

# The Art of Mentalism

(Part One Revisited)

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<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>THE PRESENTATION OF MENTALISM</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>HANDLING THE AUDIENCE</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>AUDIENCE READING-THE MAJOR EFFECT OF MENTALISM</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>THE FINAL VERSION OF THE THREE ENVELOPE TEST (1984)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>THE TWO ENVELOPE TEST</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>A PICTURE AND A WORD</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>THE ATLAS TEST</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>THE ESQUIRE MAGAZINE TEST</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>THE MEMORY DRIVE</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>RUSSIAN ROULETTE</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>THE ETHICS OF MENTALISM</b>	<b>26</b>

## INTRODUCTION

"Art," according to Webster's New World Dictionary, is the human ability to make things-the creativity of man as distinguished from the world of nature. It is set apart from "craft" in that the latter applies to a lesser skill involving little or no creative thought.

The performance of mentalism is necessarily a creative process. To be successful the performer must tailor each presentation-not only to a particular audience, but to the individual volunteers he uses in his program. No two performances of a mentalist are exactly the same. He must always be ready to capitalize on unexpected luck and to compensate for unforeseeable error.

The creative process is equally at work in the area of methodology.

This book is not intended to be merely a means of adding new effects to the reader's repertoire. I have tried to give an insight into how my own approach to the art has resulted in methods, and combinations of methods, which serve to create the illusion of mentalism.

I hope that it will serve to stimulate your own creative process. Good thoughts to all of you.

## THE PRESENTATION OF MENTALISM

Mentalism is the art of presenting seemingly paranormal effects in an entertaining manner. Its essence lies in the performer's ability to successfully suspend the disbelief of his audience. Fortunately, there is already substantial belief among the public in psychic and other paranormal phenomena. But it is a large mistake to assume that simple public acceptance of the possibility of E.S.P. is sufficient to carry a successful performance of mentalism. Such a view has been the cause of many a bad act. And, believe me, there are plenty of bad mentalism acts around today.

So what is it that makes an act good? There are many factors, of course, but the main thing is that the performance must be entertaining. Anyone who thinks otherwise and has the nerve to perform a standup act in a theatrical setting is a fool-and probably an egotistical fool to boot. If a performer really thinks that the mechanical performance of technically flawless mental effects will cause an audience to sit in awe of his "powers" and bring him success, he is sadly mistaken.

Now, obviously, entertainment value alone does not make a mental act. But it is very difficult to be entertaining if the audience doesn't like you and whatever it is that you're doing. So we arrive at a very simple rule-to succeed you have got to do everything in your power to be likeable. So many mentalists nowadays try to affect a threatening, superman-type image. That sort of thing may intrigue people for a while, but in the long run it puts them off-they may like to go to freak shows on occasion, but they go there to gawk, not to interact. And if a mentalist cannot get people to interact- i.e., to volunteer, to participate- he doesn't have an act.

How many times have you heard the complaint "I just can't seem to get people to volunteer?" Those who have that problem would do well to look at their image. Are they presenting likeable personalities, or do they pose a threat to their audience? Or, worse yet, are they coming on so strong that people just don't want to be seen on the same stage with them?

And that's one of the reasons that mentalism is so difficult to do well. Reading people's minds is inherently threatening. Consider- do people really want to have their minds read? Would you like to have your mind read? For real? Suppose you really could read minds and reveal people's innermost thoughts. Do you think they would like you? Do you think they'd volunteer once they were convinced that you could really do it? Of course not! They'd get away from you as fast as

possible, or they'd kill you. But as a mentalist you can't come right out and say you're just doing tricks. Then the act is just a puzzle. The inherent fascination is gone.

The resolution is really pretty simple—you've got to create the impression that you can only do this stuff sometimes. That it doesn't always work. That it's not minds that you can read, just very clearly defined thoughts—thoughts which a volunteer must focus on to the exclusion of everything else. That's why they must write things down, or make selections within clearly defined parameters. In one stroke you've eliminated the threat and made the secret work of mentalism both possible and plausible.

Some basic rules flow naturally from the above premises—rules that I feel form the core of effective mentalism and are the foundation of the effects which I perform.

1. Never use any materials that were obviously purchased at a magic shop. If you use them people will assume you are a magician and you will have destroyed the basic premise of the art—the suspension of disbelief in a paranormal format.

In no way do I mean to put down the fine art of magic. Most mentalists, myself included, have a deep love for good conjuring. But it's a different art form—it creates a different impression. If you want to do magic tricks, do fancy and impressive magic. "Mental magic tricks" may be fancy, but they're not very impressive. More often than not, they are simply boring.

For the same reason it is generally wise to avoid any mental effects which have become popular with magicians who are in the public eye.

2. You should strive to use an absolute minimum in the way of visible props. It is the performer who should dominate the stage.

Don't misunderstand me on this point. I am not talking about visual aids which focus attention on what the performer is doing (and very often provide the modus operandi for a given effect.) I am referring to table loads of props which too often dominate the performing area. You just can't give the impression that you really need all of that stuff to do mentalism.

3. All effects must be clean, direct, and as brief as possible. Your purpose is to entertain, not to bore. Even intelligent audiences don't want to strain to understand what a performer is doing. While they may like to think that what they are seeing is educational, they didn't come to see you with the idea of really getting educated.

4. Avoid effects which require the audience to do mathematics, counting lines in books, etc. The reason should be obvious. More than likely they will make a mistake. People tend to get nervous when doing even the simplest tasks before a large group. Always make things as easy as possible for your volunteers. Carefully phrase all instructions to avoid any ambiguity.

5. Always understand the effect you are doing or you shouldn't be doing it. I'm not referring to methods or effect from the performer's point of view. Rather I am concerned with the effect as it is perceived by the audience. Failure to understand that can result in audience realization that what they are seeing is merely a trick. For example, ask yourself this question—What is the effect of Annemann's "Pseudo Psychometry?" Too often the performer will simply create the impression that he is able to discover the owners of various personal objects which have been sealed in envelopes. Presented in that

manner, it is all too easy for an audience to accidentally stumble onto the actual method employed-marked envelopes.

The effect is far more impressive if the performer appears to reveal things about the owners of the objects. Not what they look like, but what they are like. Preshow work and some good cold reading is what creates this effect. Real psychometry is the apparent ability to reveal things about people by receiving vibrations from articles which have been in their possession. But even those people who believe that psychometry exists will find it hard to believe that an object's vibrations will reveal the color of its owner's dress. That's why you can't be convincing in this business unless you have some plausible theory to explain what you are doing. Which leads us to the next rule:

6. Don't claim too much. How many times have you seen mental acts presented in a format where the performer explains all of the various forms of paranormal phenomena and then proceeds to demonstrate each one of them? It just doesn't work. You may get them to believe that you are clairvoyant, or that you are telepathic, or that you are precognitive, or that you can move objects with your mind-but not that you can really do all of these things. Your claims must have consistency. There must be an inner logic behind what you are doing.

It is very important, therefore, that you carefully examine the claims you make during an act. What is it that you are doing and how do you do it? Given the abilities you claim to possess, are your effects consistent with the claim?

Now, realize, I am not advocating that you come right out and make any claims at all to paranormal abilities-at least not verbally. But the performance of successful mentalism creates implied claims and those claims must be consistent.

In my own act I create the impression that I can do three things-I can receive thoughts if they are properly projected to me on sort of a mental movie screen, I can send thoughts if you let me project them onto your mental screen, and I can sometimes make you do things by projecting a thought into your mind.

I don't want to claim the ability to predict the future, it's just too hard to sustain. So when I do an effect where I am apparently able to predict a spectator's actions-what name he will select from a phone book or what time he will set on a watch-I give the impression that I have mentally caused him to make the selection I wanted him to make-that I have given him a subconscious mental command. It's entirely consistent with the abilities I have impliedly claimed-that I can send and receive thoughts. No more and no less.

