Routine (Thomas Mutschler)	146
33. Favorite ESP Card Trick (John Meads)	152

ASK ROBERTO

34. Secret Setup (Lawrence D’Mello)	155
35. Zarrow Shuffle (Art Prest)	159
36. Escuela Magica de Madrid (Marco Antonio)	162
Manifest of the Escuela Mágica de Madrid (EMM)	167
37. Navigate Information (Michael Szilagyi)	171
38. Favorite Non-Card Effects and Books (Mal Simpson)	184
39. Magician Fooler (Fred Bobin)	187
40. Notebook and Journal (DV Harris)	193
41. Repertoire Books (Tzvi Zev)	199
42. How to Archive Tricks (Marcus Selle)	201
43. General Card (Roberto Mansilla)	204
44. Deck Switches (Guillermo del Castillo)	210
45. Stand-Up Deck Switch (Randy Markin)	218
46. Best Si Stebbins Trick (Tze Chao Lin)	222
47. Magic Pizza Expression (Paul Friederiecks)	225
48. Audience’s Reality (Juan Araujo)	230
49. Clocking a Deck (Yehuda Rauch)	237
50. Performing Opportunities (Danylo Loutchko)	244
51. Alternative Sleights (Jonathan Icasas)	249
52. Kolossal Killer (Pascal Marc)	255
THE TOO-PERFECT THEORY	261
THE THEORISTS	262
INTRODUCTION	263
THE PLAYERS AND PUNDITS	265
THE “TOO PERFECT” THEORY	267
FLASH POINT	274
THE TOO-PERFECT THEORY IN ACTION	286
THE FLAW IN THE DIAMOND	291
MIKE CLOSE ON THE TOO-PERFECT THEORY	297
STRIVING FOR PERFECTION	302
IT’S YOUR CALL: ON THE TOO-PERFECT THEORY	308
MARTIN LEWIS ON THE TOO-PERFECT THEORY	314
PATRICK WATSON ON THE TOO-PERFECT THEORY	315
POSTSCRIPT	317



Erik Arfeuille asks:

Injog Overhand Shuffle

On the injog overhand shuffle: When running the single card, Erdnase in his book instructs to move the right hand towards the body to deliver the single card. A quote: “Hold the deck in the manner described for the Shuffle. Seize about half the deck from beneath with the right hand (under cut), draw out and shift the right hand a little inwards over packet in left hand, so that when the first card is drawn off by the left thumb it will protrude slightly over the little finger (in-jog).”

In *Card College 1*, you stress that this must NOT be done; that the right hand should move in the same path as always and that the card is injogged by means of a backward movement of the left thumb.

Erdnase is often referred to as “The Bible”. So, are you a heretic? :-)

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello Erik

You're the first to ask a question – how nice to hear again from you.

I like your analogy with the Bible. As you know the Bible was written neither by God nor by Jesus, it was a “joint venture” hundreds of years afterwards, we don't know EXACTLY who wrote it and under what circumstances...and we don't know who Erdnase was and whether he or a ghost writer wrote Erdnase. I think we better stop the analogy here as we don't want to shake anybody's beliefs, at least not when it comes to Religion ;-)

By the way: When the first review of *Card College* in German came out in 1992, the reviewer wrote that it was going to be “the Bible” and that I'm the Pope. And a Spanish reviewer wrote that Erdnase was the Old Testament and *Card College* the New Testament. At the time I thought this was very amusing, for other reasons than you might think...

Back to the facts in Erdnase: If the injog (or the outjog) is really small, as Erdnase suggests in the text, the shift of the right hand will hardly be noticed. However, in my experience of 38 years of practicing magic and watching others do magic, I have yet to see this – most, including myself, want to be sure not to lose the jogged card and therefore will jog the card at least two if not three times the width of the white border – if you are in a professional performance you better do. Especially in this case the advice of keeping the right hand in the same plane and drawing the injog card in with the left thumb is relatively important.

For completeness's sake, here is my comment I made in a Genii column:

- 1. Injog during Overhand Shuffle.** When injogging a card during an overhand shuffle, there is a tendency to move the right hand back as the left thumb runs the injog

ASK ROBERTO

card on the cards already shuffled off in the left hand and then move again forward and shuffle off. This tendency must be fought and all shuffling actions be executed in the same plane. The correct way of doing it is to pull off at least the top stock to be controlled in the first movement of the shuffle. Then lower the right hand in *exactly the same way and plane* as before, peel off (run) a single card with the left thumb and with this same thumb pull it slightly inward, thereby injogging it. The right hand doesn't move inward, it remains exactly in the same plane in all shuffle movements; it is only the left thumb that pulls the single card inward. This is described and illustrated in *Card College Volume 1* p. 44, also see Check Point 2 on p. 46.

The above text can also be found as part of my lecture book *Homage to Dai Vernon—Life & Work*, 79 pages spiral bound, obtainable by sticking \$35 or €25 between two postcards in an envelope and sending it to me at: Roberto Giobbi, Schlossbergstrasse 5, 4132 Muttenz, Switzerland. I'll send you a signed copy plus a signed photograph, if you ask for it, all airmail postpaid. Mention this offer, please.)

But more than the technique itself I have found it important to bother about such details, to identify such problems, even if they seem to be irrelevant, and to find elegant solutions to them. We might come up with different answers and we might even argue about them, but in any case it shows we care, we have criteria and that I think is what makes our card magic "artistic" (please read my essay on "Artistic Card Magic" which was published in the already mentioned *Vernon Homage* of mine in the April issue 2007 of GENII (this is the magazine I recommend to subscribe if you want to subscribe to one magazine only – of course this is a partial opinion as I have my column "The Genii Session" there every two months).

Additional Thoughts:

If you have an interest in Erdnase, I would recommend you get *Revelation* (not *Revelations* with an "s"), Vernon's annotated Erdnase, which was published by Mike Caveney's Magic Words in 2008. Check Vernon's comment on p. 87 of this book, illustrated by 4 photographs.

Also I recommend Darwin Ortiz's *Annotated Erdnase*.

And check Zarrow's book on p. 366 you'll find "Overhand Shuffle Injog", which is Zarrow's answer to the problem.

Let me know if you found this answer satisfactory, but please remember that for the \$15 you have access to all other answers as well.



Richard Green asks:

Presentation Ideas

In the 2005 Hofzinsler issue of *Genii*, you have given a list of 10 presentation ideas for card routines; three of the ideas sparked my thinking and became the catalyst for my strongest pieces in my show. You mentioned that if we liked those, we could ask for more ideas like that. I was wondering if you'd be willing to share more ideas like those.

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello Richard,

This is a great question and I thank you for the implicit feedback it contains on my *Genii* article. As a matter of fact this was one of my personal favorite columns.

You might be interested to know how I got the idea in the first place. I've had ideas for similar columns years back, but what triggered it was a visit to the British Library. In December 2005 I was booked to perform and lecture at Martin MacMillan's legendary convention – it was the first Martin organized, his father Ron having passed away the same year. There is a DVD with my lecture I did there called *Roberto Giobbi Lectures at the International Magic Convention*.

It so happened that the convention venue was just next door to the famous British Library. When I went there it turned out that it was more complicated than I thought to get at their magic book collection, so I went to their Book Shop (I always do that in any museum – sometimes if the line is too long, I only go to the museum shop). There I hit on a very unusual publication called “The Writer's Block”, which had a double meaning as you'll see. It was in the form of a block with hundreds of square note leaves, glued together like a note block, and the subject was the “block” writers have, i.e. when they sit in front of an empty screen (formerly an empty sheet of paper in the typewriter) and don't know what to write about. Each note leaf contained the beginning of a story, plot etc., and the user was stimulated to get inspired by this and come up with his own story. So the leaves would serve as a sort of trigger to overcome the “writer's block”.

I immediately thought that this would be a wonderful idea to apply to magic, but instead of giving trick problems, which is very interesting but well-known, I thought: “How about giving the beginning of a story or a theme/plot and then have the user come up with a new trick or fit an already existing trick to this suggested idea?”

I've been collecting over 500 ideas by now and have thought about publishing it in book form. Do you think this is interesting? You can send me feedback, if you like, at giobbi@bluewin.ch (please don't put this address in a list – thank you).

OK – now here are 5 more ideas and I hope you like them.

ASK ROBERTO

Bowl of Billets

Show a glass bowl – a fish bowl or a large cognac snifter - filled with folded slips of paper. Explain that each one contains the title of a piece of magic. Have several spectators draw a billet and then perform a routine with the items written on them.

The billets could have different colors and represent positions in the program, such as opener, middle 1-2-3, end, bonus etc.

Still with different colors the billets could represent different genres (mental, close-up etc.), props (cards, coins, rings etc.), subjects (tricks, anecdotes, puzzles, optical illusion etc.).

If you travel and don't want to carry a bowl, you can simply use a transparent plastic bag. However, be aware that this is nowhere as *elegant* and *visually intriguing* as using a glass.

Entry Exam

Explain that you belong to an exclusive magic society. In order to be accepted you had to pass an entry exam.

What is the piece of magic you did then? Do you still do it? Has it changed from when you first performed it on the occasion of your exam?

Additional bits:

- You might really belong to an old and prestigious magic society. Tell your audience something about it.
- The fact that you do it totally different today than when you first perform it, is a nice justification to show the same trick twice with a completely different method. What else does this suggest to you?

