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LARRY HASS

WITH A COFFEE
ON THE TABLE

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Ezequiel: You are a philosopher, a writer, a teacher, and a performing magician. What I would like to know is: Who is **Larry Hass**? What is the sum of all those parts?

Larry Hass: What a great question! Let me start my answer this way: no one is more surprised than I that my life turned out this way. I was not a magician as a boy; I was a musician and still am an active musician. No, I came to magic as an adult, after I had finished my PhD in philosophy and was teaching at the university. Thus, I was in my early thirties when I discovered magic and completely fell in love with it. I

would say that since then my life has been a process of completely reorganizing itself around this deep passion. I retired early from college teaching in 2010 and have been a full-time magician since then. Also, I have always loved writing, so now all my writing pivots around magic. And one of the first things I discovered is that I wanted to perform magic—that performing it was a deep calling. Through all of this, performing, writing, thinking, and teaching about magic, in time I became the Dean of **McBride's** Magic & Mystery School. So to answer your question about who I am as a whole: I am a deeply passionate magician who wants to use magic as a way to express my perspective on the world.

Ezequiel: I can relate to it because I started in magic when I was 36. So that's five years ago. And I think when we don't start as a child into magic, or as a teenager, we have a different perspective on magic because we have a different perspective on life.

Larry: I agree completely with you.

Ezequiel: My passion came through in a sense of obsession, and I love it, in terms

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of theorizing and philosophy in magic. Do you think as a philosopher you had an advantage or a disadvantage in how to approach magic?

Larry: Yes. I feel my background in philosophy was an advantage. In philosophy, I focused intensely on perception and art, and the close relationship between them. This was the philosophical background, the set of lenses, I was bringing to my early experiences of magic. So, I never used magic as a coping mechanism in the way Max Maven talks about in Parallax, right? I never came to magic needing it to help me cope with social status. I came to magic, perhaps like you, with a rich sense of what art means to human beings and how sophisticated magical art is.

Ezequiel: How do you feel of magic as an art? I don't consider magic as an art. I am going in the direction of **Alan Moore** the comic book writer, where he says that magic, language, consciousness, and art appear at the same time. What I want to ask you is how you think about the necessity of language in magic? Eugene said that magic didn't need it to have words in it. But I think it does, in the sense that words in themselves have meaning, and that they

can create an even bigger experience of something being magic. How do you feel about that?

Larry: What you are saying is interesting, and I have a couple things to say about this. First, we do see many magicians perform without using “language,” words, to perform. And they typically use music to create the kind of meaning that language creates. So, I want to allow for what Jeff McBride calls “music-driven magic.” But language, words, the music of our words as we perform, is such an important part of the way I experience and perform magic. Using “good words, beautiful words” is one of the great advantages I have as a speaking performer. That is, being able to use my voice and my words to “weave a spell” for the audience. Now, of course, some silent performers use music to weave that spell. I respect that, but for me there is something powerful and special about the work of crafting beautiful words and speaking them well that bring audiences into my special world.

Ezequiel: I love to listen to the work from the philosopher, John Searle, on his work on language and mind, and he talks about speech acts. That you can have actions, physical actions, which are “speech acts” that have meaning, but that meaning has to

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have a context; you have to use it enough times so people can comprehend what you mean with it.

Larry: Yes. Our physical actions often do bear this kind of meaning.

Ezequiel: In a magical performance, if an audience is watching you for the first time, they won't know the meaning of your gestures, which is what attracted me to bizarre magic and storytelling magic, because it gives you more the sense of what I feel is the experience of magic instead of just being, nice trick, "how did you do that?"

Larry: One thing that supports your idea about the power of the spoken word is how many master magicians, like **Lance Burton** and **Jeff McBride**, changed over time to become speaking magicians. Both of them, for example, started out with ten-minute music-driven acts. But both of them realized that to transcend being an "act" they needed to add words. There is something about this that's true: you can't do a show without speaking. Working long form requires you are able to weave a spell with your words and your voice.

Eugene Burger believed this, too. Eugene thought there could be "silent acts," and

sometimes he wished he had created one. But everything we know about **Eugene** is that he was a supreme vocal stylist. His voice and his ability to craft words were two of his greatest superpowers.