Sure, at other shows I may demonstrate a few other abilities, such as super memory or apparent PK, but I would never exhibit more than a few mental faculties in any given show. It's just too hard for an audience to swallow-they are likely to conclude that there is trickery at work.

7. Use humor effectively. Believe it or not, even a mentalist is allowed to smile and make humorous remarks. As I've already indicated, the humorless superman approach is not very entertaining. It's important, I think, that you don't create the impression of taking yourself too seriously. When an audience can laugh with you (not at you, as is likely if you refuse to accept the fact that you are primarily an entertainer) they start to like you and feel comfortable with you. When that happens you start to become commercial-and when you've done that you're on the verge of being a successful entertainer.

Using humor does not mean that you should try to be a stand-

up comic. Generally, the humor should flow naturally from the effects you are performing.

8. Make sure that you can be seen and heard. This means that you must learn to use a microphone and be sure your lighting is adequate. Like it or not, amplified sound is a reality of the entertainment business today. Regardless of how well you can project, audiences are no longer accustomed to traditional unamplified stage delivery. There are still performers of the old school, of course, who are convinced that microphones are crutches and should be shunned. They have rarely, if ever, performed in nightclub or lounge settings.

Acoustics in modern clubs are generally atrocious. Deranged interior decorators like to put little walls and obstructions everywhere to give a feeling of intimacy. Few clubs which provide live entertainment were designed for that purpose.

It's a matter, then, of using a microphone or being ignored. There are positive aspects, though- proper mike technique gives the performer a much greater range for intonation and inflection, thus creating a feeling of intimacy that is nearly impossible to achieve otherwise. One needs only to see the manner in which mentalist Ken Weber, for example, can use a whisper to maximum effect.

I used to feel, though, that it was wrong for a mentalist to use a hidden wireless microphone. I felt that it created a feeling of electronic wizardry and I really didn't want my audiences to be thinking about such things during my performance. But times have changed. Wireless mikes are becoming so common that they generally go unnoticed. Still, I prefer to use a hand mike on a stand because I want the voices of my onstage assistants to be amplified as well as my own.

Lavaliers are okay too, but performers should avoid hanging the larger microphones around their necks. It makes them look too much like Veg-O-Matic pitchmen or barkers at a jam auction.

I'm quite satisfied with a low impedance uni-directional mike, mounted so that it is easily removed from the stand. A piece of cloth or rubber foam wrapped around the ball serves to eliminate popping "p's" and "b's". For a crash course in proper mike handling, watch the singers and comics who appear on television. Here are some basics which are too often ignored by amateurs:

Don't hang on to the microphone stand for support. Don't fiddle with the cord. Don't blow into a microphone to test it. Do make sure that you have a long cord for greater mobility. This is why you need a low impedance mike.

Do plan to have the mike on the stand when you need both hands for an effect. (If this is impossible, a good technique is to put the mike under your arm.)

Do rehearse your routines with the microphone at hand. It is an integral part of your act and you should be as comfortable with it as you are with your routines.

Proper microphone technique gives your act a professional gloss- use it.

Lighting is equally important. And in most clubs the available lighting is terrible. It's a good idea to have your own lights. For further information regarding lighting and sound, I refer you to the excellent Success Book volumes published by Magic, Inc.

## HANDLING THE AUDIENCE

Mentalism is performed in many different settings-colleges, cruise ships, nightclubs, stage, television, trade shows, etc. Each medium has its own peculiarities and requirements, but I've found that if you can work in the rougher environments, i.e., nightclubs and lounges, you can work just about anywhere. Realize, then, that the following is generally applicable to most performances, If you can master these principles, you'll be comfortable and effective in most performing environments.

Before the show:

Most of the problems a performer is likely to encounter in the nightclub setting can be avoided by taking proper preshow precautions. Wherever possible it is wise to visit the club beforehand to become familiar with the performing conditions and the clientele. These factors will dictate the type of program that will be given. For example, if the lighting in the audience is poor, and you normally do a book test with the volunteers standing by their seats, you are going to have to provide small flashlights so that they can read. In a nightclub show it is not a good idea to bring up the house lights during the performance. It destroys the atmosphere and will create a commotion in the club.

You should walk around the club and find out where the areas of poor visibility are. These are the areas you will have to work to. Otherwise, the patrons sitting there are likely to ignore your act and to talk all the way through it. Since that is a problem that can be avoided, such an interference would be your fault and not theirs.

To avoid distractions from the back of the room, plan to open the act with an effect involving the entire audience, such as a few psychological choices or audience readings. The readings should be directed to those seated in the back or at the bar. This will guarantee that you will have everyone's attention at the outset.

Other potential distractions can be dealt with by proper planning. It is a good idea to become friendly with the employees. Besides being very valuable for obtaining information about regular patrons, they can tell you who the potential troublemakers are. Above all, do not be unfriendly with the help. If they like you and show an interest in what you are doing, they will personally take care of any unforeseen disturbances which may arise during the show.

The most important aspect of preshow planning is casing the audience. By casing, I mean that you must look them over and determine where your most likely subjects are sitting. Later, when you're on stage, the spotlights will effectively prevent you from making out faces very well. It can be unnerving to just point at anyone, only to find out that the guy who comes on stage is the one the bartender told you was the town drunk. This bit of advice will eliminate most of your heckler problems, for total cooperation on the part of your volunteers is essential in maintaining control over the rest of the audience.

Obviously, these are just examples. The peculiar demands of a particular routine will require additional precautions. (For example, the lighting or angles might be such that certain impression devices cannot be used. Don't wait until the middle of the routine to find that out.) Just remember the old axiom-anything that CAN go wrong WILL go

wrong sooner or later. You must make an effort to foresee the unforeseeable. After all, that is what being a mentalist is all about.

During the show:

During the show you must command attention and avoid any lapses. In my earlier book, *Pseudomental/y Yours*, I related the story of a technically competent performer who just stood by silently while volunteers carried out their instructions. This is called "dead time." If you're not talking or if something visual is not going on, the audience is likely to fill in the gap for you by heckling or engaging in conversation. You must keep all minds occupied at all times.

Obviously, your act must be good and the material strong and direct. The opening must command attention and the pace must build to a powerful finale. A bad act or a slow one will always cause a nightclub audience to get out of hand. Don't blame them, because it would be your fault.

Be sure your humor is up to date. Most of the gag material that appears in the magazines and instruction sheets is terrible. The best humor in a nightclub mental act is generally double entendre and situation comedy. One-liners are fine if you've learned proper delivery. Otherwise avoid them.

It is assumed that you will have taken the trouble to master microphone technique and have attained professional stage presence. Amateurish handling and nervousness is quickly transmitted to the audience. If you don't talk and act like a pro, every audience will be a tough one. Generally, you can learn more about this area by watching professional comics and singers than by attending a hundred magic club shows.

Annoying conversation by patrons can best be handled by moving as close to the disturbance as possible. I move around a great deal in my club act, my microphone cord is at least twenty feet long.

Heckling is another story. Despite all of your precautions and professionalism you will get heckled sooner or later. It's nothing to be afraid of, however. The first thing to do is absolutely nothing. Ignore the heckler. If you respond too soon you will be giving him just the recognition that he wants. Also, if the audience hasn't heard the heckler's comment, they are likely to be antagonized by your retort. The situation is best handled by waiting until the audience is annoyed by it. A mild heckler line would then be permissible.

This is all it usually takes. If you've waited long enough before responding you will have the audience on your side and they will probably tell him to shut up or leave if he acts up again.

Beware of the devastating heckler stoppers found in the patter books. If the victim is a valued customer of the club you might get yourself fired. If you've over-reacted to a minor disturbance you may end up on the receiving end of a libel suit or, worse yet, a physical attack. If a heckler is totally out of control or looks dangerous, don't hesitate to signal the manager. It can seriously harm the rapport you must maintain with your audience.

