

True Magic Via Objectivity

Four main aspects of magic are: inventing, selecting, practising and performing.

Since magic is a form of entertainment, and the object or purpose of entertainment is to bring pleasure to the people we are performing for, then being a true – i.e., objective, or ‘object-fulfilling’ – magician means inventing, selecting, practising and performing for the end result of entertaining the audience. If we invent, select, practise or perform for subjective reasons, then we are not fulfilling the object or purpose of magic.

This doesn’t mean that we have to give up subjective thinking in order to be objective magicians – there’s no harm in subjectively inventing, selecting or practising to satisfy or entertain ourselves – as long as we don’t subject our audiences to performances of such magic, magic which wasn’t designed for their entertainment. To do so is to satisfy ourselves at the expense of other people’s time and attention. Imagine a sight-seeing tour which purports to visit several local places of great significance, but these places turn out to be only of significance to the tour guide, and of no interest to the sight-seers. Many performances of magic are akin to this.

Inventing magic objectively

This means creating effects and methods for the purpose of entertaining the audience (or specifically, creating in the audience a sense of wonder and amazement by symbolising – via the simulation of magic – the mystery of life, or the oneness of ourselves and the universe); not to satisfy some delusional, ego-based emotion in ourselves. Altering an effect because: you want to make it ‘easier’, ‘more practical’/‘commercial’, or any other magician-oriented category; or you wish that you had invented the original version, and thus want to devise a variation – any variation – in order to ‘personalise’ it (often followed by widely publicising your variation among magicians); or devising a procedure – as an intellectual (delusional) exercise – and then seeing if you can come up with an effect which ‘showcases’ the procedure; or devising a method for a desired effect which uses sleights that you enjoy doing; is not objective, i.e., does not fulfil the object of magic.

Avoiding subjective logic as the framework of our thinking, and using goal-based lateral thinking instead, will help us to be objective when inventing magic. This is because subjective logic is based on assumptions or preconditions which are believed to be necessary, or taken as given, but are in reality no more than delusions based on: tradition or habit, the authority of others (particularly if they are famous), majority opinion, indoctrination, literalism (as opposed to symbolism), and, very often, the failure to recognise contexts or wide-scope views, and to concentrate only on specific details, e.g., the axle breaks on a car so, logically, there must be something wrong with the axle; or, taking a table upstairs means, logically (literally), carrying it up the stairs (as opposed to, say, taking it outside and passing it up through a window). Objective logic is based on wide-scope lateral thinking, and involves integrating and conceptualising reality, not relying on assumptions. (Please note that this is not meant to imply that vertical thinking – found in tradition, habit, authority, opinion or doctrine – should be avoided. It simply means that through the use of objective lateral thinking, we can honestly assess which aspects of vertical thinking are reality-based and which aren’t.)

The key to goal-based lateral thinking is consciousness: here-and-now thinking, not force-of-habit, hypnotic, semi-sleep or semi-bicameral thinking – and the key to consciousness is the clearing of the mind of subjective logic and lazy thinking. Lateral thinking involves questioning all our assumptions and premises, and thinking in simple, reality-based terms such as (in card magic), ‘There are no fixed (necessary) movements of the fingers, hands or body, and no fixed configurations of the card(s).’ With lateral thinking, we don’t subjectively devise problems and then use logic to solve them; we notice problems and, often simultaneously, notice solutions to those problems. By clearing the subjective, delusional mess away from our mind’s eye, we are free to see all the ‘gaps in existence’ which need filling (the shape of the gaps revealing the shape of the inventions needed to fill them). Objective necessity, not subjective, ‘I-wonder-if-I-can-invent -something-new-today’ thinking, is the mother of invention.

Selecting magic objectively

This means choosing material because it is magical and creates wonder in the audience, not because we find the items intriguing or clever, or any other subjective reason, e.g., we want to gain a reputation among magicians for doing a certain trick (possibly to be associated with a great magician of the past who also did this trick – although, paradoxically, such effects are often extremely magical due to the objectivity of the great magicians); or, because we paid a lot of money for the props and therefore want to get our money’s worth from them.

Being aware of the fact that there are perceivable aspects of magic – what the audience sees or perceives, and how it affects them – and unperceivable aspects – those which affect the magician, unknown to the audience – can help us to avoid selecting material for subjective reasons. The audience doesn’t know and doesn’t care that the effect you are doing is a classic among magicians, was invented by you or someone else, or is considered ‘practical’ and can be done under any conditions. The easy, practical, do-anywhere methods are always praised by subjective magicians, whereas the difficult or specific-condition methods which may produce more magical effects, are disregarded. Such magicians place the convenience to themselves before the enjoyment of the audience, or the method before the effect. If the method can’t be altered – to suit certain conditions – without weakening the effect, then the solution is to find another effect.