Ezequiel: That is one of the things that moved me toward Eugene's magic: the voice, the cadence, perfectly on point, perfect scripts. Certain people like **Eugene Burger, Alan Moore, Alan Watts**, among others, who captivate you with words, like the sirens in the middle of the ocean in old tales.

Larry: Yes. There is vision, right? There is our ability to see incredible things happen. But our human interest in visual novelty fades fairly quickly, as we might experience with watching a juggler or a manipulation act. Seeing something can be very intense at first, but our interest wanes quickly.

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Which is perhaps why the standard magic or manipulation act is about ten minutes long. But if one of our Mystery School students wants to become a magician rather than “an act,” I encourage them to develop and use their voice in beautiful ways. A strong, trained, beautiful voice is one of the most powerful tools in our magical toolkit.

Ezequiel: [At this point we were touching so many topics that I set aside my planned interview and went a bit free form.] You talked about being the Dean of the Magic & Mystery School, which is one of the best things that exists in terms of magic. How do you teach at the Magic & Mystery School? What sets you as a school apart from everyone else?

Larry: Becoming the Dean of Jeff McBride’s Magic & Mystery School was an unbelievable honor, and it is one I did not see coming. It happened very quickly after Eugene passed away. I was in Las Vegas, teaching a class that Eugene and I were supposed to teach together, and again he had just passed away. I delivered that class with a broken heart—everyone there had a broken heart. After the class had wrapped up, Abigail McBride said that they had talked and asked if I would become the new Dean of the School.

I was utterly overwhelmed by this request because, first, I didn't want **Eugene** to be gone! But also, I felt the responsibility of it. Part of the responsibility is being able to honor the larger perspective that comes with the role of helping other magicians learn how to become better and better at making shows.

Another part of the role relates to something **Eugene** did so expertly: bringing magicians of diverse styles, interests, and flavors together in friendship. As you know, one of Eugene's big values was pluralism in magic, respecting magicians who are very different from us. **Eugene’s** famous quote “*The house of magic has many rooms*” was his appeal for magicians to stop squabbling with each other, to recognize we are all in this wonderful glorious “house.” To use an academic term, we are all “*colleagues*,” not combatants. At the time Eugene wrote that essay (1996), there was a lot of infighting in the rather small magic subculture. **Freud** called this kind of infighting among highly similar people “*the narcissism of small differences*.” Indeed! The smaller the differences between us, the more people fight and jockey over a tiny piece of turf [laughter]. But magic is much better when we respect each other in our diversity. So, representing these values came with the

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role of being the Dean, too.

In fact, I was asked by **Abigail** and **Jeff** to select a magic wand that would be the Dean's wand. I selected one that has a caduceus on it: two snakes wound around each other. To me, this represented Eugene's values about friendship across diversity. I wield the Dean's wand with **Eugene** always in my mind and my heart, because part of what we try to do at the Mystery School is embrace and support magicians with very diverse interests.

Ezequiel: Do you feel that your teaching at the Mystery School is the same or different from the academic point of view? I get the feeling in the university, one is there to learn, and sometimes it can be a drag to learn. While a magician who wants to learn is a bit more open to it.

Larry: You are correct: when teaching at the university, many of those young people are there because they feel they have to be there, not because it's their passionate interest to be there. So one big difference teaching at the Magic & Mystery School is that everyone who comes to us has, as we say, "self-selected" us; they have chosen us; they have worked hard to arrange their finances so they can get there. They have real skin in the game, because magic is a

passion for them. So that's a big difference. Another difference is that I never have to grade any papers, you know? [laughter]. It is so good! All of that grading is just gone. Not merely the work of it, but also having to serve as judge and jury on the quality of my students' work. As a teacher at the Mystery school, I don't ever have to serve as "*judge and jury.*"

Now, I have a lot of performing experience that I am happy to share with magicians, but never as a judge or jury passing a sentence on it. No, no: my approach is, "*Here is something you might consider changing, but you are the artist; you get to make the decision.*" That is the spirit of our teaching at the Mystery School; it always has been the spirit of the School, from the very beginning. We are not the authority on your magic; you are. As **Eugene** always said, "*What do you want your magic to be?*" I can't tell students what it should be! No one could have told me what my magic was going to be! Part of my pursuit in magic was to discover what I wanted it to be. We understand, all of us, that our work as magic teachers is to help magicians move along their own paths. Now, if someone is making a desperate mistake or taking a terrible risk, then I will have a stronger point of view, like, "*Please don't do that!!*" But that is a very rare occurrence, because I

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want to empower peoples' visions.

