



AR

Roberto

Dear Roberto Giobbi

can you help me develop a philosophy of magic...

(...and 51 other vital questions for the performing magician.)

Roberto Giobbi's



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(...and 51 other vital questions for the performing magician.)

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Contents

Foreword	6
1. Injog Overhand Shuffle	10
2. Presentation Ideas	12
3. Three Card Monte	15
4. How to Study	16
5. Staystack	18
6. Fear of Starting to Perform	20
7. Memorized Version of Out of Sight Out of Mind	28
8. Think Of A Card Routines	30
9. Gilbreath Principle	33
10. Magician is Only an Actor Playing the Role of a Magician	36
11. Too Perfect Theory	45
12. How Many Effects?	51
13. Creative Process	54
14. Bottom Deal Applications	61
15. Philosophy of Magic	65
16. Origin of Display Pass	68
17. Trick That Can't Be Explained	73
18. In Spectator's Hands	77
19. Effect Categories for Cards	82
20. Vernon's Travellers	97
21. Why do Magic?	101
22. Ten Best Card Effects	104
23. Practice	115
24. Best Self-Working Card Trick	118
25. Starting with Card Magic	121
26. Tabled Faro/Riffle Shuffle	125
27. Delayed Setup	129
28. Program Construction of an Act	133
29. How To Prepare For A Competition	143
30. Dirty Cards	149
31. Constructivism	155
32. Favorite Card Routine	162
33. Favorite ESP Card Trick	169

34. Zarrow Shuffle	172
35. Secret Setup	175
36. Escuela Magica de Madrid	179
Manifest of the Escuela Mágica de Madrid (EMM)	184
37. Navigate Information	188
How to Read Erdnase (or Any Good Magic Book)	192
38. Magician Fooler	201
39. Notebook and Journal	207
40. Repertoire Books	213
41. Favorite Non-Card Effects and Books	215
42. How to Archive Tricks	218
43. General Card	221
44. Best Si Stebbins Trick	228
45. Deck Switch	231
The Deck Switch Structure	233
46. Stand-Up Deck Switch	239
47. Magic Pizza Expression	243
48. Clocking a Deck (49)	248
49. Audience's Reality	255
50. Alternative Sleights	263
51. Performing Opportunities	269
52. Kolossal Killer	274
The Too-Perfect Theory	280
The Theorists	281
Introduction	281
The players and pundits	282
The «too perfect» theory	284
Flash Point	291
The Too-Perfect Theory in Action	302
The Flaw in the Diamond	306
Mike Close on the Too-Perfect Theory	311
Striving for Perfection	316
It's Your Call: on the Too-Perfect Theory	322
Martin Lewis on the Too-Perfect Theory	327
Patrick Watson on the Too-Perfect Theory	328
Postscript	330

Foreword

«*I'm beautiful, I'm strong, I'm wise, I'm good. And I have found this out all by myself.*»
(Stanislaw Jerzy Lec)

About This Revised Edition

The present version of *Ask Roberto* has been completely revised: over a period of several months I have read through the complete file of questions and answers once more, and have made sometimes considerable corrections, additions and changes. This wasn't necessary in all cases, but if you are one who has asked a question, you might want to first jump to your question and see if I have added something significant. Also, my wife Barbara has created an entirely new layout, which should be pleasing to look at, and make the printed version a joy to read.

Premise

This is arguably the most unusual publication project I've ever been involved with. I remember that one day Chris Wasshuber, CEO of library.com, wrote me an email, as he occasionally does, suggesting that readers could ask me a question about anything in magic for a little fee - I believe it was \$15 at that time - and I would answer them to the best of my knowledge. For the same fee the customer would then receive the next questions and answers for as long as the project lasted.

He mentioned that I could take as much time as I liked to answer any one question - indeed, some readers had to wait several months (!) - and he also stated that I could stop the project anytime I felt it became too much. This sounded like an acceptable deal...at that time.

Fascinating Book-in-progress

The idea of a «book-in-progress» certainly appealed to me, as I at least had never heard of a similar «book» before, certainly not in magic. Unusual book projects have always held a fascination for me, and I have tried my hand at a fair amount of different ones, only a few of which I have published in English.

