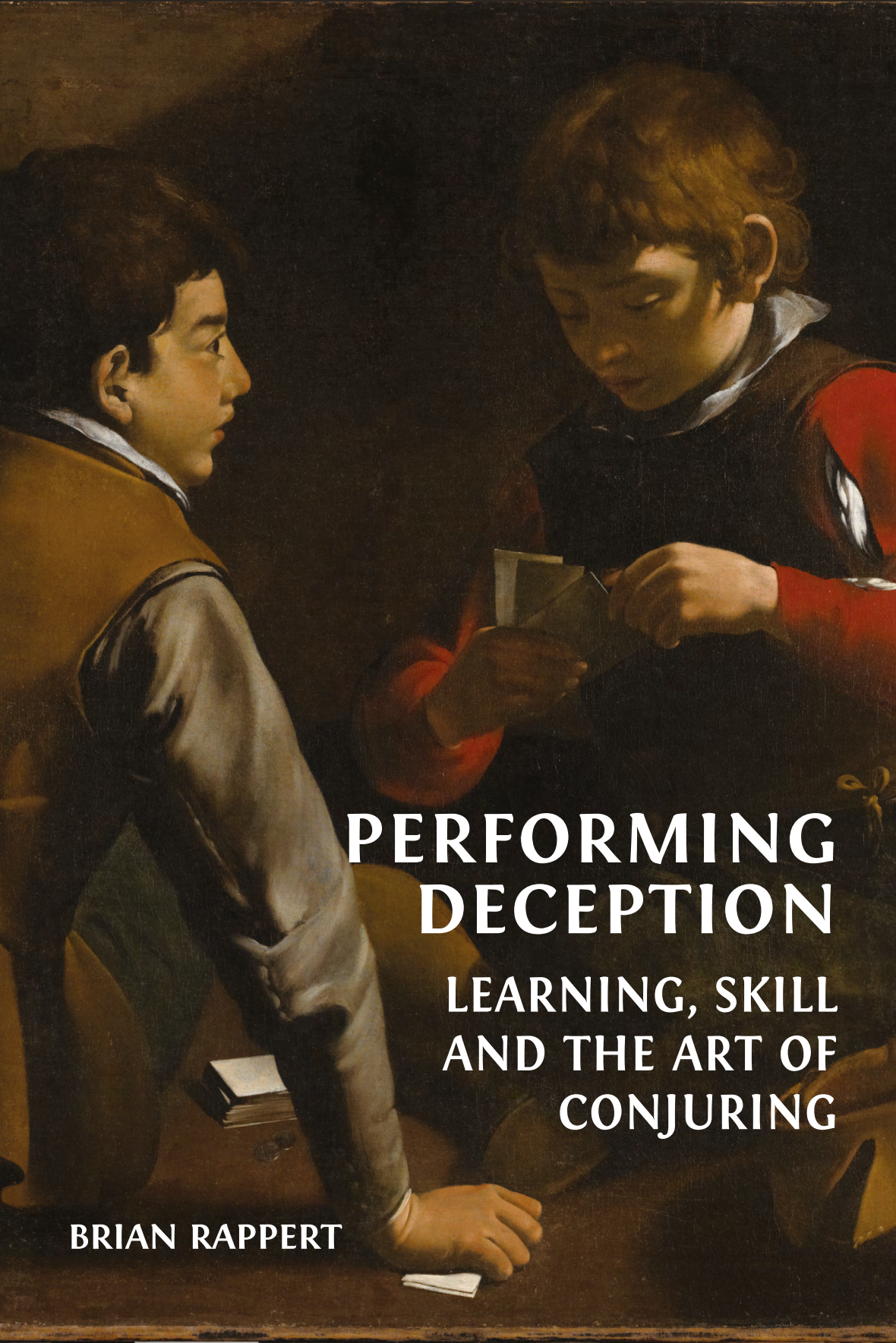

PERFORMING DECEPTION

LEARNING, SKILL AND THE ART OF CONJURING

BRIAN RAPPERT

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

ISBN Paperback: 9781800646902
ISBN Hardback: 9781800646919
ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800646926
ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 9781800646933
ISBN Digital ebook (AZW3): 9781800646940
ISBN XML: 9781800646957
Digital ebook (HTML): 9781800646964
DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0295

