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Magician Mind Tricks

Written by [Sergiu Vidican](#) on December 6th 2010
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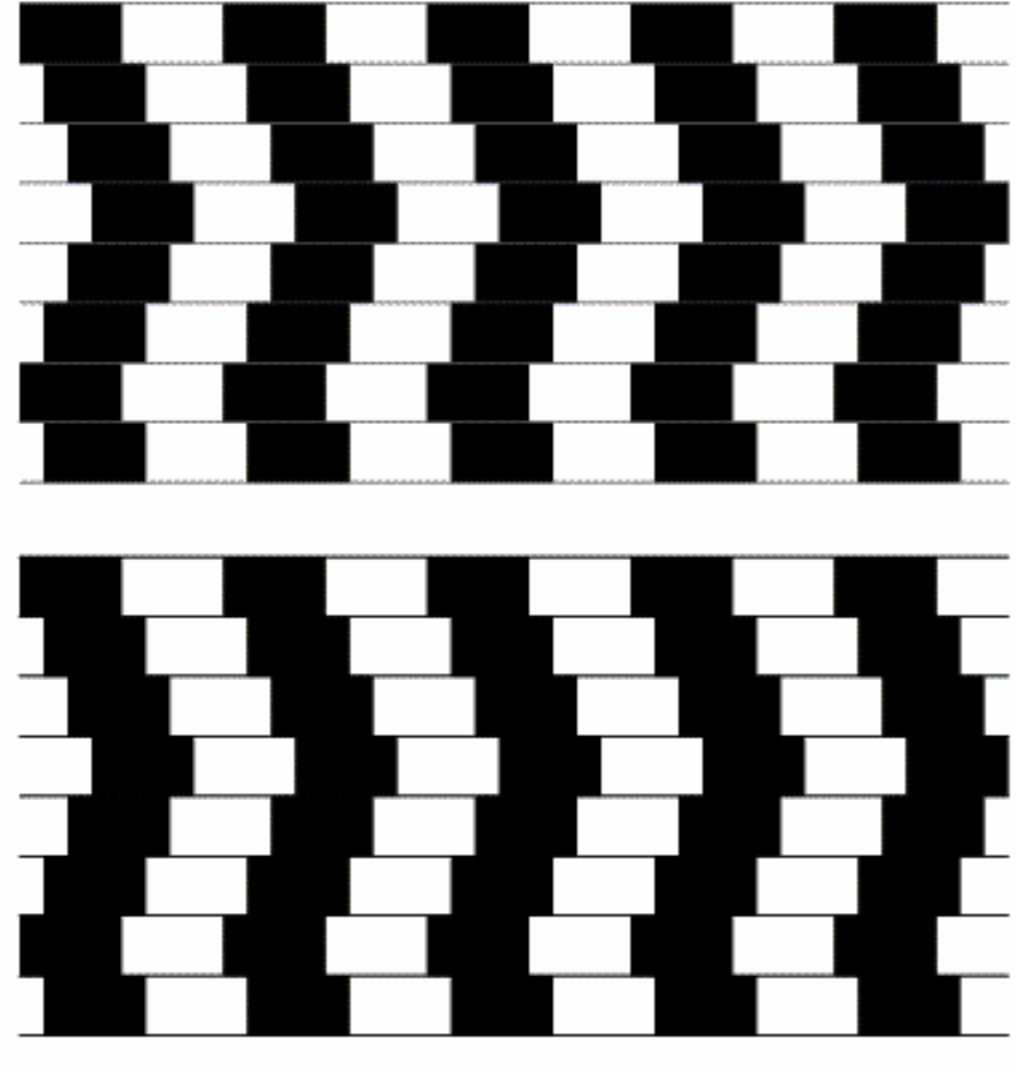
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Have you ever wondered why many people can get fooled very easily? There are cases when very clever people can be tricked with the simplest things. Magic is one of those things which can trick us with much ease, and for the first time the **neuroscientists** have analyzed the **processes** which occur in the brain when magic is



