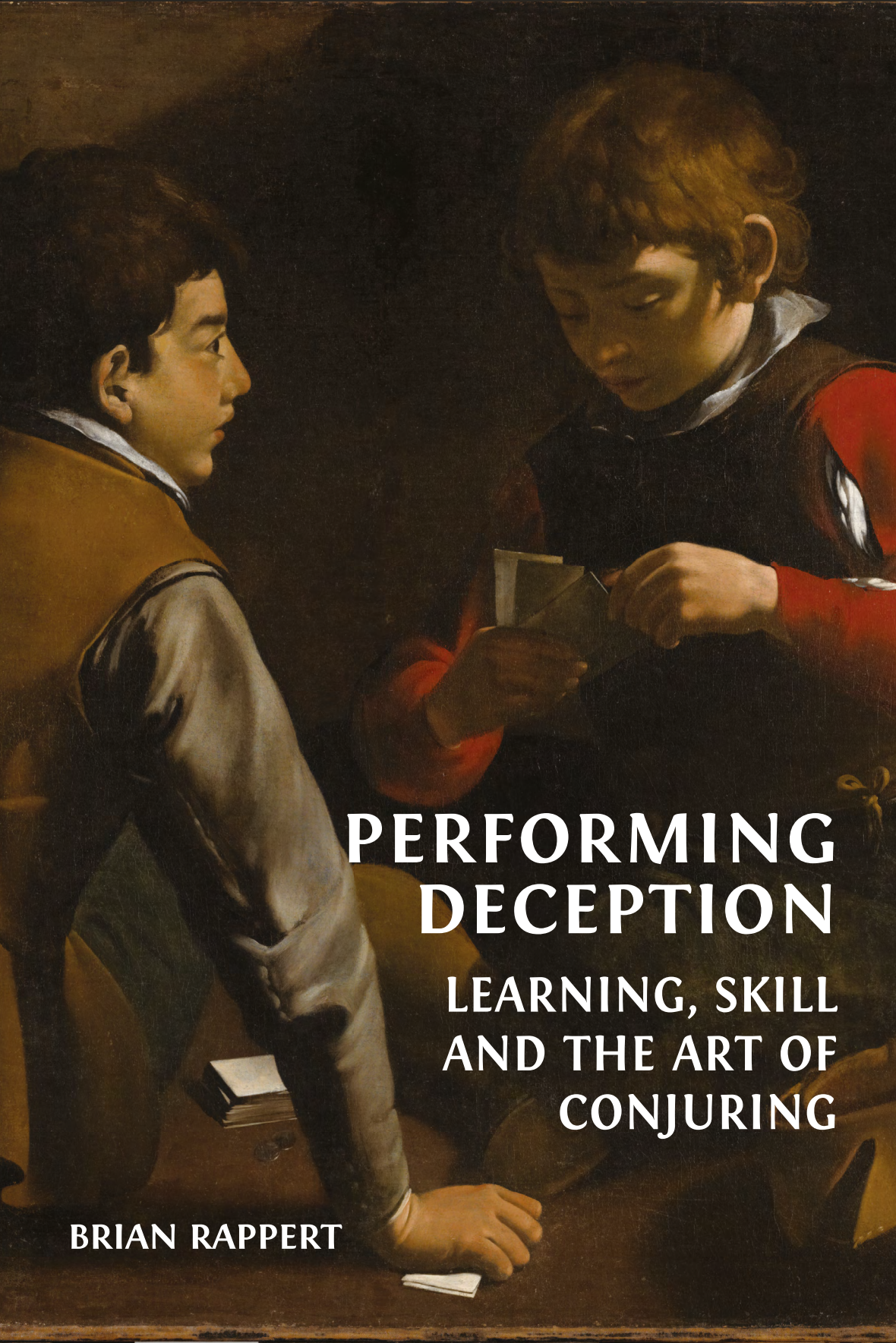

PERFORMING DECEPTION

LEARNING, SKILL AND THE ART OF CONJURING

BRIAN RAPPERT

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3. Control and Cooperation

> The intended dupe of the magician's wiles is, of course, the spectator. He is the objective. All of the performer's endeavor is aimed at deceiving him [...] In him are combined the formidable barriers the deceiver must breach and the very weaknesses that make him vulnerable. It is the magician's task to learn how to avoid the barriers and to attack the weak spots.[1]
>
> —Dariel Fitzkee, *Magic by Misdirection*

Not least because of the deception at play, magicians frequently reflect on how they do and should relate to their audiences. Within such discussions, 'control' often figures as a prominent theme. As in the above 1945 quotation from Dariel Fitzkee, conjuring can be portrayed as an asymmetrical activity in which the audience's imagination is—or certainly should be, in the case of a competent performer—sculpted by the magician's hands. This is so because the ultimate ability in magic is '*to influence the mind of the spectator, even in the face of that spectator's definite knowledge that the magician is absolutely unable to do what that spectator ultimately must admit he* [sic] *does do*'.[2] This influencing must be secured whatever the composition of the audiences—their gender, ethnicity, occupation or any other characteristics. While individual audience members might give a magic effect their own meaning, the magician strives to convince everyone that something inexplicable has taken place.

Some of those academically theorizing about conjuring have, likewise, treated it as a contest of strength and wit. As the social psychologist Nardi contended:

> The process of performing a magic trick involves a kind of deceit that involves power, control, and one-up-man(*sic*)ship. Magic is an

1 See Fitzkee, Dariel. 1945. *Magic by Misdirection* Provo, UT: Magic Book Productions.
2 *Ibid*. (emphasis in the original).

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0295.03

> aggressive, competitive form involving challenges and winning at the expense of others [...] It is creating an illusion that involves putting something over someone, to establish who is in control, and to make the other (the audience) appear fooled.[3]

Herein, while it might be readily recognized that conjuring involves actions by both the magician and the audience, the agency should rest squarely with the former.[4] The latter's role is limited to one of possessing background knowledge, perceptual limitations and social expectations that can be led this way and that.