Some performers recommend enlisting hecklers as volunteers. I don't suggest this at all. Part of your preshow preparation was devoted to selecting likely subjects so that you could avoid trouble during the show. Why nullify all of that and ask for trouble?

The main thing is to be confident and firm. I'm sure you all remember teachers you had who were better able to maintain classroom discipline than others. They knew their subjects, were good speakers

and presented a commanding appearance. They led the class and not vice versa. You must do the same with your audiences. You'll have far less heckler trouble than the performer who lacks self assurance and is easily rattled.

I've already discussed the dangers of allowing dead time during your act. Such lapses are very likely to occur if you simply say, 'Who would like to volunteer for my next effect?' In many clubs you'll get no response at all or if someone does come up, it may turn out to be the town drunk we were warned about earlier.

By asking for volunteers in this manner you are relinquishing a certain amount of the control I've been discussing. You are putting yourself in the audiences' hands. Don't do it. You sized up the audience before the show and have a pretty good idea of who the better subjects will be, so just approach one of them and tell him what you want him to do. Don't ask him if he wants to help. He doesn't get an opportunity to refuse and is on the stage before he really knows what's happening. Such an approach leaves the impression of control and, additionally, will prevent volunteers from having time to indulge in creative thinking as to how to trip you up.

Remember-it is your job to surprise the audience; don't ever give them an opportunity to surprise you.

## AUDIENCE READING-THE MAJOR EFFECT OF MENTALISM

There are two types of effects in mentalism-major and minor. Minor effects are simple divinations of selected objects, card effects, book tests, etc. They are primarily one-on-one numbers; that is to say, only one or two members of the audience actually participate in the event.

The major effects of the art are distinguished by the fact that they appear to involve the whole audience. And that is why question answering is so effective. No one knows who will be called upon next to have their mind read. Impressions are apparently received at random from various parts of the room. Facts are revealed that audience members have only thought of-that they have never written down.

I prefer to call this effect "audience reading" rather than "question answering," mainly because a straight-out question act has become rather passe.

Kreskin and Dunninger are good examples of the modern practice. Questions aren't written-facts are, i.e., social security numbers, mother's maiden names, names of pets, birthdays, etc. But when the revelations are given by the performer, the impression is given that the audience members have thought of things like, "What is my social security number?", "What is my dog's name?", etc.

The methods for obtaining the secret thoughts of an audience are legion: clipboards, wax boards, codes, electronics, billet switches, preshow eavesdropping, the one-ahead gag.

It's often been said, though, that the method doesn't matter; what impresses the audience is the way you feed the information back to them. While that's true, you still need a method that the wise guys won't be able to broadcast to their friends.

There is nothing new about the components of my method- they've all been used before. What I've done is to combine techniques which require no gimmickry in the store-bought sense, and minimum effort on



the part of the performer. The methodology is similar to that used by famous mediums of the past and is based on sound psychological principles.

In effect, the performer appears to pass out papers and envelopes to the audience. Throughout the act the envelopes remain in full view of the audience in a clear plastic container.

Occasionally the performer reaches into the container and holds an envelope to his forehead. He reveals the contents, at all times getting acknowledgement of his accuracy from the writer. Sometimes he opens the envelopes for verification, sometimes he doesn't. Many times he doesn't even pick up an envelope, he just calls out names and initials and reveals thoughts. Three or four times he reveals thoughts which have not been written down at all.

Handled properly, it is the strongest routine that can be performed. But it requires, obviously, the utmost in showmanship to keep it from dragging. Those of you who have never done this type of effect are seriously advised to read everything you can about the art of question answering. An excellent chapter is devoted to this topic in Corinda's *Thirteen Steps To Men talism*. The main thing to remember, though, is to get as many vocal affirmations of your accuracy as possible. The technique is to reveal the information bit by bit.

Here is an example:

Suppose you already know someone's social security number. What you don't say is, "Arthur Brown, your social security number is 143-80-1000. Was I right?" Arthur says, "Yeah." BIG DEAL. Everyone will figure that somehow you found out his number. Arthur won't be very impressed, and neither will the audience.

You do it like this:

"I get the initial 'A' from somewhere in the back of the room. I believe the question is coming from a man. Yes, the second initial is a 'B.' 'AB,' where are you?" (Point in Arthur's general direction to be sure he gets the idea that you're talking to him.) "You sir-it's Arthur, is it?" (Get him to say yes.) "Arthur, would you mind standing up so that everyone can see you? Good. Your question involves a number, is that right? A number that has some significance to you?" (Again, get him to say yes. If you can't hear him, the audience can't either, so make him speak up. You want those yesses to keep coming.) "It's your social security number- you want to see if I can guess your social security number, is that it?" (Only a yes answer is called for, but you have created the impression that his written question is "What is my social security number?" In fact, all he did was write his name and social security number on his paper, but you are creating the impression that he asked a question.)

"Concentrate on it, Arthur. See the digits in your mind. That's it. I'm getting a one, a four, now a three. Is that right?" (Yes again.) Continue in the same manner and reveal the number.

Actual questions are handled in a similar manner. Suppose the question is "Will I go to Hawaii with my boyfriend?" Feed back the known facts before giving an answer. If you get a question you can't, or shouldn't, answer you should still get many affirmations as you feed back the question. Only the individual who wrote it will ultimately realize that you never really answered the question at all-and you'd be surprised to discover how often even they don't notice it.

The "Hawaii" question would be handled something like this-"Your question involves someone close to you, but it is not a husband or family member." (Affirmation.) "I believe it is someone you have thought about marrying." (Good possibility since they are taking that

kind of trip together.) "I get the letter 'H,' it is the person's name-  
no, it's a place-a place you and this individual are thinking about  
going to." (Affirmation.) "Concentrate on the place. It is West, there  
is sand and beaches. Hot. An island. You are thinking about going to  
Hawaii, is that correct?" (Affirmation.)

At this point the audience thinks you have answered the question  
"Where are my boyfriend and I planning on going?" And you've apparently  
answered it correctly. In this case you can satisfy the questioner by  
saying, "Yes, you are going to Hawaii within the near future. Send me a  
postcard."

That's the basic technique. Get all of the affirmations you can  
and you will make a little bit of information look like a lot.

By now, though, you are probably wondering how I get the  
information in the first place. It's really simple. Go to the  
supermarket and buy a large plastic food container, the see-through  
kind that comes with a lid. You won't use the lid in the act, but when  
you are packing your show you can put all of your billets, envelopes  
and pencils in the container to save space.

About forty minutes or so before you are to perform, start to  
wander around the audience, handing out pencils, envelopes and paper.  
Just tell the people that you are the mind reader and  
that everyone is writing down questions-questions that are important to  
them, that they don't already know the answer to- and sealing them in  
envelopes. If you are working in a club, get some of the waitresses to  
help out.

Don't tell the people what to do with the envelopes once they  
have sealed their questions. If anyone asks, just vaguely state that  
someone will be around to pick them up.  
Have several people write down specific pieces of information-driver's  
license numbers, words, etc. Remember where these individuals are  
sitting. Be sure to tell all of the people to sign their names on the  
slips before sealing them up.

It's only necessary to pass out papers to about twenty people  
at this time.

Now retire and get the container. Make sure you have extra  
envelopes, paper and pencils in your pockets. Wander around the room  
again, handing out more slips. People who have sealed their questions  
will ask you what they are supposed to do with them. Tell them that  
they will all be collected in the container you are holding and placed  
in the front of the room to remain in full view at all times. Now just  
take the envelopes from them and dump them into the container.

Collect some more, at all times reaching into your pockets to  
give fresh slips and envelopes to those who haven't received them yet.

I'm sure you won't be surprised to know that it is the easiest  
thing in the world to steal plenty of envelopes as you are walking  
around. The main factor is that this whole preshow activity is done in  
a very low-key manner. You aren't telling anyone what will be done with  
the envelopes later, but have given the impression that everyone will  
be participating in some kind of game.