Ezequiel: For a few weeks now, I've been reading your book *Transformations* and also watching your Penguin Live Lecture and Act, and listening to your interviews on podcasts that you given through many platforms [laughter]. There is much information in these materials, but I would like to focus on *Transformations*, which is an amazing book. I read it the first time, but the second time it started to make more sense, and it makes even more sense with additional readings. Maybe it is that my own perspective has evolved. In one of your essays you speak about learning magic and imitation. How important is it to have your own path versus the process of imitating others?

Larry: First, thank you for honoring my work by reading it, by listening to it, by engaging it again; I do not take that for granted. Now, the issue of learning and originality is complicated because I think Aristotle IS right: the primary mode by which the human animal learns is by looking and copying, "*imitating*." Babies and children do this all the time; they look and see what others are doing, and then they try to fit in with what others are doing. Let's call that "*imitation*." It is deeply human: acquisition through "imita-

tion." And we are never done with this kind of learning.

But some people want to go farther; they want to use their art form to express themselves, to express their point of view about the world. This is a process that is distinctly NOT about imitation, but about expressing oneself through one's art. I use magic to try and share my unique take on the world. It is not that I want my audiences to adopt my way of looking at the world. Rather, it is that I use magic as a way put my point of view into the world. In short, "expressing oneself as a person" and "learning through imitation" are obviously two different processes. And in the subculture of magic so many forces are driving us to imitation.

There is certainly a place for learning by imitation, especially when we are trying to learn the craft or some complicated sleight. It is natural to say, "I don't know how to do a Double Lift, so let me look at a video to see how it is done." But for magical artists that is not enough. For me, as a magical artist, my beautiful work is to take the techniques I have learned, perhaps by imitation, and ask larger questions, like "What experience to I want to create for my audiences with these techniques?" And also, "Who am I when I perform magic?"

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“Why am I performing? Why am I even doing this for people?” I think it is important for magicians to have a clear intention and a sense of purpose, because otherwise we are “just doing stuff” with no clarity or purpose.

Ezequiel: Do you think we have to have an alter ego, a persona, a character to put out there? You know, for exemple, I like horror movies. And I like nineteenth century history. Those are the kinds of things I try to put in my magic with what I'm trying to convey. It is about amplifying something about me, giving a sense of setting, something one can comprehend at a glance “*Okay. It's this.*” With a horror movie or a drama, you know what you're watching.

Larry: You are referring to a complicated thing, but I agree that it's important we have a clear character when we perform, but we don't need to be a caricature. This is a technical term: playing a caricature. A good example of a caricature in magic is **Dan Sylvester**, who plays *Sylvester* the Jester: a *Loony Tunes* cartoon character with eyes that bug out while smoke comes out of his ears. In a similar fashion, **Raphael** from Belgium sometimes plays a larger than life clown; at other times he plays vampire. Those are magicians who perform with a very robust character,

which is known in theater circles as a caricature. **Rob Zabreký** and **Carisa Hendricks** both perform a “*caricature.*” I recognize the ability to create and play a caricature as a high form of art; it requires a lot of skill to make a caricature like that believable—and all these performers do so. But magicians don't have to develop a caricature. They can also perform as themselves—or better put: they can play one version of their true selves that honestly, authentically expresses their point of view. For example, I do not perform as a caricature; I perform as myself, a philosopher who transformed himself into a professional magician, which is a deep aspect of my true self.

Ezequiel: Yes, because it goes through a filter, it's going through the filter of a character that we created, so it's snowballs.

Larry: Exactly. Unless one has very strong acting skills the risk in playing a very strong, over-the-top character is that it can become a screen or a barrier between you and the audience. And then the audience doesn't know who you really are. Great artists, I think, are sharing their honest sense of things through a particular aspect of themselves when they perform. So, when I am performing my full-evening show, the audience doesn't get to see all of me, but

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they get to see certain parts of me that are really true. And I dial those parts up, I amplify them, so the audience can understand that part of me.