Between Frustration and Joy

I believe, like probably many of you do, that there is too much written out there - printed, let alone virtual - that is completely unnecessary and merely a time-thief. Therefore, whenever I'm about to start working on a publication project, I will carefully consider its possible use to the community (and myself).

In the case of *Ask Roberto*, a title suggested by Chris that I liked for its intuitive simplicity, it seemed an obviously useful contribution, as I would only write to those who asked a specific question and not bother the rest of the world with it.

However, I had completely miscalculated the effort and time it would take me to answer some of the questions. As it turned out, even the simplest of answers took me at least half a working day, and some others even several days and weeks of thinking, writing, researching, rewriting again, asking friends, letting it rest for a few days, rereading everything, removing & adding passages etc. etc. – I remember that in at least two cases I started from scratch as I didn't like what I had written.

At several points I have been on the verge of leaving the project, as you can imagine, but Chris always managed to successfully convince me of continuing what at least those who had asked a question thought was a great idea. Thoughts like this especially occurred when I started to think about having just invested maybe 25 hours for 50% of \$15, bringing my hourly rate to 30 US Cents. I really don't believe those who say I'm one of the most important and influential authors of contemporary magic – if I was, I should at least get a cleaner's salary...

I simply wouldn't have been sincere with you if I hadn't told you about the frustrating part of this project – and since you have become so to speak «part of the family» I owed you this confession.

But there is also an upside to the whole thing, of course, as there always is even in the worst of human conditions, and that's the fact that the questions – each one of which I thought was really interesting and challenging – forced me to think about a facet of the Art and Science of Magic.

In many cases the questions were about subjects I had already thought about before, occasionally even written about before, but in some cases I was surprised to be pointed into a direction I had neglected in my decades of studies, or even utterly ignored. For this I'm very grateful, as one of the greatest joys of my life is to discover a new field of interest related to magic, thus adding to its already immense complexity, and then gain some new insight about it. In some cases even, a new insight will not result in greater complication and complexity, as intuition would suggest, but quite on the contrary elevate one to a higher level of cognition that will bring order into what seemed like chaos just a moment ago. That's a sublime moment and it wouldn't have happened had I not been forced to answer some specific questions.

I hope that my answers – at least from time to time – produce a similar effect in the minds of those who are now reading these questions and answers, as this is probably their greatest inherent value.

About This Book And How to Use It

This is not a book about tricks, but a book that might help you do tricks better – and that is better than any trick. Why? Because if you learn a new trick you simply have a larger repertoire. But if you gain an insight about how to do something better, you become a better magician. Furthermore you will likely apply this idea to all your other tricks, which automatically brings your other tricks to the next level. What just took a few sentences to say will take a lifetime to install, but it doesn't make it less true.

ASK ROBERTO

You can't fail noticing that there are exactly 52 questions and answers, a natural, you will say, for someone like me, whose favorite instrument is a deck of playing cards. However, 52 doesn't only refer to the quantity of cards in the full pack, it also hints to the number of weeks in the Gregorian calendar. It is an invitation to *read one essay per week*, during a complete year. It thus resembles another unusual book project of mine, *Secret Agenda*, where I propose one magical idea for each day of the year, including the leap year. A good way of proceeding, is to read it always at the same time, for instance Sunday after brunch, or Monday evening after work etc., making it a weekly habit. Like this you will have read a complete book without any effort.

About the Questions

If it is true that in every small world there is a big world, then the questions you will find in this publication certainly couldn't reflect that any better.

The length of the questions asked ranged from almost a full page to a single sentence. Some questioners introduced themselves, told how much they appreciated my work and how I had led them to the way of magic, being exceedingly polite, whereas others dryly asked, «I want to know...». This is as different and colorful as the individual human being itself, and they reflect its beliefs and character as much as any other thing about its person, becoming a small mirror of the self.

As for the type of questions, I think you will be surprised to find an almost incredible variety going from very technical questions about heavy sleight-of-hand and mathematical principles to those having to do with all aspects of presentation, timing and misdirection; from intrapersonal issues – almost intimate self-confessions – asking about how to overcome nervousness to how to practice effectively; from historical considerations to philosophical subjects referring to magic, art and life in general.