Absent the antagonistic overtones, Simon Aronson has spoken to the imperative to mold spectators' senses: 'A magician's paramount goal is to manipulate the spectator's mind and senses to bring about [a] state of impossibility'.[5] The philosopher Leddington likewise characterized the magician as one that '*coerces* the audience into trying to imagine how the illusion of the depicted event might be produced and the main point of the performance is to *prevent* them from succeeding'.[6] One way that coercion is achieved is by convincing the audience a definite series of actions has been undertaken, but then confounding their expectations for what outcomes result.[7] Another way coercion can take place is for the audience to feel free in their choices, even when these actions are immaterial to a planned outcome.[8] Both forms of coercion rest on creating a split between the presented story of what is taking place and the real situation that makes use of hidden methods.[9]

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3 Nardi, Peter M. 1988. 'The Social World of Magicians' *Sex Roles*, *19*(11/12): 766. 'Sic' in original.

4 One entertaining guide for how to ensure this is so, see Hopkins, Charles. 1978. *Outs, Precautions and Challenges for Ambitious Card Workers*. Calgary: Micky Hades.

5 Aronson, Simon. 1990. *The Illusion of Impossibility*: 172.

6 Leddington, Jason. 2016. 'The Experience of Magic', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *74*(3): 260—italics in original. For another academic analysis of the importance of control, see Jones, Graham and Shweder, Lauren. 2003. 'The Performance of Illusion and Illusionary Performatives: Learning the Language of Theatrical Magic', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 13*(1):51–70.

7 For a classic statement on these themes, see Neil, C. L. 1903. *The Modern Conjurer and Drawing-Room Entertainer*. London: C. Arthur Pearson.

8 See Pailhès, A. and Kuhn, G. 2020. 'Influencing Choices with Conversational Primes', *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci.*, *117*: 17675–17679. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2000682117; and Pailhès, A. and Kuhn, G. 2020. 'The Apparent Action Causation', *Q. J. Exp. Psychol.*, *73*: 1784–1795. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747021820932916.

9 For a discussion of given and hidden stories, see Smith, W. 2021. 'Deceptive Strategies in the Miniature Illusions of Close-Up Magic' In: *Illusion in Cultural*

Although others have acknowledged the need for control, it has not been regarded as an unqualified objective. Thun Helge spoke to this point in an article for *Genii* magazine, by stating:

> As magicians we also like to control everything: cards, the audience... control, control, CONTROL! [...] Magic is always about control. But then again: being an artist is not about control — it's about freedom. Freedom of constraints, of obligations, expectations and worries. How is an audience supposed to feel free and liberated when the performer himself is a control freak with obsessive-compulsive disorder?[10]

In a similar qualifying vein, in *Strong Magic*, Darwin Ortiz offered 36 laws to fellow magicians. The final of these was: 'Always remain in control'.[11] A prime area identified for control was audience challenge. Ortiz advised fellow magicians to ignore hecklers proffering explanations for conjurors' feats; refuting their claims would only serve to encourage further disruption, since hecklers crave attention.[12] And yet, against the voiced imperative to cut off any contest, Ortiz also noted that some challengers were not motivated by the desire to make trouble. When audience members express reasonable suspicion about the methods for an effect, letting this air can be productive. It provides an opportunity for receiving feedback on what needs altering, and for engaging audiences in ad-lib conversation.[13] And further still, Ortiz also cautioned that allowing any interruption would likely encourage unwanted ones.

The potentially tangled relation between control and challenge has been spoken to elsewhere. Pit Hartling advocates harnessing audience challenge by encouraging it at strategically planned moments. Through 'induced challenges', what appears to be a genuine contest by spectators can, in reality, function as a means of exercising control. Conspicuously place a torn-up card on a table, for instance, and audiences may demand it be restored magically.[14] 'Voilà! Here is your restored card', says the prepared performer.

Practice, K. Rein (Ed.). Routledge: 123–138.

10 Thun, Helge. 2019. 'Control', *Genii*. December: 71.

11 Ortiz, Darwin. 1994. *Strong Magic*. Washington, DC: Kaufman & Co.: 437.

12 *Ibid*.: 420–422.

13 *Ibid*.: 425–426.

14 Hartling, Pit. [2003] 2013. 'Inducing Challenges'. In: *Magic in Mind: Essential Essays for Magicians*, Joshua Jay (Ed.). Sacramento: Vanishing Inc.: 105–112.

This chapter describes how I came to understand the place of control in conjuring. In line with the overall approach in *Performing Deception*, I do so by considering how control is bound up with, and dependent on, one of its notional opposites. Specifically, in this chapter, I examine the interplay of and complementarity between relations of control and cooperation. In my encounters with others, the emphasis placed on 'control' in some of the characterizations of magic above seemed lopsided, investing too much agency with the magician. Investigating how relations of both control and cooperation clash and co-exist in small group interactions will serve as another way for approaching entertainment magic as *deft contrariwise performance*.

Methods for Appreciation

In preparation for moving from practicing alone to performing for others, in early 2018 I began reviewing the academic literature on entertainment magic. I hoped to locate observations and reflections on such topics as: the expectations of audiences, their inter-personal group dynamics, as well as how audiences interpret performances of magic. Relating to the social sciences and humanities, at least, what struck me at the time was the relative dearth of such literature.[15] Audiences' first-person experiences and reasoning were instead largely taken as known from their overt behaviors, stipulated by seasoned magicians, whose virtuosity was taken to imply that they can account for spectators' lived experiences,[16] or reconstructed from limited historical records. The result was a curious situation: the audience was both typically deemed central and rendered marginal.[17] Charles Rolfe spoke to this point in these terms: 'We know that magic requires a spectator, but we do not know what a spectator is'.[18]

15 For excellent analyses of magic that seek ways of bringing the audience in, see Jones, Graham. 2011. *Trade of the Tricks*. London: University of California Press; and Jones, Graham. 2012. 'Magic with a Message', *Cultural Anthropology, 27*(2):193–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2012.01140.x.

16 For instance, their first-person reasoning, affective states, expectations, motivations, etc.

17 For a sustained effort to engage with audiences regarding more supernatural forms of magic, see Hill, Annette. 2010. *Paranormal Media: Audiences, Spirits, and Magic in Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

18 Rolfe, Charles. 2014. 'A Conceptual Outline of Contemporary Magic Practice'. *Environment and Planning A*, *46*: 1615.

In early 2018, I started to video small group performances, with the primary intention of understanding participants' lived experiences. I began where those new to magic often begin: doing routines for small groups of friends and acquaintances. Most of these took place around a kitchen table in what amounted to something of a blend between research and entertainment.