The perceivable aspects are:

The effect (what the audience is meant to see); the method (what they are not meant to see, but may still perceive either partially or wholly through poor construction or technique); and the implications of the magic (how it affects them emotionally – for example, the production of money from thin air may create emotions or feelings of greed in one person and charity in another. Such an effect could be considered to have strong implications – other examples being cutting the aces, or turning water into wine – whereas an effect such as tearing a sponge ball into two smaller balls could be considered to have obscure – and therefore weak – implications, which at best create a ‘that’s-weird’ or ‘that’s-interesting’ reaction in the spectators. This may be because true (magical) magic appeals to the emotional inner brain, whereas weird/puzzle magic – often the result of goal-less brainstorming, where random thoughts are considered ends in themselves rather than pathways to objective goals – appeals to the intellectual outer brain). [But, as always, it depends on who one is performing for, and what their personal outlook is.]

Practising magic objectively

This requires, first of all, an understanding of exactly what the effect is meant to be, and the exact way of achieving that effect. For example, magicians who attempt to perform an invisible pass [as a secret control, rather than a colour change] under cover of a sharp, forward-and-backward ‘jiggle’ action, are failing to understand what the pass is meant to be: absolutely nothing! Or in other words, a secret manoeuvre which is done while either apparently doing nothing, or under cover of some visible, contextual action. A sharp jiggle action done while apparently doing nothing is not contextual, i.e., it doesn’t fit the situation. (To fully appreciate this, stand before a mirror with your hands in position for a jiggle pass, but don’t actually hold any cards. Now make a sharp jiggle action with your hands, simulating the movement of the pass – you’ll soon see how ridiculous this looks, whether or not you are actually holding any cards.)

Once we understand the purpose and mechanics of something, then total honesty is required in order to assess our execution of it, and to make sure that the end result matches the desired result. This applies just as much to items we have been using for years, as well as to new items – our technique can easily lose its precision over the course of time, and therefore needs readjusting in a similar way that a musical instrument requires tuning. The key to honest self-assessment is to search for and acknowledge our faults and weaknesses, and to look at ourselves as we really are, not as we imagine ourselves to be. Effective ways of doing this include watching ourselves on video, and listening to hecklers and people who call us on poor technique (instead of ignoring them or wishing they didn’t exist – such people are our guardian angels, who accompany us wherever we go until we get the technique right).

The objective magician recognises that magic, the art of deception, requires total honesty to achieve its mastery, and that genuine achievement can only result from genuine effort – not self-deception.

Performing magic objectively

This means being the giver of pleasure, not the receiver.

When we first become interested in magic, we develop that interest because of the pleasure we receive from being amazed. But when we become magicians – true magicians – a switch takes place within us, so that the pleasure felt by our audience becomes both the goal of our work, and the source of our enjoyment. (The pursuit of objectivity being the force which makes that switch.) To perform magic because we wish to show off, gain attention or marvel at the workings of the effect, is unobjective, i.e., does not fulfil the object or purpose of magic.

Many magicians remain frozen in their initial, self-pleasure, 'hooked-on-magic' state, and then attempt to boost that pleasure with the occasional 'quick fix', for example, buying a new trick or watching a new video. [Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of these pursuits, but they must be recognised for what they are.] Because of their lack of objectivity – their failure to recognise and pursue the object of magic – they never get to experience the long-lasting, achievement-based feelings of happiness which result from making the transition, from receiver to giver, or subjective to objective.

By inventing, selecting, practising and performing magic objectively, we not only bring pleasure to the people who experience our magic, but we also gain self-esteem and happiness from our effort-based achievements. Inventing effects through a desire to be prolific inventors; selecting effects based on a fascination of their methods; practising effects without acknowledging our weaknesses; or performing effects in an attempt to become famous; these subjective activities become recognised for what they really are – meaningless – when pursuing true magic via objectivity.

(This essay was inspired by Edward Marlo's use of the word 'reaching', meaning goal-less or subjective thinking (conversation with Marlo c. 1986). Selected aspects of the works of Edward de Bono, Arthur Janov, Julian Jaynes, P.D. Ouspensky, Ayn Rand and Frank R. Wallace were adapted to fit the context of this essay. (Do Bono's black-and-white pebble story epitomises the Marlo Method, and is a recommended [example] of lateral thinking.) The jiggle pass example was inspired by a conversation with John Muir c. 1987. Examples of lateral thinking can be found in both Zen and Sufi literature.)

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