Clichés

When spectators in an audience witness the performance of a magician, they tend to come up with all sorts of solutions for his tricks. The fact that most of these are completely wrong, but the spectator is satisfied with them, is another very interesting issue if you consider that problem solving is one of the daily tasks in our life – one must wonder how often in politics, economy, religion and other disciplines people are satisfied with the first solution they come up with. I leave this to you to contemplate.

Coming back to our spectator, here are some of the solutions we are presented with:

- It's up your sleeve
- It's due to the quickness of the hands
- You talk a lot and distract our attention
- You are using a confederate

Can you come up with a multi-phase routine that uses these solutions as a premise and with each of its phases proves them wrong by defeating their theories - obviously without making the audience or a member of it look foolish?

Magie à la Carte

Show 5 or 7 cards to be blank on both sides. Draw a magic wand on one of them with a waterproof marker. Touch this card to the other cards and upon turning them over there is an object drawn on the previously blank “face”: a card fan, a coin spread, a rabbit, a rope, a question mark etc. Each of these pictures represents a category of magic. For the previously listed drawings these would be: a card trick, a coin trick, a trick using rabbits (e.g. Sponge Rabbits or Tamariz Rabbit Trick), a rope trick, a mental trick etc.

Have a spectator select a prop – you may want to speak of different “instruments” making a connection with music and thereby adding an artistic touch. Do the best trick you know with this instrument. Then have another selected, and so on, until you’ve performed a trick for each instrument.

Little help:

- The blank cards initially used can be “printed” by using any type of Wild Card handling. As an example see Kaufman, Richard, *The Card Miracles of Shigeo Tagaki*, “The Wild Blanks”, pp. 24, USA 1990.
- Taking the cards from a full stack of double-blank cards will inspire elegant but simple ways of showing the cards to be blank.

Disembodied Women und Calculating Horses

There is a long list of strange characters with whom magicians during their long history have shared the stage from the beginning of civilization to the present day: stone eaters, water spouters, elephant men, flea circus directors, living skeletons, snake charmers and numberless other geeks.

In my library I have over a dozen books that tell the life and times of such extraordinary people – the most popular publication among magicians is probably Ricky Jay’s wonderful *Learned Pigs and Fire-Proof Women*, but on the Internet you’ll find hundreds of them.

The problem: Take a character from one of these books, briefly describe the person and what he or she did: „That was an extraordinary accomplishment at that time, and it would still be – what I’m about to show you now, however,…”

What are you going to show your audience?

OK – that’s it. Let me know if you found this answer useful and interesting - remember that for the \$15 you have access to all other answers as well.

All the best,

Roberto Giobbi



Andreas Sucker asks:

Three Card Monte

On the video “Juan Tamariz’s fabulous Close-Up Lecture”, published by International Magic in 1992, Juan performs a three card monte with normal cards: one black 3, one black 7 and one black 10. On the video he wants to tell the audience who is to credit for it but he forgot the name. The audience is guessing but no one knows. Although Juan says that the name will come back to him in a minute he does not come back to it. Do you know who invented this three card monte and whether it has been published?

Thanks from Andreas/Germany

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello Andreas

Yes, Juan Tamariz did this for me many years ago and I’ve seen him do it for TV and laymen as well – the way he does it gets a great reaction from an essentially simple trick.

It is very interesting to see how he associates the identity of the cards to spaces and therefore makes the audience believe the cards never left their sight – the resulting “fusion” of the Three and the Seven into the Ten is short of miraculous.

It is obviously the plot of two or several things becoming one, as it is most notably done with the well-known Blendo effect using different colored silks that blend into a rainbow silk containing all the colors previously shown.

To the best of my knowledge the first to adapt this plot to playing cards was Paul Harris, “Cardician’s Blendo” in Paul Harris’s *Las Vegas Close-up* (1978), reprinted in *The Art of Astonishment I* (1996). This might very well be the origin Juan wanted to reference. (See also my “pasteboard Blendo” in *Card College Volume 5*, p. 1174, which is a very practical in-the-hands version of the effect needing no table and no lapping.)

Next time I see Tamariz I’ll ask him directly and if it is anything else than what I wrote above I’ll let you know.

Thank you for your question.

All the best,

Roberto Giobbi



Philip Green asks:

How to Study

As an amateur hobbyist who is working my way through the *Card College* course I find that I shy away from performing many tricks, such as the ambitious card, for fear of the secret being revealed. Because I have a small target audience of friends, family and colleagues, I will spend weeks, sometimes months, trying to perfect a sleight rather than continuing through the course and learning other sleights.

Do you feel that I should spend so much time trying to perfect the sleights, or should I perform the tricks to a reasonable standard and learn from mistakes, whilst at the same time continuing through the *Card College* course, learning other sleights and tricks?

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello Philip,

You are asking a question that is important to anyone in your situation – and there are many. I can perfectly remember being in the same kind of circumstances when I started in magic at age 14 – but on top of the problems you mention, there was the juvenile transiting into the adult world which made all even more complex. You're probably older and at least you got rid of that :-)

First and foremost let me tell you that you are in a wonderfully privileged situation as you are doing magic as a hobby, just for pleasure and there is nobody putting any kind of pressure on you except yourself. Don't think that you have to succeed immediately; just do magic for your own pleasure, at your own pace and you'll see that in due time everything will fall in place perfectly. I'm convinced that you've picked one of the very best hobbies one could choose – I hope to write about the manifold and complex benefits that practicing magic has for a child or an adult in one of my upcoming columns "The Genii Session" in *Genii* magazine.

Back to your question: You can do several things at the same time. Proceed through the course as you feel comfortable and are enjoying it. You will see that you will be developing a sense for this, criteria that will tell you how to do things. There is no point in waiting until you do a sleight perfectly – perfection is not a goal, but a vision that takes you to your goal, like the stars in the sky which you cannot reach, but if you follow them you'll get to where you want to get. Therefore try the sleights in a chapter, practice them for a few days and also run through the trick associated with the sleight until you think that your fingers can do it and you start getting the knack of it. Now put it into your practice repertoire and keep practicing it. At the same time you may move on to the next chapter and do the same there. As you are doing this you're building up a repertoire of sleights and tricks and you should keep practicing them, if you can every day or at least 3 times a week.

ASK ROBERTO

Yes, by all means do perform and get some experience, but at the same time keep perfecting what you already learned. The audience is part of the learning process and your teacher. Of course you should feel reasonably comfortable before performing something you practiced. This is different for each performer and there are no fix rules.

In order to get positive feedback and success, which you'll be able to anchor in your memory and thus build your experience and gain confidence, put together a short routine of 3 tricks. Make the first trick a self-working trick that cannot go wrong, maybe "Voilà, Four Aces!" from *Card College Lighter*, p. 3. You might want to do an Injog Shuffle and a False Cut here to control the bottom stock – this is very easy and you can hardly get caught doing that. Just don't say: "I'm going to shuffle and cut the deck." Because that might cause the audience to ask: "OK, may I shuffle the cards?" Just shuffle and cut the deck as you deliver your introductory remarks. The reaction and feedback you'll then get from the audience will give you confidence to move on the second trick, maybe "The Acrobat Family" from CC1 that uses the Glide. In this case you would obviously produce the 4 Jacks in your first trick rather than the 4 Aces. You may then end with another easy trick, an Assembly for instance, or one with some sleight-of-hand. As I don't know your level of expertise exactly I leave this open for you to fill the blanks.

Go ahead and do it, build up criteria and beliefs as you go along, develop a taste of your own, go back to it and correct as necessary, read only the best authors, the classics (see my book lists in *Card College 2*), don't buy all the modern junk, get together with other people who have the same interest, taste and are asking questions like you do. You're ahead of many people just because you're asking these questions. In my opinion it is better to be a bit more hesitant than overly self-confident without being able to back it up with competence and some experience. Your question shows me that you're humble and modest. Keep practicing, thinking and loving what you're doing and you'll get far. And if you get caught once in a while, don't take yourself or magic too seriously, you'll do it better next time.

I recommend you read my essay "The Study of Card Conjuring" in *Card College Volume 2* (pp. 476) once again and you will find useful pieces of advice as well as many very practical techniques that answer your question, especially p. 477 "Studying a Card Trick".

I wish you best of success.

Sincerely,

Roberto Giobbi

Benedikt Grundmann asks:

Staystack

After I saw Allan Ackerman perform “Marlo’s Matching Routine” (on another product from Chris [Advanced Card Control Volume 6](#), originally published by A-1 Multimedia) I got interested in the Staystack and its applications. I know two sources that mention it Juan Tamariz *Mnemonica* and Ed Marlo’s *Revolutionary Card Technique*. Are there any others?

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello Benedikt

You picked an interesting technical topic that is, as you’ve noticed, not that widely worked. I vividly remember seeing Martin Nash, the Canadian Card Expert, perform at the Magic Castle several years ago a routine he called “Ovation”. As the title of the act says, he really got a standing ovation. It utilizes 8 Faro Shuffles distributed all along the 20 minute routine and it does use the Stay Stack extensively. The routine has been published under the same name – I have a lecture note in my archive written by Stephen Minch named *Ovation*. It is available through lybrary.com as an e-book <http://www.lybrary.com/ovation-p-267.html> which is probably the most convenient way of getting it. Personally, I would print it and bind it nicely.

Lots of material concerning the Stay Stack was also published by Rusduck in his magazine *Cardiste*, see <http://www.lybrary.com/the-cardiste-p-295.html>. (Amazing what Chris Wasshuber has accumulated over the years.)