In the end, I recorded 30 sessions over sixteen months. Four different themed variations were put on. Each session lasted between seventy minutes and two hours. The 69 different participants were largely university faculty, academic visitors or PhD students who, at the time, were associated with universities in the UK or Sweden.[19]

In order to explore participants' experiences, the sessions departed from standard performances. Akin to a focus group, they combined the presentation of information (in this case, the effects) with moderated discussion.[20] I modified the questions and overall composition of the sessions on an ongoing basis in order to make my emerging reflections on performing magic into topics of conversation within the sessions (see Chapter 7). The expectation with this format was that, as in focus groups more generally, it would provide an open but directed space for participants to generate their questions and concerns. Furthermore, the emergent dialogue between participants would lead to novel insights, compared with interviewing individuals afterwards or asking them to fill in an evaluation form.[21]

In this chapter, I am going to pay particular attention to the first 13 sessions. Not only were they formative in my development, as a complete novice to the world of magic I could lay no claim to possessing refined skills or abilities at the time. My status as a novice will be relevant in the analysis that follows. All of the tricks performed in this first set were of the self-working variety covered in Chapter 2, whereas the remainder of the 30 sessions included self-working and sleight of hand-based

19 For further details of the research design, see Rappert, B. 2021. '"Pick a Card, Any Card": Learning to Deceive and Conceal—With Care', *Secrecy and Society*, *2*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120965367 and https://brianrappert.net/magic/performances.

20 For further information of the composition and rationale for these sessions, see the 'Going On' entries at https://brianrappert.net/magic/performances.

21 See J. Kitzinger and Barbour, R. 1999. 'Introduction'. In: *Developing Focus Group Research*, R. Barbour and J. Kitzinger (Eds). London: Sage; as well as Morgan, D. 1998. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

tricks. In terms of style, the first 13 sessions were framed through the notion of 'embodiment'—participants were asked to look in particular directions and say certain kinds of things (for instance, call off cards). In my accompanying verbal patter and bodily movements, I suggested that I was identifying selected cards based upon reading facial expressions, postures, eye movements, voice and the like. I was not.

Control and Cooperation

This section explores some of the ways both control and cooperation figured within our interactions. What follows is largely a description of *what* took place. Chapter 7 turns squarely to addressing how magic *should* be done through juxtaposing the notion of control with care.

Certainly, it is possible to identify ways in which the notion of cooperation seems of limited relevance to our interactions. Grice, for instance, has suggested that cooperation is underpinned by the belief that others are generally telling the truth, or at least what they believe to be true.[22] In the manner in which entertainment magic is regarded as entailing forms of deception, however, this starting presumption was repeatedly subject to explicit doubt. As one participant stated, 'the thing about the magic is... that the magic is not what it seems. So if the magician starts telling you they are reading a book about body language, I immediately think it's not about body language' (Session 4, Participant 1). This expressed contrarianism points toward the multi-layered and complex processes of deception-discernment at work. As a magician, I sought to anticipate the responses of participants, to factor them into the staging of the effects (for instance, to prevent detection of the underlying methods), and to riposte backchat (for instance, to reply to expressions of suspicion about my explanatory patter). Participants anticipated acts of misdirection in general and, at times, sought to see through the actions conducted. This was done, in part, based on the very details of gesture, voice, movement and so on that were meant to mislead them.

Likewise, too, it is possible to identify ways in which the notion of control was of central relevance to our interactions. As with many types

22 Grice, Paul. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

of conjuring, all the sessions relied on direct audience participation in response to my directives: selecting cards, shuffling the deck, calling off numbers, etc. In this, my sessions shared in the decidedly asymmetrical relations characteristic of magic: magicians routinely state directive after directive to participants, whereas participants do not do the reverse. Magicians also conventionally exercise asymmetrical rights to speak. For instance, pauses in their verbal patter typically are not taken by onlookers as possible conversation entry points, but are instead orientated to as temporary stoppages. This was generally the case in my sessions as well. Moreover, unlike as is commonplace for other social activities (childcare, to name one example),[23] I was not compelled to escalate directives into imperative demands because individuals refused to comply with my instructions.

As another dimension of control, at least initially within each session, participants routinely described themselves as mere spectators. After some initial tricks, my questioning across all the sessions included asking participants how they thought the magic was being accomplished. Responses squarely focused on *my* actions (for instance, the belief that I was covertly manipulating cards, directing attention, etc.), with almost no regard for their role in the unfolding interaction.

In the ways identified in the previous paragraphs, magicians frequently assume an authority that would be out of place in many other settings. And yet, despite how control can be positioned as germane and cooperation as not, in the next sub-section I will advance a more nuanced understanding of how the two interplay together.

The Chemistry of Control and Cooperation

As an initial observation, participants generally did follow my directives. However, this is not all they did. On some occasions they undertook actions such as secretly removing cards, demanding to inspect the deck before and after card revelations, taking the cards away from me mid-trick so to rearrange them, or grabbing away my written notes. In an exceptional (and memorable) session, one participant undertook all of these interventions. Such interventions were disruptive in that they significantly undermined the prospect that the cards could be identified,

23 *Ibid*.

or threatened to reveal the underlying methods. Whilst hardly welcomed by me at the time, such exceptional interventions were crucial in raising my awareness of the extensive range of behavior forgone by most other participants.

More common than these interventions were non-compliant responses or requests that did not fundamentally undermine what could be defined as the overall 'directive trajectory' (and presumably were not intended to do so).[24] Momentarily feigning an alternative card selection, asking me to physically re-position myself, politely requesting whether they could inspect the deck, alternating the pitch of their voice, etc. were some (often playfully delivered) acts of non-compliance.

When questioned about their (typically) restrained challenges, in eight of the first thirteen sessions, participants overtly accounted for their (in)actions through appealing to their desire to contribute toward the success of the effects. One discussion unfolded as in the excerpt below. The excerpt introduces a number of transcription conventions that will be used in this book to convey nuances of talk. See pages 10–11 for further details. At this point, however, let me note some of the conventions: double parentheses denote my own summaries of what took place; single parentheses denote my best guess at what was said or the duration of pauses; the equals sign indicates words spoken without an intervening silence; underlining signals emphasis; and capitalization indicates increased volume.