The method is nothing more than the old "back of the house  
switch" popularized by vaudeville mentalists. After this brief  
collection, which should cover only a small, well-scattered portion of  
the audience, put the container in full view in the front of the room.

Your next step is to go to the bathroom and lock yourself in a  
stall. (While you're in there you may take a tip from the late Stanley  
Jaks-put a poster of yourself on the wall, and while you are hidden in  
there people may make remarks about questions they are thinking of,

etc. Overhear as much as you can-in and out of the bath room-it will be valuable later since you will be able to reveal many thoughts which have never been written at all. Of course, the bathroom technique works even better if you get yourself a seat in the ladies room, but it would be undoubtedly wiser to let your assistant, if you have one, handle that variation of the technique.)

Open all of the stolen envelopes and lightly write the information on the flaps. On some envelopes write two or three different bits of information. In that way you will be able to put yourself one and two ahead when answering the questions later.

Put the newly prepared envelopes in your pocket and leave the john. (Make sure you throw all of the opened envelopes away where they won't be found.) Travel around the place one more time collecting envelopes and handing out papers and slips to newcomers. On your way back to the front, add the prepared envelopes to the ones you've just collected and dump them all into the container, making sure the known envelopes are placed to one side where you can easily find them without rummaging around.

Now it's time to socialize again. Visit a few tables and set up special tests that don't involve writing. For example, you might have someone peek at a card in his mind and not to reveal its identity to anyone. Make sure to get the individual's name. Later you will be able to call him by name, state that he is thinking of a playing card, that he has not told the identity of the card to anyone and that he has never written it down.

Personally, I don't like to use playing cards in my act, so instead I use the "Calcutta Deck," which is described in Tarbell, Volume 7. This is a blank deck of cards on which the names of 52 various cities and places have been written.

Borrow a dollar bill from someone else. Have him fold it up and seal it into an envelope. Use a flapless envelope switch and leave him with an envelope containing a bill whose serial number you have memorized. During the show you will point to this person and state that he has not allowed his envelope to be collected, and that must be because it contains something of value. He affirms this and you ask him to remove the contents. "Ah, money!" you state. (As if you didn't know.) "I don't want to come near you or touch the bill. just concentrate on the serial number." And you reveal it.

I'm sure you get the idea now. There are many such minor effects which can be performed during the preshow phase. You handle the selection processes in the audience and save the revelations for use in the major effect-the question answering act.

You are now ready to perform. Have the M.C. or the band announce that the questions that are being written at the tables should be placed in the container which is on the stage. Anyone who has not yet received an envelope and paper is asked to raise his hand-this will be the majority of the audience, since you have confined your preshow work to no more than twenty percent of the crowd. Have envelopes and paper passed out to the rest of the audience and you are ready to go.

When you begin the question answering phase of your act have all of the uncollected envelopes passed to the front of the room where you plainly dump them into the container.

Believe it or not, you are now fully capable of answering any question in that container. The envelopes with several notations will allow you to get one ahead into envelopes whose contents you don't know. For example, you could hold a prepared envelope and reveal the contents-the first notation. The paper can be removed and handed or

tossed out for verification. Remember the second notation and go one-ahead with an unprepared envelope, only this time there is no verification when the slip is opened.

But don't open many envelopes at all. For the most part, just reveal previously stolen or ascertained material. Vary the envelope revelations with the divination of the facts that were never written at all-the overheard facts, the card or city revelation, and the dollar bill.

As I've said, you are capable of handling every question in the container. But if you do, the act will take too long. Limit yourself to no more than ten or twelve revelations.

The key to this methodology is the combination of methods used. Properly handled, the audience will be convinced they are seeing actual telepathy at work, for all methods which have become known among the lay public have apparently been ruled out.

Finally, after the performance, do not throw away the slips that were collected prior to and during the act. You will remember that most of the audience were asked to write questions about things that were important to them. Save those questions and transcribe them into a notebook, noting the type of audience the question came from (i.e., average age, income, singles place, family restaurant, etc.). After several months you will discover that similar audiences write similar questions, giving you the ability to answer many questions which have never been written, and being thought of by people you have really never met before. Your preshow work will be reduced and you will begin to look like a real mindreader.

## THE FINAL VERSION OF THE THREE ENVELOPE TEST (1984)

(Which, as it turns out, was not to be my final version after all, as demonstrated in *The Art of Mentalism 2*. It is, though, a method that I am still very happy with and have put to use in other billet and envelope routines.)

This is a feature routine for the mental act. While few of the component principles are new, the routining has eliminated most of the drawbacks of the underlying one-ahead principle.

**EFFECT:** One spectator thinks of a name and writes it on a piece of paper. A second volunteer writes down the name of a pet. Both fold their papers and are asked to seal them in pay-type envelopes, and then to hold them up to the light to verify that they cannot see through them. A third spectator is handed a slip of paper and asked to draw a picture. He too folds his slip and seals it in an envelope. The performer collects the envelopes and numbers them 1, 2, 3. They are then given to another audience member for safekeeping.

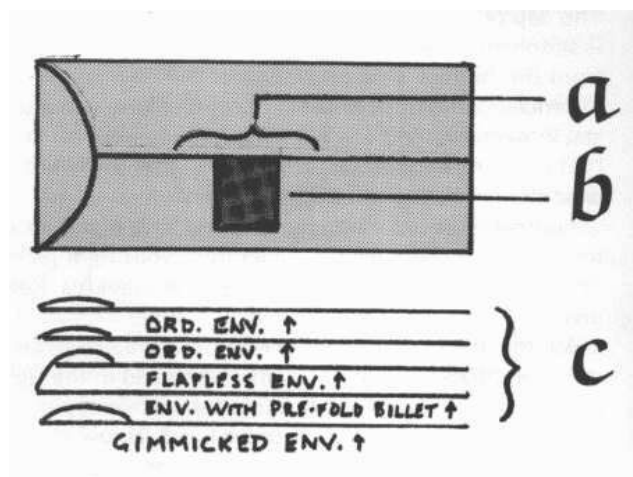
The performer does his concentrating bit, and writes something on a large pad which is placed face down on the lap of a spectator in the front row. He then asks for envelope number '1', tears it open, removes the slip and reads it aloud. The spectator with the pad turns it over showing that the performer's impression was correct. The slip of paper is returned to its owner.

The same procedure is followed with the second spectator, but when the performer gets to the third volunteer the procedure is changed. The mentalist takes the third envelope and crumples it up. He puts it in his pocket, without ever opening it, and hands the third volunteer a large pad and a magic marker. The volunteer is asked to draw the same picture he drew before, but much bigger, so that everyone can see. The performer turns his back to the volunteer while this is done and draws a picture on a large pad of his own. The climax is reached when it is shown that the drawings match.

Note the strong points in the routine—there are no forces, no preshow work with the spectators, no impression devices, no window envelopes, and the slips can be returned to the volunteers after each revelation, thereby eliminating the idea of a one-ahead.

#### PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE

Five pay envelopes are required. The size is not critical. One is prepared as a billet hold-out as follows:



Seam is partially opened using an Exacto knife or razor blade. Don't cut the paper, just separate the seam from the glue. (a)

Fold a billet in standard Annemann fashion, i.e., in half, then in quarters and then once more, and place the slip in the envelope. (b)

Place this envelope, seam side up, on the table in front of you. On top of it place an unprepared envelope containing a blank, prefolded billet. On top of that, but under the flap, place a flapless envelope (in preparation for a flapless envelope switch in the routine). Finally, put two unprepared envelopes on top of the stack. (c) Paper clip the stack together and place it in your right outside jacket pocket.

Put two pre-folded billets in your left inside jacket pocket, and put some pencils in your left outside jacket pocket. Have two large drawing pads and two magic markers handy. You are now ready to perform.

## PERFORMANCE:

Tell the first volunteer to think of the name of a friend or relative and to imagine that name being projected onto a motion picture screen.