Then of course there is Marlo. As Ascanio used to jokingly say: “In dubio pro Marlo.” (That’s an allusion, of course, to the credo of Roman Right “in dubio pro reo”, “if in doubt in favor of the accused” and he used it when not sure who to credit for a move or an idea). Check his *Faro Controlled Miracles*.

And whenever you want to know something about clever use of the Faro Shuffle, check the *Collected Works of Alex Elmsley*. Elmsley, whom I had the pleasure of meeting a few times in his latter period, loved the Faro Shuffle and had many very clever applications that can be used with Stay Stack as well.

OK, dear Benedikt, I could go on like this and fill pages with individual sources. But they say that I’m a good teacher and that a good teacher should teach fishing, not just give fish, so here are a few links you can follow up yourself that will not only answer your questions about the Stay Stack (more fish), but many others concerning magic in general and card magic in particular.

Here e.g. are the entries from Denis Behr’s very interesting archive (free of charge) <http://archive.denisbehr.de/>:

ASK ROBERTO

Russell Duck & Alex Elmsley	Stay Stack	historical information, context	The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley - Volume 2	385
Alex Elmsley	Computer Dating	removed selection is mated under fair conditions, stay stack	The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley - Volume 2	385
Alex Elmsley	Empty and Full	removed selection is mated under fair conditions, stay stack	The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley - Volume 2	387
Alex Elmsley	Late Night Location	stay stack with duplicates	The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley - Volume 2	372
Alex Elmsley	Topsy-Turvy Stay-Stack	(A Problem) topsy-turvy stay stack with 2 decks	The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley - Volume 2	391
Alex Elmsley	Wedded Ambitions	free selection, mate rises to top, stay stack	The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley - Volume 2	389
Ted Gillam	Pairs	stay stack	Card Cavalcade 2	87
Ken Krenzel	Mental Matrix	stay stack	The Card Classics of Ken Krenzel	74
Harry Lorayne	Nine All Mine	using mini stay stack	Apocalypse Vol. 16-20	2248
Ed Marlo	Alternative Procedures	stay stack principle applied to memorized deck, see previous item	Faro Notes	43
Ed Marlo	It's Mathematical	stay stack principle applied to memorized deck, 2 effects	Faro Notes	40
Ed Marlo	Masterful Match Up	2 methods, stay stack	The Unexpected Card Book	83
Paul Swinford	The Stay Stack	information and applications	More Faro Fantasy	22
Randy Tanner	Thinking Man's Poker	using stay stack, clever	Apocalypse Vol. 6-10	955

Click on the title link and it will take you to the list of the complete entries for that book or magazine, an amazing work.

Whenever you are looking for any type of information, I also recommend Bill Kalush's *Ask Alexander* database, the best I know (\$95 for one year):

http://askalexander.org/alex_login.cgi?p=%2F%3F

[**Note by Chris Wasshuber:** A free full text searchable magic database is available at Lybrary.com. It is called the *Magic Knowledge Base*:

<http://www.lybrary.com/magic-knowledge-base-help-a-6.html>

It is comparable to *Ask Alexander*, perhaps not quite as many pages indexed, but with a better selection of more recent works as well as a search engine which returns page images as well as text. Most importantly it is a free resource to any Lybrary.com customer who subscribes to the Lybrary.com magic newsletter.]

I think that will keep you busy for a year or so, and when you're through all of this, come back and we talk more :-)

Keep up your interest in what Hofzinsler called "the poetry of magic", card magic.

Best regards,

Roberto Giobbi



John Holt asks:

Fear of starting to perform

I've been interested in card magic for many years, purely as a hobbyist, performing for my own amusement. However, recently, I've wanted to make a change into performing close up, in pubs and bars. The trouble is, because I've only really performed for myself, I've no confidence in being able to perform for other people, the fear of failure almost paralyzing me from performing. The nerves, sweat and shakes make me hold back on performing, not making any progress towards my performing goal. What advice would you give someone like myself to help counteract this fear, to get to the stage where I can confidently perform without letting fear and worry hold me back?

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Dear John

This is a wonderful question that not only concerns you as a starting performer, but almost everybody who performs, up to the most seasoned professional. I remember exactly when I got hold of a magic book in Italy by Padre Ciuró. I must have been about 16 of age then and into magic for two years or so. In it he gave some advice to his readers and among other things he wrote that if you are overly nervous you should think about dropping magic and doing something else. This advice was as bad as the rest of the book :-). I'm glad I didn't follow it, as in the past 36 years I've practiced magic as a hobbyist, amateur and eventually full-time international professional (since 1988), and magic has given me everything I need – and more. In my entire life I've only met very few performers who were not “nervous” in some way before their shows, most notably Juan Tamariz, who keeps amazing me when – about 90 minutes before doing a show in a big theater for 800 people – he says to me: “Roberto, let's get a bite before the show – I need some energy.” Then we go to a restaurant and order a three-course meal! I've talked to many professionals about this issue and found that there doesn't seem to be one technique that works for everybody all of the time, but most performers have a personal strategy. I know of famous magicians who kept their “stage fright” for all their life. However, in my opinion, this is not necessary. Let's explore a few things about nervousness, so-called “stage fright”, and let me help you find your own personal strategy – that's the point of this essay.

Comparatively little has been written on this subject, as you will have noticed if you have investigated the literature, and although I haven't written much about it myself, I've brought this complex subject up in most of my full-day seminars and private coachings. Here are a few thoughts in no particular order:

Natural stress mechanism:

First of all be aware that our body and mind has been programmed by nature to be able to tap into extra resources whenever we need them. This brings to mind the famous quote we always hear from motivational speakers, who want to sell us their ideas by trying to convince us that we can have a more fulfilled life if we buy their products: “We only use 10% of our potential.” Well, of course we do, how else? If we used 100% of our potential all of the time, we would kill ourselves. We’d be like a stereo system going at all times at full power. Or like a car that constantly goes full speed – in reality, however, you’ll drive an average of maybe 30mph. But when you need to pass another car or react in a dangerous situation, you can tap into its resources and drive faster. I’m using these two examples as an analogy for our human system. There is a natural stress mechanism that was given to our ancestors (and now to us) to survive: whenever something unusual happens, that could endanger us, our body instantly activates dozens of chemical and mental processes that are there to make us run, think and generally react faster. This complex stress mechanism is triggered when we perform. Therefore being “nervous” before going on is something nature has given us to be at our best.

Fact

Scientific stress research showed that the two activities that cause most stress are a pilot in a test flight and an actor on stage. Did you know that? In a way I think that’s fantastic to be among the leaders! Years ago I read a survey where people were asked what the thing was that they feared most. Very much to my surprise they didn’t answer “going to a cemetery at night” or “walking through a dark alley at night in a foreign city” BUT “speaking in front of an audience”. Another record! So, you see, it is absolutely normal that we should be nervous before performing, as it implies both realities of the actor and the person who speaks in front of others. Now the big issue is how to let just enough of the stress mechanisms into our mind and body as to help us deliver an optimum performance, but get rid of those stress factors that keep us from performing at our best. So let’s now look at how to avoid an “overreaction” of the system, which is like an allergy that is also an overreaction of the system.

The first insight to be gained from the above is that it is completely natural to be nervous before doing anything extraordinary – and performing is something extraordinary. Once understood, you can start making “nervousness” your ally, your hidden partner that helps you being your best. Begin by giving “nervousness” a new meaning, reframe it as “extra energy” which is necessary to:

- think on your feet if anything goes wrong
- activate your enthusiasm
- project yourself (I mean this in a figurative sense...) into the audience
- create strong and permanent rapport during the whole show

The day you don’t have this extra energy and you feel the same way performing as you feel in every other moment of life, in my opinion you’re dead. In my case as a professional who works maybe 8 shows a month (I mostly do corporate and private shows, occasionally some

ASK ROBERTO

cultural events as well as intermittently lectures and workshops for magicians), I know that a “show day” feels different than a “regular day” (where I’m studying, practicing, reading, writing etc.). I look forward to feeling different and I know that I need to feel like that in order to have a successful performance. One state has been permanently linked to the other by now over many years and I can assure you that it feels perfectly OK, even great at times.

As a result of the above, learn to identify how nervousness affects your mind and most of all your body. I’m not a doctor, but have noticed that there are two categories of symptoms that occur, the “stomach type” and the “heart type”. The stomach type will feel “butterflies in the stomach” with more trips to the bathroom than usual. I’m a “stomach type” and I think it’s great to have that occasionally, as I can read all these thin booklets I don’t get to reading but when I’m sitting on the toilet, and my doctor tells me that it’s healthy – many people would take medication to be able to do this occasionally. The “heart type” has a heart-beat that speeds up, sweating hands and shakes. The way you describe your symptoms you seem to be this type. Don’t worry, we’ll fix this, too, as you will see by the time you’ve read this essay.

Here are a few more considerations:

Practice:

It is my experience from looking at myself and others that we simply don’t practice and rehearse as much as people in other disciplines, like sports, music, theatre. One major reason for “stage fright” is that we are not sure what we are going to say and to do and why we are saying and doing it. This can radically be changed by practicing and rehearsing better, more intelligently and simply more often and for longer periods. You will see that each time you practice you will improve at least one little thing – make this a conscious habit and goal of each practice and rehearsal session. Find one little thing to improve or to learn every day and after a year has gone by you might be another person.

In order to gain more self-confidence in what you say and why you say it, I recommend you try writing a script for just one or two of your presentations, learn it, rehearse it and then go out and do it. By doing this you’ll learn a strategy and implement it so it now becomes a tool you can permanently use.

