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## Sleight of Hand

Tue, 11/17/2009 - 03:33 — Tim Manners



"There is no better way to see how the mind works than to study how we can be deceived," says Thomas Carew in a *USA Today* piece by Mary Brophy Marcus (10/20/09). That's why neuroscientists are collaborating with magicians to explore "flaws of the human brain." Stephen Macknik, director of the [Barrow Neurological Institute](#) says magicians help them get a clearer view of how the mind is tricked because subjects are relatively unaware that they are being fooled.

"Magicians basically do the same things we try to do in the lab," says Stephen, except that they are much better at it. [Apollo Robbins](#), a longtime Vegas magician, says his technique "is heavily focused on misdirection ... I learned that there are movements that instinctively draw the eye away from one spot and to another," he explains. Susana Martinez-Conde, also of Barrow, says this works because we don't always absorb what we see. "If you gaze at something and don't attend to it, it won't be processed or perceived," she says.

Susana says humor can be a big distraction, as well. "We didn't know before that when you laugh or are amused by something, you can't pay very good attention," she says. [Eric Mead](#), a magician who bills himself as a "mind reader," meanwhile says he has "techniques to change ... memories." As to why most people enjoy magic even though they know they are being deceived, Dean Cestari of Harvard says, "Humans by nature like to solve puzzles and understand them ... Plus, there's something about magic that brings back memories of your childhood."

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