With your right hand, reach into your inside left jacket pocket and remove a blank billet. Unfold it and tell the spectator to imagine that the slip of paper is the movie screen and to visualize the name on it. Refold the slip and hand it to him along with a pencil, telling him to print the name and to refold the paper.

While the first volunteer is thus occupied, select another spectator and ask him to think of the name of a pet he once owned or knew. Use the same motion picture screen approach as you remove another blank billet and pencil. Again unfold the billet, telling him it is the imaginary screen. Refold and give it to him with a pencil. THIS IS IMPORTANT- You are conditioning the audience to your opening the slips to illustrate the movie screen concept. Later you will open a slip and secretly read it right in front of them.

The first spectator should now be finished writing and folding. Approach him, removing the stack of envelopes from your right side jacket pocket. Toss the paper clip aside. Hold the stack in your left hand, flap sides up, just as you would hold a deck of cards. With your right hand, slide the bottom envelope halfway out to the right. Put your right thumb on top of the exposed billet, pull it into fingerpalm position-that is, lengthwise between the first and third joints of the middle finger. (Obviously, you must keep the stack tilted toward your body while doing this move.)

Square the stack and transfer it to your right hand, again holding it as you would a pack of cards. The palmed billet is now concealed beneath the stack. This sequence takes only two or three seconds, and takes place while you are speaking about how the spectators should be concentrating on their thoughts.

Now comes a completely invisible billet switch: Take the first spectator's folded billet from him, holding it between the tips of your left first and second fingers. Hold it high, pointing out that it is impossible to see through the paper.

Place the envelopes into the crotch of your left thumb, once again as if they were a pack of cards in dealing position, retaining the palmed billet in the right hand. Grasp the spectator's billet between the middle finger and thumb of the right hand, and drop the hand to waist level. Bring the left hand stack of envelopes to your mouth and open the top envelope by blowing into it. AT THE SAME TIME perform the classic billet switch with the right hand. (Ref: Practical Mental Effects.) The misdirection of blowing into the envelope is so strong that a five-year-old could do the move undetected.

Now place the dummy into the opened envelope on top of the stack and place the stack into your right hand as before, covering the spectator's billet. Hand the envelope containing the dummy to spectator number one and have him seal it. Hand the next envelope to spectator number two and ask him to seal his folded billet inside.

Now ask for a third volunteer-someone with artistic ability. Have the person stand and ask her to visualize a picture of something that she could draw. Tell her to see it on her mental movie screen and tell her you have a slip of paper for her, too. Put the envelopes into your left hand, retaining the hidden billet in your right, and put your hand into your inside jacket pocket, as if to get another slip. Come

right out with the slip that was palmed and unfold it, telling her to imagine that the slip is the movie screen. This is the exact procedure, from the audience's point of view, that you followed with the other volunteers. Except now you are looking at what the first spectator wrote.

Casually refold the slip and put it into the flapless envelope. Remove a pencil from your pocket, perform the flapless envelope switch and hand her the envelope with the blank slip in it. While the third spectator is drawing her picture, you put the remaining envelopes into your right jacket pocket. In your pocket you buckle them, causing spectator number one's billet to fall into your pocket. You then remove the envelopes from your pocket and put them in your inside jacket pocket. This leaves you with nothing in your right jacket pocket except for the stolen billet.

This sequence, done while you are talking about E.S.P., should look like you were just casually looking for an empty pocket to put the leftover envelopes in. You must make this look totally unconscious.

Now's the time for the E.S.P. patter to cover the time she takes to draw her picture. (Refer to "Presentation," which follows.) When she is done, have her seal the envelope and collect all three of them.

State that you will number them, but instead of numbering them 1, 2, 3, you misnumber them 3, 1, 2.

Having collected and misnumbered the envelopes you now take your pad and write number one's thought on it. Place it on someone's lap and ask for envelope number one. Tear the top off of the envelope and remove the billet. Open it and misread it as spectator number one's thought. As you are misreading, your right hand puts the torn-off top of the envelope into the right jacket pocket and palms the slip that is there.

Ask the spectator with the pad to turn it over to reveal what you wrote. AS HE DOES SO, remove your right hand from your pocket, bring it to your left and refold the billet you just read. Switch them in the process and dump the switched-out billet and the remainder of the envelope into your right pocket. This is all covered because the spectators are busy looking at what you wrote on the pad. Now you are able to return spectator's number one's original billet to him.

Follow the same procedure with spectator number two, but this time don't worry about returning the billet. I act like I just got a brainstorm about how to change the procedure with the third spectator. Of course you know what number 3 drew when you opened the contents of envelope number 2 and misread them as the second spectator's thought. Finish as described under "Effect."

The above routine reads long and seems complicated. It is not. Every single move has a reason behind it and all of the secret work is perfectly covered provided you have some ability as an actor. And if you don't, you are in the wrong business.

## THE TWO ENVELOPE TEST

(Also known as THE WHITE DWARF)

**EFFECT:** The spectator writes a number or draws a picture on a visiting card which he then holds face down. The performer removes two envelopes from his pocket and has them examined while the spectator is writing. The spectator places his card face down in the smaller of the two envelopes, which, in turn, is sealed in the larger envelope. The large envelope is initialed and held by a volunteer.

The performer now reveals the thought in his most mystifying manner.

**METHOD:** The large envelope is a number 5J Sphinx Clasp. This type of envelope is absolutely opaque. The smaller envelope is a cheaper number 4 size pay envelope. This type of envelope is so cheaply made that it is very easy to see through.

The card used must be blank on both sides. Prior to the effect, the card is placed in the smaller envelope which, in turn, is placed in the larger envelope.

**PERFORMANCE:** The nested envelopes are removed from the performer's pocket and handed to a volunteer. The volunteer is asked if he can tell what is inside the envelope merely by looking at it. He will, of course, say "no." The performer takes back the envelope, opens the larger one and removes the smaller envelope. From that he withdraws the card and hands it to the spectator along with a black felt-tip pen. The spectator is asked to draw a simple picture.

While he is so occupied, the performer allows other spectators to examine the two envelopes. Since there is nothing in them, their opacity, or lack of it, cannot be discovered.

Retrieving the envelopes, the performer places them face-to-face with the smaller envelope uppermost. The spectator slides his card into the smaller envelope, which remains in the performer hands.

While still holding the envelopes face to face, the performer seals the smaller envelope. He may now have the spectator put his initials on the flap. The performer now turns both envelopes over, removes the bottom one and places it into the larger envelope. In so doing, he will immediately be able to see the spectator's writing through the thin paper of the cheaper envelope. He seals the larger envelope- which now can be safely held by the volunteer.

The revelation is now made either by duplicating the thought verbally or on a large pad.

(Bascom Jones named this "The White Dwarf." I always meant to ask him why. Now it is too late for he is no longer among us. Perhaps John Edward can ask him.)



## A PICTURE AND A WORD

For stage use, I often perform the test with two sets of envelopes. It acts as a speeded up version of the *Three Envelope Test*, described earlier. In this case, I have one of the volunteers draw a picture, and the other one writes a word. No one-ahead is necessary if both sets have a transparent inner envelope.

If you like to get fancy, use two opaque envelopes to make one of the sets. That way, you can let one of the spectators handle the sealing process all by himself as you show him what to do. You use the transparent set to illustrate, thereby secretly obtaining one of the spectator's thoughts. You now misnumber the envelopes and work one-ahead to obtain the other spectator's information.

## THE ATLAS TEST

My purpose in devising this test was to overcome a defect which exists in most book tests-only one person ever gets to see the vast number of words which appear in the book. That's not a major problem, and it's never stopped me from doing book tests. But I thought it would be nice to have the visual advantages of a magazine test incorporated into the book test format.

