

The concept of "true believer syndrome," coined by the psychic-turned-skeptic Lamar Keene, underscores the compelling grip of entrenched beliefs, even when contradicted by clear evidence. This psychological phenomenon is vividly illustrated by Harry Houdini, the famous escape artist and magician, who explored this syndrome through his own direct experiences. In his book, "A Magician Among the Spirits," Houdini recounts how he conducted séances himself, explicitly revealing and explaining the tricks used during these sessions after the performances. Despite his transparent demonstrations that these séances were hoaxes, many participants continued to believe they were witnessing genuine supernatural phenomena.

Harry Price, who transitioned from magician to paranormal investigator, further complicates the interplay between reality and illusion. His "Rosalie" séance is a prime example of how he manipulated public perception, using tactics similar to those in theatrical performance, yet with a crucial difference. Unlike theatre practitioners such as Peter Brook and Antonin Artaud, who invite audiences into a shared understanding that what unfolds is a creation, Price maintained the deception that his "performances" were genuine. This difference highlights a significant ethical consideration: the impact of the lie.

Peter Brook once noted, "All that is necessary is for the audience to be in a state where they are ready for the experience." Brook's approach emphasises the psychological readiness of the audience to embrace the theatrical illusion, acknowledging their awareness of its nature. Conversely, Antonin Artaud argued for a total immersion of the senses, stating, "Theater is a practice which 'wakes us up. Nerves and heart.'" Artaud's vision aimed to engulf the audience, plunging them into a visceral experience that transcends ordinary suspension of disbelief.

Brook and Artaud, with their distinct philosophies, foster environments where the audience is complicit in the illusion, fully aware yet deeply engaged. In contrast, Price's methodology depended on the audience's belief in the literal truth of his supernatural stagings. This approach taps into deeper, more primal beliefs and fears, potentially enhancing the impact but also raising ethical concerns about the integrity of such deceptions.

This raises critical questions about the responsibilities of creators of deceptions and hoaxes. While the allure of the supernatural and the thrill of the staged are powerful, is the depth and intensity of experiences elicited by deliberate falsehoods justified, or do they undermine the essential trust in storytelling, whether in magic, spiritualism, or theatre? This ongoing debate challenges both practitioners and audiences, reflecting the complex dynamics of truth, belief, and deception.

Adding to the layers of this discussion, consider the possibility that this very text could have been