The longer I do this, the better I understand a great paradox of magic. Performing magic is about being as *truthful* as possible while we are using techniques to create impossible experiences. I think truthfulness is the fundamental value as a performer, even though we are also using hidden techniques. So as I teach and talk to magicians, I always invite them to be truthful. *“First truth, then trick.”*

Ezequiel: That reminds me of when **Eugene Burger** interviewed **Tony Andruzzi** and talked about “sincerity,” which is really strange with magic because we are being honest and sincere on one hand, and on the other, we are using our fingers to get something secret accomplished. And we cannot have guilt about that, because it is a part of it.

Larry: That's beautiful. I am glad you evoked Eugene's word “*sincerity*,” which is another word for what I am talking about. In his last years, Eugene talked to magicians a lot about sincerity. He came to feel that one doesn't see a lot of sincerity

in magic today. I think his word “sincerity” is another way of talking about what I mean by truthfulness.

For example, when we go see an actor on the stage, we engage in “*the play*,” “*the theatrical make-believe*” that they are the character they play. So, lesson one for an actor is to be truthful when they say those lines written by someone else. As an actor, one of the worst things you can hear from your director is, “*I don't believe you.*” Ouch!! That means I am not being truthful. For me, this is the sense of truth that magicians could use more of, being theatrically truthful when they perform. That is, for **Eugene**, what sincerity is: sharing yourself with your audience when you perform.

I think as we come up in this crazy subculture of imitation, it is easy to adopt modes of performing that are false or distancing to our audiences. For example, I have seen magicians on stage use lines and sentences they would never use in real life; they become monsters stage with their participants. Or they sound like used car salespeople or lounge singers. Part of my goal as a magic teacher is to help magicians understand that their shows will become so much better when they are truthful, when they talk about things that

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are true to them, and share points of view that are really theirs. **Penn & Teller** are perfect examples of how powerful, interesting, and artistic this can be.

Ezequiel: It's an interesting thing, that magicians often use words without carefully working on them, and this goes back to Eugene. We don't edit our scripts, we just write them and perform them. We don't go to the trouble of speaking them out loud and asking ourselves, "*Would I ever use this word?*" I have a perfect "*victim*" at home because I perform everything for my daughter, and she knows when I am not being me in terms of speaking. She will say, "*Hmm, that's strange,*" or I can see it on her face.

Larry: That's like, "I don't believe you," right? [laughter].

Ezequiel: Yes. I believe so and, quite strangely, I decide a lot about my magic because of reaction; I will use or not something. I have my version of **Max Maven's** "*B'wave*" with no gimmick, it's different from **Eugene's** and from **Maven**, just because of one thing that she said, "*I did this!*", and I'll keep it as it is.

Larry: This is an interesting topic. Eugene, you know, had a teaching track about how

family and friends are the hardest people to perform for. In one sense, I think he is correct: some family and friends might have a lot invested in us not amplifying ourselves the way a performer needs to do to be effective. But other family and friends can watch us perform with great joy and help us make sure that what we are saying is something we would actually say, rather than sounding like somebody else.

Notice, we are right back to the imitation problem again. It is very common in magic to take lines from other magicians without even realizing it. I suspect every single magician has done that at some point on their journey. Let's take as an example something Eugene would sometimes say when he was performing close-up magic at a table, "Don't look in the magic box or your eyes will fall out." That is an edgy line, almost a scolding line, but Eugene could deliver it sweetly and people would laugh. But I've heard other magicians use his line and suddenly it sounds mean.

So, one thing my family and friends can do is help me know if I am using jokes or lines that aren't me, or aren't right for me. My wife knows me better than anyone, and if she doesn't like a line then I cut it.

On this topic, let me share a story. You

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know that Eugene Burger: Final Secrets includes Eugene's card masterpiece titled "Influence." Many magicians assume I perform the piece because I am the author of that book and know the piece inside and out. But the fact is I do not perform "Influence," because I have not yet found a way to present it that is truthful for me. Eugene's way of performing it was strong and challenging and filled with his sense of humor, "People really are very much alike!" That line was perfect for Eugene, but it would be absolutely imperfect for me. So, "Influence" is on my list of possible routines that I haven't yet found a way to make it mine.

Ezequiel: I love that piece. I never had a splint of an idea to do something with it. So I'm out of the game on that sense.

Larry: Yes, "Influence" came from Eugene's younger self, when he was working in restaurants and bars and needed strong, challenging material. But as Eugene became older, he became mellower, less challenging and edgy. He became a gentler, more sage-like performer. And "Influence" came out of that earlier kind of phase of Eugene's life.