I didn't stay up nights looking for a solution. It came quite by accident as I sat in Jim Mongey's Dublin Pub in Morristown, New Jersey. I looked at the large map of Ireland on the wall. It was labeled "Do You Have a Great Irish Name?" and was covered with all of the native names of the old country. My first thought was to take a large map like that and cover it with only four or five names, each repeated many times in different type faces. But it seemed too gimmicky.

Then I remembered the book test problem. A book with lots of maps could be used. An atlas. If the performer were to flip through even a pocket-size atlas, the entire audience would be able to see all of the different colored maps.

**EFFECT:** The performer shows a pocket-size atlas to the audience, pointing out that it contains thousands of cities. He riffles the pages and a volunteer tells him when to stop. The volunteer now places his finger anywhere on the page he has selected and calls out the name of the city closest to his finger.

The performer states that he had a dream the night before of a certain city in the world, and that he wrote the name of that city on a large piece of paper which was sealed in an envelope. He then removes the envelope from his pocket and hands it to the volunteer. It is opened and it is seen that the performer has successfully predicted the city selected by the spectator.

**METHOD:** One page in the atlas is specifically prepared. It is cut short on the long edge in order to facilitate a riffle force.

In the atlas I use, the force page is Western Australia. The reason for this is that there are very few major cities in Western Australia, the bulk of the map being wilderness.

Using press-apply type in varying sizes, the names of four different cities are placed randomly all over the map. The use of varying type sizes disguises the fact that each of the cities is repeated several times.

No matter where the volunteer places his finger, it will land near one of the force cities.

Four predictions are prepared and are body indexed. It is a simple matter to remove the proper envelope after the selection is made.

Note that the effect can also be presented as a telepathy test. Just have the spectator think of the city closest to his finger and keep your head turned away as he makes his selection. Now it is only necessary to pump for the correct city. Guess at the first letter. If you are wrong, guess at the number of letters in the city's name. Each time you have eliminated one of the force cities. Just make sure you select force cities which have different first and last letters and are spelled with different numbers of letters.

The best atlas to use is a cheap one with tiny print. It helps the force cities to stand out. Also, it is important to select a country that your volunteer is not likely to be geographically familiar with. (You wouldn't want to use a map of Britain and have the spectator select London as a city in the northern part of Scotland. Nor would you use Australia if you're working in Melbourne.)

The short page force works better if you cut that page and several pages next to it. It gives you a larger "break" to riffle to. Finally, since you can riffle a book from either end, it should be obvious to you that two separate maps can be prepared in the same atlas. If you do back-to-back shows in the same club, you can then have a different country picked at each show.

Using the prediction format, I originally spotted this effect as a closer, and it serves adequately in that spot. But it is even more effective as an opener. It is not necessary to have the spectator come to the front of the room. It is just as easy to select someone in the front row, or ringside, and to let him remain seated as you stand next to him. For the final revelation, you return to center stage, produce the envelope, and open it yourself. The prediction is written on a large piece of paper with black magic marker. Everyone can see it as you hold it up and receive your applause.

## THE ESQUIRE MAGAZINE TEST

Years ago, I saw a psychic on television demonstrating alleged astral projection. He had the host of the program open a freely selected magazine and place it face down on a table in its open condition. Then, "astrally projecting" himself beneath the magazine, he described the contents of the selected page.

The impressive thing about the demonstration was its apparent fairness. The psychic never touched the magazine after it was handed to the host. Naturally, I played with the effect and tried to come up with a methodology that would closely duplicate what I had seen. My methods just weren't practical enough to make the effect worthy of regular use. Then Richard Bloch came on the scene with his *Falstaff Book Test*, and purely by chance I noticed something very interesting about the make-up

of "Esquire" magazine. The pieces of the puzzle fell into place and the present effect was the result.

EFFECT: A magazine is selected by an audience member. The performer, or the spectator for that matter, flips through the magazine to show the audience the great variety of material contained therein. The spectator now takes his own business card and slips it anywhere into the selected magazine, leaving about half of the card projecting from the long side of the publication.

During this procedure the performer stands at a distance with his back turned to the volunteer.

Announcing a test in clairvoyance, the performer begins to speak of impressions he is receiving. It goes something like this- "I get the feeling of something hard, yet flowing. There is a window? No. It's a glass. There is writing on a label. There's liquid, dark. A bottle! I'm getting the impression of a bottle of some kind, possibly whisky. Does anyone else get any impressions?" Some audience input can be interesting at this point, and can also inject some humor into the presentation.

The spectator opens the magazine at the selected page and holds it up for the audience to see. There is a full-page liquor advertisement with a bottle prominently displayed.

METHOD: Before going further, I should point out that the revelation needn't be of a liquor ad. It could just as easily be cigarettes or an automobile. Because, and this is the interesting thing I noticed about "Esquire," the magazine is loaded with just those types of ads.

The average issue of the magazine contains from nine to twelve full-page liquor ads, and just as many cigarette and automobile promotions. Further, the magazine is not saddle stitched like "Time" or "Newsweek." Instead, the pages are glued together. Once the cover of an "Esquire" is removed, it is very easy to separate all of the pages.

Those are the two elements of the secret. To prepare the magazine for use you must first get hold of about eight different issues of "Esquire." Remove the covers and separate the pages. Take out all of the full-page liquor ads. Select ads which have a bottle prominently displayed. With a paper cutter, cut off about one-eighth of an inch on the long side which will be nearest the binding when the magazine is put back together. Now stack the pages by alternating regular pages with the narrow ones. Square the edges on the binding side and staple them all together. Now reglue the cover into place.

What you have made is a Svengali-type magazine, with liquor ads as the force pages. If you have also set aside cigarette and car ads, you can prepare additional magazines to allow the spectator a choice.

Note-All of the liquor ads are different in appearance. Don't use the same ad for each force page, just be sure each page has a bottle prominently displayed. Your "clairvoyant" impressions will be applicable to any of the force pages.

You can now see why it is possible to freely flip through the magazine. Since all of the force pages actually look different, no discrepancies will be noted. Of course, if you flip through the book in the proper direction, the force pages will not be visible at all. The working should now be obvious. If the magazine is placed on a table and the spectator is asked to open it by the long side and insert a card, he will place it at a force page. If he is asked to hold the magazine in front of him and open it by the front cover, holding the opened magazine to his chest, he will also open at a force page. In

this latter handling, he may look at his selection and the test would be presented as one of telepathy.

It only takes about 25 minutes to make this up. As you do so, the methodology will become crystal clear. But do make it up. It will be come a reputation maker for you.

## THE MEMORY DRIVE

The blindfold drive has been a popular publicity effect among mentalists since the days of Washington Irving Bishop. In the old days, of course, it was done with a horse and buggy, and would have been far more impressive if the horse were blindfolded rather than the driver. Since the effect is generally presented as "eyeless sight," it is only natural that performers and writers have spent a good deal of time creating new and more elaborate blindfolding methods.

That, I think, is a fundamental flaw in the effect. Audience attention, rather than being misdirected from the method (the blindfolding technique) is intentionally directed toward it. Constant emphasis on how fair and impregnable the blindfold is, only serves to convince the skeptics that, somehow, the performer is nonetheless able to see.

Again, the solution lies in reinterpreting the effect. I perform it as a memory test. No claim is made that I can see without my eyes, hence the "heat" is taken off the blindfold.

EFFECT, METHOD AND PRESENTATION: The drive should usually be performed in a mall parking lot or at a racetrack. Police, nowadays, don't take too kindly to people driving around blindfolded on congested thoroughfares. Furthermore, most careless driving statutes are confined to regulating operation on "highways."

Excellent publicity can be generated by tying up the event with a worthwhile charity—for example, a "Drive for Life" to help raise funds for medical research. The money is raised by selling boosters to be printed in a program or in the local paper. Ads can also be mounted on the car.

The car should preferably be a convertible. The audience will then have a clear view of the blindfolded driver.