Cover image: Follower of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Card Players* (17th century). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Friends of the Fogg Art Museum Fund, Photo ©President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1929.253, https://hvrd.art/o/231633.
Cover design by Anna Gatti

8. Learning and Unlearning

Performing Deception began by taking an activity as its object of attention, namely entertainment magic. Successive chapters have detailed how the crafts of conjuring are learnt through recounting the experiences, abstractions, reflections and experimentations of a novice, as well as of seasoned practitioners.

In this concluding chapter, I want to continue in the spirit of treating learning as a process of iterative development by first returning to the starting topic for this book—now informed by the previous chapters.

What, then, is entertainment magic?

In responding, it is important to first acknowledge that what counts as an appropriate answer depends on the reasons for posing the question. In this regard, let me begin by noting some prominent scholarly depictions of magic and the wider intellectual projects associated with them.

The philosopher Jason Leddington has sought to establish what makes magic a distinctive and unique aesthetic experience.[1] For him, entertainment magic is first and foremost concerned with displays of the impossible.[2] While conjuring might incorporate comedic or theatrical moments, these features are not the marks of magic. Instead, what distinguishes magic from other activities is the conjuror's intention to create illusions of the impossible. Furthermore, this sense of impossibility is not the make-believe associated with reading fictional novels or watching Hollywood blockbusters. Instead, 'it is essential to a

1 Leddington, Jason. 2016. 'The Experience of Magic', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *74*(3): 253–264 and Leddington, Jason. 2020, May 28. 'Savouring the Impossible', *Aesthetics Research Centre Online Seminar*. http://aesthetics-research.org/archive/2020/leddington/.

2 See, as well, Coppa, Francesca, Hass, Lawrence and Peck, James (Eds). 2008. *Performing Magic on the Western Stage*. London: Palgrave MacMillan: 8. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230617124.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0295.08

magic performance that *impossible events actually appear to happen*.'[3] The result is a cognitive bind: audiences know that what is happening is impossible, the magician presents it as impossible, and yet it appears to be taking place nonetheless. The combination of those beliefs and displays creates an oscillation between confusion and curiosity.[4]

Integral to achieving a sense of the impossible for Leddington is the requirement that magicians cancel out every explanation that audiences might harbor. For David Copperfield's flying through the air to be magical, for instance, the performance must negate each of the premises audiences hold about how his movements could be achieved. The belief that he is suspended from wires, for instance, needs to be negated by Copperfield moving through alternatively aligned metal hoops. Without such cancellations, the performance might be regarded by audiences as impressive, but it should not be labelled as magical.[5]

In offering these arguments, Leddington provides a variety of distinctions for marking out what is specific to magic. The identification of distinctions means it can be contrasted with the essential qualities of other aesthetic experiences.

Other scholars have taken alternative aims. In *Magic's Reason*, anthropologist Graham M. Jones takes as his concern how entertainment magic has been varyingly understood within European traditions of thought.[6] As he argues, over time its meaning has been entangled with what counts as occult magic. Whilst entertainment conjurors have sometimes sought to tap into the mystique of the occult, the prevailing

3 Leddington, Jason. 2016. 'The Experience of Magic', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *74*(3): 255. https://doi.org/10.1111/jaac.12290. (Emphasis in the original).

4 An oscillation that can be used to bring into effect wonder and thrill, or wonder and unease. See Taylor, N. 2018. 'Magic and Broken Knowledge', *Journal of Performance Magic*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.5920/jpm.2018.03.