Mental rehearsal or mind before body:

“Stage fright” is purely and exclusively a thing of the mind – what you think is what your body will do. In my opinion this means one thing: we have to take responsibility for our situation by the way we understand and do things. When Ascanio, my spiritual father in magic, first talked to me about mental rehearsal, it opened a huge door for me. He suggested the books by Charles A. Garfield and Laurence Morehouse to me (details on p. 485 in *Card College Volume 2*). I remember preparing during months for my FISM acts in 1988 and 1991, especially 1988, by going through my act first thing and last thing in the day after waking up and before going to bed. It did work very, very well for me and I suggest you try this. You can do this either by sitting or laying comfortably and listening to blues or classical music (or whatever relaxes you) or in any situation you don’t need to pay attention (so DON’T do this while driving):

ASK ROBERTO

mentally go through the performance of one or several tricks and try to imagine the situation as vividly as possible, hearing yourself talk, feeling the cards in your hands, maybe even smelling whatever you like to smell and above all imagining that you are doing all this in your very best way, relaxed and standing above everything, but also getting the best reaction that still feels natural from your audience (no need to overdo this). Do this a few times and note what it does for you - I'm sure you'll do this often. It really, really works and helps.

Think of our audience:

Tamariz told me many times about his teacher and idol José Frakson, the world-famous cabaret magician. I've met him twice in the Eighties and he always looked to me like a peaceful and very happy person. Frakson would stand behind the curtain, breath slowly in and out, put on a broad smile on his face and think about his audience: "I look very much forward to seeing you, my friends." When he got older, Tamariz told me, he would think: "You are all my children." Let's take this a little further: Do you remember an occasion when you were sitting in the audience and a magician – or any other performer or speaker for that matter – went on and was obviously nervous? I'm sure you can quickly find such a situation in your life. Now remember how you felt? You felt a little bad, didn't you? The nervousness sort of took over to you. And you felt sorry for the performer, maybe even a little guilty that he was so nervous because of you and the rest of the audience. Now you wished that he might feel better, wondering why he should be so nervous, because if he wasn't, he could give the best of himself, and you would enjoy it, and he would enjoy it – everything would be much better for everybody. Remember how that feels? Great. When you go on next time, remember that each and every person in your audience is your friend or will become your friend during the performance and that they *all* want you to be as good as you really are, and that they want to enjoy the experience together with you. Yes, that's what a performance is, a communion, thence communication is the basis of all art and of all life. You have a passion, magic, you've spent hours, days, weeks and years of your life studying and practicing magic, you've solved many problems, you've had ideas of your own, well, even though you're "just a hobbyist" you've dedicated a part of your life, intelligence and passion to studying what you are about to perform. You are actually sharing a small part of your life and of your inner self with some of your friends or some strangers that will in some sense gain an insight into your life and work. I'm sure you agree when I say: This is a wonderful moment for all involved and you have every reason in the world (and beyond) to do this as best as you can and to feel as best as you can because it's all a great, great pleasure.

Insight:

After many years of pondering the issue, I come to the conclusion that the core problem of why we are afraid of failing has to do with the fact that we take ourselves too seriously. The higher we put ourselves, the longer it takes us to fall and the more it will hurt. But is anyone of us really that important? I recently went to the funeral of a "very important person". I thought: "Well, now he's dead like all the other less important people." When we come to the last moments we're really all the same. And measured with the billions of years the universe

ASK ROBERTO

and life has existed and will maybe continue to exist, and measured with the tragedies of life – war, famine, torture, rape, cancer, death - millions of people go through every day, what importance does your and my failure in a card trick have? Compared to that it is ridiculous we even worry for a second about anything, let alone a trivial failure when we are performing. This is so grotesque that it is certainly not worth worrying about, not even for a second. Of course this doesn't mean that one should care less about what he does, not at all. Personally I always try to strive for excellence, try to be the best I can. We might not be able to completely change ourselves, but we can always improve. I am the most important person in life for myself and what I do is important, otherwise I'd rather not do it, but all of this has to be kept in the right perspective, with modesty and humbleness, but with self-confidence, based on acquired knowledge and skill (otherwise it's arrogance). It's not worth worrying, nobody cares. And now for some suggestions on your personal strategy to overcome nervousness and improve your well-being when performing.

Before anything else, let me suggest what NOT to do: don't take any type of drugs, alcohol or medication if at all possible. I know of a very famous amateur magician, who was very close to me, who used to take beta blockers before performing. And of another very famous professional magician who worked top night clubs who would drink a few whiskies before going on. If you start any of this, it might work at first, especially drinking works very well. HOWEVER, after a year you will need two glasses of whisky and after two year three, etc. This is a cheap solution and therefore is NOT a solution. There are other and more noble ways of winning over yourself. Let's look at some of them:

Start small:

Even the longest journey starts with the first step, doesn't it? Start by performing for one or two spectators before going on to a larger group – do this for the next few months. When you have a successful experience, put it in your memory bank, if you have a less good experience analyze why it was so, think about how to do it better next time, practice a bit more, and then forget the bad experience and replace it with the next good experience that is certain to come. I remember it took me years before I had the confidence to perform in a parlor or even stage situation. Meanwhile I (almost) prefer a show on stage than doing close-up! So know that it will take its time, but that you are going to enjoy that time enormously, and you will grow humanly and artistically.

Personal motivation:

You write that you've been interested in cards for many years, purely as a hobbyist, performing for your own amusement. Great! Keep this in mind before you go on and as you perform, at least at the beginning of the performance, because you'll see that once you start, most "nervousness" issues will take care of themselves. Become aware WHY you're doing magic. Dare to ask the question and find honest answers to them. Why is it that you do magic? What do you expect magic to do for you? If you do this - it might take days and weeks to find the answer, that's perfectly OK - you're ahead of most that have never bothered asking this question.

ASK ROBERTO

And you'll find that it will give you more peace of mind when you perform, because now you know the reasons (or at least some of them :-)) why you practice and perform magic and this will make you stand above the game.

Don't compete with others:

Don't compare yourself to others. Study the subject of magic as well as you can, understand why you are doing and saying this and that, and then do it. Then look at your performance, keep the good things you did, improve the things that you think could be improved and next time you perform you're going to be better than last time. Try to be just a little bit better than last time, add or eliminate a little thing, and before you know, you've traveled the road to personal excellence and success.

A few techniques:

- Breathing in and out slowly and listening to your breath is, since time immemorial, considered to be one of the very simplest and best ways of mastering stage fright. Inhale slowly through your nose counting to 10. Hold your breath counting to 3. Now don't forget to exhale through your mouth...slowly counting again to 10. Repeat several times. You can adapt this to your own rhythm, of course.
- Find a set of simple exercises to go through, such as Ammmmm, Emmmm, Immmm, Ommmm, Ummmm, sort of humming the vocals A, E, I, O, U for about 10 seconds each. You'll find that the vibrations caused by the humming will calm you almost instantly. It is assumed that the purring of a cat has the same function (for the cat...).
- If you are the dynamic type who can't sit still before a show, simply walk around. That's what I do and it is perfectly OK and works. I walk miles :-)) before a show. If you have a little time before your show and the environment allows it, go for a short walk and go through the performance mentally (see mental training above).
- You can make the above ideas - and more if you like - into a short routine that could become your ritual before performing, either during the day or shortly before going on. With each success you will associate the ritual to it, so that by starting the ritual you automatically trigger your "success mode".
- Try out specific things like Autogenetic Training, Yoga, Tai-Chi etc. Personally I've tried all of this plus Transcendental Meditation, Self-Hypnosis, NLP, Transactional Analysis and many more. I've NEVER made a religion out of any of these ideas and techniques, but have used the information and insight gained to build a tool box and I'm the sole craftsman and responsible of how I'm going to use it - I suggest you look at it this way.
- I'll give you one last technique, and if you try it, it'll work wonders for you. They call it the Circle of Excellence and it was the best thing I learned in a course of Syntonic Reading, a sort of esoteric speed-reading (that doesn't work for me :-)). You'll need about 5 minutes in which you don't want to be disturbed. Silence or a music you like is OK. Draw a large imaginary circle (no need to damage the floor...) on the floor, big enough that you can stand in it. Now stand upright next to the circle. Close your eyes and think of a situation in your life

ASK ROBERTO

where you've been at your best, where you've surpassed yourself and just did everything right. We all have such moments. Start to vividly imagine the scene, hear, smell, feel, and involve all your senses. It might take 15 seconds or a minute or two, don't worry. At the moment you feel the situation is at its peak, step into the Circle of Excellence, keep the feeling and immediately perform a discrete gesture, such as forming your right hand into a fist and turning it 90 degrees clockwise, or anything else. You can also pronounce a specific word in your mind at the same time you do the gesture. This will associate the gesture and the word to the feeling of accomplishment and success. Stand in the circle as long as the feeling lasts. When you sense the feeling is diminishing, step out of the circle. You've done it. Next time you need access to this resource, take an imperceptible step aside, repeat your gesture and word and you'll feel the power you've anchored in the initial exercise will come back and be with you. Don't laugh, do it ;-)

Out:

And here's a little out if you tremble during the performance of a trick. Simply say: "Don't worry about my trembling, that's part of the trick – I've practiced it in winter." This will create a guaranteed laugh that will sooth you and instantly stop your trembling.

