

Ex Libris by Joaquin Ayala, Ph.D.

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for June of 2017! Is everyone enjoying the beautiful weather we have had the last week or so? It has been wonderful, at least in the Downriver area and the surrounding areas. Summer is not officially here yet but it feels like it is starting to arrive, almost as if by *design*...Hmmm, 'design'...That leads me to think of the book we will focus on for this month, which as promised last month is a sort of continuation. The book is ***Designing Miracles*** by **Darwin Ortiz**, his second book of magical theory.

This is the book that followed his ***Strong Magic*** (which we discussed last month) but it is entirely different in its topical nature. As the title implies, this book focuses on making your magic stronger by using good designing principles and this is, as far as I know, the only book devoted solely to this topic. Other books across the literature discuss this topic in bits and pieces and as such are by far in large, inadequate.

The first chapter of the book discusses criteria that magicians use when selecting an effect for inclusion in a show or a set. He discusses the various points that are both overlooked and ignored and why they should not be. Magicians often select things based on how well they like the method, whether it is clever or how badly it fooled them. The gist of this chapter is that good design means taking all the techniques, sleights, moves, redirection of attention (misdirection as some call it) and putting them together in a way that adds up to an effect which, in and of itself, is greater than the sum of its parts.

Chapter two touches on an old watercooler debate (rather an argument of art): deception vs. illusion; puzzle vs. miracle. Is it art for the sake of art? In this chapter, he talks about the four main (and all necessary) ingredients that go into the making of a finished magical showpiece: Method, Effect, Presentation and Design. Many magic books and certainly the majority of magic products out there are full of ideas about the effect and the methods used to achieve them. They very often neglect to talk about Presentation and almost never talk about Design. After all, you cannot make a fancy wedding cake with just flour and salt. You need something to bind them together and some sort of design to make them look good.

Chapter three, put simply, discusses causality of effect in the eyes of the audience; that is to say, when one sees something completely impossible, they start looking right away into their immediate, everyday knowledge for an explanation, culling from their knowledge pool of how things in their everyday world work. The gist here is that you can make your magic stronger simply by eliminating causal cues – things that point almost directly to the method.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters deal with three interlinked topics related to distance, specifically distance from methodology. They are Temporal Distance, Spatial Distance and Conceptual Distance. These are all extremely important because in using these principles, it allows you to design effects that are impossible to backtrack and your audiences are left with no option but to give in to the impossibility and enjoy the magic. This is not armchair theory or

abstract theory either – Darwin specifically cites various case studies and examples to back the discussion points.

The book goes on to discuss false framing (a technique very much and very well employed by Juan Tamariz, akin to leading your audience down the garden path and then turning the hose on them), the pros and cons of ‘visual magic’ and why it is not necessarily always a good thing and finally, correlations of effects and methods (why they should or should not exist) and my favorite, manipulating memory. In the appendix you will find a list of 27 rules, called “Darwin’s Rules”, some of which are not his but for which references are given (which, as usual, is something Darwin does extremely well in this book too).

This book is aimed primarily at close-up workers, but there is no reason that stand-up, strolling/walkabout, stage and parlour performers cannot apply these principles to their work with a bit of thought. Mentalists in my opinion might have the hardest time using some of these ideas, but it is still worth the read for the thought stimulation. One small downside to the examples used throughout the book: most of them are card effects and if you are not a card magic performer, you might find it difficult to apply these lessons to your own work, but that does not mean it cannot be done.

This book is yet another that deserves a place on the bookshelf of every serious student of magic, especially given its topic. That is all for this month folks – join me again next month as we delve into the pages of another magical tome. Keep the magic alive! - **JMA**