Ezequiel: Yes, I see that difference in his videos. When we reach the early 1990s, it

changes. His approach towards the audience, to spectators, changes. I have watched it many times, and at first it feels strange in some way and you can't put your finger on it. And then you realize, "Okay, there is a shift here."

Larry: I agree with you. I think, too, there are three big phases that were shaped by Eugene's performing contexts of those times. In the 1980s, Eugene was performing in bars and restaurants, which means the setting involved a lot of alcohol. And that means he needed to be more funny and edgy while he worked. But in the mid-1990s, he decided he was done working in bars and restaurants, and his primary venue was at the *Mystery School* retreats. He was the Dean of the School and needed to be more sage-like to help magicians understand higher levels of our work as performers. You see this more sage-like Eugene in his "Cosmic Thread" script, as he talks about the death and resurrection of the universe

Ezequiel: Yes.

Larry: And I believe there is yet a third phase, when Eugene starts teaching Master Classes and working more for high-end public audiences at universities and colleges. In this phase, Eugene becomes

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less of a sage and more of a teacher. The performing contexts changed over the course of his life and that shifted the way he performed. For example, even though magicians revere “*Cosmic Thread*,” I know that, at the end of his life, Eugene’s preferred way of performing Thread was “*The Thread of Life and Death*,” which came out of his teacher phase.

Ezequiel: Actually, that video happens to be on my computer screen right now. [Laughter] I have the *MagicBeard* webpage open right now because I am getting some references.

Do you think there is a formula for making a presentation? I mean something powerful or meaningful, instead of just talking about the props, which you see all over the place today.

Larry: This is an urgent question, actually. Part of the problem is that the subculture of magic is driven through commercial sales. This is an old story; it goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when learning magic started moving from the old teacher-apprentice model to a commercial market for practitioners and hobbyists. But this is a special problem for us today because of the extraordinary extent to which digital media infiltrates

our consciousness. How many push sales for magic products did you receive in your email today? So far, I have received five, two of them from the same vendor, you know? [Laughter]. And it is still early in the day! [Laughter]. Does this infiltration have an effect on the way magicians in our subculture approach and think about magic? Of course it does. Advertisers spend a lot of money because it works! Magicians do “*press send*.” Sometimes I sometimes “press send,” too, against my better judgment, you know? So there is a fairly brutal commercialism driving our subculture. And that makes it hard for us, as individual magicians, to invest the creativity into developing presentations that are ours, that express ourselves as individual people and as human beings—presentations that help our shows really connect with non-magician audiences.

So, back to your question, how can we do it? Is there a formula? Not so much a formula, but I think there is a path. There are some decisions we can make as aspiring artists that will help us hit the target, more often than not. For example, for me personally, I no longer buy a trick until I have a strong presentation idea for it, until I know what I—the philosopher-magician—would do with it. Otherwise, I am just buying “*toys*,” to use **Teller’s** word for

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it. Toys are fun; we all love toys, but as a performer, if I just show off my toys to people, it is not that interesting for them and I am not going to be aiming toward art. So, I always start my work with a prop by asking about presentation: “*What would I say and do with this?*” “*How can I make a routine with this my own, rather than just doing what other magicians are doing?*” This is, for me, the first step of moving something from being a prop or a trick to something that might become a piece of magic. I think this is a first step all magicians can embrace: “*Don't buy it, don't waste any time on it, until you know how you could make it yours.*”

Another thing that would help magicians on the path is doing the work of character, of figuring out who you are when you perform. In general, I would say to anyone seriously interested in performing to stop buying tricks and invest that money in experiences that will help develop their performing character. What are those experiences? Well, it might be books that can help them learn about character from the field of magic or the field of theater. It might be classes or experiences with magicians who know how important these things are, for example taking a Master Class with us at the “*Mystery School*” or buying lessons from a magician with skills

in the area of character development. Or we might hire a theatrically trained director to watch us doing our routines who will ask us the hard questions: “*Who are you? Why are you doing that?*” I worked with the great magic director **Bob Fitch** years ago who once said to me, “*Larry, that is a beautiful story, but why are you telling it?*” Pow! I had a beautiful story with a very deceptive method, but the piece wasn't done because I hadn't figured out yet why I was telling it to my audience. A theatrically trained director, like Bob Fitch, can help us with challenging questions like that.