Books:

Irecommend you read one or two books about the subject, e.g.:

- Gallwey, Timothy, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, ISBN 0-553-27372-8.
- Millman, Dan, *Way of the Peaceful Warrior*, ISBN 0-915811-00-6.

But also:

- Gelb, Michael, *Present Yourself*, ISBN 0-915190-51-6

You can find more book recommendations in *Volume 2 of Card College*, in the theory section, where I recommend books after each theory essay. Nowadays you can navigate internet and will soon find some interesting texts, I'm sure, when you enter "stage fright", "nervousness" etc.

And even if all of this should fail, which I doubt very much, you can keep magic as (in my opinion) the most complex and wonderful hobby there is, just studying and practicing magic for yourself, as thousands of other people in this world are doing, without the pressure of ever performing except in a few occasions for friends or for other fellow magicians who feel like you. As an amateur you don't need to perform, and just this very thought and feeling will free you of your nervous luggage right NOW.

I'm confident that this has been of some help to you and I predict that your next performance will be a better experience for you and your audience just as you finish reading these words.

Keep up your enthusiasm and you'll go as far as you want to go.

Best wishes,

Roberto Giobbi

ASK ROBERTO

PS:

Wait one year and apply some or all I've told you, and then let me know via my private e-mail how things went. Or ask another question at: <http://www.lybrary.com/roberto-giobbi-p-11669.html> (maybe how to run a fan club)!

To all who are reading this:

It took me several days to formulate the answer to this question of John Holt's, plus a lifetime of thinking, doing, learning etc. in order to be able to say all this in just a dozen hours or so. Would *you* do this for \$15 even if you could? It's OK, you don't need to thank me, I liked doing it because I learned myself. I had the answers for a long time, but never sat down to formalize them – so you need to thank John Holt for the question! But if you want to show your appreciation, please don't copy the PDF this answer comes in and don't send it to other people. But by all means tell everybody about the *Ask Roberto* product. If you think somebody is interested in this question or in any other, send them to this link <http://www.lybrary.com/roberto-giobbi-p-11669.html> and tell them to subscribe to *ASK ROBERTO*. It only costs \$15 and you get information that is the result of a lifetime of experience. If you want to say “thank you” for anything I've done for you, that's one way of doing it. I thank YOU.

Roberto Giobbi

Eric Fry asks:**Memorized version of Out of Sight Out of Mind**

What do you think of a memorized version of Out of Sight Out of Mind? Pros and cons.

Start with a set up of nine memorized cards on top of the deck (or two sets of nine, to be safer). The nine cards contain three trios of cards, each set up on the majority/minority principle, such as two red cards/one black card, or, more subtly, two high cards/one low card. Spectator mentally selects a card, as usual.

With a shuffle, move the nine cards as trios to near the top, middle and bottom. The cards being memorized, you don't need to know exactly where they are. Now you verbally fish for the majority/minority information as you try to "get an image." That narrows down the chosen card to being one of six cards or one of three cards.

You hold up the deck, faces away from you. Run cards from one hand to the other, asking the spectator to "send a brainwave" but no visible signal when she sees her card. After the first third of the deck, or first two thirds of the deck, if necessary, fish for whether she's sent a "brainwave." "Did you send one? I thought I felt something..." At the end of this process, you know which trio contains the chosen card.

Now, if the spectator has chosen a minority card, you know its identity. You have never seen the faces of the cards. You can name the card or draw its image before the spectator names it. That's a big plus.

Or, if the spectator's card is one of two cards in a known trio, you can look through the deck, cut one possible card to the top, and then place the other possible card on top, and turn over a single or double as needed. Even in this case, you appear to have committed to one card before the spectator names her card.

There are other subtleties I use, but that's the gist.

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Dear Eric,

You're the first to ask a strictly "trick question" – very good, especially because OOSOOM (Out of Sight, Out of Mind) is a great favorite.

When it comes to tricks or techniques one has invented or adapted, it's like with children: your own are the most beautiful. Of course it has to be that way, because you're going to live with them :-)

Now you're asking my honest opinion and I'll tell you that I find your solution really interesting and I can imagine you pulling this off very successfully. Done nonchalantly with enough performing experience and confidence it will fool even knowledgeable cardmen.

ASK ROBERTO

However, you're paying a considerable price.

First, you lose the immense elegance coming from a trick that can be done totally impromptu, with any borrowed deck, and you're introducing a set-up of 9 or even 18 cards.

Second, it seems to me that even though Deep Sea Fishing, as the Majority Principle is sometimes called, will allow you to know the spectator's thought of card after the first NO, you have got to *ask specific questions about the cards* - and probably several - that will tip off the method to some intelligent laypeople. In the original you never ask questions about the cards specifically, but only once, maximum twice if he saw his card already, the question being asked very casually so that most don't even remember you asked at all.

Third, you obtain a slightly different effect and it is debatable (like everything else is, of course, since we're just exchanging opinions) whether this is for the better or for the worse. In your effect you divine the identity of a thought of card and either tell your audience, write it on a slate etc. In Vernon's trick you are taking cards as the spectator thinks of his card and sense exactly when to stop the deal as you're holding his card. Although you've actually "just" localized his card (knew where it is), additionally to this already quite astonishing effect people will also believe you've divined the card, i.e. read their thought. So that's a double effect and it's remarkable if you consider that everything is impromptu. (Although we should always be careful to make the method a consideration when talking about the effect.)

If you're interested you might want to look at my solution of the problem in *Card College Volume 5* called "Mind- and Sightless", p. 1318. Also see my way of setting the 9 cards up in one single overhand shuffle on top, center and bottom (see "Mind- and Sightless" in *Card College Volume 5*).

Final Thought: Two tricks come to mind that in my opinion would greatly gain by applying your idea of a set of cards in mnemonic order. One is "The Thought-of Card" from *Card College Lighter* (p. 23), which is based on a trick by Dai Vernon from Ganson's *More Inner Secrets of Card Magic* (there called "Simple Arithmetic"). Once the spectator tells you the position of the card, you also know its identity and can use this information to obtain a stronger climax by not only revealing the card, but also divining it. The other trick is "2-6-4" from Hugard's & Braue's *Expert Card Technique*. You might want to explore other known think-of-a-card tricks that are usually done impromptu by doing them with a memorized set-up (with or without majority principle), or what have you. That's an interesting approach your solution suggests.

Anyway, personally I would stay with Vernon's original method, but as far as the effect on the spectators is concerned I would say that your version is equally good and I congratulate you on an interesting idea. Since you've come up with it, you should stick with your version

All the best,

Roberto Giobbi



Joe Mckay

8. Think Of A Card Routines

I would love to hear your thoughts on what are the strongest ‘Think Of A Card’ routines that you have come across.

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello Joe

You’ve just tapped into one of my favorite subjects, the thought of card. In my two- or three-day seminars I always include a lecture/workshop of about 90 minutes on the subject that participants usually enjoy immensely.

From a brief description we have in Luca Pacioli’s *De Viribus Quantitatis*, that tells us of the performance of one Giovanni de Jasone, we can deduct that the thought of card might very well be one of the very first card tricks in print. The description tells about a boy being blind-folded and divining a card (Second Sight effect and method). Therefore this is one of the very oldest effects/plots in card magic.

Also, it is not always clear what a thought of card trick is, as it will depend on how it is staged. For instance is a prediction effect a thought of card trick? Yes and no, right? One could even interpret and reframe Chicago Opener as a mental card trick (“I knew you were going to choose/think this card, because it is the only red-backed card I’ve placed in the deck before we even started...”).

Now to your question which is not easy to answer because it depends from what aspects you want to consider (pure effect, method, venue, target audience, length etc.). Here is a list of combinations that have an excellent method/effect ratio:

- Dai Vernon’s Brainwave with Paul Fox’s addition of the red- and blue-backed cards is and will always be a classic. Well done it is hard to beat. Of course there are variations, like the “Invisible Deck”, that some performers can do in a very entertaining way. But in my opinion Brainwave is clearer, more magical, more deceptive and more memorable.
- Dai Vernon’s Out of Sight, Out of Mind is probably the very best in its genre with a borrowed deck and without set-up whatsoever (I immodestly recommend my take on it in *Card College Volume 5* called “Mind- and Sightless”). See also Eric Fry’s interesting procedure in this PDF.
- Alan Shaxon’s thought of card in envelope is also of excellent effect, although the method requires more complex preparation and you need to occupy 4 or even 5 pockets with the envelope sets. See his video volume 1.