5 In my experience, realizing the impossible sets a high bar for effects —one that seems to rule out a great deal of activity labelled 'conjuring'. By proscribing that magicians must cancel out each of the likely explanations audiences harbor, this definition would exclude the vast majority of effects I have encountered in books, DVDs, conventions, etc. devised by leading magicians. Whilst effects often counter a limited number of probable explanations, few of them systematically ensure each and every explanation is cast into doubt. Also, audiences might regard some feats of magic as impossible, such as turning one object into another. Especially in the case of card magic in which laws of physics are rarely at stake, however, 'improbable', 'adroit' or 'inexplicable' seem more apt labels for the activities taking place.

6 Jones, Graham M. 2018. *Magic's Reason*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226518718.001.0001.

tendency going back to at least the mid-19th century has been to oppose secular, entertainment forms of magic with so-called primitive ones. Through doing so, entertainment magicians have aligned themselves with notions of the modern and the rational. Jones' task in *Magic's Reason* is not only to recount a history of magic within the development of modernity, but to relate this to the development of social anthropology. Within the latter field, magic has been a central topic of study. However, as Jones contends, attention has been cast overwhelmingly toward occult forms. With this selective preoccupation, social anthropologists have portrayed belief in magic as relevant to the irrational and primitive, while they have sought to cast themselves as rational and modern through their efforts to explain other cultures.

In forwarding his argument, Jones uses the question of what counts as magic to inform the understanding of high-level concepts: modernity, rationality, ritual, culture and so on. In this pursuit, he has not been alone. Chris Goto-Jones took up the relation between modernity and magic by examining the tension-ridden manners in which the oriental magic of China, Japan and India was embraced, diminished and appropriated within Anglo traditions.[7]

In contrast to these projects, *Performing Deception* has sought to understand some of the practical forms of reasoning and skills associated with conjuring. In particular, I have examined some of the ways it is taught and learnt through instances of demonstrating, instructing, performing and the like. As noted, demonstrating, instructing, performing and the like rely on routine sense-making processes, even as magic underscores how sense-making is fallible. In this concluding chapter, I want to return to some of the premises for this study as well as offer conclusions that follow from it.

7 See, as well, Goto-Jones, Chris. 2016. *Conjuring Asia: Magic, Orientalism, and the Making of the Modern World*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139924573. For an analysis of how magicians have figured as archetypal figures in cultural imaginations, see Granrose, John. 2021. *The Archetype of the Magician*. Agger: Eye Corner Press.

Joint Wonders

As part of the agenda pursued here, reasoning and skill have been regarded as practical doings. I have sought to examine how they are realized in and through situated actions. This orientation has shaped how notions such as culture, expertise and naturalness are conceived. Much of my effort in the previous chapters has been dedicated to elaborating how the realization of culture, expertise, naturalness and so on takes place through verbal communication, deliberate gestures, body orientations, object placement, directed gazing and so on.

Central to this analysis has been the contention that magic is not something done only by magicians. Instead, those acting in relation to roles such as 'audience member' and 'magician' realize a sense of their identity through each other. In short, it is a joint activity, albeit one that typically involves stark asymmetries in knowledge and action. In particular, my focus has been on forms of group encounters. I have sought to understand these occasions as entailing mutual dependencies wherein each person's experiences is dependent on the others present, as well as on the evolving group situation. Accordingly, proficiency is realized through relations with others, rather than being an attribute of those billed as 'performers'. Even when conjurors practice alone, magic is not well understood as an insulated activity.

Aligned with this general orientation, a recurring theme throughout this book has been how those partaking in magic can know what others are thinking, wishing or feeling. As a performance art, conjurors attempt to put themselves in the place of their co-present, virtually present or imaginary audiences. Doing so is problematic, not only because of general questions that might be asked of how any person can know another, but because magicians engage in actions designed to create an experiential divide between themselves and others. *Performing Deception* has taken as a central concern the reasoning and skills for an activity in which audiences generally accept that deception and manipulation are afoot.

