

Neuroanthropology

For a greater understanding of the encultured brain and body...

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• Welcome to Neuroanthropology

Neuroanthropology is a collaborative weblog created to encourage exchanges among anthropology, philosophy, social theory, and the brain sciences. We especially hope to explore the implications of new findings in the neurosciences for our understanding of culture, human development, and behaviour. If you are interested in joining as an ongoing contributor, please contact Greg Downey at Macquarie University [greg.downey @ mq.edu.au](mailto:greg.downey@mq.edu.au) (remove spaces).

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[Magic and Mind Tricks](#)

Posted by dlende on August 12, 2008

Benedict Carey has a NY Times article today, [While a Magician Works, the Mind Does the Tricks](#). Cognitive neuroscience

and magic has been receiving a lot of attention lately. Mind Hacks has [written extensively on magic](#) and Neurophilosophy has a [more general post](#).

Carey covers much the same ground, beginning with the recent paper “[Attention and Awareness in Stage Magic: Turning Tricks into Research](#)” (full paper) by Stephen Macknik and colleagues in Nature Neuroscience Reviews. Carey writes about the visual and tactile tricks of magic, of a red flash that lingers in vision to hide the stripping away of a white dress or gripping the wrist to leave a “somatosensory afterimage” before neatly stealing a man’s watch.

Carey also links to an [extensive collection of videos](#) that accompanied the Nature article. That’s one of the things I definitely want to highlight. These are videos of magicians doing their tricks, as well as some talks at a recent conference.

Magic would make a great neuroanthropology research project, similar to the placebo effect or video games. Anthropologists have long studied “magic, witchcraft and religion” (a typical course title), and are well placed to understand the techniques and training of magicians, the cultural knowledge and biases that magic seems to subvert or surprise, and how audiences read intentions into actions by the magician.

Possibly related posts: (automatically generated)

- [Scientists and Magicians Describe How Tricks Exploit Glitches in Perception...](#)
- [The Magic of Marketing](#)

This entry was posted on August 12, 2008 at 9:43 pm and is filed under [general](#). . You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

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