ASK ROBERTO

- For many years I did a trick popularized by Fred Kaps, where a red card in a blue deck turns out to be the freely thought of card of the spectator (Brainwave plot, but totally different method). It used a normal deck with a Joker second from bottom and a red-backed Joker with a sticky face on bottom – you probably know this. I used this by throwing 3 roses into the audience to three ladies (an idea by my friend and mentor Carlhorst Meier). They would then name a color, a suit and a value, making up a card. The red card would be placed in a glass and later shown to be the freely thought of card. In the past years I have come up with a version that seems to fool most magicians I do it for (using again a different method) – I hope you can see me do it at a convention.
- In the Eighties, at a Ron MacMillan convention in London, I saw Max Maven put his right hand in his trousers pocket, have a spectator “think of a card” (peek) from the deck he held in his other outstretched hand. When the spectator looked through the deck himself an instant later, the thought of card was seen to have vanished. Maven then pulled his hand from the pocket with the thought of card. The trick is not published as far as I know, and please don’t copy this staging – I once did using my own method and Max reprimanded me. He was right, of course, and I’ve never done it again. But that was a memorable interpretation of the thought of card.
- Nobody has fooled me more often and with so many variations of the thought of card plot as Juan Tamariz. You can find many of his ways and means in his book *Mnemonic*. One of his most impressive interpretations of the theme is in a stage presentation, where he asks a spectator to call home on his mobile phone and ask his wife (or whoever is called) to think of any card and to name it. The spectator on stage then cuts to the card in the deck that was previously shuffled and placed on a table.
- At some conventions I have performed my own thought of card in envelope and wallet and hope I will be able to show it to you one day – I’m sure you would like it.
- Also, any card named that rises out of a deck is a strong effect. The most recent performance of this plot I have seen is the Hooker Rising Card. (For more information see [samuel Cox Hooker and His Rising Cards](#) by Chris Wasshuber)
- From the myriad of “packet interpretations” of the thought of card plot, I like Dai Vernon’s “Mental Card Miracle” best, from *Stars of Magic*, one of the very best books of the second part of the 20th century that is fortunately again available through Meir Yedid. I use this trick in my seminar on Vernon’s Life and Work to illustrate the psychological construction of a trick. (You can find my analysis in my book *Dai Vernon – Life & Work* obtainable from H&R Magic or directly from me.)
- „Premonition” is another classic in the genre that I’ve performed occasionally and the plot and method of which I like. You might be interested to read my take of it in Oliver Erens’s *Concertos for Pasteboards*, there called “A Case for Premonition”.
- I also remember seeing David Berglas do his interpretation of any card at any number. There are many ways he does it and some of it are miraculous. You’ll hear more about this shortly. I’m not allowed to tell you more, but you’ll know everything soon...

ASK ROBERTO

- Bernard Bilis does a very nice interpretation of a Marlo trick, the name of which escapes me at the moment, where two Jacks are placed face up and squared on the table. The spectator thinks of a card that is then invisibly thrown between the Queens. The sandwiched card proves to be the thought of card. This uses the Tenkai Palm and is one of its very best applications.

I'm sure I'm forgetting a few very good thought of cards I've seen in the past 36 years, but the list above should cover at least most of them. None of these versions is perfect, of course, as there is always a price to pay, but in able hands the above interpretations of the theme are certainly among the very best I know.

I hope to write more about the subject in one of my upcoming Genii columns "The Genii Session" – I look forward to telling you about other aspects of the subject there.

Best regards,

Roberto Giobbi



Samuel Wheeler asks:

Gilbreath Principle

Dear Roberto Giobbi,

My question is about the Gilbreath Principle. I understand what the principle is and roughly how it works, and I find it simply fascinating. I would be interested in hearing about anything you know and can share on the matter, however specifically I am interested in any ideas or thoughts about how to best make use of the principle. Also is it possible to adapt the Gilbreath Principle for with a non cyclic stack (such as Tamariz's Mnemonica)? Finally I am interested in searching out any literature on the subject, and would like to ask you to include a small bibliography. This all seems like a lot to ask, and maybe there are more than one question in there, therefore I will sum up with the following:

What can you tell me about the Gilbreath Principle?

Regards,

Samuel Wheeler

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Dear Samuel

You have good taste – the Gilbreath Principle is one of the really clever mathematical principles, well protected and incredibly versatile.

A book could be written to answer all your questions! But let's see how we can do with a little less and still make you happy.

The first problem, which is really three-fold, is how to get into the red-black configuration. Therefore you might want to first look at all the techniques that separate the red and the blacks, such as Lennart Green's GAS (described in *Card College 4*, p. 903), inspired by Harry Lorayne's *Great Divide* (a separate booklet) and dozens of other methods. Second you'll want to use some kind of false shuffle that keeps the reds and the blacks separated (you'll find a few in Chapter 33 of *Card College 3*, dedicated to advanced Riffle Shuffle work). And as a third step you will use a Faro Shuffle, a Klondike Shuffle or some strategic dealing procedures to get into the red-black alternating sequence. At this point there are again several techniques to false shuffle the deck.

The next subject is how to delay the use of the stack, always a good strategy to adopt in any type of set-up work. I have a complete routine to do this. In this routine I start with Dai Vernon's "The Third Color" (*Chronicles II*, p. 180), which is a beautiful introductory effect, to be done exactly as the Professor suggests with a gentleman and a lady. If you think about it you will come up with a list of tricks that can be used and that won't destroy the set-up, or were

ASK ROBERTO

the set-up can rapidly be re-obtained. Several applications of Bob Hummer's CATO (Cut And Turn Over) come to mind, which use the red-black configuration and a small number of cards.

At some point you will go into a trick using the actual GP. One of its powerful features is that the spectator can riffle shuffle himself the cards. You can combine this with a previous false shuffle of yours, overhand or riffle type. Then let the spectator shuffle, and after that false shuffle again yourself, or just cut. Personally I like to let the spectator do the riffle shuffle freely, rather than cutting the deck at a red and a black card myself, then cut between two cards of the same color if necessary – of course I glimpse to see if the top and bottom cards are the same color, so I don't have to do anything. Rather than using an ordinary riffle shuffle, you can employ Lennart Green's Rosetta Shuffle which is very deceptive in this context.

From here on the list of tricks is endless. If you have access to Lennart Green's work you'll find great applications, such as his "26'000\$ Bet" (one of my favorites). When my *Card College Lightest* comes out in December 2009, look at "Out of USA", which is a very nice effect I've been using for years. As follow-up to "The Third Color" mentioned above, I have often used "Vernon on Gilbreath" (p. 212 of *Chronicles II*), to be done with 5 or 6 pairs, then change to another trick using the rest of the Gilbreath order. At the end of a trick using the GP, you are left with the red and the black cards separated (not always, but often). I use the situation to perform my take of Kennedy's "Out of This World" from *Card College Light* (p. 9, called "Intuition"). See below for more trick suggestions.

One of the problems with the GP is that the deck, once shuffled by the spectator, needs to be dealt into two piles of 26 cards each, at least that's what is needed in most applications. This is a potentially boring moment. Now that takes thought and experience. First, practice dealing rapidly and without mistake. Second, talk and look at the audience occasionally; to interrupt the deal briefly is OK, of course. Maybe you tell a short story, or deliver the prologue to the effect about to perform. It is important to make this part interesting. If you have to deal the packet into 2 packets (some applications can use more), you can change the dealing procedure, by asking the spectator to call stop at any time. As long as you've finished dealing a pair, you can reverse the deal, i.e. start dealing on the second packet first and then on the first. Or you can take two cards in hand and have the spectator decide into which packet he'd like the top card. All of this can be mixed. Identify this problem, carefully think about solutions and then practice.

I should also mention that the GP works not only with red and black orders, of course. You could also (Faro) shuffle the cards face-up and face-down into each other, which makes the set-up sort of impromptu, doesn't it? And how about finding other dual categories?

You mention using the GP in conjunction with a stacked deck. Of course, Si Stebbins, or Eight Kings, being already in red-black order, are perfect, but any other stack can be used. You simply have to devise one or two intermediary tricks that ultimately lead to the red-black order. As Dai Vernon always said: "Use your head." Here's your chance to do it – you'll be very proud when you've come up with something of your own. This is one of the greatest satisfactions in magic, and in life...

ASK ROBERTO

For more sources and tricks, click here:

<http://archive.denisbehr.de/archive/route/entries.php?url=10,50,408>

A good start is Reinhard Müller's *Gilbreath's Principles*, which is quite a comprehensive study on the GP. [Note by Chris Wasshuber: Since this book is not easily accessible I am working with Reinhard Müller on an updated version. However, as such projects can take quite a long time I can't give any release date or make any promises.] Or you may want to get in touch with Norman Gilbreath himself...

I hope this keeps you busy for a while.

All the best,

Roberto Giobbi

[Added by Chris Wasshuber: Since 'mathematical principles' is one of my personal areas of interest I would like to add a few resources.

If you like gambling routines then you should read [*Angels May Shuffle But The Devil Still Deals*](#) by Steve Mayhew, which in my opinion is the best application of the GP for gambling routines.

[*Principles and Deceptions*](#) by Peter Duffie – an easy trip through the arithmetical principles of card magic. This covers a few other principles you will like. Peter Duffie has several other publications and tricks where he uses the GP: [*Ulterior Motifs*](#), [*Card Conspiracy 1*](#), [*Card Conspiracy 2*](#), [*New Inspirations*](#), [*Card Flair*](#), [*Card School*](#), [*Untold*](#), [*Method in Effect*](#).

And searching in the Lybrary Magic Knowledge Base will reveal more resources.]

Tadej asks:

Magician is only an actor playing the role of a magician

Hi Roberto. Thank you for taking the time to answer my question. My question is what are your views, thoughts, omissions, additions, decisions, revisions, upgradings and updatings (to use H. Lorayne's words) on Robert Houdin's famous saying that "a magician is only an actor playing the role of the magician". Thanks again. Kind regards.

Tadej, Slovenia

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello Tadej

Here we go with a great question!

"You may say why struggle with some kind of perfection when there are much simpler means of pleasing the audience? One can only answer to that, why have art?" (Mikhail Shchepkin 1788 – 1863)

I've been working on an essay on precisely this topic for over two years as I'm planning to make it the subject of one of my "Genii Sessions" column. I've kept adding and moving pieces around, as the argumentations are tricky, especially finding convincing analogies and examples. So now you get a sort of preview on the unfinished article, but I'm confident that it will answer your question.

