



## **Mentalist | Illusionist | Magician Corporate Event, Private Parties Simon Winthrop Productions**

**www.SimonWinthrop.com**  
**Las Vegas, NV 89101**  
**310-704-2708**

Mentalist | Illusionist | Magician Corporate Event, Private Parties Simon Winthrop Productions  
www.SimonWinthrop.com  
Las Vegas, NV, 89101  
work 310-704-2708  
36.171 -115.1259

**See more blogs in [Las Vegas, NV Merchant Blog](#)**

**The magician works, but the mind does the tricks**

This weeks International Herald featured this fine overview on the interrelationship between Illusion, Perception, and Mind.

--Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

-----

By Benedict Carey | [International Herald Tribune](#)

**While a magician works, the mind does the tricks**

Wednesday, August 13, 2008

**A decent backyard magic show is often an exercise in deliberate chaos. Cards whipped through the air. Glasses crashing to the ground. Gasps, hand-waving, loud abracadabras. Something's bound to catch fire, too, if the performer is ambitious enough or needs cover.**



A painting from the 16th century, entitled "The Conjurer."

"Back in the early days, I always had a little smoke and fire, not only for misdirection but to emphasize that something magic had just happened," said The Great Raguzi, a magician based in Southern California who has performed professionally for more than 35 years, in venues around the world. "But as the magic and magician mature, you see that you don't need the bigger props."

Eye-grabbing distractions to mask a palmed card or coin, say are only the crudest ways to exploit brain processes that allow for more subtle manipulations, good magicians learn.

In a paper published last week in the journal *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, a team of brain scientists and prominent magicians described how magic tricks, both simple and spectacular, take advantage of glitches in how the brain constructs a model of the outside world from moment to moment, or what we think of as objective reality.

For the magicians, including The Great Tomsoni (John Thompson), Mac King, James Randi, and Teller of Penn and Teller, the collaboration provided scientific validation, as well as a few new ideas.

For the scientists, Susana Martinez-Conde and Stephen Macknik of the Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, it raised hope that magic could accelerate research into perception. "Here's this art form going back perhaps to ancient Egypt, and basically the neuroscience community had been unaware" of its direct application to the study of perception, Martinez-Conde said.

"It's a marvelous paper," Michael Bach, a vision scientist at Freiburg University in Germany who was not involved in the work, said in an e-mail message. Magicians alter what the brain perceives by manipulating how it interprets scenes, Bach said, "and a distant goal of cognitive psychology would be to numerically predict this."


One theory of perception, for instance, holds that the brain builds representations of the world,

moment to moment, using the senses to provide clues that are fleshed out into a mental picture based on experience and context. The brain uses neural tricks to do this: approximating, cutting corners, instantaneously and subconsciously choosing what to "see" and what to let pass, neuroscientists say. Magic exposes the inseams, the neural stitching in the perceptual curtain.

Some simple magical illusions are due to relatively straightforward biological limitations. Consider spoon bending. Any 7-year-old can fool her younger brother by holding the neck of a spoon and rapidly tilting it back and forth, like a mini teeter-totter gone haywire. The spoon appears curved, because of cells in the visual cortex called end-stopped neurons, which perceive both motion and the boundaries of objects, the authors write. The end-stopped neurons respond differently from other motion-sensing cells, and this slight differential warps the estimation of where the edges of the spoon are.

The visual cortex is attentive to sudden changes in the environment, both when something new appears and when something disappears, Martinez-Conde said. A sudden disappearance causes what neuroscientists call an after-discharge: a ghostly image of the object lingers for a moment.

This illusion is behind a spectacular trick by the Great Tomsoni. The magician has an assistant appear on stage in a white dress and tells the audience he will magically change the color of her dress to red. He first does this by shining a red light on her, an obvious ploy that he turns into a joke. Then the red light flicks off, the house lights go on and the now the woman is unmistakably dressed in red. The secret: In the split-second after the red light goes off, the red image lingers in the audience's brains for about 100 milliseconds, covering the image of the woman. It's just enough time for the woman's white dress to be stripped away, revealing a red one underneath.

