

"That was really neat, and new to me," said Dr. 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, Mr. 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.

A version of this article appeared in print on August 12, 2008, on page F1 of the New York edition.

Until we appear again,
Kipp Sherry

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Last edited by Kipp Sherry; 08-13-2008 at 08:09 AM.



08-13-2008, 08:10 AM

#2 (permalink)

[John Logan](#) John Logan is offline
Senior Member

Join Date: Dec 2007
Location: MA
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Quote:

Originally Posted by [Kipp Sherry](#)
If you are interested in advancing your magic, here is an interesting article I found published in the New York Times. It's a scientific approach to magic, but still very relevant, and often forgotten about by today's magicians.

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.

I think this is the article they were talking about [How magicians control your mind - The Boston Globe](#)

That's pretty interesting. Ill have to keep all that in mind.

John Logan.

[myspace.com/logan3210](#)
Impossible is only a word.

Last edited by Kipp Sherry; 08-13-2008 at 08:18 AM.



Today, 08:08 AM

#3 (permalink)

[Don Savant](#) Don Savant is offline
New Member

Join Date: Feb 2008
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