Excerpt 3.1—Session 6

No	Direct transcript
1	P1: Of course I know I could mess up your=
2	P3: Yeah
3	P2: =trick.
4	P3: Yeah
5	P1: But that's not fun.

24 Goodwin, Marjorie Harness and Cekaite, Asta. 2012. 'Calibration in Directive/Response Sequences in Family Interaction', *Journal of Pragmatics*, *46*(1): 122–138. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.07.008.

No	Direct transcript
6	P3: I know, I am like that as well, you know, I just, in fact I still don't want to know how he makes it because=
7	P1: Yeah
8	P3: =it's fun. I agree, you know, it is a cooperative enterprise so what's the point of
9	((side discussion))
10	P2: But I also don't think you don't want to be too disruptive because you want (2.5) you want him to succeed as well. Do you know what I mean?
11	P1: Yeah
12	P2: Like you kind of, when he spins over the card you want it to be the right card=
13	P1: =So in that
14	P3: Yeah
15	P1: =sense we
16	P2: Yeah
17	P1: =are a willing audience, but I think generally audiences (1.2) for magic at least are willing.
18	P2: Yeah
19	P1: Cooperative
20	P3: Yeah, yeah. Yeah it is a kind of a (.) game you play together. In a sense=
21	P1: Yeah
22	P3: =you don't want to be (.) disruptive. In a=
23	P2: Hmm
24	P3: =way you want to be surprised. You know=
25	P2: Yes
26	P3: =you WANT (the trick to come). You WANT to be amazed, that's the deal.

In expressing the desire for the trick to succeed, the participants spoke to the enactment of a situation in line with magician Darwin Ortiz's expectation that nearly:

> any audience may fall into the mindset of viewing a magic performance as a win-lose situation if you encourage them to. It's your job to make them see it as a win-win situation [...] A good magic performance is a cooperative venture, not a competitive one. The audience should actually be your allies in fooling them.[25]

For Ortiz and many other magicians, a vital requisite social skill is the ability to induce cooperation in others. Like managers or political leaders, conjurors do this through their movements, comportment and the stories they tell.[26] Taken as representations of motivational states, the exchange in Excerpt 3.1 serves as evidence for this session achieving a win-win situation. Yet, importantly, this cooperation was not solely achieved because of my agency. In other words, it was not my job alone. Participants retained a sense of control through the options they elected *not* to pursue in this situation and accounted for their inaction with the label 'cooperation'.[27]

Further along the lines of treating the audience as active in their own right, participants engaged in numerous forms of behavior that worked toward the accomplishment of the effects. For instance:

- They routinely used visual scrutiny, verbal corrections and pointing gestures with one another to ensure actions were taken per my directives. This was particularly important when I turned my back or left the room.[28]
- Participants monitored each other regarding the appropriateness of behavior. They verbally (and often playfully) sanctioned each other (or themselves) when a

25 Ortiz, Darwin. 1994. *Strong Magic*. Washington, DC: Kaufman & Co.: 22.

26 Fligstein, Neil. 2001. 'Social Skill and the Theory of Fields', *Sociological Theory*, *19*(2): 105–125. https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00132.

27 The manner in which failure can be uncomfortable for an audience is discussed in Landman, T. 2018. 'Academic Magic: Performance and the Communication of Fundamental Ideas', *Journal of Performance Magic*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.5920/jpm.2018.02.

28 Also frequent were participants' queries to me checking whether they were undertaking appropriate card manipulations.

line of action was deemed to have been taken too far or not far enough (for instance, when a participant was judged as not paying sufficient attention).

- They verbally described their actions when manipulating cards so that others would be able to follow along with the sequence of what was taking place.
- When efforts were interpreted as having 'gone wrong' (for instance, I was not able to identify the chosen card), participants offered apologies about their own shortcomings in executing the instructions.

In short, through such words, gestures, movements and postures, participants coordinated their actions with the actions of others present. More than the equivalent of the type of responsive coordination that takes place in figuring out where to stand in an elevator with strangers, they coordinated their actions in ways that entailed actively working *together* in sustaining a *shared* enterprise.[29] Furthermore, individuals engaged in varied forms of corrective behavior—sanctioning, rebuking, justifying, reminding, pointing, apologizing and so on—that worked toward sustaining their sense of what ought to be taking place.

The display and direction of attention provided another area for cooperation and the exercise of agency by participants. Attention is a topic at the fore in theorizing magic. Indeed, its manipulation through talk and non-verbal action (such as the direction of the magician's gaze)[30] is often portrayed as a central task for conjurors. As a beginner, though, what was unmistakably evident from these sessions was that participants acted together in ways that were not the result of some intentionality on my part. As in other types of small group interactions, in these sessions, ordinary forms of mutual engagement between participants (and thereby away from me) were general features of interactions. Participants watched each other, looked back at others watching them, physically orientated toward one another (for instance, during laughter),

29 In such respects, magic differed from the kinds of co-present coordination elaborated elsewhere, as in Goodwin, C. 1995. 'Seeing in Depth', *Social Studies of Science*, *25*: 237–274.

30 Kuhn, Gustav, Tatler, Benjamin W. and Cole, Geoff G. 2009. 'Look Where I Look', *Visual Cognition*, *17*(6/7): 925–944. https://doi.org/10.1080/13506280902826775.

and so on. Such actions promoted mutual regard between individuals, but undermined the prospects for all present to have a single joint focus for attention. In other words, unlike in some social activities,[31] directing gaze elsewhere than toward the notional focal activity (such as my body or the cards) was not necessarily treated as an accountable deviation from expected forms of behavior.[32] Indeed, establishing a shared visual focus by participants to the card manipulations[33] was a demand on me from time to time, especially when I wanted participants to attend to specific actions in order to foster certain memories. Conversely, at other moments participants used the words, gestures and gazes of interaction to momentarily produce shared foci for attention.