The questions thus echo the great complexity and depth of our world of magic, and they show that magic – in the sense of theatrical illusionism - is a part of the larger world in which we live. It is another compelling proof that «the art of conjuring» is indeed an art form and that it certainly is a full-fledged building block of human culture and civilization. The real problem of magic is that many who are into magic, and should know better, are not aware of this, let alone those outside of magic.

Quite frankly, after having gone through the whole project once more, and having been forced to reflect about its entirety at the moment of writing this foreword, I will tell you that there is hardly a publication in our huge world of magic, of which I'm aware of, that so *perfectly reflects what magic is about and what kind of people are its representatives*. This is simply amazing, especially if you think that there is not a single trick explained (Editor's Note: This is not quite true, as Roberto has kindly donated a few tricks from some of his other writings to illustrate a point, and which we have appended at the end of the relative question...)

Disclaimer

In my foreword to Jamy Swiss's *Devious Standards* - in a different context - I wrote, «To give answers is dogmatic, to ask questions is wise. And it is the way of the teacher.» Now I'm giving answers, because that's in the nature of this work. I do, however, insist that these are *my* answers, *personal opinions*, not dogmas, and that there are other answers to the same question, often opposite to mine. Sometimes those contrary opinions are given by people who have become wealthier and more famous with magic than I have (not so difficult...); therefore they might be right and I could be wrong. However, there is a fundamental difference between them and me: *you didn't ask them, you asked me*. And that's what you are going to get, my opinion, no more, no less. I hope you enjoy the experience.

(Written at the end of the project, as so often happens with «forewords», in MuttENZ, January 2013, by the author himself, rather than by a benevolent friend, and completely revised once again in May 2014, before release of the printed version of this project.)

Roberto Giobbi



Richard Green asks:

Presentation Ideas

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

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Hello, Richard,

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

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

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

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

I've been collecting over 500 ideas by now and have thought about publishing it in book form. Maybe one day you'll see it...

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

Bowl of Billets

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

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

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

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

Entry Exam

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

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

Additional bits:

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

Clichés

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

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

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

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

Magie à la Carte

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

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

Little help:

- The blank cards initially used can be «printed» by using any type of Wild Card handling. As an example see Kaufman, Richard, *The Card Miracles of Shigeo Takagi*, «The Wild Blanks», p. 24, USA 1990. See my taken based on an idea by Fred Kaps and Camilo Cazquez in «The Program is Wild» (*Secret Agenda*, p. 259).
- Taking the cards from a full stack of double-blank cards will inspire elegant but simple ways of showing the cards to be blank.

Disembodied Women und Calculating Horses

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

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

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

What are you going to show your audience?

OK – that's it. Let me know if you found this answer useful and interesting.

All the best,

Roberto Giobbi

Yuki Kadoya asks:

Origin of Display Pass

Dear Roberto :

I'm your huge fan in Japan since you lectured at Ton Onosaka's close-up convention in 1991.

In *Card College vol.4*, you explain a technique called «The Display Pass». Do you know who is the creator of this pass? I searched in several books. I only found a trick that used this pass in «Teacher's Pet» by Paul Curry in his book *Special Effect* (1977) and his *World's Beyond* (2001).

Thanks in advance.

Sincerely,

Yuki Kadoya

P.S. Speaking of «Think of a Card», I loved your «Think a Card in Cigarette» trick that you lectured in Japan. I still loved to use it on and off - a real fooler.

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Dear Yuki,

How nice to hear again from you after all these years. Yes, Ton's convention in Hakone with Max, Eugene, Tommy and Aurelio, among many others, was certainly a memorable event.

You ask about what I've titled in *Card College 4* «The Display Pass». I think that the inspirational source is what Victor Farelli titled «The Horace Goldin Pass» and you can find it in [*Hugard's Magic Monthly*](#), Volume XII, Number 12, May 1955, or on p. 285 of the bound edition published by Magico Magazine in 1996.