In a conference last summer, hosted by Martinez and Macknik, a Las Vegas pickpocket performer and co-author named Apollo Robbins took advantage of a similar effect on the sensory nerves on the wrist. He had a man in the audience come up on stage and, while bantering with him, swiped the man's wallet, watch and several other things. Just before slipping off the timepiece, Robbins clutched the man's wrist while doing a coin trick  thereby lowering the sensory threshold on the wrist. The paper, with links to video of Robbins' performance, is at [www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com).

"That was really neat, and new to me," said Bach, who was in the audience. The grasp, he said, left "a sort of somatosensory afterimage, so that the loss of the watch stays subthreshold" in the victim. The visual cortex resolves clearly only what is at the center of vision; the periphery is blurred, and this is likely one reason that the eyes are always in motion, to gather snapshots to construct a wider, coherent picture.

A similar process holds for cognition. The brain focuses conscious attention on one thing at a time, at the expense of others, regardless of where the eyes are pointing. In imaging studies, neuroscientists have found evidence that the brain suppresses activity in surrounding visual areas when concentrating on a specific task. Thus preoccupied, the brain may not consciously register actions witnessed by the eyes.

Magicians exploit this property in a variety of ways. Jokes, stagecraft and drama can hold and direct thoughts and attention away from sleights of hand and other moves, performers say.

But small, apparently trivial movements can also mask maneuvers that produce breathtaking effects. In a telephone interview, Teller explained how a magician might get rid of a card palmed in his right hand, by quickly searching his pockets for a pencil. "I pat both pockets, find a pencil,

reach out and hand it to someone, and the whole act becomes incidental; if the audience is made to read intention [getting the pencil, in this case] then that action disappears, and no one remembers you put your hand in your pocket," the magician said. "You don't really see it, because it's not a figure anymore, it has become part of the background."

The magician's skill is in framing relevant maneuvers as trivial. When it's done poorly, Teller said, "the actions immediately become suspicious, and you instantly click that something's wrong."

David Blaine, a New York magician and performance artist, said he started doing magic at age 4 and quickly learned that he did not need any drama or special effects. "A strong and effective way to distract somebody is to directly engage the person," with eye contact or other interaction, Blaine said. "That can act on the subconscious like a subtle form of hypnosis."

Not that there's anything wrong with a dove, a plume of smoke or a burst of fire. As long as it doesn't break magic's unwritten code: First, do no harm. Frightening neighborhood parents, however, is allowed.

xxx

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 10:52 AM August 17, 2008

### **New York Hall of Science Presents The Science of Illusion & Magic**

This new exhibit at the New York Hall of science is TERRIFIC!

- Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

-----

Get Into the Act with Magic:

### **The Science of Illusion at the New York Hall of Science**

**NY HALL OF SCIENCE | 8-04-08**

Queens, N.Y. - Mind reading, levitation, a head without a body - is it magic or science? Visitors can explore the secrets behind their favorite magic tricks in Magic: The Science of Illusion, an interactive exhibition at the New York Hall of Science from June 28 - September 14. The exhibition, which includes original contributions from world-renowned magicians [Penn & Teller](#), Goldfinger & Dove, Max Maven and Jade, allows visitors to become active participants in the magical illusions.

"Magicians can't do the impossible, but by using basic scientific principles, they can appear to," says Marilyn Hoyt, the President and CEO of the New York Hall of Science. "This exhibition provides a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the illusions that have been amazing spectators for ages."

Magicians often act more like inventors, using psychology, physics, math, engineering and the art of performance to create innovative illusions and stunning effects. Magic: The

Science of Illusion features four popular illusions: transformation, mind reading, levitation, and the disembodied head. Professional magicians introduce visitors to each illusion through original video presentations, and later invite them backstage to see how they perform the amazing tricks.

Goldfinger & Dove explain the secrets of their levitating Throne of Enlightenment, and Jade uses magic words - with a little help from electromagnetism - to make an empty box too heavy to lift. Max Maven uses math to read visitors' minds, while Penn & Teller give aspiring magicians the opportunity to lose their heads - literally! Visitors can also explore the history of magic by examining artifacts including handcuffs Houdini once escaped from and consider the ways they use "magical thinking" in their own lives.