As a prologue I would like to state that obviously anything you're getting in these answers of "Ask Roberto" in particular, but in all other answers in general, are of course *my personal opinion*. Especially the big question of whether a magician should be an actor in order to be a good magician, has people in magic who are more famous and earn more money than me tell you exactly the contrary. As an old Zen Master once said: *"Of course they are right."* Now, I maintain the contrary, as you will see, and I hope the Zen Master would find I'm right, too.

Since Robert-Houdin's famous quote that *"a conjuror is an actor playing the part of a magician"* was first published in 1868 in its original French form *"un prestidigitateur n'est point un jongleur; c'est un acteur jouant un rôle de magicien"* on p. 28 of Robert-Houdin's landmark book *Comment on devient sorcier*, it has been quoted by big and small authorities to support the belief, that in order to be a good magician you also and first of all have to be a good actor.

Personally I don't believe that this is so. On the contrary, if you try to act in the sense of the actor, in my opinion and experience you have the best chances NOT to be a good magician, for to act in the actor's sense, you will very likely appear contrived, unnatural, uncommunicative because artificial. I personally know several actors, singers and directors, people who *are* in

ASK ROBERTO

the actor's business professionally, who are amateur magicians. Some of them are lousy magicians, some of them are good magicians. However, those who are lousy, are not so because they are actors, they are lousy because they *don't understand magic*. And those that are good, aren't good because they are actors, but because they *do understand magic* and have some magic-specific talent, albeit not above-average. No actor/director that I know personally is in my opinion a superb magician, at least none comes to my mind now, but probably there are a few very good ones, like there are a few who are doctors, bankers or plumbers and are good magicians. But again, it's not because they are doctors, bankers or plumbers that they are very good amateur magicians, it's because they know intuitively or consciously what magic is about. On the other hand the best amateur and professional magicians I know and admire, such as Tamariz, Lavand, Daniels, Jay, Williamson have never been actors (with the exception of Ricky Jay, but he became an actor *after* already having been an outstanding magician).

In the tradition of a dialectic discourse I will, however, also say that I think we're better performers and will have a more professional, effective and memorable performance if we use some of the actor's techniques. Is this a contradiction? In my opinion it isn't, or as little as saying that in order to speak Italian you have to be an Italian citizen. You can use acting techniques without being an actor. Let's look at this from different angles.

Let me start by saying that in my opinion the quote has been misunderstood and that Robert-Houdin didn't mean it the way it was mostly understood by his contemporaries, especially his modern colleagues. There is a long tradition of misinterpreted quotes in history and I have a small collection of them. With this I mean quotes that have been taken out of a context and have then been used to prove a speaker's or an author's point of view, often supporting exactly the opposite of what the creator of the quote wanted to say with it. To lead into the subject I will briefly comment on my favorite mis-quote and which you will all know, namely Juvenal's "*mens sana in corpore sano*", "*a healthy mind in a healthy body*". It is often resorted to by so-called "motivational speakers" who want you to believe that you have to lead what they preach to be a "healthy life" in order to become happy, or reach your goals. The main goal, however, or so it seems to me, is to sell their philosophy, their seminars, their books and DVDs (here's a similarity to magic lectures, but we'll leave this for another question...). Juvenal's (ca. 60-127 AD) complete quote in context is: "*Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*", and it means something like "*it would be nice if in those healthy bodies there was also a healthy mind*". Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, Anglicized as Juvenal, was a Roman satiric poet of the 1st century AD who used this phrase in his Satires, a collection of satirical poems, and it was meant to criticize the folly of Roman society during the reign of the emperor Domitian (60-140), among other things the body building cult the Romans had developed at that time. So Juvenal meant the exact opposite of what so many people are using his quote for, he wanted to say that people should better develop their intellectual capacities rather than wasting their time to care for their good looks. Well, this thought has never been more topical than today, especially in the US and its "look-good-folly".

I found it amusing to note that Professor Hoffman in a footnote of Robert-Houdin's translation wrote the following: "*The present chapter being a disquisition on the precise signification*

of a couple of French terms, will have but little interest for the ordinary English reader. It would, however, have been an unjustifiable mutilation of the text to have omitted it.” He couldn’t know what a tremendous influence one specific sentence in this chapter would have on authors and performers for the next 150 years.

Unfortunately we cannot ask Robert-Houdin to comment on his famous and influential sentence which has become one of the most quoted in the history of magic. Therefore let’s start by putting the facts on the table and look at the exact context the phrase has been taken from; from then on we’ll have to intelligently speculate. The sentence occurs in the middle of a chapter which deals neither with presentation nor staging of magic, but...etymology. Robert-Houdin discusses which term (in French, of course) would be most suitable to be used for a conjuror. He lists a few and especially chastises the relatively (then) new term “prestidigitateur”, the Latin origin of which signifies “fast fingers”, and being an artist at heart, he vehemently refuses that a magician and his magic be reduced to just sleight-of-hand, finger-flicking as we would derogatorily say nowadays, and it is in this context that he writes the fateful sentence that of course a magician is not like a juggler, but rather an actor playing the role of a magician. Before we proceed, let me give you the original French text, as it appears in Robert-Houdin’s book *Comment on devient sorcier – Les secrets de la prestidigitation et de la magie*, Paris 1868. The copy in my possession and from which the following text is taken is a reprint by Slatkine Reprints, Geneva 1980.

[start of original French text]:

Escamotage, Prestidigitation

Avant de nous servir des deux mots qui forment ce titre, il est nécessaire, je crois, d’en faire connaître la véritable acception, et pour cela nous aurons recours à leur étymologie.

Escamotage vient du mot arabe escamote, qui signifie la petite balle de liège à laquelle on a donné plus tard le nom de muscade, à cause de sa ressemblance avec ce fruit. Dans le principe, le mot escamotage s’appliquait uniquement à l’action de jouer des gobelets; il a servi, ensuite, à généraliser l’exécution des tours d’adresse.

Prestidigitation est d’une date plus récente : en 1815, Jules de Rovère, physicien, comme il s’appelaient alors les escamoteurs de premier ordre, créa pour lui-même le mot prestidigitateur, formé des deux mots latins presto digiti, doigts agile. Ce mot a passé dans notre langue, et maintenant on croirait faire injure à un escamoteur de quelque talent, si on ne lui donnait pas ce titre pompeux.

De ces deux dénominations consacrées par un long usage, ni l’une ni l’autre ne sont, à mon avis, suffisantes pour peindre l’art de la magie simulée.

Escamotage reportera toujours la pensée au jeu des gobelets dont il dérive, et ce mot, en spécialisant un tour de main, donnera difficilement l’image des prestigieux exercices d’un magicien.

Prestidigitation rappellera, par son étymologie, qu'il est nécessaire d'avoir des doigts agiles pour opérer les illusions de la magie, ce qui est loin d'être exact.

Un prestidigitateur n'est point un jongleur ; c'est un acteur jouant un rôle de magicien ; c'est un artiste dont les doigts doivent être plus habiles que prestes. J'ajouterai même que, dans les exercices de prestidigitation, plus les mouvements sont calmes, plus doit être facile l'illusion des spectateurs.

Le prestidigitateur annonce qu'il possède une puissance surnaturelle; il tient en main une baguette au pouvoir de laquelle rien ne saurait résister; qu'a-t-il donc besoin, pour la production de ses prestiges, d'exagérer la vitesse de ses manipulations? Une telle manière de faire est illogique et contradictoire.

Devant des gestes d'une vivacité inusitée, le public sera le plus souvent ébloui, dérouté, mais non convaincu; tandis que le calme et la bonhomie entraîneront toujours chez lui la confiance et par suite l'illusion.

Donc, le mot prestidigitation exprime imparfaitement l'art qu'il représente.

Au lieu de créer des mots nouveaux, n'eût-il pas été préférable de conserver aux adeptes de la magie blanche le nom si juste et si complet que l'on trouve dans Plaute et que l'on voit aussi dans le plus grand nombre de dictionnaires anciens et modernes, Prestigiateur (prestigiator, faiseur de prestiges)?

Quoi qu'il en soit, et pour ne rien changer aux habitudes de nos lecteurs, nous nous servons indirectement des deux mots adoptées pour l'appellation de la magie simulée : escamotage et prestidigitation.

[end of original French text]

Now let's look at the translation by Professor Hoffmann (Angelo Lewis) of Robert-Houdin's original text:

[start of translation]

Escamotage, Prestidigitation.

BEFORE we proceed to make practical use of the two words which head this chapter, it will be as well to get a clear understanding of their true meaning, and to do this, we must inquire into their derivation.

Escamotage (conjuring) comes from the Arab word escamote, signifying the little cork ball subsequently known as a muscade (nutmeg), from a fancied resemblance to that fruit. Originally, the term escamotage was applied solely to cup-and-ball conjuring, but it was subsequently used as a comprehensive term to describe the performance of conjuring tricks generally.

The word prestidigitation dates from a later period. In 1815, Jules de Rovère, who had previously denominated himself a physicien, as was then the practice of all conjurors

of the first rank, invented for his own use the term prestidigitateur, formed from two Latin words, presto digite, meaning nimble fingers { The word is really of mixed origin, digitus (a finger), being Latin, presto (quick), Italian. RG}. The word has been adopted as a part of our language, and now it would be deemed a slight upon a performer of any mark not to give him this high-sounding title.

Neither one of these denominations, however, authorized though they are by long use, is in my opinion fully adequate to describe the art of fictitious magic.