Excerpt from *Hugard's Magic Monthly* May 1955 – Farelli's London Letter:

The Horace Goldin Pass (For Magicians Only)

Gentlemen, by referring to my records, I find that the late Horace Goldin (1873-1939) demonstrated his pass to me in Glasgow, Scotland, in November 1911. I was completely deceived and I had not the faintest idea of «how it was done.» Over twenty years later (January 1932), Goldin and I met in Brussels, Belgium, and it was not until then that he taught me the method that he used.

At that meeting, I had demonstrated to him my version of what I called the Improved «Bluff» Pass¹ which was based on one described by Frederick Montague on page 75 in his

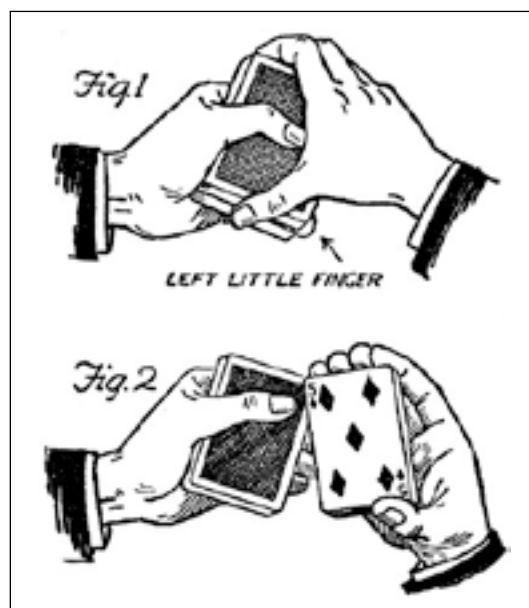
1. A detailed explanation of my version of the Bluff Pass – illustrated with four photographs – will be found in Chapter Two in my book, [*Farelli's Card Magic*](#). First edition, London 1933.

book, «Westminster Wizardry», published, in 1928, by Will Goldston of London. At that time, the author was a member of the Lower House, «Westminster»: hence the title of the volume. Today, Montague is known as Lord Amwell, and he has a seat in the House of Lords.

Although I performed my version of the Bluff Pass – no fewer than sixteen times in succession – Goldin confessed that he had not an inkling of the method employed, and said: «I give it up! Show me how to do it, and I shall teach you my method.» And that is how I came to learn the secret of a trick with which Horace Goldin had puzzled expert magicians in almost every civilized country in the world.

Working of the Goldin Pass

1. Get a card freely selected from the deck, and hold the latter, face down, in the position usually adopted when about to make the standard double-handed pass. Figure 1.
2. With the right hand, cut off about half the deck, and get the chosen card placed on top of the lower portion held in the left hand. As you do so, insert the left little finger between the two halves of the deck. Figure 1.
3. Look straight at the man who chose the card, and remark: «You know the name of your card ... I look at the card above it ...» As you say those words, move the left thumb out of the way, make the standard pass, at same time turning the back of the right hand towards the floor and bringing the (original) bottom card of the deck into view. Figure 2. (The left hand does not move.)
4. Replace the upper half of the deck in position and neatly square up the cards.
5. Ask the assistant to name his card. Then, with the fingers and thumb of the right hand, riffle the deck. Finally, show that the selected card has passed to the top.



Ample cover for making the pass is afforded by turning over the upper part of the deck in order to expose the face card. Figure 2. In Horace Goldin's expert hands, the illusion produced was absolutely perfect.

Origin of the Method

Horace Goldin did not claim to have invented the pass that he taught me, and I regret that I neglected to question him on the matter. But, at that time – over twenty years ago – I was much more interested in tricks and sleights than in their origin. Now, a lot of my time is spent in historical research which I find more fascinating. (But less lucrative!).

On page 126 in the «Magic Department» published in the May (1930) issue of *The Sphinx*, Charles A. Leedy described a «Slicker Sleight» which I now recognize as the Horace Goldin Pass. But when the article appeared I could not make head or tail of it, and it seemed to me that the author himself feared that his explanation was incomplete. At any rate, he added (on page 129), the following remark: «If the idea isn't clear, write to Charles A. Leedy».

For many years, the «Magic Department» in *The Sphinx* was edited by «Baffles», and his comment on Leedy's contribution was: «El Barto will make everything clear.»

Does this mean that the «move» in question was devised by El Barto? I would indeed like to know.

End of excerpt.

