

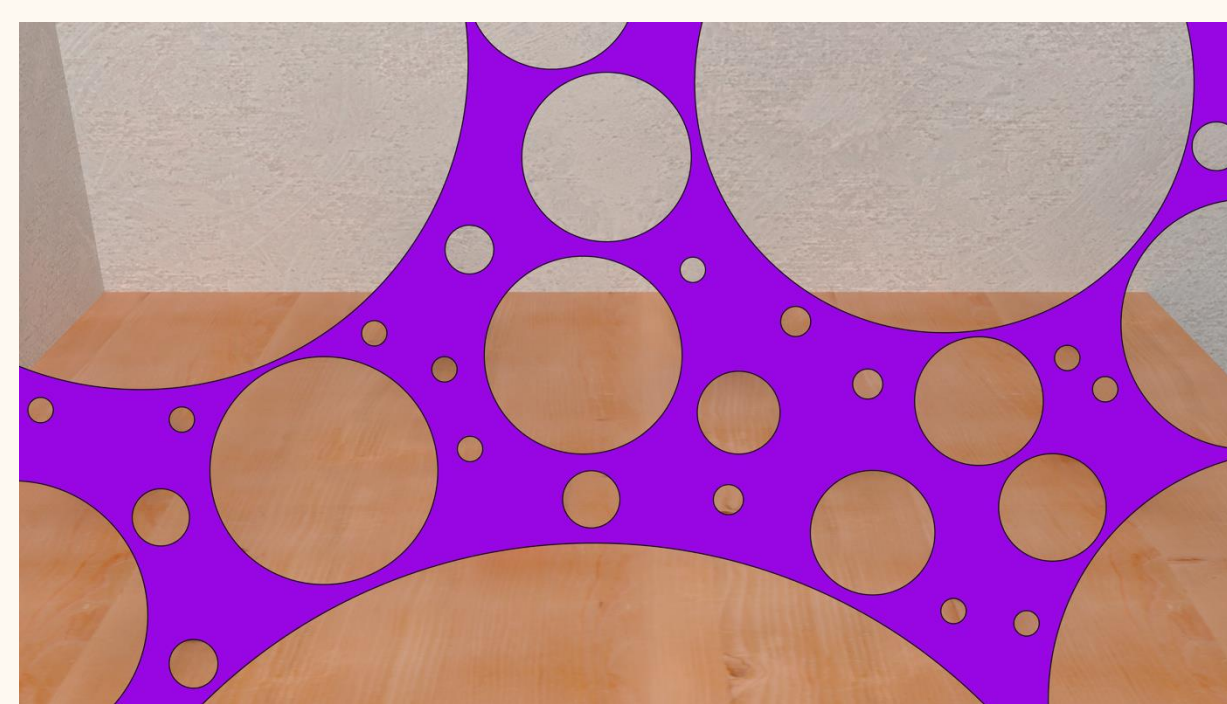
# The illusion of absence in the arts of magic and photography

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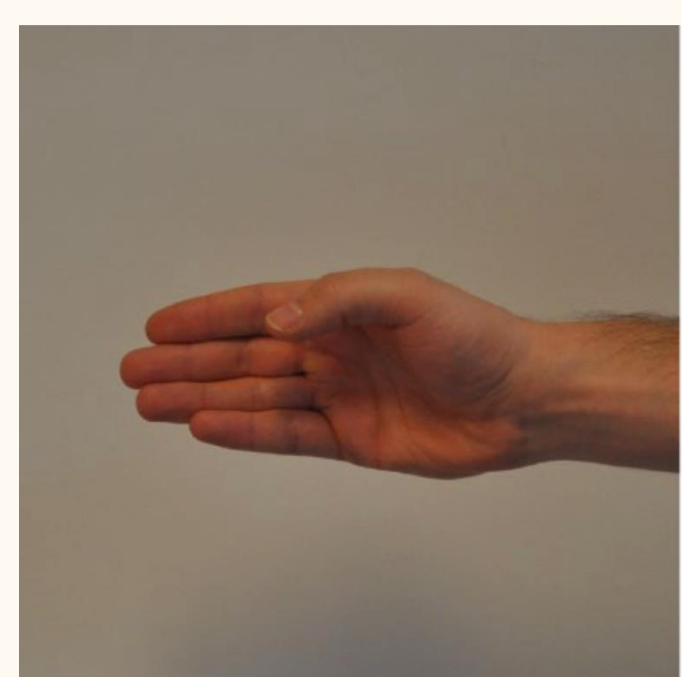
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**The illusion of absence** makes space behind an occluder appear empty (left) even though many objects may actually be hidden there (right).

