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The Takeaway explains how the brain lets magic work

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John Hockenberry had the authors of “Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals About our Everyday Deceptions” on The Takeaway on WNYC recently. In the segment, they describe how the brain favors scenarios that seem the most likely (i.e., if a woman gets in a box and you see her head and then some feet sticking from the box, the feet probably are attached to the head), and how when you focus on one thing you’re blind to most everything else without even realizing it.

Dr. Stephen Macknik, on Penn and Teller’s Cups and Balls: “They’ll do the trick with transparent cups. ... And yet it still works. Even though you can physically see the balls being loaded underneath the cup through sleight of hand, the fact is that you don’t notice it because you’re so drawn to the other balls that they’re trying to get you to pay attention to.”

“Our brain does a lot of guesstimation as to what the reality of the world is. Magic tricks are designed to take advantage of the guesstimates that the brain makes.”

— Dr. Susana Martinez-Conde

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