As elaborated through this 'self-other study', the work involved in trying to know another varies considerably across encounters. Chapter 2 spoke to the forms of envisioning which take place in reading written instructions for tricks. It also suggested that how appreciating

what instructions can instruct involves becoming awareness of their limitations. Such limitations stem from the inability of instructions to guide decisions about how to act in relation to the unfolding expressions, positioning and other actions undertaken by audiences. Furthermore, enacting instructions places demands on readers to bring to bear standards beyond those provided by the instructions themselves. However, it is just these kinds of appreciations that are not available to novices.

In recounting my first attempts to perform face-to-face magic, Chapter 3 relayed further conundrums in trying to know others. These sessions involved a dynamic interplay between separation and connection. As in social life more generally, the potential for establishing meaningful connections relied on the starting separation between participants and I.[8] Our sense of separation was evident in the very means we sought to overcome separation in our roles as magicians, audience members, speakers, listeners and much more besides: through aligning our bodies, gazing eye-to-eye, sequencing verbal communications, etc.[9] In the case of these sessions, specific factors regarding separation and connection were relevant. The participants and I were divided through our alternative understandings of the methods for the tricks, even as we took part in a common endeavor. The suspicion that deception was enacted through our movements and words was also a topic of concern in how it created a gap between us, even as we sought to communicate through movements and words.

Through reflecting on my initial encounters with instructions and performances, as well as recounting the writings of prominent professionals, Chapters 2 and 3 elaborated how greater familiarity with performing magic engenders a sense of moving closer to and away from appreciating the experiences of others as well as one's self.

The work involved in knowing one another was also touched on in Chapter 4. As elaborated, through highly choreographed movements,

8 Baxter, Leslie A. and Montgomery, Barbara M. 1996. *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*. London: Guilford; and Arundale, Robert. 2010. 'Constituting Face in Conversation', *Journal of Pragmatics*, *42*: 2078–2105.

9 As is the case elsewhere. For instance, see Heath, Christian. 1984. 'Talk and Recipiency: Sequential Organization in Speech and Body Movement'. In: *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversational Analysis*, J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 247–265. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511665868.017.

magicians operating in the modern style seek to render their actions natural according to cultural conventions of the day. Achieving naturality is a way to make the actions easily recognizable and intelligible, and, thus, unworthy of note, even as audiences might well harbor the suspicion that something untoward is going on. Chapter 4 also discussed how knowing another is a thoroughly materially mediated activity in which learners need to shift between ways of feeling and sensing.

Chapter 5 began by detailing contemporary contests over who can speak for audiences and who can assess the quality of magic—seasoned entertainers, lay spectators, experimental psychologists and others. These arguments provided the impetus for investigating how the reliability and fallibility of perception are made relevant within specific undertakings of magic. In also recounting the instructions as part of a masterclass, I sought to illustrate how instructors can adopt varied and shifting orientations to perception. Students of magic can be both invited to rely on their senses in a matter-of-fact way, and warned of the dangers of doing so.

Chapter 6 examined how prominent magicians have made themselves known through autobiographies that varyingly suggested that there was more going on than appeared on the surface. In forwarding more or less stable, known, definitive images of themselves, the autobiographers also forwarded images of their audiences. As a final exploration of self-other relations, Chapter 7 turned to how individuals can and should be together in acts of deception and manipulation.

Positioning Methods and Theory

Throughout these chapters, notions of self and other have been understood as formed through co-existing and conflicting features such as separation and connection. I have sought to characterize how such features interplay. Herein, multiple kinds of methods have been invoked: magicians have their methods for simulating and concealing the basis for tricks. Audiences, too, have methods for making sense of what is displayed and for detecting conjurors' methods. Moreover, I have offered a conception of magic as a kind of method for understanding ourselves and others. This is not a method for making others or even one's self transparently known. As noted, to hide and simulate,

conjurors utilize many of the same kinds of physical movements and verbal justifications that signal openness and sincerity. Audiences can do much the same. Each can have qualms about the trustworthiness of others. This analysis has suggested how doubt, acceptance, suspicion and trust mix and meld through examining how magicians[10] and audiences get entangled with each other. As a result, to characterize magic as a method is to signal its fraught potential to foster insights into ways of doing and being.

