

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, Derek DelGaudio produced a video with Future of StoryTelling called *Invisible Dialogues*.¹ It's a beautiful video, that deserves to be watched, rather than described poorly here by me, so I urge you to go and watch it. I mention it because the title of this book comes from a section of that video. Derek says that **"Magic doesn't exist in the hands of the magician; it exists in the minds of the audience.** I think this is a beautiful idea, worthy of deconstruction.

Considering whether magic 'exists' leads us naturally to questions of reality and non-reality. Most magicians tread the line of reality and non-reality when performing. This is because a magic trick is (usually) an apparent violation of natural causal laws. (By natural causal law, I mean one of the laws of nature, i.e. the laws that we assume hold true perennially and without exception.) But this doesn't mean that a magic trick has to be presented as this grand metaphysical violation. So-called 'comedy magic', for example, is a way of presenting magic tricks without flagging up that the magic part is breaking causal laws. However, for a magic trick to be a magic trick, it *does* have to seemingly break causal laws, regardless of whether the presentation draws attention to it. A magic trick *by definition* has to challenge our

everyday understanding of how the world works.

Magicians also approach the question of reality and non-reality in another way. Consider the French drop. (A 'French drop' is a sleight of hand move, that makes a coin seemingly vanish.) The sleight's execution relies upon the magician acting as if they are holding a coin that isn't really there. In other words, the magician is non-verbally making the claim that something physically exists, which *doesn't actually exist*. The magician is 'holding' an unreal coin.

But what about magic itself? The statement that "magic doesn't exist in the hands of the magician; it exists in the minds of the audience" does not concern the reality status of causal laws that seemingly get broken when a magic trick is performed, nor does it concern the reality status of physical objects that seemingly vanish and reappear. The quotation makes a claim about the reality status of *magic itself*.

Moreover, the claim can be broken up into two sub-claims: (a) that magic is a real entity that does exist, and (b) that whatever the nature of that entity, it is located within the minds of audience members, rather than being located in the magician.

This deconstruction throws up a whole host of new questions. Is magic actually a real entity? What would it mean for magic to be genuinely real or unreal? Does that question even make sense to ask? What does it mean for something to be real or unreal, anyway? And — is the sub-claim about magic being located within the minds of audience members justified? What could serve as justification for that sub-claim?



In the following pages we'll unpick the meanings of the words magic and reality. Along the way we'll hear from some wonderful magicians, who I am extremely grateful to be able to call friends, on their views, experiences and opinions.

The first section covers the nature and phenomenology of the magical experience. What is magic? What does it mean to experience magic? Does a magical experience really exist in the minds of the audience? Spoiler alert: we don't reach a conclusive answer that gives us a neat definition of what magic is. But we learn a lot along the way. This section ends with an interview with [REDACTED]

The next section covers the idea of magic as an artform. What is a study of art? Can we apply questions from that area to performances of magic? I.e., can we give magic an aesthetic critique like we can with other types of art? This section ends with an interview with [REDACTED]

Finally, the last section closes by looking at the greatest error in human thought: that there exists an Ultimate Reality. In investigating the nature of reality and man's search for Truth, we explore the metaphysical status of magic, and whether or not magic should be classed as real or unreal. This section ends with an interview with [REDACTED]



Most magic books teach you how to do magic tricks. This book doesn't do that. This is just a book of magic theory. But I think there's value in theory. There's something worthwhile in trying to understand what magic is and what its relation to other artforms is and whether it even counts as an artform. And, moreover, what's worthwhile about it is something more than the intellectual pursuit; it is firmly not just theory for theory's sake. Understanding the theory is useful for performance. When you know what your view about magic is, you share that with your spectators, whether explicitly or implicitly. That view guides how you hold yourself when on stage. It even guides your performance when showing a trick casually to friends. So it's good to know what that view is.

Let's explore...