But magicians will never reveal all their secrets, and videos of additional illusions that cannot be done with the methods explained in the exhibit will still leave visitors mystified. At the intersection of science and magic, there is always room for wonder.

Magic: The Science of Illusion was developed by the [California Science Center](#) in cooperation with the Science Museum Exhibit Collaborative. It is also supported in part by the National Science Foundation. Advisors for Magic include magicians Penn & Teller, Goldfinger & Dove, Jade, Max Maven and the late Doug Henning, along with magic industry specialist Jim Steinmeyer and Milt Larsen.

Educational programs and materials associated with Magic: The Science of Illusion are made possible with support from [Roslyn Savings Foundation](#).

The New York Hall of Science is New York City's hands-on science and technology center. More than 400 interactive exhibits explore the wonder and excitement of biology, chemistry and physics. Admission is \$11 for adults and \$8 for children (ages 2-17), college students with valid ID, and seniors (62+). For hours, directions, and other information, please visit [www.nyscience.org](http://www.nyscience.org) or call 718.699.0005.

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 05:26 PM August 08, 2008

## **THE ILLUSIONIST VERSUS THE MAGICIAN**

Yes, Dorothy, there is a difference! --Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

-----

## **THE ILLUSIONIST VERSUS THE MAGICIAN**

SOURCE: [JC SUM "The Thinking Man's Magician"](#)

Are you a magician or an illusionist? What difference does it make?

If you think that you are better than any stage, close-up or kids magicians because

you perform illusions, think again!

Within the magic community there tends to be an implicit distinction (and at times snobbish segregation) between different kinds of magicians. Stage magicians think they are better than close-up magicians, straight magicians think they are better than comedy magicians, close-up magicians think they are better than kid show magicians and mentalists think they are an elite breed, better than any other kind of magical performer.

The truth is, each form of magic requires its own unique set of skills, techniques and experiences in order to be successful in. Each form has its own specialized difficulties and challenges that require years of mastery, rehearsal and practice. So, to look down on another type of magician is ludicrous.

Having said the above, the purpose of this essay is not to tackle a 'social' issue but is to examine the need to make a distinction between the illusionist and the (regular) magician.

Is there a real need to make a distinction between the two? The short answer is 'Yes'.

However, the distinction has nothing to do with the 'superior' abilities of the illusionist. But, the distinction becomes essential when marketing yourself as a magical entertainer.

Remember, show business is two words, 'show' and 'business'. In business, you need to differentiate yourself from the competition and create a strong position for yourself. If you perform illusions, billing yourself as an illusionist will help create a strong business advantage.

Illusions are generally accepted as 'big' magic where the effects created are generally larger in scale involving larger props, persons or animals. Illusions are considered more difficult as it is assumed that bigger effects require more expertise to stage. As such consumers (the lay audience and entertainment industry) generally perceive illusionists as a grade up from regular magicians and confer upon them a higher market value.

Consumers hold illusionists in higher regard and think that an illusionist has a higher status than a magician. While it is sad for the general magic art and community, this stereotype works in favour of the illusionist.

Thus, the distinction between the illusionist and the magician is important and relevant commercially, for the sake of marketability. As an illusionist, you can command a higher show fee than a magician as consumers are willing to pay more for a better/bigger show.

While selling yourself as an illusionist does increase your perceived market value, you have to live up to that billing. Make sure that the show you present is reflective of what consumers expect from an illusionist. Owning and performing an 'illusionette' like an 'Arm Chopper' does not qualify you as an illusionist in the real world. Use world-class illusion shows as a benchmark for what consumers will expect from your show.

You can expect to invest a significant amount of effort, time, money and resources in building an illusion show. That is also one reason why an illusionist 'needs'

to be paid more than a magician because his capital outlay is generally much more than a magician. You could realistically build a solid magic show for under US\$1000 but probably not a decent illusion show.