Also, throughout the chapters, examining forms of reasoning and skill has not been conceived of as a straightforward task of applying a particular scholarly theory. For instance, ethnomethodologist Eric Livingston has contrasted different types of sociologies: those of the *hidden social order* and *witnessable social order*. The former seeks to get underneath what is visibly taking place by employing methods and theories that can explain the root societal forces that shape action. In contrast, sociologies of the witnessable social order seek to describe how the orderliness of life is sustained through a detailed analysis of what is readily observable in the here and now. This is done without recourse to the theoretical frameworks and methods commonplace in sociologies of the hidden order that seek to explain one phenomenon (say, religious belief) through reference to yet other ones (say, gender).[11]

In taking the development of reasoning and skill as the prime matter of attention, I have not adopted either 'theory' or 'observable action' as an exclusive or principal framing path for inquiry. Relatedly, I have not set out an approach to inquiry based on either establishing experiments with a definitive hypothesis or describing naturally occurring social phenomena. Instead, learning magic has been treated as I experienced it: that is, as an ongoing, back-and-forth and dynamic process of relating concrete experiences, abstract concepts and theories, active experimentation as well as observations and reflections.[12]

10 For further commentary on how audiences can be strangers to magicians, see Tamariz, Juan. 2019. *The Magic Rainbow*. Rancho Cordova, CA: Penguin.

11 Livingston, E. 2008. *Ethnographies of Reason*. London: Routledge: 123–130. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315580555.

12 In these broad terms, the account offered here of mixing concrete experiences, abstract concepts, active experimentation as well as observations is in line with how professional magicians recount their experiences; for instance, see Tamariz, Juan. 2019. *The Magic Rainbow*. Rancho Cordova, CA: Penguin.

This four-part breakdown of the modes of 'experiential learning',[13] while inevitably open to question for how it carves up learning, has served the purpose of drawing distinctions and relations between the undertakings entailed. In this spirit, too, proficiency in conjuring has not been conceived as simply the knack associated with controlling one's body or material objects. Instead, skill in its broadest sense has been treated as including the potential to relate experiences, abstractions, experimentation and reflections as part of emerging relations with others and the world. This capacity itself derives from previous efforts to relate experiences, abstractions, experimentation and reflections, and it conditions subsequent such efforts. I have been able to elaborate on this kind of emergent approach to skill by examining my practical undertakings over time as a learner.

In this way, rather than seeking to adopt a position somehow external to the activity of magic, I used my fledgling membership in the category of 'magicians' as a basis for understanding. This has been done even as I have sought to make what it means to be a magician or do magic into topics for inquiry.

One implication of this research design is that, rather than advancing a single theoretical framework for understanding magic, *Performing Deception* has relayed the circuitous ways abstractions can inform a sense of what is taking place in conjuring. Also, rather than treating magic as a singular (albeit perplexing) object of study, I have been interested in the tremendously varied kinds of work that achieve outcomes deemed 'magical'. As such, magic was not treated as something that exists out there in the world waiting to be discovered and inspected. Instead, what counts as conjuring is continuously made and remade through our doings—what we choose to regard as astonishing, how we behave during interactions, how we define categories and concepts to make sense of the world and so on. My unfolding doings as a learner not only shaped the sense of what I observed but shaped myself as an observer. In this way, an underlying premise and conclusion of this book is that the known and knower cannot be separated.

