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Abstract:

How do magic tricks work? In this 30-minute presentation I discuss how magic tricks work in terms of the underlying psychological mechanisms. On a very general level, magic tricks work because people are unable to imagine what is really going on. On a more concrete level, there are many different reasons why people are unable to imagine what is going on. One reason is a visual illusion that makes people see things that are not there. Another one is a visual illusion that makes the space behind objects in the foreground appear compellingly empty, even when it is not. Yet another one is that when we imagine how flexible object can be transformed, our imagination is much more inflexible than reality. I will also illustrate how scientific research on magic can provide surprising new insights in other domains, such as road safety.

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