Farelli relates how Goldin fooled him over and over again, but ultimately when they met again 20 years later (!), Goldin would eventually teach him the method. How times have changed!

What Goldin did, according to Farelli's description, was simply the pass action displaying the face card of the right hand portion, which was then replaced on top thus bringing the selection to the top. So that's the principle, albeit not as refined as the version in *Card College*, which follows the pass action with multiple packet cuts. Farelli, however, further relates that the sleight was not original with Goldin, but had already been described in the May 1930 issue of *The Sphinx* (p. 126) by one Charles A. Leedy and named «Slicker Sleight». But as in so many cases, I wouldn't be surprised to find an even earlier reference sometime.

Excerpt from *The Sphinx* May 1930:

Slicker Sleight: «Some card experts,» patters the conjuror, «have a fashion of asking you to select a card and then place it on top of half the pack, which is held on the palm of the left hand. The other half of the pack is placed on top and the selected card is quickly located and identified.»

«If you have watched me closely you have no doubt suspected that I glanced surreptitiously at the bottom of the uppermost pack, and that I knew the bottom card which was placed on top of the selected one. Then, of course, all I had to do was to fan the cards and locate the chosen card next to the one I put on top as an indicator.»

Performer demonstrates phases of trick as he proceeds. Then, he adds:

«But a real card man does not stoop to such a clumsy expedient. All the real performer does is to riffle one end of the cards – like that – and the selected card immediately leaps to the top right under the very nose of the spectators.»

Here is the plan of operation: Chosen card is placed on top of half which rests on palm of left hand. Right hand takes what appears to be top of pack, after covering bottom half, and shows it to audience as an afterthought. He directs attention to bottom card of top half, which is supposed to act as locator. Top half is then placed back, locating card in deck, which is fanned.

As matter of fact, fanning merely shows locator card casually. Selected card is brought up by means of two-handed pass in first move of trick. Pass is made in act of bringing «top» half up to show bottom or «locator» card. The rest is obvious. Merit of trick lies in misdirection of showing locator card to cover pass, and then placing it on what seems to be chosen card. I have done the trick many times, and it always passes for an example of unusual cleverness and skill. If the idea isn't clear, write Charles A. Leedy.

Baffles says: El Barto will make everything clear.

End of excerpt.

The management and handling you read in *Card College* was taught to me by Juan Tamariz, like so many other things, but I can't tell you if it was he who added the cutting off of small packets right after the pass is executed. Of course it is this detail, along with the delayed timing and the dynamics of the look, that make this 100% deceptive even for experts.

Handling Variation

Here is yet another handling I came up with lately and which you'll find very satisfactory: Have a crimped block of cards on the bottom of the deck. You can set this by doing a Hindu shuffle and *bridging downward the outer end* of the first block you shuffle off with the middle finger and thumb of your left hand. At the end of the shuffle give the deck an All-around Square-up, thus bringing the bridge to the inner end.

Have a card selected and replaced under the bridge – it would be coherent to do this as well by means of a Hindu shuffle. You now have the selection at about the center of the deck and marked off by the bridged portion - this is only visible at the inner end. At this point, you can obviously delay the control to come by setting the deck momentarily aside, fanning it or by ribbon spreading it on the table – all very nice features.

Here is how to do the Display Pass: hold the deck face down in left hand Dealing Position. With the right hand directly cut into the bridge and display the face card of the portion in your right hand: «Your card is somewhere in the deck, but I don't assume it is this one, right? Well, I would have been lucky then.» As you are saying this look at the spectator. This and the little humor in the remark will be sufficient cover for the action that happens at that moment: replace the portion in the right hand, but insert the left little finger as per Classic Pass.

ASK ROBERTO

NOW do the actions of the Display Pass, i.e. execute the Pass, show the face of the right hand portion, go back, drop off a few cards from the bottom, again show the face card of the right hand portion and repeat for one or two more packets. When you eventually restore the deck, the selection will be on top. The patter I would use here is some kind of continuation of the previously made statement, such as, «So your card is obviously lost somewhere in the deck and we can't know where it is - and I don't even know which one it is, you can take my word for it.» The last statement is certainly true...