Ezequiel: Yes, the words of **Tony Andruzzi** have always stuck with me: get a drama teacher, get a hairstyle, a *GQ* magazine [laughter], know who you want to present yourself as and how to present yourself.

Larry: Yes, You can't buy these essential things at the magic store. Period.

Ezequiel: There is something else related to your book *Transformations*, when you talk about “*vision questing.*” This is so interesting and off the normal path one gets in the magic literature. Would you delve into it?

Larry: There is a whole generation of magic books that are about, “*Here is where you*

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hold your little finger.” “*Here is how you make that move.*” And it is purely teaching about technique. Of course, there is a place for that. The development of magic techniques in the twentieth century have been extraordinary, especially with playing cards. Yet, you can read those books to end of time and they won’t help you discover yourself as a magician. Moreover, they will drive you toward the imitation of techniques.

I would say this is one of the really important things we do at the *Mystery School*. Of course good techniques are important. They serve as our knowledge base, and we can’t create effective magic without excellent techniques. And yet so many magicians get stuck at the level of technique, they get hooked on the technical secrets, hooked on the latest technique, and they don’t elevate their magic to the higher level of asking themselves the questions that will help them become better performers.

To take one example, there is the question Eugene raised for the students at every Master Class: “*What do you want your magic to be?*” Whoah! This question is not what does some magic vendor want it to be, but what do I want it to be? Or, what kind of experience do I want my audiences to

have at my show? That is a very interesting question! What do I want people to leave my show thinking about or feeling?

I talk about these kinds of questions under the template of vision questing. What does vision questing look like? Well, historically shamans would go out into the desert to try and have visions [laughter] and they might take “*power plants*” to help! [Laughter]. But for us today I think it involves simply lying down on a couch with all our devices turned off, and visualizing our magic, and reflecting about what’s actually happening with we perform for someone. That’s why I call it “*vision questioning.*” I imagine myself performing; I remember the performance I’ve just made, and I ask myself questions like: “*Is that what I wanted to have happened?*” As I have written in *Inspirations*, for me “*the fundamental business of every magic show is relationship building,*” and so I try to remember how I did with the relationships during a show. And I imagine how I might have improved this or that interaction. I might ask, “*Can I come up with a better line for this moment?*” Of course I can, yes, because when I am vision questing I am not stuck watching stuff on screens.

Perhaps my facility with this comes from my being a philosopher, someone who is

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trained and experienced at being reflective. But I believe this possibility is available to every single person. The digital culture, the digital economy, has very little interest in us being thoughtful, self-reflective, free-minded human beings. We can never remind ourselves about this enough. The digital economy wants us to “*press send*,” it wants us to “*buy now*,” it wants us to stay plugged in.” It wants us to watch the next video. And I think that’s the path to hell, because by succumbing to all this digital pressure, we end up surrendering to advertisers our ability to make free decisions. We have just given that gift away to our screens. So, I like screens, and I like certain aspects of digital culture, but I also know they actively block me from being an artist.

Ezequiel: After reading *Transformations*, I tried vision questing on the couch and before going to sleep at night. And it it gave me quiet time to rest and envision my magic. I do it both ways: I do it as a performer presenting magic, and I take the place of the participant looking at myself. How did I move there? Does this move looks great? Should I turn this way, on the offbeat or on the beat? Did I look at my hands or at the participant? I have found it helps a lot to have an external view of myself. If we don't have someone at the

show to tell us, we have to do it ourselves, and it definitely helps to address problems and fix details.

Larry: That is great! And the next level to this self-examination takes us to a point in the process where digital life can help us. When we get material into the rehearsal stage, using our phones to video our



rehearsals and performances allow us to actually see what we are doing so we can make corrections. This is true for everyone, and certainly for me, even though I am an experienced magic

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director. Because no magician can direct themselves. Period. Not **David Copperfield**, not **Penn & Teller**, not **Jeff McBride**. They get expert advice from experienced directors, which is something else you can't buy at a magic shop.

Ezequiel: It is interesting you use the word “*rehearsal*.” Not practice, but rehearsal. This is something thing you stress, that you “*practice*” the small bits, the pieces. But with “*rehearsal*,” it is do or die, you run the piece as a whole from the beginning to the end, and if you miss, you miss. The best thing is that nothing happens. You just you just failed in that moment.