13 Kolb, D.A. 2015. *Experiential Learning* (Second Edition). Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

A Heuristic Definition

Informed by my investigations as a student, I have sought to characterize magic as a *deft contrariwise performance*. I have not done so to set out a definitive, for-all-purposes, singular representation. Instead, I have offered this phrasing to cultivate sensitivities that enable us to attend to magic as a social and material accomplishment. Each chapter has sought to appreciate how notionally opposing tendencies in magic interplay and, in doing so, potentially contribute to and complement each other. How can performers learn to recognize naturality? How can they appreciate the limits of human perception through their perception? How does competitive scrutiny rely on cooperation?

These are the types of questions pursued in this study, a study that has taken paired notions—such self/other, truth/deception, control/care, etc.—as not absolute opposites. Instead, they have been treated as complementary and conflicting. In this, understanding one notion depends on and informs knowing its pair. As suggested earlier in this chapter, attempting to know another provides a means of self-knowledge and turning toward oneself a means of knowing another.

As argued, the demands on magicians about how to act are not puzzles to be resolved once and for all. Instead, they are sites of chemistry between different kinds of appreciations. This chemistry pertains to the complex entanglements between authority and empowerment, individuality and joint action, as well as connection and separation.

One benefit of approaching conjuring in this manner is that it provides a basis for acknowledging alternative ways of making sense of a host of practical matters. For instance, conjurors debate questions such as:

- To be considered a 'proper' magician does one need to develop dexterous manual skills or is it possible to rely on manufactured gimmicks?
- Is it wise to foreshadow an intended feat?
- Do magicians need to be proficient in a range of effects or only hone a few?
- Should conjurors portray magic as taking place by them, through them or even to them? Relatedly, should they strive to make the magic appear effortless or strenuous?

- Can a performer gauge the effectiveness of their tricks by taking the visible reactions of others at face value?
- Does understanding the methods for a trick decrease or enhance the sense of wonder associated with witnessing it?
- Is magic a form of artistic self-expression in which the artist's aesthetic judgements should shine through, or is it a form of entertainment in which the audience's judgements are the ones that ultimately count?[14]
- Should beginners imitate their idols or should they seek out their own style?
- When things 'go wrong', is this an opportunity for making an emotional connection with the audience, or a source of disappointment that should be passed over as quickly as possible?

As noted previously, different magicians give different answers to such questions. More than this though, individual magicians can offer opposing counsel at alternative points in time too. In characterizing entertainment magic as *deft contrariwise performance*, the prevalence of clashing responses is not unexpected. Nor does the existence of such advice in itself stand as evidence that some magicians simply do not grasp what they are doing. Instead, the possibility of conflicting counsel can stem from how conjuring entails bringing together the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the conventional and the unconventional, and so on.

When conceiving of magic as *deft contrariwise performance*, skill is, in part, the ability to hold together varied ways of assessing what is appropriate. This is another kind of trick that magicians perform. Acting appropriately can be a subtle and fluid undertaking since determinations of what should be done are highly dependent on the sought purposes for performing. Furthermore, any particular purpose—for instance, to entertain; to produce wonder; to inject meaning into life; to reenchant the world; to disaffirm our collective illusions; etc.[15]—can itself be

14 Contrast, for instance, Mancha, Hector and Jeremy, Luke. 2006. *3510*. Rancho Cordova, CA: Penguin Magic: 13.

15 For a discussion on the purposes of magic see Burger, Eugene and Neale, Robert E. 1995. *Magic and Meaning*. Seattle, WA: Hermetic P.

questioned for how it involves an interplay of contrary considerations. Determinations of what counts as appropriate action also depend on the varied anticipations, perspectives and identities of those involved, the particulars of performance situations, cultural predispositions, predominant social habits, as well as many other considerations.