If you are seriously thinking about distinguishing yourself as an illusionist to advance your magical career, check out my book ['The Event Illusionist' - A Guidebook to Building & Marketing an Event Illusion Show](#).

xxx

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 04:10 PM August 07, 2008

### **[The World's first University of Magic & Illusion](#)**

The World's first University of Magic & Illusion, in West bengal India. I hope to visit soon!

--Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

-----

## **Masters degree in Illusion from World's first University of Magic**

[INDIA.EDUNEWS.NET](#) | July 19, 2008

---

Shillong: The world's first University of Magic will be setup in [Kolkata](#) by November this year, by acclaimed magician P.C. Sorcar (Junior).

Speaking to reporters here, Sorcar said, "About a dozen students have been selected for the university's maiden session scheduled to begin in November later this year."

"We have broken down the courses into various branches like Psychology, Acting, Mechanical and Lighting. Experts from the fields have also been roped in as faculty", Sorkar added.

Interestingly, students will be awarded a Masters of Illusion degree after successful completion of the course.

P.C. Sorcar (Junior), who has elevated the status of magic further more from the position where his father P.C. Sorcar (Senior) left it, says that the magic of today is the science of tomorrow.

"We have laid down strict procedures for selecting candidates for the course. We will only select witty students who have a good IQ and those who will benefit the society rather than harm it," he said.

It was P.C. Sorcar (Senior), father of P.C. Sorcar (Junior), who popularised the family art of 'Magic' beyond the boundaries of India, elevating the presentations to a more prestigious pedestal of theatrical form of International standard, keeping Indian traditions

as the central motif.

Sorcar (Senior) gave a new lease of life to the dying art and thus is recognised as "The Father of Indian Magic".

"Ours is a family of magicians... and performing magic is our birthright. Even the cat in our house is a magician", says P.C. Sorcar (Junior).

xxx

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 06:41 PM August 01, 2008

### **The Best Magic, Illusionist, Mentalist Show I Ever Saw!**

"Sometimes it takes the perspective gained by the passage of time to realize the greatness of an event."

--Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

-----

***On that Saturday evening of May 31, 1958, I had not the slightest inkling that the full-evening show of Willard the Wizard would become...***

## **The Best Show I Ever Saw!**

**By John Moehring**

**First published in the February '98 issue of [MAGIC Magazine](#)**

The houselights of Houston's San Jacinto High School auditorium slowly dimmed to a comfortable half-brightness, as an organist began a spirited overture. A lilting waltz segued to stirring Sousa marches, and the crowd of around 800 was abuzz with anticipation. A knowledgeable-sounding gentleman seated behind me advised his family of five: "Harry always started on time." The houselights completed their dim. There was an trumpeting fanfare. An offstage voice simply announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome the world's greatest magician, Willard the Wizard."

At age 62, with a flowing mane of silver-streaked hair, an elegant waxed mustache, and a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, the immaculately dressed magician stood center stage as the epitome of the masters of the old school — Alexander Herrmann, Harry Kellar, and Harry Willard's idol, Frederick Eugene Powell.

The opening wizardry of Willard was like stepping into the pages of Professor Hoffmann's *Modern Magic* or *More Magic* — "Flowers from the Cone," "Decanters and Flying Handkerchiefs," "Hot Coffee and Milk Served," and the "Cones and Beans" — conjuring of a bygone era that today is relegated to the colorful volumes of Dr. Albo. Yet, when Willard spoke, he convinced all that the anachronistic apparatus was "absolutely free of guile." Each mystery was presented as "a magical experiment."



A small metal tub placed on a frame stand was splash-filled with water. Suddenly a pair of white ducks materialized. Willard then performed "Where Do the Ducks Go?" with a tail-feather-duster sucker-ending.

Blue footlights flooded the stage. The music became dark and haunting. An open-front trunk was wheeled onstage. Glass plates were used to line the bottom and side walls of the trunk. The lid was equipped with rows of bright incandescent bulbs, which rendered the interior clearly empty. Willard whisked a sheer scarf across the front glass. Instantly, a beautiful lady waved to the audience from the confines of the trunk. The lid was raised and Frances, Harry's 17-year-old daughter emerged, flourishing silken wings of an iridescent butterfly costume. In addition to Frances, Ann Mahendra, wife of famed mentalist M.S. "Doc" Mahendra, assisted Willard that evening.

