

“Designing Deception in the Magician’s Craft”

March 9, 2012
12:30 - 2:00 pm
Room 7-431

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Abstract:

Entertainment magic is an art of deception that hinges on secret procedures, concealed mechanics, and veiled intentions. It also requires a firm grasp on spectator psychology. To create illusions, magicians practice “disinformation design,” strategically managing an internally consistent flow of true and false information. In this talk, I draw on extensive anthropological research among contemporary French magicians to describe how they acquire and refine the ability to imagine their actions from spectators’ perspectives, and tailor their performances accordingly.

Bio:

Graham Jones is a cultural and linguistic anthropologist, whose research focuses on knowledge and rationality in practice, performance, and interaction. After studying literature at Reed College (BA, 1998) and anthropology at New York University (PhD, 2007), he was a postdoctoral member of the Princeton University Society of Fellows (2007-2010). Based on almost two years of field research, his first book explores the secretive subculture of entertainment magic in contemporary Paris, revealing how French magicians acquire the knowledge and skill necessary to produce their mystifying illusions. His related research explores the historical significance of magic in colonial spaces of intercultural performance, and the use of magic tricks as a medium for religious messages by Evangelical “gospel magicians” in the contemporary United States. He has also carried out extensive research on the linguistic dimensions of computer-mediated communication (particularly instant and text messaging), an area he continues to pursue.