Relatedly, a common assumption in the study of magic is that audiences want to know how effects are achieved and act to decipher the underlying methods.[34] Yet, when asked whether they wanted to know the methods at play, a diversity of responses were offered.[35] Whether and what participants wanted to know were reported as turning on whether the affective value of trickery would be enhanced by knowing, whether they might be more at ease with the comfort of ignorance, and whether I could be trusted to provide a true explanation after all of the subterfuge on display. One person characterized the complexity of his orientation to knowing and being fooled in this manner:

> I think it is tricky because umm, you don't want to be, umm, fooled, I mean you don't wanta (.) miss something obvious. But at the same time, you like it when it is pulled off. So, OK, so you wanta be kind of lured by the trick but you of course don't want to be sheepishly foolish. But, of course, you won't kinda want to be all, don't you trick me, because it is

31 Rouncefield, M. and Tolmie, P. 2013. *Ethnomethodology at Play*. London: Routledge.

32 In an extreme instance of disengagement, one participant repeatedly attended to his mobile phone, a practice eventually verbally sanctioned by another participant.

33 As in the perceptual intersubjectivity noted by Zlatev, Jordan, Brinck, Ingar and Andrén, Mats. 2008. 'Stages in the Development of Perceptual Intersubjectivity', *Enacting Intersubjectivity*. Amsterdam: IOS Press: 117–132.

34 For instance, Danek, Amory H., Fraps, Thomas, von Müller, Albrecht, Grothe, Benedikt and Öllinger, Michael. 2013. 'Working Wonders? Investigating Insight with Magic Tricks', *Cognition*, *130*(2): 176. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2013.11.003 176.

35 In line with Jay, J. 2016. 'What do Audiences Really Think?' *MAGIC* (September): 46–55. https://www.magicconvention.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Survey.pdf

part of the sensation that you are going to be tricked. So I think it is kinda of double. You both want and don't want to be fooled (S12, P2).[36]

Moreover, participants also reported more deliberate kinds of modulated attention. For instance, intentionality was brought into play through deliberate efforts to *disengage*:

Excerpt 3.2—Session 13

No	Direct transcript
1	P4: I guess in my case I tried to not look at the card, too much, ahh when you were doing the trick with me, umm, I won't not look at it, but look at all the cards, equally, kinda shifting a looking at you a lot, where you're looking. But when, umm, in the other cases I just tried not to get involved, because I did not want to give it away. Like I did not listen to ((P2)) when she was counting, I did not know her card. umm
2	BR: OK
3	P1: So you were afraid that you would give=
4	P4: Yeah
5	P1: =the answer away when
6	P4: Yeah
7	P1: Ah, OK.
8	P4: If I knew her card then maybe I was going to look at it too much and he (.) would see that.
9	P1: AH.
10	((Group laughter))

These comments point to how participants attempted to exert agency within situations by intentionally directing attention *away* from the performance.

36 For a further discussion on how audience can be 'torn between the enjoyment of belief and the resentment of being fooled' see Neale, Robert E. 2009. 'Early Conjuring Performances', In: E. Burger and R. E. Neale (Eds). *Magic and Meaning* (Second Edition). Seattle: Hermetic Press: 43.

Overall, instead of a one-way process of control by the conjuror, the considerations noted in this section suggest a more negotiated, multi-directional dynamic. While participants undertook various forms of non-compliance that could be regarded as opposing my efforts at control, these were intermixed with actions that helped maintain the setting as one of the performance of magic, and furthermore were frequently orientated to by participants as instances of intentional cooperation.

Accounting for Control and Cooperation

The previous section examined the interplay between control and cooperation, in part through reproducing participants' statements. As with most forms of social research, in the case of these conjuring sessions the methods employed were constitutive of the data produced. By my prodding through questions, participants responded in ways that went beyond the typical (dis-)affiliation displays that often follow magic effects (for instance, applause, laughter, jeers, expressions of 'How did he do that?'[37]). Instead of just being with the activity at hand, they were explicitly asked to account for their participation. The issues they voiced helped constitute a sense of the unfolding scene at hand, there and then. As conversation is a kind of collaborative conduct in the first place, the exchange of dialogue itself helped constitute a sense of the scene as cooperative.

As part of the overall dynamics, I now want to turn to how rules and norms were evoked as justifications for cooperation. Reference to rules and norms defining a sense of proper conduct for a magic performance was commonplace across the sessions. In eight of the thirteen initial sessions, for instance, participants spoke of their conscious commitment to shared standards that bounded the scope for legitimate conduct. This commitment was described at times by expressions such as that given by one participant that 'You play, of course, to the rules of the game'. Elsewhere a more elaborated relevance of norms was articulated. When asked why they had not sought to interfere with the tricks, the following discussion ensued (the placement of left square brackets on two successive lines indicates the start of overlapping talk):

37 For a discussion of those displays, see Ortiz, D. 2006. *Designing Miracles: Creating the Illusion of Impossibility*. A-1 MagicalMedia.

Excerpt 3.3—Session 3

No	Direct transcript
1	P1: That would violate a
2	P1: [norm that, I mean, there is this sort of implicit
3	P2: [YEAH
4	P1: participatory =
5	P2: Hmm
6	P3: = expectation that we are all part of this performance and, and we just implicitly trust that, we know there is an explanation for this. There are mechanisms=
7	P2: Hmm
8	P3: =there are a logic behind this, but we want to be caught up in this and share this experience so we go along with you. We let ourselves be guided by you.
9	P2: ((side point)) We know that we are <u>both</u> in this
10	P3: Yeah
11	P2: together. Sort of a, so it is not like you're doing magic (.) to us.
12	P1: Hmm
13	P2: It's like we are
14	P3. Yeah
15	P2: You know, agreeing to do magic. Whether it is fantasy=
16	P1: Yeah
17	P2: =or logic
18	P2: [sort
19	P1: [Well we talked about body language too. If we were not giving you, ongoing feedback and raising our eyebrows and <u>no way</u> that is a good one Brian.
20	P3: ((laughter))
21	P1: If we were just a dead unreceptive participant, that would have changed the character of all of this. Certainly
22	P1: [so we play an active role in determining how

No	Direct transcript
23	P2: [So like
24	P1: this develops as well, the audience does.

Again, at one level, what is at stake in these characterizations is how individuals report on their motivations and assert agency. In this case, by being able to step back from the ongoing interactions and offer jointly formulated reflections on what was taking place, those present were able to perform a sense of themselves as knowledgeable about magic and competent to play their part as participants. In addition, rather than a state of acquiescence being secured by the magician's one-directional control, the contention was that the effects unfolded through the willingness of participants to co-produce certain patterns of relations with the magician (Lines 8, 9–15). An implication that followed was that this willingness could disappear if the participants opted for this course of action.