The program listed the next effect as "Birds in Flight." Frances brought forward a cage containing three canaries. Willard gently placed them into a paper sack. He assured the audience that the little birds were all right, as small air-holes were torn into the bag. Then in the very next breath, a pistol was used to shoot out the bottom of the bag. The canaries were chirping and fluttering about, back in their cage.

The house curtain closed and Willard stepped down to the stage apron holding a yard-length of hemp cord. He invited two gentlemen from the audience to tie his thumbs together. The men were challenged to pull with all their might to prevent any slack before each knot was added. A second piece of rope was used to further bind his thumbs, which had become blue due to circulation being cut-off. With his hands tightly secured in this praying position, Willard rapidly and repeatedly penetrated a length of iron pipe held by the spectators. Despite the constant examination of the knots, he continued to pass his tied-hands through steel rings tossed toward him. He walked into the aisles, placing his arms over spectators' heads, pulling his bound-hands through their necks. There was a tremendous ovation when his thumbs were finally cut free. I would later learn this was the Ten Itchi "Thumb Tie," a guarded secret that Willard had elevated to become his masterpiece.

Still in front of the house curtain, Willard performed the "Miser's Dream," catching handfuls of silver half-dollars from the air. A young man from the audience assisted, and Willard started producing as many laughs as coins, as the boy discovered and removed half-dollars from just about every pocket of his clothing.

Willard promised his young assistant a souvenir, but first made him promise that he would take good care of it. The curtain parted to reveal the "Doll House." After the boy helped empty the toy furniture from the house, Willard reached through the door and produced several white doves. Then came a duck, a rooster, a rabbit, and the big surprise — the rooftop split apart — out came Frances, wearing a formal dress that literally covered the tiny house. She took the boy by the hand and both returned to his seat in the auditorium.

>> [Continued online at MagicMagazine.com](http://www.MagicMagazine.com)

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) | [StumbleUpon](http://StumbleUpon) | [Digg](http://Digg)

Posted 05:10 PM July 30, 2008

**[Illusionist Magician Had Role in Earthquake, Maybe?](#)**

Today's big 5.4 R earthquake in Southern California, despite rumors, was not David Copperfield's doing, or was it? --Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

---

## Judge: "Maybe Magician Had Role in Earthquake"

Posted: July 29, 2008 03:13 PM PDT

[KESQ.com News Services](#)

A judge considering dueling lawsuits involving magician David Copperfield managed to add some levity to the proceedings when Tuesday's earthquake struck.

"I hope this wasn't Mr. Copperfield's doing," Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Robert L. Hess quipped.

Earlier, the judge ruled against Copperfield and his personal attorney, Albert Rettig, neither of whom were present. Attorney Benjamin P. Broderick tried to have parts of the case against them dismissed, including a breach-of-contract allegation against the magician.

The temblor struck just as Broderick was answering questions from Hess about the status of any potential criminal probe of Copperfield. The sleight-of-hand master has been under investigation since mid-October, when a woman who was in his audience claimed he flew her to the Bahamas and raped her. He has denied the claim.

The promoters, Viva Art International Ltd., based in the Channel Islands, and Maz Concerts Inc. of Ontario, Canada, originally filed suit last Nov. 6 in Los Angeles Superior Court action against Copperfield, his production company, David Copperfield's Disappearing Inc. and his lawyer, Albert Rettig.

According to the promoters' suit, the companies entered a contract with Copperfield in September for 38 live performances in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Bangkok in October and November, and 10 performances in the United Arab Emirates, all of which the entertainer later canceled.

The companies are trying to recover nearly \$2.2 million as a result of the cancellation, most of which they allege is being held in Rettig's attorney/client trust account. They claim they forwarded the money to Copperfield to cover his costs for the tour.

The promoters filed additional claims in an amended complaint on Dec. 19, including indemnity.

The companies allege Copperfield did not go ahead with the promised performances because of the ongoing criminal investigation and that he did not want to make public appearances after the allegations surfaced against him because he would have had to face questions from overseas news outlets.