In performance, I first go onto the lot and mark out the course I will drive by placing traffic pylons. The positioning of the pylons is generally directed by a committee of observers. The only restriction I put on the placement is in regard to the distance between turns. Since the drive is performed at a high rate of speed (usually 45 to 55 mph on the straightaways), I don't want too many sudden turns. I suggest to the committee that a "figure eight" type course is most suitable.

The start/finish line is marked on the ground with water-soluble paint.

After setting the course, a timekeeper is appointed and the car driven to the starting line.

I explain that I will drive the course once, without the blindfold, and with the timekeeper as my passenger. The timekeeper is instructed to count aloud the number of seconds required for me to complete the course. Ostensibly, I will be memorizing the course, gear changes, the pressure I place on the gas pedal, and the number of

degrees required for each turn of the steering wheel- apparently coordinating all of this data with the time elapsed according to the timekeeper during the preliminary lap.

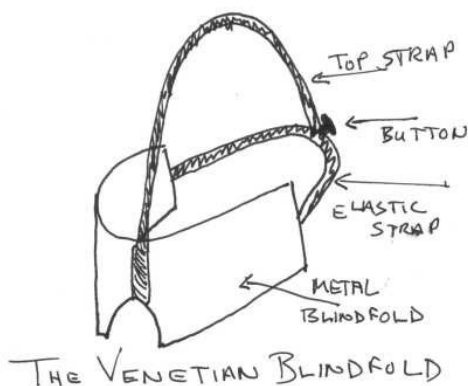
A great show is made of this. During the test run I speak aloud to myself while the timekeeper is counting, "Pedal halfway down, four seconds, ninety degrees left, two seconds, downshift, ninety degrees right, etc."

After the test run, the car is stopped on the starting line and the timekeeper announces the elapsed time.

Volunteers are now requested to take the places of the pylons. (It will now be a human obstacle course!)

The blindfold is now exhibited, and is placed on a volunteer to demonstrate its opacity.

I use a Supreme "Cast Iron Blindfold" [NOTE: Nowadays I use the Osterlind *Stainless Steel Mask*] modified as follows:



An additional strap is affixed to the blindfold, designed to go over the top of the head. It is attached to the elastic strap at the rear of the headband, where a large button is affixed.

After this blindfold is in place, a large "Revello" bag is placed over the head. The "Revello" allows straight-ahead vision to the performer, yet can safely be placed on a volunteer who will see nothing. For details on the bag and subtle modifications, refer to Cordinda's Thirteen Steps to Mentalism.

Because of the additional strap on the metal blindfold, you will find that, once the bag is in place, you can grab the button at the back of your head through the cloth. By pulling down on it, the metal mask will be pulled to your forehead giving you straight-ahead vision through the bag.

The advantage of this method is that the hands never touch the front of the face, thus obviating suspicion that you are somehow manipulating the metal mask.

I call it the "Venetian Blindfold."

The blindfold is now placed on the performer and he is assisted into the car. The timekeeper once again is his passenger. This time he is asked to call the time at each 10-second interval. This enables the performer to finish the drive in the same amount of time as the test run.

Naturally, all volunteers acting as pylons must be instructed not to move during the drive. In fact, it is better if they are seated. If you have any doubts, however, about your ability to do the drive safely, stick with the traffic pylons. Or use new automobiles as obstacles—a very commercial variant by my friend Lowell Fuhrman (aka Manilow)

Presented as a memory stunt, the blindfold drive takes on new life and provides excellent publicity for the mentalist.

## RUSSIAN ROULETTE

This one effect has probably received more attention than anything else I've ever released to my fellow mentalists. It originally was described in a set of lecture notes I wrote in 1976. Later, it was published in Tony Raven's "Invocation" magazine. It appears here with modifications that I have devised over the years, together with some reflections on the psychology of the routine.

Ironically, the effect is not a favorite of mine. I don't think that it is good mentalism, but audiences seem to disagree. For sheer impact, it is stronger than anything I have ever done.

So what's wrong with it? Simply this—there has to be something wrong with providing the vicarious thrill of watching a possible suicide. The audience state of mind is different from when they watch a magician, for example, perform a torture-type illusion. In that case, the audience knows that it is only make-believe; that the girl doesn't actually get cut into pieces. But if a mentalist has successfully suspended disbelief, an audience will perceive Russian Roulette as being real.

Further, the game is often played in a tragically legitimate way. Every year or so you'll read in the paper about someone who was killed playing it. Even as I write these words, the television news is carrying a story about a sixteen-year-old who was killed as he played roulette with his father's .38 caliber revolver.

But despite the distasteful associations the effect can create, it is the ultimate demonstration of a mentalist's faith in his own ability. It's frightening, controversial and far more relevant, from a psychological and sociological point of view, than most things that a performer can do. It hits people at a gut level.

Obviously, it is not something that you would want to do in a family program—imagine how you'd feel if some kid went home and imitated it.

What the effect lacks is a logical reason for being. Even if a mentalist, or psychic, were capable of using his abilities to preserve his life, why would he demonstrate that ability unless he had a very good reason for doing so?

And that is the basic flaw in the routine. I don't think there is a good way of overcoming it. So why do I continue to present the effect? Because people, underneath it all, really like to see someone face death and win. It's a way of denying our own mortality. And besides, I love to scare the hell out of them.

So, before you present the effect, decide what your motivations are. Think about the effect you are conveying and how you will present it. The basic routine is as follows:

EFFECT: Four pistols are displayed on a large board which is mounted on an easel. The pistols hang from nails which pass through the trigger guards. Over each pistol hangs a removable number card. The cards are numbered from one to four. The performer explains that three of the pistols are loaded and that one of them is empty.

A spectator, preferably one who has had some experience with firearms, is called forward. He is blindfolded and the performer holds a lit cigarette lighter in front of his eyes. The volunteer is asked if he can see the flame. He states that he cannot. (The wording here is important. Even if the blindfold was legitimate, which it is not, there is a possibility that the spectator will have some down-the-nose vision. If the performer merely asks him if he can see, he may be totally honest and say "yes." But by holding the lighter directly in front of his face, there is no way that the flame can be seen by any down-the-nose or peripheral vision.)

The blindfold is removed from the spectator's face. He is told to take the number cards from the guns and to mix them thoroughly.

The performer advises the audience that, for their safety, the guns are loaded with high-power blank ammunition. This would make no difference, however, if a gun were to be fired at point-blank range into a person's face or ear. The concussion and flame would cause serious injury.

The mentalist now dons the blindfold and turns his back to the display stand. The volunteer is told to place the numbers on the guns in any sequence he desires, and the audience is requested to concentrate on that sequence.

"Are you ready?" says the mentalist. "I get the feeling that gun number three is a loaded one. Remove the number card- number three-and take the gun which it covers. Remove it from the stand and hold it. Just drop the number card onto the floor. Are you right-handed or left-handed, sir? Fine, hold it in your right hand (or left, as the case may be). Aim it in a safe direction- at the wall or at the ceiling. Do not aim it any person, for, as I've said, I believe that this is a loaded gun. On the count of three I want you to squeeze off three shots.

"One... two... three... Fire!"

The spectator fires and three loud reports are heard, each accompanied by a mean-looking flash of fire at the muzzle of the weapon.

The mentalist requests that the audience concentrate on the sequence of the remaining numbers and the onstage volunteer is told to place the gun he has just fired on the floor or on a convenient table.

"Number one is also a loaded weapon." Giving the same instructions as before, the mentalist directs that the gun be fired on the count of three. Once again the performer is correct.

"Two guns remain. . . . One is empty and one is loaded. I will now show you my version of Russian Roulette. Sir, take gun number four. Hold it in your hand and come stand next to me. Put the muzzle of the gun against the back of my left hand." Performer holds up his left hand. When the pistol touches his hand, he grabs the spectator's wrist and guides the muzzle of the gun to his left ear. "And hold it here." (There is a reason for this handling, also. If the spectator is asked to place the gun in the performer's ear, he may hesitate or refuse.)

