

# Is There Still Room for *Magic* in Our Lives?

CONFESSIONS OF A MAGIC EXPERIENCE DESIGNER

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*The goal of magic is not to deceive people, but inspire them to live life in a state of wonder.*

—S.H.Sharpe

We live in a very interesting moment in human history: our technologies have topped the best sci fi movies, an overwhelming abundance of information is just a click away, and humankind has discovered the existence of a vast reservoir of cognitive surplus that could potentially solve global challenges.

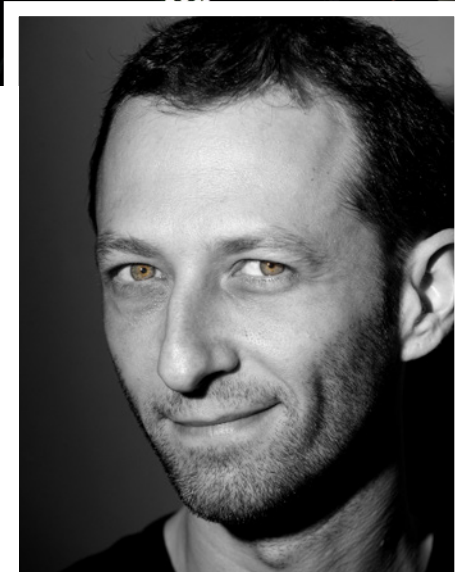
However, this techno-utopian state of affairs can have a side effect. The high dosage of technological marvels we engage with, combined with the fast-paced information overflow we are exposed to, leads to a sort of psychological anesthesia—we start to take many of these things for granted. We quickly get accustomed to the latest gizmo or app, and we come to believe that everything can be known and understood. More than ever, our time is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization. As a disenchanted society, we don't stop and smell the roses—we are gradually being stripped of the primal feelings of mystery and wonder.

My vocation is in the art of performing Magic. My profession is to design “magical experiences,” contexts where people can experience a combination of mystery, surprise, astonishment, and wonder. On good days, someone even undergoes a transformation, and catches a glimpse of non-ordinary realities. To paraphrase Tom Robbins, you can't manufacture wonderment, but you can pull people out of [their] context so dramatically that they gawk in amazement at the ubiquitous everyday wonders they are culturally conditioned to ignore. Whatever the tools, we need disruption of the profane so that we can engage with the extraordinary, and so that we can experience Magic.

Far from the trivialized clichè of clownish kids' shows, Magic is a fascinating performing art—when it works—[capable] of moving us beyond our perspectives, assumptions, beliefs, and our certainties. The realm of Magic is a liminal space ripe with possibilities: things appear and disappear at command, people fly, broken pieces can be restored into a coherent whole, thoughts and words can be transferred from mind to mind—all without the aid of an iPhone5. This is the domain of the mercurial Trickster, playfully shuffling and reshuffling the fabric of reality, spicing it



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up with ambiguity, deception, paradox, and continuously shifting awareness by blurring the boundaries between what's real and what's perceived.

Ultimately, a Magic performance is a celebration of the deeply mysterious and wonderful nature of the universe itself. The play of symbols points toward the numinous and transpersonal dimensions, awesome places where there's more than meets the eye.

My mission as a Magic Experience Designer is to remind people that, along with our Promethean technological achievements, our

lives are still surrounded by Magic, and that mystery is something irreducible—meant to be experienced, not explained. As religious scholar Lawrence E. Sullivan beautifully put it: “The horizon of the unknown moves outward with the horizon of knowledge.” Such flowing interplay of the known and unknown, I deeply believe, is the source of true Magic and eternal aesthetic delight.

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