Although rules and norms were widely evoked across the sessions to justify behavior, the meaning of those standards was not the same between participants. When participants cited norms, they did so to render *their* behavior as that which ought to count as ordinary, expected, what anyone would do, etc. And yet, as evident in my sessions and the writing of professional magicians, audiences vary considerably in their conduct (for instance, concerning the extent they seek to disrupt magicians' verbal patter or physical actions).

In one respect, the variation in the range of activities said to be aligned with the 'norms of magic' is hardly surprising. While some games like chess have established rulebooks for gameplay—even ones for player etiquette—no such manuals exist for conjuring performances. Despite the inability of anyone to point to some established definite, written down 'rules' specifying what kinds of behavior is acceptable, participants' citations of norms gestured toward something pre-given, out-there, known, etc. In this way, appropriate standards for conduct were defined as existing separate from our interactions around a table.

Such a recourse to norms is in line with the kind of objectification Kenneth Liberman identified in how rules become orientated to as

'social facts' during the playing of board games. Rather than the produced orderliness of gameplay being regarded as the 'practical achievement of the players' concerted gameplay', he found game players accounted for rules as existing 'without any immanent connections to the players who produced' them.[38] In other words, rules were regarded as rightfully determining how a game should be played by players even as they invariably end up interpreting and negotiating the meaning of rules. Liberman's analysis itself was in line with a long history of ethnomethodological studies that note a basic disparity; the contrast between the way norms and rules are said by individuals to serve as definitive, objective standards and the way groups actively labor to establish the meaning of norms and rules.[39]

To treat norms as phenomena-in-the-making entails orientating to the invoking of norms within conversations as in itself a form of situated action. Consider some ways in which the invoking of norms can be consequential. In Excerpt 3.3, a norm was explicitly identified (Starting on Line 1). In this case, the appeal to the relevancy of norms developed a sense of the joint moral situation at hand (it was one of trust—as in Lines 6–8). The understanding promoted of the situation proved a background context for making sense of body language later (Lines 19–21).

Beyond just explicit reference to norms, when participants presented their actions and inactions as born out of commitments to cooperation, this helped influence the understanding of magic as a practice there and then. As an example, in the case of Excerpt 3.1, the reference to cooperation accounted for the behavior of participants through characterizing magic as an activity in that session (Line 10) and in general (starting at Lines 17), retrospectively offered a justification for participants' behavior. It labelled this specific interaction as a shared one of 'cooperation' by individuals that were accountable for their actions, and thereby set out a framework for interpreting what subsequently took place.[40]

38 Liberman, Kenneth. 2013. *More Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press: 108.

39 See, e.g., Heritage, John. 1984. *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press; and Wieder, D. Lawrence. 1974. *Language and Social Reality*. Paris: Mouton.

40 A reading inspired from Wieder, D. Lawrence. 1974. 'Telling the Code'. In: *Ethnomethodology*, R. Turner (Ed.). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

In such ways, our identities as audience members and as a magician were established as part of the emerging and jointly negotiated interactions. This is evident, too, in the instances that were orientated to by participants as norm deviations. Consider the following exchange. It was prompted by asking participants how they thought the effects up to that point had been accomplished.

Excerpt 3.4—Session 7

No	Direct transcript
1	P1: Well, attention is being directed
2	BR: By who?
3	P1: By you. Yeah, yeah.
4	BR: How have you felt me directing your attention?
5	P1: Well, because it's a contract and we are here to be entertained and in order to be entertained we know we have to play along with the rules and you are the person that is providing the rules. And so you are saying things like, umm, check these cards, now have a good look at them.
6	BR: Uhm
7	P1: And it is impossible for us to do that while also paying lots of attention to you.
8	BR: Yeah
9	P1: So we are having our attention drawn away from where the action is going on.
10	BR: Okay, Okay.
11	BR: [Yeah
12	P1: [That's how I have seen, and that is how whenever I have seen anything about magic that it has been explained, and that it is just amazing that you can (1.0)
13	P2: Draw attention
14	P1: Draw attention away from what you are doing.
15	((side conversation))

No	Direct transcript
16	P1: Some of it, I think, is physical manipulation, and you having a chance to look at cards and re-arrange cards in interesting ways. But in order to do that surreptitiously our attention has to be elsewhere. And you have to have (.) quite a lot of physical dexterity. And it's like playing a musical instrument and singing, or, you have got to do more than one thing at a time. So you have to get the patter going=
17	BR: Yes, yes, yes
18	P1: =and sound really confident as well as the fact that you are surreptitiously looking at what the bottom card is because in a lot of these tricks, sorry am I saying too much?
19	BR: No, no, no, it's fine. Whatever.
20	P1: But a lot of tricks, what's happening is that the card is either being placed on the top or the bottom, but seems to be concealed, but is in a prime place and that means as long as you have enough dexterity, you can ((inaudible)) make sure you know roughly where it is.
21	P2: But he needs to know more than roughly. Don't you?
22	P1: But we need to then not be distract, we need to be distracted. In some of the tricks it is easier to see that happening than others.

Herein, the participants and I unfolded a sense of the scene together through our verbal exchanges. What P1 perceived in our encounter was spoken to through reference to her prior familiarization with card tricks. In Line 5, she suggested that performances entailed a contract between audiences and magicians in which the former play to the rules of the latter. Across Lines 12–14, she compared her experience in this session to previous encounters with magic, and grounded her statements based on past exposure to explanations of secreted methods. Such utterances functioned in a real-time manner to develop a sense of the scene at hand and the identities of those in it. They framed our interactions in terms of distinct roles; authorized me to act as the performer; gave a gloss of our previous interactions, as in line with conventional roles; accounted

for limitations in being able to specify the detailed methods of the tricks; and provided a resource for making sense of later interactions.[41]

Subsequently in this exchange (Line 18), P1 would offer a general-level description for the methods for effects—an act that she orientated to as transgressing the proper audience role spoken to in Line 5. In subsequently seeking approval for this action (Line 18), she sought to repair any perceived transgressions. In this way, both a sense of the specific scene as well as the nature of magic as an activity was worked up through the exchange.[42]

Dialectics of Control and Cooperation

This chapter has analyzed my initial experiences in performing magic in 2018–2019 through considering the place of control and cooperation within them.

