

The Método Simbólico Goes Digital

By RNC, May 2002

In 1978 Juan Tamariz released a publication titled "Método Simbólico", in which he suggests a new format for the description of card tricks. Based on a categorization of the technical elements employed in Card Magic Tamariz introduces a remarkable symbolic alphabet capable of describing the technical backbone of cardtricks.

Juan Tamariz' "método simbólico": past and future

During the last two decades publications in general have increased with accelerating speed facing students of card magic with the major challenge of efficiently working their way through the libraries of books, videos, lecture notes and impressions gained at conferences. Without a proper concept the student will easily get lost between the many modifications on certain themes and he will easily reach the point where his mental capacity limits the assimilation of new material. Those who agree to this point might already have found personal solutions to cope with it, others might be still looking out for an answer.

In principle Tamariz' Symbolic Method represents a novel solution to this task, which reminds of the way music notes are used for handling musical ideas. However, his concept is still waiting to be discovered by a larger audience.

The Symbolic Method was constrained to manual notes, quality of reproduction could never cope with the professional formats established through the technological advances in electronic text editing and image recording. This might partially explain the ignorance it received during the last 25 years, its close-to-zero presence in publications. On the other hand students of books and videos, without whom Card Magic would be a less rewarding place, would highly benefit from an elegant tool to efficiently exploit their magical contents.

All this might change. The Symbolic Method is now available in electronic format supported by a Symbolic Editor. It is my intention, dear Reader, to show the new directions this may give to the student of card magic.

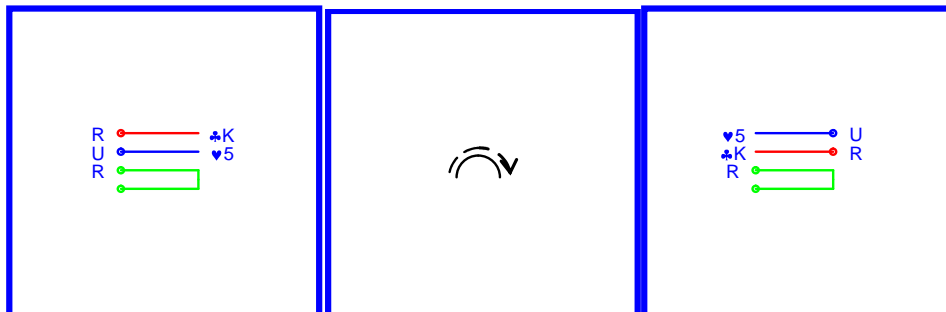
Brief description of Juan Tamariz' "método simbólico"

The Symbolic Method covers a set of graphical icons representing actions, situations and structural elements typical to the handling of playing cards in card tricks. It is designed to express the technical backbone of card tricks.

A brief example

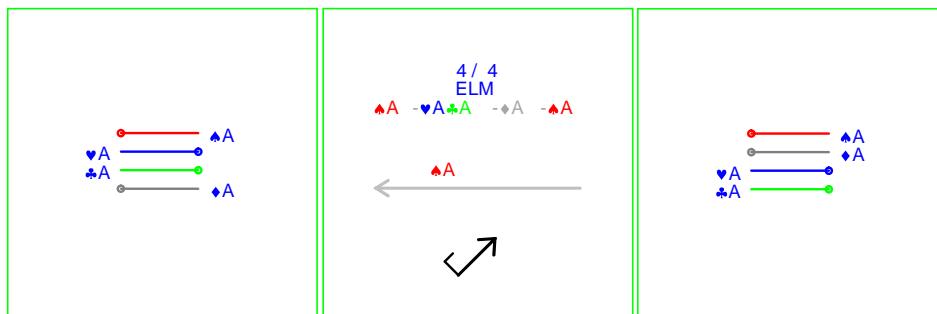
The two most fundamental ideas are these:

- Cards are represented through lines with a dot. A dot on the left signals face-down. A dot on the right signals face-up.
- Actions are represented through a set of icons that always indicate a direction by means of an arrow head. When pointing up, the arrow signals a back-up (i.e. a face-down) direction and vice versa.



This brief example reads as follows: Red-backed king of clubs and blue-backed five of hearts, both face down, sit on top of the face-down red deck. Perform a double turnover. Blue-backed five of hearts will show, hiding the red backed king beneath.

Another sample, more challenging to first time readers but amazingly rich, refers to a sequence in Vernon's Twisting the Aces. It illustrates the Elmsley count which reveals the first twisted ace.



To read this properly, one must know the powerful conventions suggested by Tamariz to symbolize counts. Please don't try to understand this at first sight. As you may come back to this description more and more details will become clearer which may have passed unnoticed before. Consider that an example like this probably represents the most complex level that Tamariz' notation system can get to. Let's give it a try:

The first box:

- The initial order
 - From top to bottom: spades, hearts, clubs, diamonds.
 - Hearts and clubs are face-up, spades and diamonds are face-down.

