

Foreword

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On Saturday, 10th June 2017, I was a participant in *The Magiculum*, a symposium hosted by Nik Taylor, the co-ordinator of the Performance Magic Research Group at the University of Huddersfield and co-editor of *The Journal of Performance Magic*. The day's event was structured around three themes (Magic and Ideas; Magic Worlds; Magic and Questions of Performance) and eight of the nine presenters were practitioners and/or scholars of performance magic. I was the single exception. I had been invited to participate partly on the basis of a conversation with Nik Taylor where I had spoken about an event in the late 1980s where I had performed as a 'Gypsy' fortune-teller in the back room of a restaurant in Derby. My contribution to the symposium was a paper titled 'The Ethics of Disenchantment' which attempted to address some of the some concerns I still had about that performance and expand from that moment to some initial thoughts around the ethics of enchantment and disenchantment in contemporary performance magic. It was pleasing to find that other contributors shared these concerns even if their knowledge of the theory and practice of performance magic greatly exceeded my own. I don't want to present myself as someone completely naïve, however, and I am not completely ignorant about magic. My interest, however, hasn't been focused on the techniques of performance magic, on tricks, but more on the history and philosophy of magic: on magic as a power or as a set of potentially transformational practices or perhaps healing fictions. John Randall, author of *Parapsychology and the Nature of Life* (1975) was one of my schoolteachers (1968-75) and I participated in ESP experiments in classes with him, but this wasn't magic but science. I did study magic in Shakespeare and Marlowe at University, read the work of *inter alia* Frances Yates, Cornelius Agrippa, Roger Bacon, Marsilio Ficino, Giordano Bruno, Eliphas Lévi, A.E.Waite, Dion Fortune, Émile Durkheim and Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard. I had grappled with Daniel O'Keefe's *Stolen Lightning* (1982) an attempt to articulate a meaningful social theory of magic and enjoyed Michael Tucker's *Dreaming With Open Eyes* (1992) and Rogan Taylor's *The Death and Resurrection Show: From Shaman to Superstar* (1985). Taylor claims that:

The 'magic' of showbusiness is *real* magic. It draws its power from an immensely well stocked religious bank, which contains the deposited riches of perhaps a million years of human genius. To make the leap from shaman to superstar, we must embark on a

strange and enchanting journey, into the hellish underworld of demonic powers and through the delightful realms of the gods of the Upperworld. We must engage in that most ancient, rewarding *and* entertaining of all human endeavours, a journey of the soul. (1985: 13)

To follow Rogan Taylor is to take magic seriously and, whilst there is an acknowledgement that entertainment is important, when he discusses the Indian Rope Trick he considers the fun aspect to be 'wrapping'. Inside the wrapping is some 'heavy magic' that not only instructs the audience and provides a map for journeys in spiritual territories, but also gives a 'visible verification of supernatural ability' (1985: 35).

It would seem to follow from Taylor's position that once magic is stripped of this verified supernatural dimension it becomes disenchanting and we are left with tricks which are 'nothing but' entertainment where we know that we are being tricked by a skilled performer but are simply unable to work out how (assuming that we have the slightest interest in trying to work it out).

It would be an error, of course, to assert that magic is either full of supernatural power or it is a shell of empty tricks and that wonder and enchantment (even dark enchantments) cannot co-exist with the knowledge that our senses are being deceived.

Of the nine papers presented at the symposium only three are included in this issue of *Performance Magic*, those by Todd Landman, Nik Taylor, and Edward James Dean. Each of these, together with an additional paper by Brian Jay Corrigan, questions in one way or another, with magic in an age when the magician is openly playing with questions of truth and fiction, reality and illusion, instruction and diversion, and enchantment and disenchantment.

Some of us have a desire to believe that something supernatural is happening in magic. We might, as Todd Landman reports, be like the audience member at a Derren Brown show who, at the end of the show and despite Brown's explicit disavowal of any psychic powers, choose to believe that they had witnessed a visible verification of his supernatural abilities. Nik Taylor also discusses encounters with individual spectators who, in spite of any evidence to the contrary, want to believe that what they have witnessed is 'really real'. Taylor does acknowledge, however, that in *Bizarre Magick* the disclaimers are often ambiguous and playful. This is part of the fun, we are invited to entertain certain possibilities and by doing so we open ourselves up to the possibility of experiencing wonder and having a 'magical experience'. Edward James Dean draws on some ideas from Richard Schechner's work on

play and the concept of 'dark play' to explore some of the ambiguities in performance magic and makes links to the world of wrestling and the openness of contemporary *kayfabe*. Brian Jay Corrigan also pursues some of the ambiguities claiming that, in *Bizarre Magick*, the spectator never quite knows whether the performer is 'in earnest'.

I'd like to thank the members of the Performance Magic Research Group for their invitation to participate in the symposium and to write this Foreword and also to the other contributors to the symposium Madelon Hoedt, Martyn Smith, Stuart Nolan, and Stuart Burrell, whose work is not included in this issue of the journal but who revealed to me how little I know about contemporary magic.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Franc Chamberlain is Professor of Drama, Theatre, and Performance at the University of Huddersfield UK. He is co-editor of the re-launched *Routledge Performance Practitioners* series and co-editor of the *Journal of Mindfulness and Performance*. He's currently putting the final touches to a revised edition of his book on Michael Chekhov and collaborating on four other book projects.