Copperfield countersued the promoters for \$4 million on Feb. 8. He maintains he is owed the money under an "artist's guaranteed fee" in which he was to be paid \$2.8 million for the Southeast Asia portion of the tour and the rest for performances in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

xxx

xxx

xxx

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 10:04 PM July 29, 2008

## **The Boundaries of Perception, Illusion, and... Liars**

Fascinating article provides much insight... and some new ideas for my future performances!

--Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

# **The Science of Sniffing Out Liars**

07.28.2008

## **An interrogation expert spills his secrets.**

by Susan Kruglinski | [Discover Magazine](#)

Armed with a doctorate in physiological psychology, [Eric Haseltine](#) has explored **the boundaries of perception and illusion** in commercial projects ranging from flight simulators for Hughes Aircraft to virtual reality and special effects for Disney theme parks. After the events of 9/11, he became engaged in the study of a different kind of illusion: the shadowy world of international espionage. He headed research and development for the National Security Agency in 2002, and in 2006 he was named associate director for science and technology for the [Office of the Director of National Intelligence](#). One of his responsibilities involved research on how to extract information from people during interrogation and how to determine whether the information is valid. Now an independent contractor who calls himself a “technology futurist,” Haseltine divulges as much as he can about deception detection.

### **Can science help us determine if someone is deceiving us?**

The very high-tech stuff we rely on includes functional magnetic resonance imaging, [magnetic encephalography](#), and some very, very sophisticated electroencephalography—one of the techniques used to test so-called guilty knowledge. That’s where you expose somebody to something and they have guilty knowledge—they’ve seen it before, let’s say. You can tell by looking at their brain response, up to a point, whether their brain has seen that thing or not. You say, well, do you know X, or have you seen X, and they say no, but their brain says otherwise.

Other work is trying to make traditional polygraphy better by using, for example, algorithms instead of humans to look at what’s coming in on the needle. The polygrapher, who is only human, can have a positive or negative bias about the subject that will color the interpretation of what’s on the needles, so there is a lot of work to make it objective. Algorithms can do a better job of telling if there is a good physiological response, but it’s still a big leap to telling whether the person is lying. It’s still in the basic research phase and far from being something that I would feel comfortable relying on, especially when it gets into the issue of cross-cultural communications. And there are other factors that we don’t completely understand. For example, the kind of person you worry about the most is one who has what we call [antisocial personality disorder](#) [a person who is indifferent to the needs of others]. Those people seem to have low guilt and anxiety. Do they have the same physiological response as someone who is “normal”? Yes and no. Lying requires a mental workload, which, according to some scientists, [drives up the blood pressure](#) and heart rate

regardless of your emotional state, and so there may be some similarities and there may not be. Those are questions that require more investigation. So I personally would not put a lot of stock in any of these measures, including polygraphy per se.

We now get into the category of things that I would call low tech, which I think have a fair amount of validity. For example, [Paul Ekman](#) looks at microexpressions as evidence of what you're really feeling. What he feels is that when you are suppressing things, things leak out in microbursts. If someone says, "Gee, I really am saddened by the death of my wife" and a microexpression shows that he is happy or contemptuous, then it would give you pause. By itself, I wouldn't call it lie detection. But it does give you information that would either support or not support the hypothesis of deception.

#### **What are interrogators told to look for?**

There isn't a lot of behavioral research data about which particular techniques are most effective. There was a Luftwaffe [German air force] corporal who was legendary in World War II for interrogating. His name was [Hanns Scharff](#). He spoke flawless English. He was an incredibly gentle person. He was warm, he never in any way pressured interviewees, and he extracted tremendous intelligence. People who talked about being interrogated by him said they didn't know they were being interrogated. He had an incredible memory and he never wrote anything down. So you'd be walking out in the exercise yard, smoking a cigarette with him, and he'd just be talking. And he would remember everything.