As you can see, *this handling changes the moment* when the pass is executed. To cut to the bridge you need a very light touch, but it is perfectly OK to look at the cards at that moment, so you can check if you miss and correct by dropping or picking up cards in the next cut and only then do the pass.

I hope to see you sometime again in your lovely country, until then take care.

All the best,

Roberto

Elan Levitan asks:

In Spectator's Hands

Dear Mr, Giobbi, Kudos to you and Mr. Wasshuber for this fantastic e-book innovation! I have many of your books, including the iconic *Card College* volumes and both of the *Card College Light* (and «Lighter») books. These seven books are the most prized in my library.

My question is based on a statement made in Juan Tamariz's *Verbal Magic*: The most powerful magic happens in the hands of the spectator.

I recently purchased «Up the Ante,» which is a fine effect in which the card performer does not touch the deck (once the action starts). What do you think of the «in the hands of the spectator» concept and would you recommend your favourite card effects that utilize this approach? Is there another book solely devoted to this approach aside from *Verbal Magic*?

With much admiration and respect,

Elan Levitan

Roberto Giobbi answers:

Dear Mr. Levitan,

Many thanks for your kind words and the interesting question – it shows you have a great affinity for *pure magic*, certainly a fascinating topic about which not much has been written. There is no single work that comes to mind now and which would deal monographically and *exclusively* with the aspect of effects happening in the spectator's hands, but of course it is an important criterion considered by all performing magicians who care to *create an experience* with their performance and not just to please themselves.

The Special Case of «Magic Done From a Distance»

If you search for «Radio Magic» on *Ask Alexander* or simply Google, you'll find many articles in magazines, tricks in books and an occasional booklet. Tamariz's *Verbal Magic* is of course a special case, because the magic not only takes place in their hands, the performer is also not present or very far away – that's unquestionably a special category of magic.

I think that such tricks «done from a distance» have strong points and weak points. The strengths are that they are novel, unexpected procedures, at least for the layperson, and of course the effect is surprising *at the moment it occurs*, but only few of these pieces will really cause long-term amazement. I mean, if you find the card you have previously selected after let's say doing a Down Under Deal, it will surprise you when you turn up the last card and

ASK ROBERTO

note it is yours. But if you start thinking about it, or even if you repeat the actions several times (provided you can remember them!), all but the gullible will recognize some kind of mathematical procedure. Of course most will still appreciate the ingenuity («Gee, that's clever») and they won't be able to delete the experience the surprise created, but there won't be true astonishment as caused by a truly amazing and impenetrable piece (Brainwave or any good trick).

Now, Tamariz is a special case for the simple reason that he is a celebrity. He has already established the fact that he can do incredible and impossible things on TV and in the theaters, where people have seen him. Also he is very much liked, he has charisma and is a character. When such a well-known person does a «verbal trick» over the radio for you, you've given up disbelief to begin with and therefore the experience, which otherwise would be a mere surprise as explained above, can turn to astonishment, at least momentarily. However, performing such a piece as an unknown – and most of us are unknown to the lay audiences of the world – is a completely different thing, or at least it is a different starting point.

Regardless of these considerations, any practicing conjuror can vouch for the effectiveness of a trick that happens in the spectator's hand and apparently without physical control of the performer, even if it is just one phase of the trick. Let's look at a few different aspects of this.

General Thoughts

As a rule a piece that takes place in the hands of the spectator is bound to cause strong impact at the moment the effect occurs and be more memorable. However, it is *not the sole criterion*. You can conduct an experiment, if you like. Do «[Vernon's Variant](#)» mentioned below (the trick were everybody gets four cards) and then do «Folded Card in Box» (see *Card College 5*), «Card to Wallet» (see *Card College 5*), «Ambitious Card» or «Brainwave» and I'm sure that the impact of the latter are better and will create more astonishment because their magical quality is simply much higher. (What makes the *magical quality of a piece of magic* is an interesting question.) Of course they might still talk about the trick that took place in their hands, but this, too, doesn't necessarily mean that it was the best trick. It's not only the fact of being remembered that makes a trick good, but if it is good, it will be remembered.

