

Why, What and Who?

A Theory of Questions

There are three questions that form the basis of a performing philosophy. The three questions are really three words. These words can be applied to the entire range of performance in magic. And in their simplicity comes their strength. So let's meet these three little workers. But before we do I have a few thoughts.

Magic, we all seem to agree, has the potential to be an Art (with a capital "A".) And since this is true there are several qualities inherent to Magic because it is an ART. The first is that it is a medium. It is a channel, a conduit. It is a means of communication through which humans share experiences, ideas and visions. This communication is the ultimate goal, the enviable end of the road.

Second, there are techniques which have grown up within the Art Form. It is not merely a matter of desire which creates art and the artist. Skills must be sharpened and aptitudes developed. For a period of time, the acquisition of technique becomes an end in itself, but as the artist matures, technique is relegated to its proper role ... that of a means to an end.

Third, there are two communities involved in this activity and product called art. (In truth, there are many communities, including the community of dealers, the publishers, those who fund performances and innovation, those who make news out it, etc. But here we are, for the sake of usefulness, restricting ourselves to two major communities.) The two major communities are those of the practitioner and the spectator, which come together on those occasions called performances.

Fourth, as this Art communicates through imagery, there will be differences in the meaning of the art to the two communities. Due to the education of the community of practitioners, it will elicit a different psychological response, as it draws not only from the personal and cultural experiences of the each viewer, but is often tainted, if you will, with the practitioners' obsession of technique.

Fifth, maturity allows artist the ability to control cultural symbolism, which comes to replace the purely personal symbolism of the child.

Sixth, there is a language that exists which allows our community to talk about the Art. This language allows the examination of both the product and the production. This discussion is part of that language.

All this brings us to the need to introduce my friends. A lot of thinking needs to be applied to our performances, to the structure of individual pieces and entire shows. In addition to getting caught up in thinking about what we do we need to learn how to do it better.

Recently, in his book *Spirit Theatre*, Eugene Burger pinpoints one of the dangers of performance as "Wobbling." A better description I can't imagine. Eugene shows the way toward effective performances. What we need though, are techniques that will help us solve the problems he sets for us. That's why I want you to meet my friends.

Here, let me introduce you: What, Why, Who, I'd like you to meet our reader. Dear reader, I'd like to have you meet my three friends and tormentors, What, Why and Who. I've made the introduction, but it is up to you to get to know them intimately.

- Why:*
1. *Why am I doing this?*
 2. *Why should anyone want to watch this?*

If there is a reason to do magic (fooling people is not a reason, just a technique), then what is it? What does someone have to gain from watching me perform?

- What:*
1. *What is this piece about?*
 2. *What would this look like if it were "real Magic."*

Since magic is an imagistic art, and communicates through its symbolism, each piece must have an inherent meaning. What is it? If it is to work as Magic, it must look like Magic. What would that be?

- Who:*
1. *Who are you doing this for, who is your audience?*
 2. *Who are you in this presentation, your character?*

The type of audience you perform for determines part of the equation of what your work means. Age range, economic strata, environment all affect what you choose to do where. Know yourself, know your work, know your audience. Who are they? What do they want? And who is the character performing? Wouldn't that affect everything from costume to language?

Spend a little time with these friends of mine. Believe me, they love Magic. They will help you. Oh, you may not always be able to answer them, but just the asking of the questions is taking steps in the right direction.

I hope you all get along now. Time for me to go. Let's get together and see some art sometime...

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