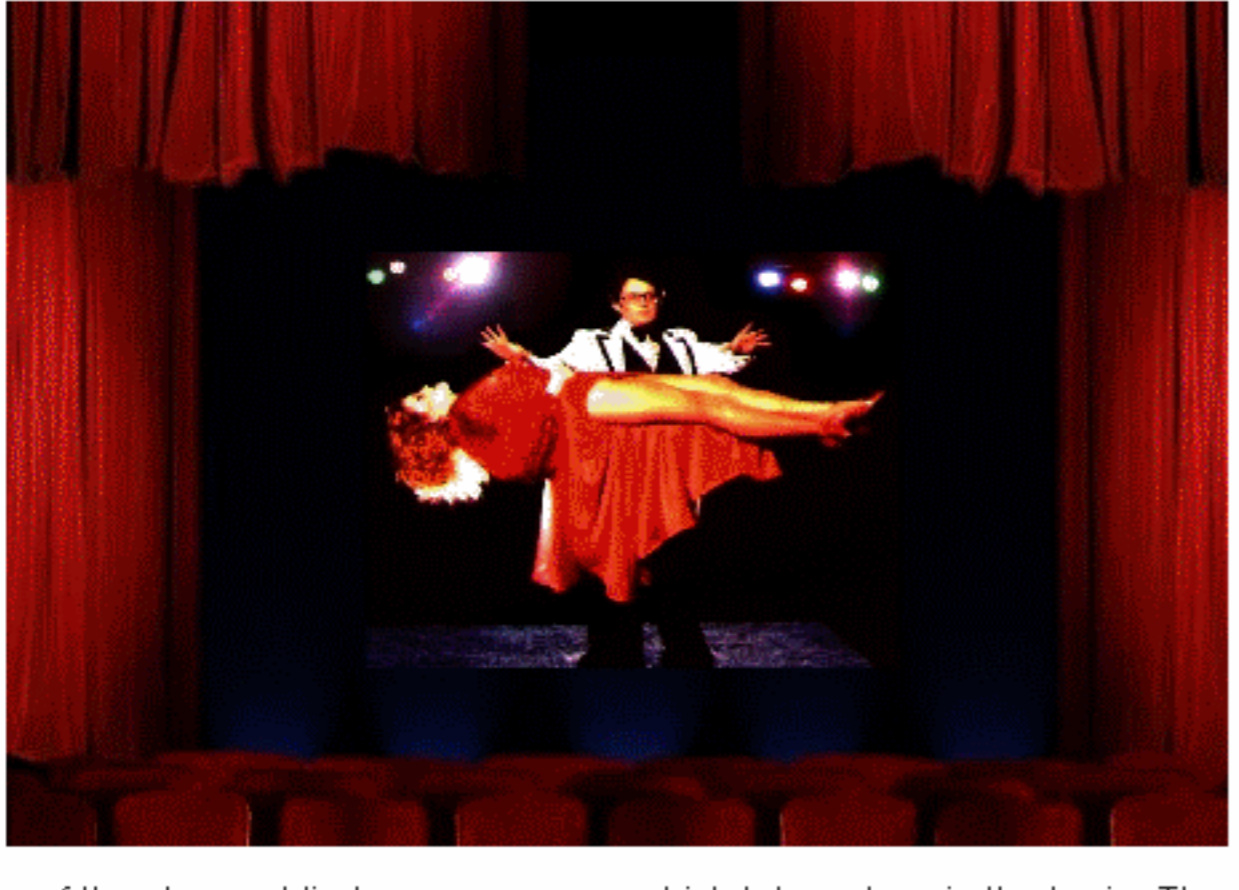
performed.

Stephen Macknik and Susana Martinez-Conde collaborated in order to find out the ways in which the magicians might trick us with certain magic tricks. They said that the magicians have an advantage over the neuroscientists, as they are aware of the different manners in which the human mind can be convinced to believe something false. The magicians are experts at cognitive illusions, and they have studied them for hundreds of years. The neuroscientists have just started studying them, and as a result it is only natural for the magicians to have an advantage. Susana and Stephen use magic in order to study the way in which the brain works. Illusions are very important because they have the capacity of separating the reality from the fiction. The magicians are aware of this, and they use our sight, our touch, and all of our senses in order to trick us. They are able to create illusions which seem impossible; which they are, only that because of their knowledge we consider them to be real.



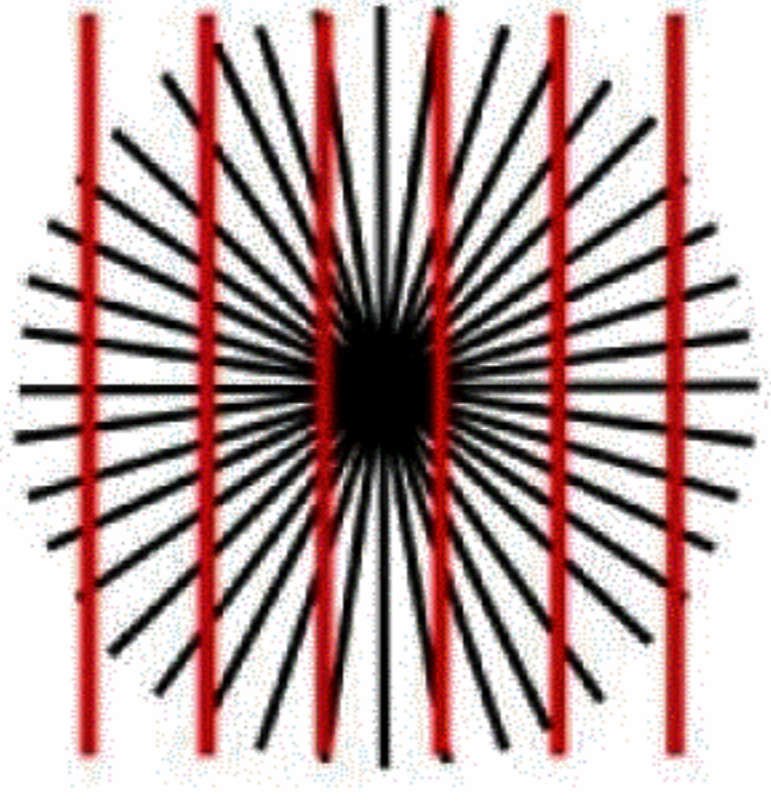
The two were lucky because various magicians who have shows in [Las Vegas](#) have agreed to reveal some of their secrets. The two have written a book about it, and [the book](#) is called "Sleight of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about Our Everyday Deceptions". It seems that the magicians have the ability of understanding the way in which the illusions influence the mind, but they do not have a very large knowledge of the **processes** which take place in the brain. They do not have too much anatomy knowledge, which could be very useful in order to develop even more impressive skills. Each of the tricks they use, take advantage of a certain process which takes place in our minds. For example a certain trick might use the fact that our neurons trick us that an object is still in the same place even if it was moved. The reason why this happens is because the neurons want to conserve energy, so instead of making the change, it keeps it in its initial state. Because of this, when a magician might have removed something we might still see it as being there.