Escamotage will always recall to the mind the “cup-and-ball” tricks whence it derives its origin, and referring specially, as it does, to one particular feat of dexterity, suggests but an imperfect idea of the wide range of the wonder-exciting performances of a magician.

Prestidigitation seems to imply, from its etymology, that it is necessary to have nimble fingers in order to produce the illusions of magic, which is by no means strictly true.

A conjuror is not a juggler; he is an actor playing the part of a magician; he is an artist whose fingers have more need to move with deftness than with speed. I may even add that where sleight-of-hand is involved, the quieter the movement of the performer, the more readily will the spectators be deceived. {My bold – RG}

The conjuror claims to possess supernatural powers; he holds in his hand a wand the might of which nothing can resist. Why then should he need, in order to work his wonders, to exaggerate the quickness of his movements? Such a mode of proceeding is illogical and inconsistent. In view of gestures of unusual rapidity, the spectators will generally be bewildered, puzzled, but not convinced, while, on the other hand, an easy, quiet manner will always induce confidence, and so promote illusion.

The word prestidigitation, therefore, only imperfectly describes the art which it denotes.

Instead of creating new names, would it not have been better for the adepts of White Magic to have retained the term, at once appropriate and exhaustive, which we find in Plautus, and in many dictionaries, both ancient and modern—prestigiateur (Lat: prestigiator), worker of wonders (prestiges). Nevertheless, in order not to run counter to our readers' preconceived notions, we shall make use indifferently of the two terms generally adopted to designate the art of deception, Escamotage and Prestidigitation {Hoffman notes: The present chapter being a disquisition on the precise signification of a couple of French terms, will have but little interest for the ordinary English reader. It would, however, have been an unjustifiable mutilation of the text to have omitted it}.

The vast majority of conjuring tricks are variations of the same broad idea-viz., to cause the disappearance of a given object, and to make it reappear in a different place to that in which it has ostensibly been placed. The details may vary, but the principle is the same. There are certain articles of frequent use in conjuring, which have necessitated the composition of appropriate methods and processes for their production, di-

ASK ROBERTO

sappearance, or transformation. Such are, for example, coins, cards, large and small balls, corks, pocket-handkerchiefs, &c.

The description of these methods will precede that of the tricks in which the articles I have referred to are employed.

We will commence with the methods especially appropriate to coins.

[end of translation]

There you are – I let you draw your own conclusions. What follows are some considerations of mine, opinions, if you will.

One of my favorite essays on the theory of magic is “The Vernon Touch” published as an introduction to what I consider one of the most important magic books, namely Lewis Ganson’s [*The Dai Vernon Book of Magic*](#). There, on pp. 27, Dai Vernon talks about naturalness and says:

„A lot of people might have difficulty in understanding exactly what I mean by being natural. It’s very important that movements made when a secret sleight is accomplished are natural movements, but being natural also means being yourself. If you work in a conversational style, you work as you feel, you do not try to ape somebody else, unless you are playing a part.”

End of quote.

Reread the last sentence: “*you do not try to ape somebody else, unless you are playing a part.*”

Acting is essentially about playing a part and that’s what magic is *not* about, at least as a rule with its exception. Most of us, especially those performing in close-up situations, as compared to parlor or stage, are at least trying to be themselves, or the best of themselves, and *are not playing a part*. Actually playing a part, as an actor does, is in my opinion detrimental to good magic. In the history of magic there have and there still are performers who do play a part, a theatrically clearly defined role, such as Cardini playing a tipsy gentleman, Di Sato a Mephistophelean magician or Ali Bongo the Shriek of Arabia. In these cases a character is defined through a costume, special make-up, specific gestures and poses, situations, music and more. In this essay I will essentially *not* be concerned with this type of magic as it very obviously *is* an example where a performer acts the part of a magician whose role he has clearly but artificially defined. Here the magician clearly *is* an actor playing whatever role he has created for himself. I will be concerned with the performer who essentially wants to be himself, and that’s most of the magicians I know, including myself.

I believe that the art of the actor and that of the magician are two different arts. The actor is an instrument, albeit an artistic one, of the play. Essentially the actor is a figure within a play that theatrically interprets a story as it could occur in real life, with its plot, conflicts and final resolution. This can be played from comedic to tragic and everything between these two poles. The actor interprets a text written by the author of the play and it is his job to creatively inter-

ASK ROBERTO

pret this given role and text to emotionally and intellectually involve the audience and make them “live” the story, but of course in the theatre and in the safe seat of the auditorium. It is hoped that the audience thus gains a dissociated view and experience of a situation he or his fellow men could be in and thus get a more mature understanding of life and people.

Magic, however, is different, although structurally similar and will occasionally use the same platform, the theatre. The purpose of magic is to take man’s world of dreams and fantasies as the subject and show how it can be lived by a super-hero, a God on earth, who is the magician, the maker of wonders. The beauty and wisdom harbored by the mysterious and the feeling of astonishment and wonder created by the magician’s performance liberates the spectator from the constraints of his limited intellect and leads him, to use a metaphor favored by Juan Tamariz, over the rainbow, through Alice’s mirror into Wonderland, where everything is possible. This is different from theatre, or literature, or film. And even the science-fiction genre of those arts won’t have the realistic feeling a magician’s performance has, were the audience, at least for a moment, really believes that the lady is floating, whereas the same effect in another medium does not cause the same emotion.

Furthermore the “natural” magician is the direct source of his art, unlike the actor who is an “instrument” of the play and its author. The magician is more like a painter, who expresses himself through his hands and his instrument, the hand becoming the extension of his mind, to paraphrase the German philosopher Karl Jaspers. But unlike a painter the magician communicates at the moment his art is performed. Ideally and in an artistic sense, magic is about the performer himself, his beliefs and criteria, his taste and choices, his inner world, not that of a role imposed upon him by an author as it is the case with a theatrical actor. Furthermore acting is about “presentation”, but as Tamariz points out in his lectures, presentation is *not* the most important thing in magic, however, personality and the (choice of) effect are – to this I would add the performer’s originality, which is a combination of his personality and his interpretation of the effect, as well as the flawless (technical) execution. The latter is important before the presentation, because if the audience suspects, let alone detects, what the performer is doing, no presentation in the world will cause wonderment.

I sincerely think that in order to do good (close-up) magic you do not need to be an actor. This is good news, I hope, because most of us are not actors. And even if we try, because we know the concept and even if we have taken a few acting classes, we are still not actors. At least as little as we are chefs because we have eaten in good restaurants and read a few cooking books. Cooking as well as acting is a profession and you don’t become a professional just like that. A partial proof is the fact that an actor is not automatically a magician. Although an actor as well as a magician may stand on the same stage, their professions are even more different than playing the piano and walking on a rope. Both take talent, dedication and skill, but they are not the same thing. Not even playing the piano and playing the violin is the same thing, albeit both is music and may even be in the same orchestra playing the same piece. If you play the piano you cannot automatically play the violin, they are two different instruments and it takes two different careers to be able to play them professionally. This is not impossible, but highly unusual as far as I know (with the usual exceptions).

ASK ROBERTO

An example where acting is detrimental to a situation is in most kinds of sucker effects as Juan Tamariz once pointed out to me. Acting out the situation with a text and gestures as it would be done in a play won't pass as sincere, whereas if you simply keep quiet and don't say anything it is much more probable to be believed.

My very personal opinion is that I don't believe going to acting classes or joining an acting group will be of great help to be a better magician, because you will be doing many things that have nothing to do with magic, some of them will even be unfavorable for magic.

On the other hand I *do* recommend taking private lessons from an actor, speaker or director – I took lessons from all three of them – by studying specific magic tricks from your repertoire you already do well. Here the actor's, speaker's and director's know-how will directly be applied to your way of performing a magic trick. Still, be aware that as much as these people know about the dramatic construction and interpretation of a trick, they haven't got the slightest clue of the psychological construction of a trick. I have seen some (almost) fatal examples of professional magicians who have solely relied on the work and advice of a theatrical director (because they thought those directors hold the truth and magicians who work without director are idiots). For instance I saw an otherwise excellent act attach a prediction envelope to the back curtain of a small theatre with a clip. Obviously, when the prediction is later taken from the curtain and its content shown, several intelligent spectators will think that an assistant behind the curtain could introduce the prediction through a slit in the curtain into the envelope (unfortunately that WAS the method).

In order to avoid such mistakes, you have to know that every trick doesn't just have a dramatic construction, staging or presentation as it is sometimes called, but also and in first priority a psychological construction, which is responsible for protecting the secret of the trick from the spectator's intelligent mind. This means that one should try to find out how the spectator tries to penetrate the secret and then construct the trick in such a way, that all possible solutions the spectator might have during the performance and after it (in the phase of reconstruction) and eliminate them by constructing the trick accordingly. Read more about this in Tamariz's most wonderful book *The Magic Way*, where he explains his "theory of false solutions" (or "theory of false trails" as it is sometimes referred to in English).

To close I will say that in my opinion Robert-Houdin never meant his words as an encouragement to put acting into one's magic. I have instinctively stayed away from any type of acting, and so have many colleagues I know who have become world-class magicians. It is much better to practice magic intelligently, read, discuss, think to better understand magic in all its aspects – this will make somebody a good magician if there is also perseverance, talent and inspiration.

"I realized that I had said a few words in a perfectly simple manner, so simple that had I said them in life and not in a play I would not have said them otherwise." (Stanislavski p. 7 in. Benedetti, Jean, Stanislavski an introduction – The System, Methuen, London 1982.)

Best regards,

Roberto Giobbi