#### **Who makes a good spy or a good liar?**

I don't think there's any one answer to that. Being a good actor, being a good poker player. Being a good con man. Con men are people who are sociopathic, who do not feel remorse, and who are very attuned, strangely, to other people and can read them very well. If I know what you really want to hear and what is in your heart of hearts, your fondest desire, because I'm good at reading you and I'm street-smart about assessing you, then I can feed you what you want to hear. A good con man does that. A [good magician](#) does that. You also have to have a good memory.

#### **So behavioral scientists have a leg up on technology as far as interrogation goes?**

I think that's right. You think of things like [thermal imaging](#) and pupil dilation, and you can look at heart rate with ultrawideband radar, and blood pressure and breathing rate and galvanic skin response—signals like sweat—and you can look at the constellation of all of these things, and they may tell you that the person is aroused or that he's having an autonomic response. But it's a big leap from that to "He's lying." I've undergone polygraphs, and I will tell you it's [a very stressful experience](#). And some people react very differently to stress than others without being liars at all.

#### **Does torture work as a method of extracting the truth?**

I'm going to go back to the findings of the Intelligence Science Board, a group of scientists who advised the U.S. intelligence community and studied the most effective ways to gather information in a free society. When they looked at all the techniques that are used, their conclusion is that we don't have the behavioral science to give us the answers. As to coercive methods, I don't think we have good information to say one way or another. [The notion that] if you're in intense pain then you'll break may not be true.

#### **What is the hottest area today in deception detection?**

Human lie detectors. I think the low-tech training of humans to be better interpreters of information is where the most productive work is going to be. The reason being that you can either train a human to do it or train a computer to do it, and human brains are still [much better computers](#) than computers are.

#### **Is there any technique that scares or worries you?**

I think it's inevitable that with neuroscience we're going to get to a point where, without [a person's] cooperation, we can be pretty accurate about knowing what a person knows or feels or thinks. And so I wouldn't say it scares me, but I would say that there are going to be some really tough issues for society to deal with [regarding] where privacy and

human dignity begin and the right of the larger group to protect itself ends.

It's kind of like the same question as: Is it okay to take the fingerprint of a criminal or a suspect? Yes. Is it okay to take their DNA? Less clear. Is it okay to [find out what's going on](#) in their brain without their cooperation? Let's say we can train a computer to do better than a human does looking at facial expressions and body language and everything else, right? I think that it will be possible and maybe not too far off in the future. So imagine if a computer can look at you through a camera and know whether you are suppressing information or having feelings that are not consistent with what you're saying, and you don't have any ability to volunteer that. I think that society has got to wrestle with that question. And I'm not saying that I'm scared, I'm saying that I'm not optimistic that there are any easy answers.

xxx

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 12:07 PM July 29, 2008

### **Remembering A Master Magician**

Harold Russell was a legend and he will be sorely missed.

--Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

-----

### **Remembering A Master Magician: Harold D. Russell**

**Wednesday, 23 Jul 2008**

**By Dan Gray | [KTVI-TV](#)**

ST. LOUIS, MO (KTVI-myFOXstl.com) -- St. Louis' first African American magician has died. Harold D Russell was an inspiration and mentor to many young black magicians and he was one of a handful of magicians to be recognized with a prestigious award from fellow magicians. In 2005 Russell Received the Gold Medal from the Society of American Magicians.

In the history of the society, only seven gold medals have been awarded.

He's also remembered as a great role model.

"I remember him as being the best father. Anybody who knows him knows how compassionate he is." daughter Sharon Anhalt explains, "We will miss, of course, our dad. Our friends and his family will miss his smile. I know that when you interviewed him, his smile was like this," and she grinned.

And he will be remember as a great showman.

Fellow magician Derrick Daniels recalls, "When he came out, he always said the same thing. He said, 'Ladies and gentlemen. My name is Harold D. Russell, and I am star.'"

Russell was known as the goodwill ambassador for magic in St. Louis and he would mentor young magicians.

Daniels says, "You'd come into the club and he'd walk over to you and talk to you and take you around and meet the people. That was vintage Harold D."

Russell was hospitalized about a month ago, but Sharon says he continued entertaining, even when nurses gave him a pill, "She said, 'Good job Mr. Russell!' They watched him swallow the pill and when she said good job Mr. Russell, he opened his hand and the pill was in his hand."