The magicians are experts when it comes to visual illusions, as they can often introduce or remove certain things without us realizing that. One of the reasons why they are able to do that is because they know that we are not always focused on what they do. They talk, and they entertain us with their stories, and they can make us lose our focus on what we need to focus on. The magicians use many tricks and many methods of making us lose focus, and when they do that, they can make the changes or whatever they need to do with much ease. They are masters at manipulating us, but they do it in a very subtle way. It seems that our brains can be tricked with extreme ease. There are cases when an object is swapped in front of us and we do not realize it. We do not pay 100 percent **attention** to the things which take place around us, and this is the main reason why the magicians can do all of those tricks on us. You might have seen this on TV: a person asks one for directions, and while the two talk, two people carrying a panel pass between them. The person who asked for directions is changed, and the one who offered the directions did not realize it.



This happens because of the change blindness, a process which takes place in the brain. The reason why the person did not realize it is because the person who replaced the first one who asked for directions belonged to the same category. For example both of them could have been blondes, could have worn a hooded jacket, and so on. The reason why we our brains do not **focus** entirely on a certain thing is because if it would do that then it would miss other things, and it can not risk taking that chance. It seems that the brain can be easily fooled by some of these illusions, and one of the most obvious of them is the Standing Wave. The Standing Wave illusion consists of three flickering bars, the one in the middle being the target. You will start losing the target if the two other bars are coming closer, the one in the middle becomes invisible. This is surprising because the eye sees the three bars, only that our brain no longer processes the **information** in the correct manner. The neurons pay attention to the two moving bars, so they consider the one from the middle to have no importance.

It seems that the magicians use this information in order to create certain illusions, and when they move certain things we no longer focus on the one we should pay attention to. We pay attention to the things we focus at the moment, and we lose certain things because of it. Probably one of the most popular videos which prove this is the one where you are asked to count a certain thing, and in most of the cases you will miss something because of it. You can see the [video](#) [here](#). There are many ways through which a magician can make us look somewhere else, and one of the most popular **methods** is releasing the dove or the pigeon from the hat. Smoke is also a good way of distracting us, but smoke is more obvious, so the people might become suspicious. Mark Changizi, a [researcher](#) of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, says that the reason why we are tricked by the optical illusions is because our brain has the capacity of predicting the future.



Not in the sense that you **picture**, but it can predict what it will happen in the following one-tenth of a second. It is said that since the neurons make the change later than they should, our brain interprets the things which will happen. This is the reason why we have reflexes, and why we can **protect** our face from a ball let's say. It happens instinctively because the brain predicted that the ball will hit our face, before this would happen. This is the reason why we were able to go through a crowded place without bumping into every person. We predict the way in which they will move, and where the bodies of those people will be located in the following seconds. Changizi said that this is the main reason why we are tricked by **illusions**: the brain tries to predict what will happen, and it will fail at doing so, thus it will lose the target it was focusing on.

The Hering illusion is one of the most popular; the illusion looks like the spokes of a bicycle which has a central point and **vertical** lines run across it. We see the lines as being bent, even if they are straight. The reason why this happens is because of the [picture](#) makes our brain believe that [we are moving](#) forward, and since we are not moving, the lines become curved. The brain is simply trying to recreate something which would happen in real life in the exact same situation, and it fails at doing so. If we would move forward in real life and if a central point would be surrounded by vertical lines, like a door would be surrounded by columns let's say, then the closer we would get to the door, the rounder the columns would get. In real life, it's not just the shape of the object which can change, but there are other aspects as well. For example the size of the object can change, and that happens when there are two identical objects in front of us, and we move towards one of them. He said that there are more than 50 illusions which can be included in 28 different categories, and each of these illusions can be explained with the aid of science. The information might not be life changing, but at least now you could try and figure out why certain things seem to be what they are not, and how certain things actually work.

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