While certainly not denying entertainment magic often entails efforts to control the thoughts and behavior of audiences, the analysis presented in this chapter has given reasons for questioning: (i) binary oppositions between the magician and their audience, and (ii) tendencies to reduce performances to the doings of the conjuror. As a result, during 2018 I came to understand magic as a form of what can be called 'reciprocal action'. Reciprocal action refers to situations in which 'changes in one [person leads to] changes in the other, and the process goes back and forth in such a way that we cannot explain the state trajectory of one without looking at the state trajectory of the other'.[43]

When approached as a reciprocal action, space opens up to move away from conceiving of conjuring solely as a one-directional exercise

41 For an analysis of how norms and situations are mutually constituted, see Wieder, D. Lawrence. 1974. *Language and Social Reality*. Paris: Mouton.

42 Following Goodwin, we can treat these kinds of sense-making efforts as emergent 'co-operative' undertakings. Co-operative here designates how individuals produce actions on the basis of reusing and transforming the discursive resources provided by others. In this exchange, we were cooperating with each other through varyingly relating to each other's utterances—for instance, by explicitly drawing on one another's statements (Lines 17–18), by expressing doubt about others' contentions (Lines 34–35), and generally by offering statements designed in response to others' prior conversation. See Goodwin, Charles. 2017. *Co-Operative Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

43 Kirsh, David. 2006. 'Distributed Cognition', *Pragmatics & Cognition*, *14*(2): 250. https://doi.org/10.1075/pc.14.2.06kir.

of control by an individual secret keeper. Instead, it becomes possible to orientate to it as a moment-by-moment negotiated ordering between all of those present, organized together by all those present. Herein the actions of an individual audience member need to be understood through their situated and embodied relation to the magician and other audience members, and the magician is understood through their situated and embodied relation to members of the audience. In the case of my sessions, reciprocity was relevant both within the group dialogues, as well as within the performance of the effects.

Treating magic as entailing reciprocal action, though, does not in itself resolve how control and cooperation *will* or *should* interplay together in any specific encounter. As noted previously in this chapter, control of audiences' thoughts and behavior is frequently portrayed by magicians at times as an unqualified imperative. As such, it should be maximized. Control is what enables feelings of astonishment, excitement and wonder. Alternatively, at times, control has been positioned as needing to be balanced against other considerations. For instance, reining in magicians' will to control can encourage spontaneity and connection.

In seeking to describe the interactions in these sessions, my goal has not been to advance an argument as to what counts as the proper mix of control and cooperation for conjuring. Instead, I have sought to draw on the details of the interactions to make a more preliminary argument: how control and cooperation can mutually depend on and contribute to each other as part of phenomena-in-the-making. In particular, as a response to the emphasis often given to control by seasoned magicians, I have attended to my experiences and reflections as a beginner without any extraordinary ability to influence others. It is from this status as a novice that I developed an awareness of how audiences engaged in forms of cooperation that worked towards the mundane but vital practical tasks: ensuring directives are followed; shifting attention away from myself; producing joint objects for attention; looking at effects but not watching for methods, and so on. While this section has sought to elaborate how the methods employed for promoting dialogue were constitutive of the data produced, Chapter 7 will go on to consider how I would later come to marshal this condition within the design and delivery of shows for the public.

Coda

I started this chapter with an observation of how the experiences of audiences both feature as central to, and can be marginalized in, attempts to understand conjuring. Through integrating reflection on the interactional dynamics of magic within performances, the sessions considered in this chapter were intended to make individuals' implicit feelings and experiences into explicit topics for group conversation. In seeking to provide an analysis attentive to details of our interactions, I aimed to take (co-)participants' accounts of experiences seriously.

However, doing so has relied on an underlying premise: namely that participants' accounts can be taken at face value. In other words, this analysis has assumed that others were ordinarily telling the truth, or at least what they believed to be true.[44] Such a starting presumption is commonplace in social life. From an ethnomethodological approach, David Francis and Stephen Hester contended that individuals:

> ... seldom have the freedom to engage in [...] idle speculation about the motives behind the actions of others. The fundamental constraint that operates in all interaction is that persons should, wherever possible, take things 'at face value'. In other words, one should respond to the actions of others on the basis of what those actions seem, obviously or most plausibly, to be. If something seems quite obviously to be a question addressed to oneself, then respond to it as such. The same holds for the meaning of what is said. If the meaning of the question is clear, then respond to it on that basis.[45]

Similarly, philosophical (and specifically phenomenological) approaches for how we know others' reasoning and intentions (see Chapter 2) are often based on the assumption that a pragmatic understanding of others can be gained by attending to the face value meaning of their overt bodily movements, facial expressions, posture, displays of emotions and other expressive actions.[46]

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44 See Grice, Paul. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

45 Francis, David and Hester, Stephen. 2004. *An Invitation to Ethnomethodology: Language, Society and Interaction*. London: Sage: 7.

46 See Gallagher, S. 2005. 'How the Body Shapes the Mind'. In: *Between Ourselves: Second-Person Issues in the Study of Consciousness*, Evan Thompson (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In contrast, my engagement with conjuring has suggested a strong dose of caution regarding what to take at face value. Magic is an activity that routinely turns on the misalignment between appearances and doings. Learning magic entails opening to the considerable potential for marshalling notions of what is obvious, plausible, on-the-face-of-it and so on through voice, gesture, eye direction, bodily movements and the like to deceive others about the state of the world. That might be about which card is in a pocket, whether this deck of cards is still the same deck of cards that was used before, etc.

More than this, audiences of conjuring generally anticipate hidden moves, lies, bluffs and other misleading acts. Yet this anticipation does not necessarily hamper the potential for magicians to mislead. Instead, it provides further grounds for it. By engaging with the beliefs and perceptions of audiences, including their suspicions about how conjurors might mislead, it is possible to exert control. The next chapter elaborates how magicians seek to marshal subtle movements, precise wording, directed gestures and many other commonplace behaviors in order that their actions appear justified to scrutinizing eyes and ears. Now I wish to attend to an alternative matter.