Harold D. Russell died of complications from pneumonia. He was 86 years old.

Visitation will be at Layne Renaissance Chapel on West Florissant in north St. Louis on Sunday. The funeral will be at the same location on Monday.

xxx

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 01:09 PM July 27, 2008

### **Mentalist and Illusionist tricks reveal brain inner-workings**

This is the perfect timely news with which to kick-off my new Merchant Circle blog.

Enjoy! --Simon | [Simon Winthrop Productions](#)

-----

## **Magic tricks reveal inner-workings of brain**

Friday Jul. 25 2008

[The Canadian Press](#)

VANCOUVER -- The trick starts simple enough: A magician pulls out a cigarette and a lighter and casually tries to light up.

As he fumbles around with the objects in his hands, the lighter vanishes into thin air. And then, just as quickly, the cigarette is gone, too.

It's classic sleight-of-hand. In fact, the magician drops the lighter and the cigarette into his lap, and he doesn't even try to hide it.

The reason you don't notice -- even if you're watching for it -- can reveal a lot about how we perceive the world around us, say researchers from Canada and the United Kingdom who are studying the science behind magic.

"Cognitive science has been around for about 50 years; magic has been around for thousands," says Alym Amlani, a practising magician and one of the co-authors of a paper in the current issue of the journal Trends in Cognitive Sciences.

"So, what magicians have done from generation to generation is passed down methods to create effects that work in the brain and work consistently on everybody. We're now at a point in cognitive science where we can begin to understand how these things all come together."

Amlani, a recent graduate from the University of British Columbia, is collaborating with a

colleague at UBC and another magician-cum-academic at Durham University in the U.K. to study how people see magic tricks.

They argue that there are many unanswered questions about how magicians can so easily deceive the brain, and answering them could have far-reaching implications ranging from driver safety to how we interact with computers.

The researchers gathered volunteers and showed them magic tricks, and then asked them how they thought the illusions worked. They also measured the eye movements of the participants as the tricks unfolded to see where they were looking.

For the cigarette and lighter trick, most participants didn't notice the magician drop the cigarette under a table, even though it was dropped from 15 centimeters above the tabletop in plain view.

Instead, they were watching his other hand, where he was revealing the lighter, too, had disappeared.

"When you look through your eyes, what you're seeing in front of you feels like a complete picture, but that's really far from the truth," says Amlani, who graduated from UBC's cognitive sciences program, which mixes a number of fields including computer science and psychology.

"You're actually aware of what you're consciously paying attention to, and what magicians do on a day-to-day basis is direct people's attention away from what they don't want people to consciously perceive."

The paper argues that further study of magic could help scientists understand how our brain processes information in a range of situations.

For example, studying misdirection tricks could reveal more about what our eyes pay attention to and why.

That could improve computer interfaces to better guide users through vast amounts of information and control where their attention is drawn to on a screen, or help understand where drivers focus their attention on how easily they can be distracted.

"A common (car) accident is that a driver looked but failed to see - just because your eyes are focusing on something doesn't mean you're paying attention to it," says Amlani, who notes that even participants who were looking directly at the hand dropping the cigarette fell for the trick.

"As technology gets more and more complicated, we have systems competing for our attention, and it becomes more important to design systems in such away that people can pay attention to what they need to pay attention to."

Durham University's Gustav Kuhn, also a magician, says there's much about magic -- and, in turn, how it relates to human cognition -- not yet understood.

But as he studies some of the oldest tricks in the book, he's careful not to pull the curtain back too far.

"It's something that we're very aware of, and we've always tried to make a big point about not giving away any of the secrets," says Kuhn, who says his childhood interest in magic steered him towards studying psychology.

"Most people who go and see a magic show know that misdirection will be taking place, so just knowing that you're going to be distracted is not actually going to help you find out

how the trick is done."

xxx

[0 comments](#) | [Edit](#)

Bookmark: [del.icio.us](#) | [StumbleUpon](#) | [Digg](#)

Posted 06:38 PM July 26, 2008