Larry: Yes, with rehearsal you have to keep going. You run the piece as a whole moving your body and saying your words aloud, just as though you are in front of an audience. This distinction between practice and rehearsal is already in Eugene's earliest publications, and I have found it to be a very powerful idea. In rehearsal, unlike practice, we learn how keep going because in the real world, we have to keep going. We cannot let our audiences experience something that makes them feel pity for us. If they pity us because we've made a mistake and we have no way to finish, then the show is over! And we should be refunding their money because that is the

opposite of magic.

I sometimes have this wicked thought that a majority of magicians, including some professionals, don't actually rehearse. I think what these non-rehearsing magicians do is kind of run through the routine and the words in their heads, but they have not put in the dedicated time of rehearsing the piece, filming it, and making corrections based on a careful evaluation process. For example, since their words are only a vague notion in their heads, they can't discover if their scripts are too long or too short, which can only happen by rehearsing it aloud. After hearing me teach about this, many magicians, including some top professionals, have told me, “*Oh my! Larry, you are right!*” “*I hadn't thought about it until you said that.*” “*I am not rehearsing enough.*”

I do believe one reason we see so much weak magic is because many magicians have not leveled themselves up to carrying out actual rehearsals.

Ezequiel: I think one should use the process of visualizing a performance, running it in your head, after you have it really assimilated it, as though it is part of your body. Then you can do a quick run-through before a show, reviewing the script

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you have brought along, as you discuss in *Inspirations*.

Larry: Yes, I think that's right. We don't want to be doing a full rehearsal before a show or we won't be fresh at showtime. So visualizing and reviewing is a great thing to do on the day of a show. As the great actor and professional magician Max Howard once told me: "*Larry, it is important not to do the show before the show!*"

Ezequiel: There is a new **Eugene's** book coming out this Halloween: *Eugene Burger: The Workshop Transcripts*. When I heard this, it was a big surprise. How did this third book come about?

Larry: As you know, *Eugene Burger: From Beyond* came out in 2019, followed by *Eugene Burger: Final Secrets* in 2021, and I fully thought I was done—that I had fulfilled my vow to Eugene to share all of his unpublished routines and materials. But once *Final Secrets* came out, there was extraordinary worldwide interest in Eugene's approach to psychological card magic and *Equivoque*. I thought I had shared everything about this in Part Five of *Final Secrets*, but slowly I came to understand that I had not quite done that. Through a productive conversation with

Jamy Ian Swiss, I came to realize that many magicians would want to have access to the audio recordings I had from Eugene's workshops where he taught this material. Now, it wasn't possible to share the recordings themselves, because they were of mixed quality. But I realized I could create written transcripts of the three workshops I had audio recordings of. I also added a fourth transcript from a later workshop where Eugene taught his favorite card forces. So that's what this this new third Eugene book is about.

Ezequiel: Also, you are not heavily printing it, right?

Larry: That is correct. This will be a limited edition of 850 copies, each one of which will be numbered and signed by me. The reason for this is because we are donating all the profit from this book to the philanthropy **Eugene** helped create: the *Magic & Mystery School Scholarship Fund*, which provides need-based financial aid for magicians to study with us online or in Las Vegas. It felt very important to me that I donate the profits because I don't want anyone to think I'm doing this to milk Eugene's legacy. No, all the profit will be given away from this limited edition, and there will not be another book!

I should also mention that because of this

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donation, the only way to get *Eugene Burger: The Workshop Transcripts* is by purchasing it from me directly at www.TheoryandArtofMagic.com.

Ezequiel: And what about projects coming from **Larry Hass**? Any books in the horizon or any essays?

Larry: Thanks for asking. My longstanding dream was to mount a theatrical run of my full-evening magic show that I had composed over the period of about ten years. The show is titled *Magical Life*, and I ran the show at the Rhapsody Theater in Chicago this summer for nearly two months. This was a thrilling magical experience for me: to put this two-act show up that shares me—who I am as the Philosopher-Magician—and shares magic pieces I have created over the past twenty-five years. I believe the show went really well—it received outstanding reviews in the public press, and I have been invited back to the *Rhapsody* to deliver more performances in early 2024.

Another forthcoming project is to write and publish the third book in my own trilogy of magic. There was *Transformations* from 2007, *Inspirations* from 2015, and at some point down the line—in a few years—there will be

Illuminations. This book will be the capstone to my career: i plan to share all of the unpublished routines I have been holding back. Like Eugene, I want to share everything, but I don't have a "Larry" to do it after I've passed away. So I will do it myself while I am still here!