"Do exactly as I say. I believe you are holding the empty gun to my head. On the count of three you will squeeze off three shots. One... two... (performer now switches off his microphone and holds same against his body) three!" The volunteer pulls the trigger and, much to everyone's relief, only three clicks are heard.

The volunteer is dismissed and the performer takes the remaining gun from the stand. "Imagine what would have happened if I had selected this one." The performer fires the gun and three loud shots are heard.

METHOD: This effect is almost as dangerous as it sounds. The danger, however, does not lie in the method. Instead, it potentially exists with the volunteer. He must obey your instructions to the letter.

The only gimmick is the blindfold. Everything else is as described above. Any blindfold that will allow you straight ahead vision is suitable. Nelson, Jimmy Herpick and Tenkai all have marketed ideal blindfolds for this effect. When placed on a spectator, he cannot see anything. The performer, however, will have perfect vision.

I will not describe the workings of such blindfolds here. If you are not fully conversant with a good method, you are not ready to even attempt this feat.

The performer, of course, knows which of the guns is the empty one. The spectator never moves the guns, only the numbers. You will recall that the mentalist's back is turned to the easel. This is why the blindfold is never suspected-even without it, you couldn't see the easel.

After the volunteer has placed the numbers on the guns, the performer tells him to stand to the side of the easel so that everyone can see the numbers and concentrate on them. "You're not standing in front of it, are you?" asks the mentalist. At this point, he turns his head and looks directly at the easel, noting which number has been placed on the empty gun. This is a completely natural thing to do when talking to someone and must not be done furtively. After noting the number he turns his head back again.

The rest of the effect is as described above.

I cannot overemphasize the caution you must exercise. You must have a completely obedient volunteer and your delivery must be such that he would never dream of taking the wrong gun. A blank shell, as long as it has no wadding, will not kill you. But believe me, it can knock you to your knees. Or blow out an eardrum. THIS HAS HAPPENED TO TWO QUALIFIED MENTALISTS WHO LEARNED THE EFFECT FROM ME! (They allowed themselves to be distracted while setting up the effect and inadvertently put the loaded gun in the wrong place.)

The blindfold turn is the modus operandi of Annemann's "Mystery of the Blackboard" and was the inspiration for this original version of Russian Roulette. Review the details in *Practical Mental Effects*.

Now for the variations: I originally considered the turn of the performer's head to be the weakest part of the routine. So I tried to eliminate it. This can be accomplished by having a confederate in the audience convey the number which has been placed on the empty gun. If the houselights are up, this can be done by a simple hand signal. With the lights down, hand signals, though, are useless. Audible signals, such as a well-timed cough or sniff could be used, but these would be unreliable in a crowded room where other people could possibly cough or sniff at the wrong time.

My initial solution was to have a confederate in the audience armed with a flash camera. After the numbers were placed I would say,



"Now concentrate on the sequence of the numbers. Look at the 'one' and think of its position. Look at the 'two' and its position; now the 'three;' now the 'four.'" "

At the moment that I referred to the number which had been placed on the empty gun, the confederate would take my picture and I would see the flash through my blindfold.

The method appealed to me because I knew the flash would be easy to see. Further, the signal was so bold and so obvious that I knew it would go undetected. It seemed to be an ideal solution.

It wasn't. How was I to know that at least eight different people would take flash pictures of me during the critical phase of the routine? And at least two of them were seated in the same area as my confederate. But, did that stop me? No. I took a guess at which flash was the right one and called gun number three as being a loaded one. The spectator aimed in a safe direction and proceeded to fire the empty gun.

I suppose I was lucky. If I had guessed correctly twice I would have really been playing Russian Roulette on the final selection.

Yes, I got out of trouble. I took off the blindfold and told the audience they weren't concentrating enough. I mixed up the guns on the easel and started over again. This time I used the original method. While the mistake greatly heightened the routine, I don't ever again want to experience the sick feeling that went through me when I realized I had made such a stupid mistake.

There is another, more important lesson to be learned here. Very often, you will read effects by modern writers on mentalism that depend on sound reading and remote cueing. They all look great in print, but under actual performing conditions they have a way of failing miserably. Avoid them unless you have a sure-fire back-up method.

(There is one book in particular, often referred to as a modern classic of mentalism by arm chair enthusiasts, that is filled with such effects. I never met a full time pro who thought the book was any good, and yet it continues to be sought after by the uninitiated. I guess they will learn the hard way if they ever perform in public.)

My second solution was more practical and has caused some debate as to whether or not it is preferable to the original method. I use it as a variant at repeat shows. I first introduced it at *The Magic Castle* to throw off the magicians in the audience and those who had read the effect when it first appeared in *Invocation*.

The turn-around move is still employed, but this time on the off-beat. Instead of telling the spectator to mix up the numbers, you tell him to switch the positions of any two. For example, he can switch number two for number one, or number three for four, etc. He does so. You now tell him to switch the positions of the other two numbers-the ones he has not touched.

You know for sure that the number which originally covered the empty gun is presently covering a live one. This enables you to make your first selection without turning around. After the spectator has fired the gun you make the turn move and say, "Now place the gun on the floor." You now know the number which covers the empty weapon.

Undoubtedly, the misdirection of the turn is stronger in this variation. But at the same time you probably increase the possibility of spectator error. If a mistake is made, your first selection will be the empty gun. You'll have to bail out the same way I did in the flashcube fiasco.

So do it the way you prefer. In either case the method is so bold that it will go undetected. Dai Vernon put it this way in a limerick he wrote after seeing me perform the routine:

*A famous mentalist named Cassidy  
most decidedly has the capacity.  
He lacks any fear  
when they fire a gun in his ear.  
It certainly takes great audacity.*

That it does.

## THE ETHICS OF MENTALISM

Earlier, in "The Presentation of Mentalism," I briefly alluded to the subject of ethics. There are many individuals, particularly magicians, who believe that mentalism is wrong because it fosters a false world view. But, if you think about it, so does the magician who claims that "the hand is quicker than the eye." It is not, and to create the idea that it is also engenders a false view of reality.

Even so, the critics are essentially correct in their awareness that the techniques of the mentalist can be used to achieve dubious ends. With that in mind, I think that it is very important to realize that mentalism has only one primary purpose- to entertain. It cannot be used to the financial or personal detriment of the public. While the critics will argue that any false presentation of reality has the capacity of creating personal detriment in the observer, that is only so if the performer induces reliance on his representations. You will recall, though, that the theory of mentalism requires the suspension of disbelief-the creation of the idea that what the audience is seeing might be real. To say that this creates a false world view is to state conclusively that paranormal avenues of communication simply do not exist or, at least, that the performer is creating a false impression about his own abilities.

As to the actual existence of psychic phenomena, some would argue that there is no hard-core scientific data in its support. On the other hand, it can be argued that the non-existence, to date, of a repeatable experiment supporting the hypothesis simply indicates that E.S.P. studies are beyond the scope of the traditional methods of the "hard" sciences.

Simply put, until there is positive evidence that the paranormal phenomena imitated by mentalists do not exist, the claim that the psychic entertainer creates a false world view is unsupportable.

As to the criticism that a mentalist at least creates a false impression regarding his own abilities-so does every magician who ever presented a pseudo gambling expose designed to create the impression that he possesses far greater technical skills than he actually has; so does every individual who dresses or presents himself in such a way to create the idea that he is something he is not.

Everyone, from car dealers to members of the clergy, is, to some extent, in the business of illusion. The ethical question really goes to the individual's underlying motivation.

The ethical mentalist has only one primary motive-to skillfully entertain his audiences by bringing them into a world where they can temporarily forget the pressures of day-to-day reality without creating a false reliance on his own alleged abilities. His secondary motive is to be remunerated for his efforts and, if he has successfully entertained, he is well entitled to his compensation.

I sincerely hope that you have enjoyed *The Art of Mentalism*. All of the material has been used professionally by me, and I hope that it shall be of value to you.