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## On The Moral Economy of Exposure

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The notion of transaction is preeminent to the debate around exposure. What is ultimately at stake when assessing the moral economy of magical pedagogy is the exclusion of financially and socially underprivileged individuals. Exposing a magic trick's method can only be deemed immoral on the grounds of it being anti-capitalist.

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## ON THE MORAL ECONOMY OF EXPOSURE

Conceiving of exposure through the notion of transaction is paramount. For magic to operate as a business means that both its aesthetic and moral interests are inextricably linked to its economic interests, and necessarily benefit from conservative ideology. The question of exposure in magical pedagogy, then, becomes strictly one of business ethics.

Addressing the issue of “the moral economy of learning magic,” we get a historical picture of the normative praxis of magical pedagogy. As artist and magic theorist Alcy Hart (2024) explains the reality that to be under the tutelage of a magician means that the student is at the mercy of said magician’s determinations and prejudices, thus creating (sometimes impossible) obstacles to overcome for anyone who does not fit the bill of a magician. Furthermore, specialized books often lacked details in how to execute sleights effectively, returning us again to the need for outside instruction, on top of the “difficulty of acquiring these texts and the lack of literacy available to those not in the aristocracy to even read them.” (Kohler & Hart, 2024, p. 21) Hart then points out how further instructional innovations have democratized magical pedagogy, such as mass-market books, videos for those who have difficulty processing written instructions, and, of course, online downloads which made it possible to learn from the comfort of one’s own home. Finally, we reach the most recent novelty, that of social media tutorials, which have taken away the need for any payment whatsoever. This remodeling has helped break down barriers which otherwise would have kept those less fortunate from thinking there is a place for them in this artform (Kohler & Hart, 2024, p. 21).

Hart goes on to argue that non-magicians do not care enough to search the internet for how the trick they witnessed was done, and that just as many magicians who complain about seeing magic methods on social media do not see posts about contemporary art, non-magicians do not often see posts about magic—for it is the user who determines their own algorithm. (Kohler & Hart, 2024, p. 22) I would add two additional details: First, contrary to what Rappert & Kuhn claim, specifically that methods are only “a few keystrokes away,” it is oftentimes not that simple. Think of how many tricks make “coins go from one hand to another” or where “a deck is shuffled and then put back in order.” To find the exact trick they’ve witnessed would prove quite difficult and require extensive research, which laypersons simply do not have the time nor care for. Second, if they do put in the time and care to research and learn, then the performance has accomplished what great magic ought to—that is, leave the spectator feeling inspired, curious, and with a growing desire to immerse themselves in the artform.

What is at stake for the conservative (in the sense of conserving “traditional” ways of teaching magic) magician, then, is twofold: (1) the integrity compromised by the revealing of methods to those who do not care (enough or at all), and (2) what the individual revealing the trick receives from said revelation. The latter is in fact a red herring, and we will come back to this momentarily. The former, as proven above, is an uncommon occurrence in the algorithm of individuals who do not care at all about magic. The issue that conservative magicians have, then, is that not enough care is being taken by the student. Though, the term “care” is deceptive. What this actually means is that there is not enough dedication, and thus less deservedness to know. Although, this dedication is not monolithic, and, importantly, is an output constituted by multiple inputs. We can attack this problem arithmetically using a variable Rappert & Kuhn themselves give—labour. We can say:

$$\text{Labour} \times \text{Time} = \text{Dedication} = \text{Deservedness to Know}$$

By the same token, we can also say that:

$$\text{Less Labour} \times \text{Less Time} = \text{Less Dedication} = \text{Less Deservedness to Know}$$

Ergo, it would be generally correct to say that, according to the conservative magician, (a) the student who puts in less labour-time has less deservedness to know the secret, and (b) the teacher who reveals magic methods must put in the adequate labour-time to obtain the deservedness to teach. Even so, this equation is still insufficient since some consider even the exposure of one's own product to be taboo unless it is behind a paywall.

That being the case, we can affirm that moral exposure aligns with capitalist ideology and economic practices, and thus exposure which undermines dominant modes of transactionality acquires anti-capitalist valence. For instance, the individual in case (2) who reveals methods online for "likes, subscribers and...attention" might not be doing so for "cheap thrills," but rather because views and engagement is how they make their living via ad revenue and sponsors. And yet, despite this being essentially no different than one who makes their living garnering views and engagement with their books, paid downloads, etc. this practice is still condemned. The sole difference is that the former does not require the student to fork over their cash. Therefore, we can conclude that:

**The Expenditure of Capital = Dedication = Deservedness to Know**

Consequently, the conservative magician may only deem exposure immoral on the grounds of it being anti-capitalist. This conjecture facilitates the war on exposure, and ought to be done away with—if for no other reason than to end the persistent gatekeeping of those financially and socially less fortunate.

All of this leaves me curious about the political affiliations of those recruited in the survey, as well as if the survey results would have been drastically different had the participants' average age been significantly younger (say, a crowd who grew up in a world with magic on social media). Nevertheless, the answer to the question posed by Rappert & Kuhn, that is, "Does paying to learn the secret make exposure more acceptable," is undoubtedly yes—with the caveat that this question only arises when we begin to inquire about exposure's moral permissibility from within a capitalist framework.

## References

Kohler, Z., & Hart, A. (2024). Magic & Fetishism: The Crisis for Women in Magic (pp. 21–22).