With all the concerted efforts toward deception on my part, it is perhaps not surprising that, over the course of putting on my initial sessions, doubt crept into my mind regarding my ability to read others and regarding the wisdom of taking their statements at face value. For instance, my attempts during the recorded research examined in this chapter to solicit critical feedback from participants generated few negative responses. As I was a complete novice who could not but improve my technical and presentational skills, the absence of criticism led me to ask: might participants be deceiving me? Could they be offering accounts of their experience that they thought I wanted to hear? Might they be speaking and acting in ways at odds with their inner thoughts and feelings?

At the time, my grounds for concern were deepened by reading two sets of literature. One, my growing familiarity with the writing of professionals gave reason to believe that at least some were wary about the ways audiences try to please magicians.[47] Reflecting on his

47 The Jerk. 2016. 'The Importance of Combining Methods'. http://www.thejerx.com/blog/2016/6/30/the-importance-of-combining-methods; Brown, D. 2003. *Absolute*

experience before becoming a household name in the UK, for instance, Derren Brown spoke to one dimension of audience deception:

> One problem with magic is that too often, people are polite in their responses, and we think we are getting away with methods when we simply are not. I hope you have had the experience of overhearing a spectator correctly guess exactly the method you used to achieve an effect that you have honed and worked on for years. In such situations you wonder how often this happens and you simply don't hear. But there are enough dreadful magicians around for us to know how easy it is to perform magic badly and not get any feedback. Where, after all, could that feedback come from? Not from the public, who would in most cases pretend to be fooled out of sheer pity [...] For an art that relies entirely on the experiences of the spectators, it is remarkably difficult to find out what those experiences are. We cannot finish an effect and then immediately have the audience dissect their experience of it to provide us with useful information. Yet that is exactly what we need.[48]

In its design, my sessions realized a form of the immediate dissection Brown advocated. Instead of just doing effect after effect, I engaged audiences in discussions based on what was taking place there and then. And yet, this design in itself does not bypass the basic problem of audience insincerity.

As a second literature, sociologists and psychologists have identified the ability to manipulate the truth and falsity of information as a vital skill, one learnt early in our personal development.[49] For instance, within

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Magic (Second Edition). London: H&R Magic Books; Armstrong, Jon. 2019. *Insider* (16 December). https://www.vanishingincmagic.com/insider-magic-podcast/ and Clifford, Peter. 2020, January 12. *A Story for Performance*. Lecture notes from presentation at The Session. London.

48 Brown, D. 2003. *Absolute Magic* (Second Edition). London: H&R Magic Books. Despite his success—in television, stage and close-up forms of magic—20 years after rising to national prominence, Brown continued to argue that performers cannot judge by themselves how well shows went; as in Brown, D. 2021, May 3. *Bristol Society of Magic—Centenary Celebration: An Evening with Derren Brown*. Bristol. See, as well, Vernon, Dai. 1940. *Dai Vernon's Select Secrets*. New York, NY: Max Holden; Frisch, Ian. 2019. *Magic Is Dead: My Journey into the World's Most Secretive Society of Magicians*. New York: Dey St.: 258; and Kestenbaum, David. 2017, June 30. 'The Magic Show—Act One', *The American Life*. https://www.thisamericanlife.org/619/the-magic-show

49 For examples of such literature, see DePaulo, B.M., Kashy, D. A., Kirkendol, S. E., Wyer, M. M., and Epstein, J. A. 1996. 'Lying in Everyday Life', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*: 979–995. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.5.979. and Newton, P., Reddy, V. and Bull, R. 2000. 'Children's Everyday Deception and

the sub-field of Symbolic Interactionism, social interaction is often conceived as entailing mutually monitored acts of self-presentation.[50] Herein, individuals:

- strive to control the image of themselves they express to others through what information they give and conceal through speech, dress, comport, facial expressions, etc.;
- attempt to uncover others' self-presentation performances on the basis of what others intentionally provide by way of information and what they inadvertently give away;
- recognize that others, in turn, are trying to uncover their self-presentation by what the individual intentionally gives and inadvertently gives away.[51]

Within such tangled cycles of presentation-discernment, complete honesty and forthrightness with one another can *threaten* our ability to get along harmoniously. In contrast, tactful words, discretion and other ways of maintaining polite fictions are commonplace means of avoiding overt conflict and preserving relations.[52] Such forms of pretense can become so deep that individuals no longer consciously strive to create an illusion for others. Instead, ways of acting become internalized and taken for granted.[53]

Within my sessions—that is to say, small group interactions between acquaintances—the potential for participants to engage in offering fabrications geared towards managing an impression of the scene and each other were ever-present. Therefore, I could hardly rule out deception directed towards me, whatever I heard from participants or read from their faces. But I could not definitively discern deception either. The same ways of speaking, gesturing and behaving that are used in face-to-face interactions to display honesty are those that accomplish subterfuge.

Performance on False-Belief Tasks', *The British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *2*: 297–317. https://doi.org/10.1348/026151000165706.

50 Scott, Susie. 2015. 'Intimate Deception in Everyday Life'. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, *39*: 251–279. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0163-2396(2012)0000039011

51 Goffman, E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

52 Also see Adler, J. 1997. 'Lying, Deceiving, or Falsely Implicating'. *The Journal of Philosophy*, *94*(9): 435–452. https://doi.org/10.2307/2564617.

53 Hochschild, A.R., 2003. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. London: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520930414.

Reflecting on different theories of the mind—that is, how we understand the perspective and intentions of others—philosophers Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi contended:

> In most intersubjective situations we have a direct understanding of another person's intentions because their intentions are explicitly expressed in their embodied actions and their expressive behaviors. This understanding does not require us to postulate or infer a belief or a desire hidden away in the other person's mind.[54]

Whether or not this is the case for most interactions, reflecting on my experiences provided many grounds for doubting these contentions relating to magic performances.

Chapter 2 included some of the paradoxical aspects of knowing the other that I experienced in learning to undertake self-working card magic instructions. This included how my growing experience with magic both brought me *closer to* and *away from* being able to appreciate the perspective of audiences. Likewise too, through performing magic for audiences, I developed a sense of the potential for magic as a method for making a *connection* with others. Yet my growing concern with deception in 2018 and 2019 brought concerns about my reason for *disconnection* from others. Both came together in a recognition that seems aptly labelled as bittersweet.

54 Gallagher, Shaun and Zahavi, Dan. 2007. *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*. London: Routledge: 187.