As such, the availability of contrasting advice about how magic ought to be performed serves as a basis for debating and assessing. This is particularly important for this art form because of the relative absence of formal institutions for training and accreditation that can serve to establish community-wide standards. On the darker side, the prevalence of contrasting ways of thinking also has the potential to lead to highly evaluative judgements of alternative styles, as well as defensive responses to criticism.[16] In my experience, both of these potentials get realized when conjurors come together during conventions, clubs and online forums. And yet, I have been struck by how magicians respectfully watch each other, share their techniques and even seek out criticism. Learning from one another and teaching one another are central features of collective gatherings. At one level, such behavior is hardly surprising, because being attentive to how other magicians conduct themselves—how they marshal distraction, plan spontaneity, pretend to be natural and so on—helps other magicians to notice what they might not have appreciated about themselves. It also enables individuals to both situate and differentiate themselves in relation to prevailing styles.

Learning From Magic

With this understanding of skill as entailing the interplay of opposing tendencies, I now turn to contrasting the approach to competency development offered in *Performing Deception* with those approaches offered for other domains of activity.

To do so I want to begin with the relation between sensing and knowing. As described in the previous chapters, magic plays up our inclinations to perceive patterns, to adopt the belief that the world exists independently of us, and many other taken-for-granted ways of orientating to our surroundings. Consequently, through learning magic,

16 For one practitioner's effort to acknowledge and address defensive reasoning in magic, see Weber, Ken. 2003. *Maximum Entertainment*. Ken Weber Productions.

commonplace ways of understanding the relationship between the senses and knowledge become problematic.

Take sight, for example. The contention that seeing and knowing support each other has widely figured as a theme in the cultural and social analysis of skills acquisition. Roepstorff presented learning to navigate through glaciers and to read brain scans as hard-won enskillments. For such activities, refined vision underpins adept situated action.[17] For O'Connor,[18] sight functioned as a taken-for-granted means of receiving sensory inputs that enabled glassblowers to gain nuanced types of focal and subsidiary awareness.

Learning, in my case, certainly entailed the refinement of visual-motor skills (for instance, finger positioning) through assessing actions (spreading, cutting, bending, placing and lifting cards) against intended outcomes. However, what has also come to the fore has been the complex and sometimes indeterminate relationship between seeing and knowing. In the practices surveyed in previous chapters, seeing could not straightforwardly be taken as knowing (for instance: knowing *whether* physical manipulations are detectable; knowing *that* someone is being truthful; knowing *how* reliably a visual effect can be repeated). Knowing, too, fostered questioning of what takes place in seeing. This happened, for instance, in relation to what was not made visible in instructional videos and to the alluring seductions of gazing into a mirror when you know what to look for.

In other words—as part of my development—I came to know, to realize I did not know, to wonder what I could know, and to doubt what I thought I knew. In doing so, I experienced a growing uneasiness about the intelligibility and reliability of the visual, even though in many other respects I treated visual perception as unproblematic.[19]

In such ways, as I engaged in conjuring for others, the world transformed into a kind of conjuring.

As a result, definitions that depict learning as a process of matching 'this to that'—for instance, error detection against expected outcomes,[20]

17 Roepstorff, A. 2007. 'Navigating the Brainscape'. In: *Skilled Visions: Between Apprenticeship and Standards*, C. Grasseni (Ed.). Oxford: Berghahn Books: 191–206.

18 O'Connor, E. 2005. 'Embodied Knowledge', *Ethnography*, *6*: 183–204.

19 A troubling for which many historical parallels could be made; see Clark, Stuart. 2007. *Vanities of the Eye*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

20 Argyris, C. 1995. 'Action Science and Organizational Learning', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *10*(6): 20–26.

or of linking stimulus to responses,[21] or of disciplining errors to achieve greater skillfulness[22]—only capture some of the dynamics surveyed in previous chapters. My own fraught learning involved a maturing hesitancy about my claims to individual agency and control, even as I became defter in physically moving cards and socially interacting with audiences. Learning was a process undertaken concerning imaginary or actual others, yet others with a shifting status. Others were (un) available to me in relation to our shared experiences, our different experiences and, importantly, my growing hesitancy regarding whether we had similar or different experiences.