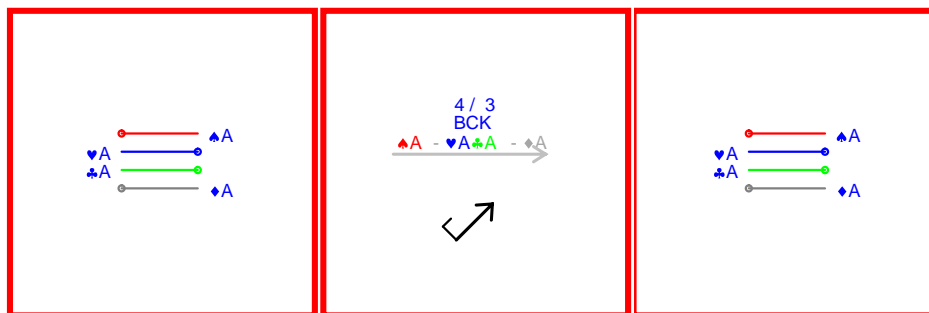
The second box:

- The Title line
 - 4/4 indicates that 4 Cards are counted as 4 cards.
 - ELM indicates that the count is done in Elmsley style.
- The counts
 - The 4 blocks separated by the "-" signs indicate the 4 push-overs, ie. the individual counts.
 - Of the four blocks, the second block consists of a double card. Note that the (green) clubs will in fact be hidden when counted.
 - Cards that are stolen (or added) below (or above) the pile are drawn below (or above) the "main level". The horizontal alignment with the respective block indicates the moment. Here, the (red) ace of spades is stolen (below the pushing pile) at the second count.
- The resulting sequence of cards from top to bottom
 - The resulting sequence reads according to the sequence of blocks when read in the direction of the arrow
 - Whereby, each individual block always reads from left to right. Eg. the second block reads (blue) hearts, (green) clubs
 - Of course, cards are only counted once, ie. the last (red) ace of spades at the very left (remember the direction of the arrow!) no longer plays in the sequence
 - Here, the final sequence is: (red) spades, (gray) diamonds, (blue) hearts, (green) clubs.

The third box:

- The final order
 - From top to bottom: spades, diamonds, hearts, clubs.
 - Hearts and clubs are face-up, spades and diamonds are face-down.
 - Note that the position check in this last box and the sequence indicated by the arrow in the count-box are consistent.

Once understood, the following sequence may hopefully make sense to you, dear reader: it shows a simple (non-reversing) Buckle Count, which simply hides the ace of clubs. All concepts introduced above hold.



The Symbolic Method's characteristic points

The characteristic features listed below may give an idea about the benefits. Briefly, they all relate to the efficiency of learning new material and to the perfection of one's repertoire.

- Ongoing situation-checks

Symbolic documents deliver ongoing situation-checks from set-up to final plots. They allow the student to focus exclusively on the trick's mechanics speeding up the early learning phase of tricks.

- Easy recall of details

The symbols allow to easily fresh-up one's mind on tricks that were on ice for a while allowing continuous dedication to tricks over a longer period of time. This refers especially to tricks with complicated set-ups and complex proceedings.

- Routine-structure at a glance

The symbols reveal the structure of the routine at a glance. The trick's structure is reflected by the document's layout, so to say in a visual way. It leads to clarity and helps to gain the proper rhythm. The student will find it easier to interpret the trick.

- Repertoire's notebook

The dense technical format typical to symbolic documents allows for managing the information across an entire repertoire. Use the symbols to extract the primary information of your books, videos, impressions gained at lectures and conferences. Compiling symbolic documents of the tricks you currently perform and the ones you are working at for future makes for a valuable technical notebook: consult it to recall details and use it to fix corrections, comments, ideas and modifications.

- Fix your own ideas

Fix your own ideas in this stenographic format to release them of their temporary existence in your mind.

The Symbol-Editor

The symbolic Method is now available in electronic format. This turns Symbolic documents, so far restricted to manual notes, to living documents, which can be easily modified, corrected and enhanced.

The same arguments that explain the worldwide success of traditional text editors apply here as well. The Symbol-Editor sees the Symbolic Method into a new era.

Learning the symbols and learning the software

It is in the nature of symbols to look abstract to the untrained eye and surprisingly intuitive to the experienced eye. Those who never had the pleasure to learn the Symbolic Method will have to train their eye in order to read symbolic documents and to develop the editing skills for expressing the mechanics of tricks through symbols. This task is much less difficult as it may seem.

This internet site intends to support you on this way. Use the "symbols"-link to learn some basics. Use the "sample"-link to see some real applications.

Symbolic Documents, Books and Videos

The Symbolic Method's ability to deliver x-ray stills of an entire routine might be considered an advantage over the abstract format of traditional written descriptions and the transient-nature of videos.

However, remember that the symbols have been designed primarily to express technical information. This might exclude them from ever gaining the artistic and intellectual level found in so many respected books, without those Card Magic would be a less rewarding place.

Also, consider that the symbols were not designed to express the mechanics of moves such as the pass, the glide or false shuffles. Like musical notes they tell you what to do, they don't tell you how to do it.

The various media established in Card Magic are not competing at all. Rather each format has its own benefits.

From Cards to Coins, an Outlook

The same principles used to represent card tricks through symbols may be transferred to the field of coin magic. The symbol-editor already supports coin-specific elements such as Shells, Copper/Silver Coins, conditions such as visible/palmed/hidden etc. Some card-specific actions turned out to be useful for handling of coins as well such as turn, count etc. There's still a road to go for taking this to the level at which the Card-symbols are today. Any suggestions are welcome!

Communication

The main benefit Tamariz expresses in his first publication on the "método simbólico" concerns communication between magicians worldwide. While he mainly refers to its inherent internationality, modern communication platforms now bring additional evidence to this aspect. Available in electronic format, symbolic documents can be exchanged either by email or internet homepages.