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Magic Research

Yesterday's Science Times described research published recently in Nature Reviews Neuroscience in which "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."

See performances of one the magicians, Apollo Robbins:

(you can also check out his web site, IStealStuff.com)

The *Times* article talks about the relationship between magic and perception, suggesting that the work of magicians can help neuroscientists understand the limits of perception. My non-scientific take on this is that magicians are exploiting known phenomena like the blind spot we have in our vision. The *Times* article highlights several magic tricks that rely on these "biological limitations" to trick humans into thinking that magic is being performed, while it comments on how the brain is misled:

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.

There are interviews with a few magicians, as well as a description of Apollo Robbins' performance at last summer's Magic of Consciousness Symposium.

For More Information

- Carey, Benedict. While a Magician Works, the Mind Does the Tricks. New York Times, August 12, 2008.
- Doctorow, Cory. <u>Magic teaches us about human cognition</u>. Boing Boing. August 5, 2008.
 There are some interesting comments about the Boston Globe coverage of the same
 Nature Neuroscience article.
- Stephen L. Macknik, Mac King, James Randi, Apollo Robbins, Teller, John Thompson and Susana Martinez-Conde. <u>Attention and Awareness in Stage Magic: Turning Tricks into</u> <u>Research</u>. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, advance online publication, 30 July 2008.
- Magic of Consciousness Symposium. June 24, 2007. See some video clips, including a video of <u>Teller speaking</u>, Apollo Robbins picking the pocket of a New York Times reporter, and Dan Dennett being fooled by the Amazing Randi.)

Posted by CogSci Librarian @ 8:34 AM Labels: brain, consciousness, magic



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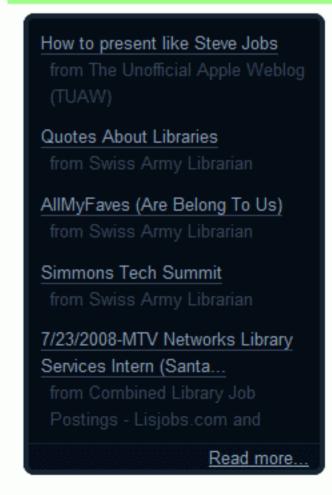
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