As I have come to understand conjuring, learning it entails adeptly acting in between certainty and uncertainty, as well as the possibilities for affirmation and not. In this way, learning involved what anthropologist Tim Ingold coined as an 'education of attention'.[23] That is to say, it involved sensitization of the perceptual system. However, educating attention entailed an *unsettling* of perception too, not simply honing it. This unsettling took place at two levels: one, making sense of specific sensory experiences (what was seen in looking in this mirror, watching that video, etc.) and, two, making sense of the sensory capacities in general (the possibilities for discernment given the fallibilities of human perception).

Taking these points together with themes from previous chapters, learning magic has entailed developing a receptiveness to *movement;* that is, an ability to to-and-fro between:

- particular situated events and general descriptions;
- the reliance on others' accounts and the questioning of them;
- the credence given to and the distancing from sensory experiences;

21 Lachman, S.J. 1997. 'Learning is a Process', *The Journal of Psychology*, *131*(5): 477–480. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223989709603535.

22 Downey, G., Dalidowicz, M., and Mason, P.H. 2015. 'Apprenticeship as Method', *Qualitative Research*, *15*(2): 183–200. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114543400.

23 In doing so, Ingold adopted James Gibson's term, see Ingold, T. 2001. 'From the Transmission of Representations to the Education of Attention'. In: *The Debated Mind: Evolutionary Psychology Versus Ethnography*, H. Whitehouse (Ed.). London: Bloomsbury Academic: 113–154. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003086963-7.

- resting with what one has learnt and seeking to unlearn;
- treating other people's experiences as distinct as well as similar to one's own;
- losing oneself in play and being aware that one is playing.

Part of the demand of performing magic is being able to adapt to and shift between such orientations. This can entail recognizing what is readily accessible; appreciating what requires refined judgement; perceiving with foreknowledge; disregarding foreknowledge; watching what is demonstrated, and imagining what is not shown. Undertaking such acts can also entail moving between different working theories regarding how we know ourselves and each other. I refer to the development of the ability to move between certainty and uncertainty, as well as affirmation and its unattainableness, as *trick learning*.

The comments in the previous paragraphs are not just relevant to the practical task of learning magic. They apply to the account given in *Performing Deception*. The analysis in these pages—which is to say, the relationship between the teller and the told—is caught within the kinds of tensions set out. Notably, I have used my own sense-making as the principal way into considering the basis for sense-making. This tension-ridden situation is hardly unique to *Performing Deception*, as any inquiry of reasoning faces a basic conundrum of how to examine the means it uses to undertake that examination.[24] There is then a second-order challenge regarding how to communicate the questioning of commonplace reasoning to readers such as yourself. As I have argued, the activity of magic makes relevant a third dimension of challenge: the fallibility of commonplace reasoning and perception. Rather than somehow escaping these challenging conditions, I have sought to convey my emerging understanding as a novice as a way into appreciating how notions of commonsense and sense-making are at stake in the doings of magic.

There is another important manner in which the analysis in these pages is caught within the kinds of tensions set out. While learning magic has been conceived as a process of relating lived concrete

24 A theme taken up in Ten Have, Paul. 2004. *Understanding Qualitative Research and Ethnomethodology*. London: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020192.

experiences, abstract concepts and theories, active experimentation, as well as observations and reflections, what *Performing Deception* has provided is a set of abstractions and reflections. As a reduction of worldly encounters and practical abilities into a written account, this book has not been able to somehow convey embodied experiences and actions fully. What it has been able to do is provide an intellectual guide for appreciating the illusionary nature of our everyday ways of making sense of the world. Part of the trick of crafting this book has been to offer plausible descriptions and arguments that build shared understandings of learning, despite the limitations in what is presented.

To acknowledge how telling and obscuring come together in this manner is to further open up to what learning entails. This is not a steady progression from ignorance to knowledge or from ineptitude to proficiency, but an ongoing process of coming into and out of tension and paradox.