Ezequiel: That is great news! I am always looking for good books to read, not necessarily from magicians, where the author is sharing themselves as a whole person. So, it is great you are planning to eventually release a new book.

Larry: Thank you, yes. I share your interest in learning about artists, and especially magical artists, as whole people. Not to learn their secrets, but to learn how they think about magic. How they think about making shows. Their values as creative people. Not all magicians are interested in this kind of thing because, as Eugene said, "*The house of magic has many rooms.*" But you and I are interested in these kinds of books, and I think perhaps the readers of *Amateurs* are interested in that, too.

I feel it is very important to study the work of performing artists, not only magical artists but non-magician artists, too. People who have made a lot of shows! Many performers, whether they are musicians,

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actors or dancers, don't talk about it because they have too many shows to make! But there is a group of books in which performing artists do talk about their life and work as a whole. I will quickly mention **Steve Martin's** wonderful book, *Born Standing Up*. And **Derren Brown** has just released this kind of book, *Notes from a Fellow Traveler*. **Billy McComb** has a book like this, too: *McCombical*.

Ezequiel: You mentioned **Derren Brown**. One of his books that changed my life was *Happy*. When I read it, I was, “*Okay, now we are getting somewhere, this makes sense to me.*” And it changed my thinking about some things by one-hundred-eighty degrees.

Larry: **Derren** is a great artist who definitely understands the place of truthfulness and sincerity in the ways we have been talking about it.

Ezequiel: I always feel always attracted to thinkers, like **Eugene**, your work, **Derren's** work, **Alan Moore**, **Alan Watts**. If we look at such thinkers together, we find a lot of similarities, at least I do. But I think we also need to have a counterpoint to our tastes, because if we get too connected to what is similar to us, we stagnate and don't evolve.

Larry: Agreed! And we need other magicians who are less interested in philosophy to remind us that magic is primarily an embodied art, not an intellectual exercise. [Laughter]. I mean, yes, you and I are people of like minds and that's very nice. But it is also nice to be in a community of people who remind us, “*there are many rooms in the house of magic.*”

Ezequiel: Yes, the theory part, the philosophy part, can be a maze that's hard to get out of. Sometimes we need to sit back and just watch something dumb on YouTube, like cat or dog videos! [Laughter].

Larry: [laughing] On what you have just said: as creators, we move through a wave-like movement between creative time and downtime. No creator has ever been creative one-hundred-percent of their time. Humans move back and forth between creative phases and resting phases. There is always a double movement, and it is important for us to nurture the downtime so creative time in the future can be really transcendent rather than rehashing of old creative ideas. This creative movement, back and forth, has a kind of a systolic/ diastolic dimension to it, like our heart. It is how our breath works, too, inhaling and

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exhaling. The human animal moves through these movements and cycles. And so, what we talked about in terms of “*too much theory*” ties in here. On the other hand, if we get to ensnared by our toys and screens, we might be getting stuck in the other part of the cycle: not enough theory!

Before we finish, I want to return to one of our earlier topics—about not being purely imitative and attempting to be expressive as we work on magic. I think your own work gives us a beautiful example of this, your piece “*Fading Sand*.” One of the things I admire about your routine is that you didn't stop with coins. I had read **Tomoyuki Takahashi's** “*Fading Coin*” routine in *Genii Magazine* and changed it so I never had to go to my pockets. **Eugene** built his own version of “*Fading Coin*” on my handling. Yet both of us stayed stuck within the framework of “*coins*.” But you went out of the box and came up with “*Fading Sand*.” Ezequiel, this is a perfect example of moving “*outside of the box*” and bringing your own vision to this piece, and I really admire that.

Ezequiel: Thank you very much. It gave me an ego boost when you told me you really liked it. Thank you.

Larry: You are welcome. Let me keep

encouraging you, and everyone who is reading this, to remember the creative spirit of our work as magicians. And me, too! It is not like, I can't get sucked back into the magic subculture world, too, with its push sales and today's “*hot new thing!*” The mantra I have to remind myself about this is quite simple, and I will share it with everyone: I try to look and see what many magicians are doing and then I head in another direction! Even if what everyone else is doing is really good, I always head in another direction. Because that is the path of artistry.