Magic taking place in the spectator's hands has a similar danger as using comedy in magic. There are performers who think that just because they get a laugh or two it is a good trick. This might be so, but not always. Sometimes people laugh as a natural reaction to being astonished, but sometimes they do out of embarrassment – and that's not the same thing. Magic happening in their hands is comparable: you will definitely get a reaction at the moment, but if the trick has not a solid psychological construction, that protects the secret with several «firewalls», the spectator's intelligent mind will quickly be able to «hack» into the secret and the initial astonishment is quickly gone. So changing a card in the spectator's hand by using a double lift will result in a strong reaction at the moment, but several spectators will deduce that you simply changed the card somehow and gave her another card to begin with (see the «Card in Hand» mentioned below to get around this). Whereas if you perform «Homing Card Plus» from *Card College 2* - *competently*, I should add - it will be really very hard

to reconstruct due to the complexity of the principles working together and eliminating and complementing each other.

A lateral concept to that of things happening in the spectator's hands is using borrowed properties, rather than your own. I will just mention any «Ring Off Cord» sequence, which is far superior if the spectator's *wedding ring*, the most symbolic of all rings, is used rather than doing exactly the same effect with your own ring. And even here, the simple fact of letting him hold the ends of the cord after whatever move you just did, will considerably enhance the impact of the penetration/vanish. So this is a very nice synergy, isn't it?

Good pieces of magic that take place in the spectator's hand

Let's look at a few magic pieces that use the concept of the actions happening in the spectator's hands, completely or partially.

- The first effect that I think of is *Ashes in the Hand*. It has been revealed in many children's books, but is still one of the strongest tricks if artistically done. Use a black lipstick in your pocket, the core of which is slightly retreated so as not to stain your pocket but still allowing the tip of your middle finger to get what it needs – this makes that you will never have to touch the ashtray, which someone always seems to note and remember (a fact that our vanity makes us ignore). Apply the ash - actually black lipstick paint - delayed during a previous trick such as having the spectator pass his hand over the spread cards and stop at his card or similar. Do a good force of the «loaded» hand and draw the image of his other hand on a piece of paper on which you write her first name. Nowadays that smoking isn't allowed in most places, simply use a lighter or a match to burn the hole in the paper. Emphasize distance at all time. It is still best to do it with a cigarette or a cigar in my opinion.
- A very simple piece is «Vernon's Variant» from Ganson's *Dai Vernon's Ultimate Secrets of Card Magic* (p. 226), where you give four cards to several spectators and ask them to do the same things you do with them, but they keep getting a reversed card while all your cards are face down. I can remember David Williamson performing this with a whole studio audience in Britain's *The Magic Comedy Strip* and it was a hit – obviously also due to an extremely talented performer. Try to come up with a little routine, not too short, not too long, using the well-known procedures intelligently.
- The all time classic in this genre must be the *Sponge Balls*. This might easily be the magic trick with the most outrageous skill-effect ratio. Although any child or tyro can do it, it can be done artistically, but that's another story. One of the many problems with this trick is that it is often combined with other sponge ball effects that are weaker than the sponge in the spectator's hand. It is therefore important to carefully *analyze and understand* what the effects and their impact are in order to construct a good routine. May I recommend my own «Sponge and Bowl Routine» from my DVD *Taped Live! At the British Symposium*, obtainable through L&L Publishing – many a professional has said that this routine alone is worth more than the proverbial price of the tape (I won't

ASK ROBERTO

argue this point :-). For years I used this routine to close my close-up show for laymen, now I use it towards the beginning. (It would be a nice question to ask me for my typical formal close-up act for laymen...)

