

Foreword

Most of us consider perception to be a faithful reproduction of the physical world. Most of us consider attention to be consciously focused on our faithful reproduction of that real world. Most of us consider thinking to be algorithmic even as we strive to be creative. *Reality as an Art* teaches how we can use these misconceptions to create seemingly impossible experiences and to help others see beyond their idiosyncratic reality.

Aaron Alexander

For years I have used Aaron's demonstrations to illustrate key concepts in courses in psychology and integrated sciences. I have also seen him go into rooms full of scientists and astute skeptics to create dramatic feats like "pushing" people over at a distance, knocking them out with a touch or a gesture, allowing them to see an ordinary spoon bend itself without ever being touched, or creating strange mirror movements through a surgery ritual. Aaron's diverse interests and experiences allow him to tailor presentations to a wide range of circumstances, and to take the audience beyond the basics of the lesson, sometimes changing the way we think about the phenomena entirely.

Although I am a humble psychology professor and not a performer, I have personally used Aaron's methods in my university classes of up to 500 students to help students recognize that the world is not what they perceived it to be, that attention can be diverted, and that flexibility in cognition is essential to make sense of the world and the people around them. As one example among many, I have used his unique take on a pendulum demonstration to help students understand their own hidden beliefs and biases, such as gender bias in science and personal beliefs in their own success (or lack thereof).

In addition to being compelling in a performance, Aaron's methods have benefit for the greater good. Although his book focuses on entertainment, many of his techniques can be adapted to invoke the Placebo Effect, allowing higher brain areas to control lower functions, "tricking" the body into positive regulation. As one example, in the course of one of his demonstrations for a science lab, he took away my own ability to sense pain in just moments. While it is clinically untested, Aaron's work often points to aspects of wellness and healing that are worth exploring. Regardless of the underlying nature of the effects, if these techniques make the person feel better, is it not

healthier for the affected person to "trick" the brain as opposed to drugging the brain? Imagine the savings to the medical industry should practitioners begin "Using the Force" with their patients to relieve pain, improve attitude, improve mobility, and promote healthy behaviours!

Aaron has been demonstrating concepts in perception for years, and over that time I have also seen Aaron develop his magic as part of his approach to helping troubled youth recognize that the world is more than the sum of their singular perceptions. Thus, this book not only introduces us to magic and how to achieve some spectacular effects, but also opens doors to studying the science behind the magic and how magic can be used to the benefit of society.

Aaron emphasizes that his book is entirely about an art and not a science. Even so, the art that he describes casts a light on many phenomena that is of interest to the scientist—whether as a powerful illustration of scientific concepts, as an exploration of things on the fringes of our understanding, or as a chance to see one's skeptical colleagues swept over by invisible forces. It is worth adding that while methods in this book provide for great fun, one should also be respectful of their extreme effectiveness in influencing and deeply affecting people.

Though he denies it, as demonstrated by this book, Aaron is a magician, *and* a writer, as well as an academic, a philosopher, a mystic and an extremely inspiring and effective communicator.

Aaron Alexander

Pygmalion Effects inspires the magician to delve deeper into his or her magic, the mystic to think more scientifically about his or her mysticism, and the skeptic to see beauty and value in human phenomena that they might otherwise have written off.

Dr. Connie K. Varnhagen

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Connie Varnhagen has taught thousands of students in her career as a professor of psychology and was recently awarded the prestigious 3M teaching fellowship for her dedication and innovation in post-secondary education. She is currently Academic Director of the Undergraduate Research Initiative at the University of Alberta.