

Meta-Intention: A “Reflection” on Bob Neale’s “MetaMagic”

- Tim “Santiago” Converse

You’ve probably never heard of me. That’s okay. I’m one of those part-time magicians, someone who loves the art but only really performs at small events or for friends and family. I do a lot of teaching, both with the McBride Magic & Mystery School, occasionally local community centers, privately, and even on-line.

When I’m not doing magic, I work in the software industry. Which means that when you say “meta” to me I have a particular set of assumptions that not everyone else will have. As an example, you will hear software engineers talk about “meta-data” which is the information about the data. If you hand me a set of data but you don’t tell me what it is for or how it is supposed to be used, then it is only a collection of information with no particular value.

It is the intention that gives the data value.

That is a very specific case, but from there we can broaden the idea. If someone hands me a deck of cards and says, “Here, do a magic trick!” then I have everything I need to know. The deck is the data, and the statement is the intention. Now I have everything I need to know what is expected of me, and I can go from there.

So, then what does “meta-magic” mean in this context? What does the combined software engineer and magician do with this phrase?

For me, it is very much about intention. I have a closet full of magic, and bookshelves full of magic books and videos. That is the data. What is my intention? To create a show.

But wait, isn’t that only “magic”? As our good friend and mentor Dr. Larry Hass likes to tell us, the smallest unit of magic is the show. So “meta-magic” is the magic about the show, right?

Ah, now we’re getting somewhere!

What is the intention of my magic? Or as Eugene Burger used to ask us all, “What do you want your magic to be?”

I find it rather interesting that Bob chose the concept of a mirror to illustrate his idea that magic should be reflecting the audience back to themselves, giving them a chance to see themselves in the wonders on stage. That if you do the show right, then the audience should see themselves in what you are doing, what you are saying, and come to some level of realization about themselves. It’s a very clever metaphor.

But if I might be so bold, I think I’d like to consider a small modification to Bob’s metaphor and suggest that it’s not a mirror, but rather Pepper’s Ghost. A reflection of one thing ***AND THEN*** another when the audience is shown the real intention behind the magic. The magician stands behind the reflection, orchestrating it from one image to the next, and only when the time is right, revealing themselves and their intention.

To my way of thinking Bob's "meta-magic" is the intention behind the intention. It's the crafting of stage, sound, lights, props, and acting to create the show, and then the next level of crafting the meaning the audience is meant to discover.

Or maybe more accurately, the crafting of the ultimate meaning before crafting the show that will deliver it!

Either way, that is a tremendous responsibility!

It is blindingly easy to become lost in the minutia of singular effects. To become obsessed with the right lighting or sound cue. To be stressed over selecting the perfect audience participant. And in so doing, to forget why we do what we do in the first place; to create wonder.

That's the show.

But what about the meta-show, the intention behind it? Is creating wonder enough? Or do you want to do more? Can you find a way to move the collective consciousness of the audience in a direction you decide? That is "meta-magic."

That's "meta-intention."