- Another classic is the indifferent or «wrong» card that changes in the spectator's hand. A simple, efficient and strong version is Annemann's «A Card in Hand» from *Card College Volume 1* (p. 133). Notice the excellent psychology used in the construction of this little trick that makes it, in my opinion, better than just apparently giving the spectator the wrong card, asking him to put his finger on it, name the card and then turn it over to reveal his previous selection. The latter, although it will bring about a reaction, has the *cause and the effect too close together* for my taste. Even with the simplest of tricks it is possible to add depth by thinking about its sub-structures – actually I think it is necessary in order for the performance to be artistic.
- Here is an example that shows how adding the spectator's holding the props can enhance an already very strong trick. Look at «Dai Vernon's Ambitious Card Routine» in *Stars of Magic. Stars of Magic*, which by the way, is one of the most important magic books of the second part of the 20th century – by all means get that book if you don't have it (obtainable at Meir Yedid's). Let's look at the last phase as described on p. 78: the face-up double showing an Ace is turned face down, the top indifferent card taken and the spectator asked to cut off about half the pack. Replace the card in your right hand – apparently the Ace – on top of the lower half and then have him replace his lifted off packet on top. Now hand him the deck, asking him to keep it between his palms. After making a magic gesture have him reveal the Ace back on top. I've used this for more than 20 years in almost all my Ambitious Card routines and it is one of the strongest phases, hence Vernon placed it at the very end of what must be one of the very best routines in card magic – not just of Ambitious Card routines, but of all card magic. In my interpretation of this idea I hand the deck to the spectator as soon as I've turned the double face down and taken the top card, presumably the Ace, in my right hand. I let the spectator cut the deck in his own hands by lifting off about half the deck, replace my card on top of the lower hold and then let him replace the lifted off portion. I ask him to put his forefinger on top of the deck and press down. After a dramatic 5 second wait I ask him to turn over the top card - finis. When I feel that the assisting spectator is eating out of my palm, I will hand him the top indifferent card – presumably the Ace – cut the deck myself, have him replace the card in the center and then hand him the deck. Of course this is risky, as the spectator may turn the card over when he has it in his hand, and it takes years of experience and self-confidence based on competence to do that. But when it works it is sublime. As the Spanish say: «Hay que torear!» («You must lead the bull.») Additional note: Most of the time I precede this with the bent card that comes to the top, as described in *Card College 2*, p. 341-343. Since the card is bent at the end of this phase, I straighten it out by using the dynamics of «The Hofzinsler Top Change» (*Card College 4*, p. 818) and switch the Ace on the third stroke for the indifferent top card. From here I hand the deck to the spectator and proceed as described above. In my opinion it will be hard to find a stronger and

more memorable *impromptu finish* to an Ambitious Card routine than the sequence just described. Check the books for all the subtleties, though...

- If you have my latest DVD set *Card College 1&2 – Personal Instruction* check the performance of «Twisting the Aces» in the «False Counts & Displays» section, and see how the last phase, where the Ace of Spades turns face up, takes place in the spectator's hands. This is not my idea, I think it is an unpublished Vernon handling, but as far as I know it is the first time this is divulged.
- As one last example I would like to list «Cards Across» which can be done close-up as well as on a large stage (obviously using different methods and presentations). Here we have an extremely good effect coupled with the fact that it takes place in the hands of the spectators. Therefore it doesn't come as a surprise that this has been a great classic of card magic for a long time.
- And as a very last thought I will mention that the so-called self-working books have plenty of material were the performer seems not to touch the deck. I particularly recommend, of course, my own *Card College Light*, *Card College Lighter* and *Card College Lightest* books, but also the books by Bob Longe, Karl Fulves etc.. [Note: You might also like to browse the [self-working card tricks](#) category at Lybrary.com]

Last But Not Least

Effects that take place in their hands have the additional benefit of improving communication, especially at the beginning of an intimate performance. Most of these pieces use the spectator's hands and thereby automatically force him to open up physically. So rather than doing «Paper to Money» (I do my handling of Fred Kaps's «EZ Money» inspired by Pat Page) in your own hands, the very simple fact of *first handing out the papers* to several spectators, taking them back and *only then* doing the transformation, in my experience results in a considerably stronger effect.

The same holds true for instance for «Gipsy Thread»: Instead of rolling up the broken pieces yourself and then attaching the little ball to the remaining piece, *hand out the torn pieces to the spectator*, ask her to do the rolling, then take the little ball back and attach it to the piece you hold. In my opinion and professional experience this is much better. Gipsy Thread is an item I discuss in detail in my one-day seminar and it has dozens of concepts that in my opinion make the piece more magical and can be applied to the rest of your magic (that's yet another question).

I hope this has inspired you to do some research and thinking of your own into this most interesting topic – if I had the time, I would write a book about it :-)

All the best,

Roberto