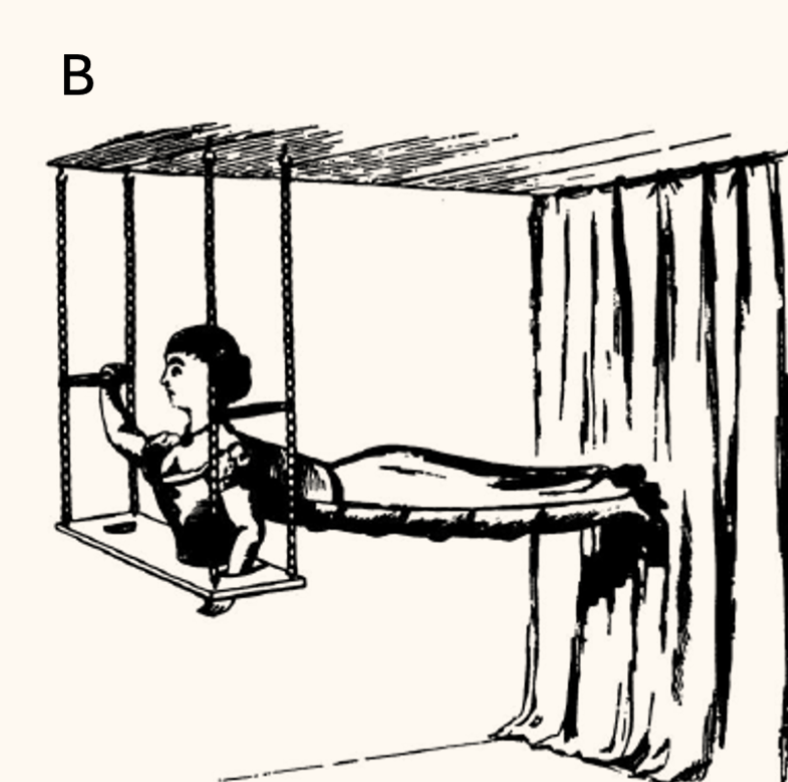
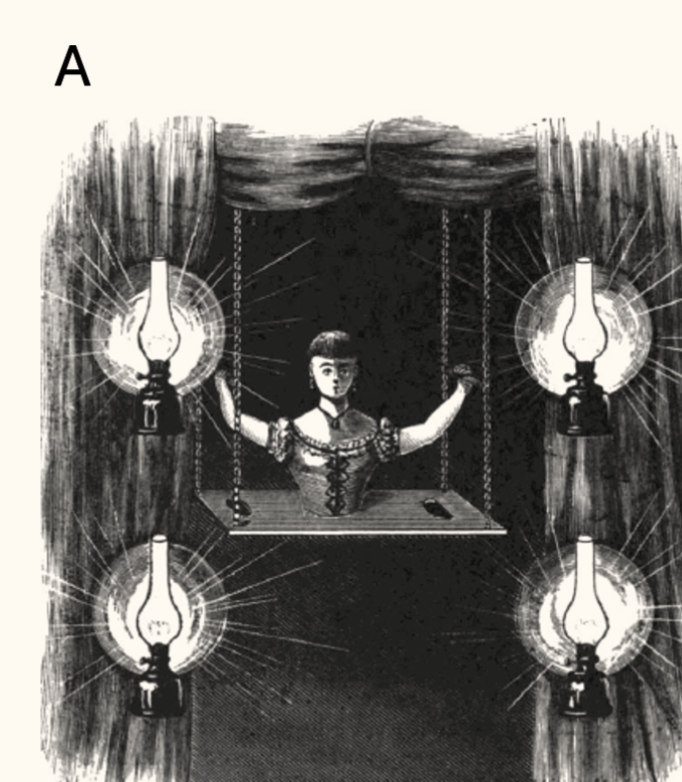
In the **art of magic**, the illusion of absence aids magicians in creating the impression ...



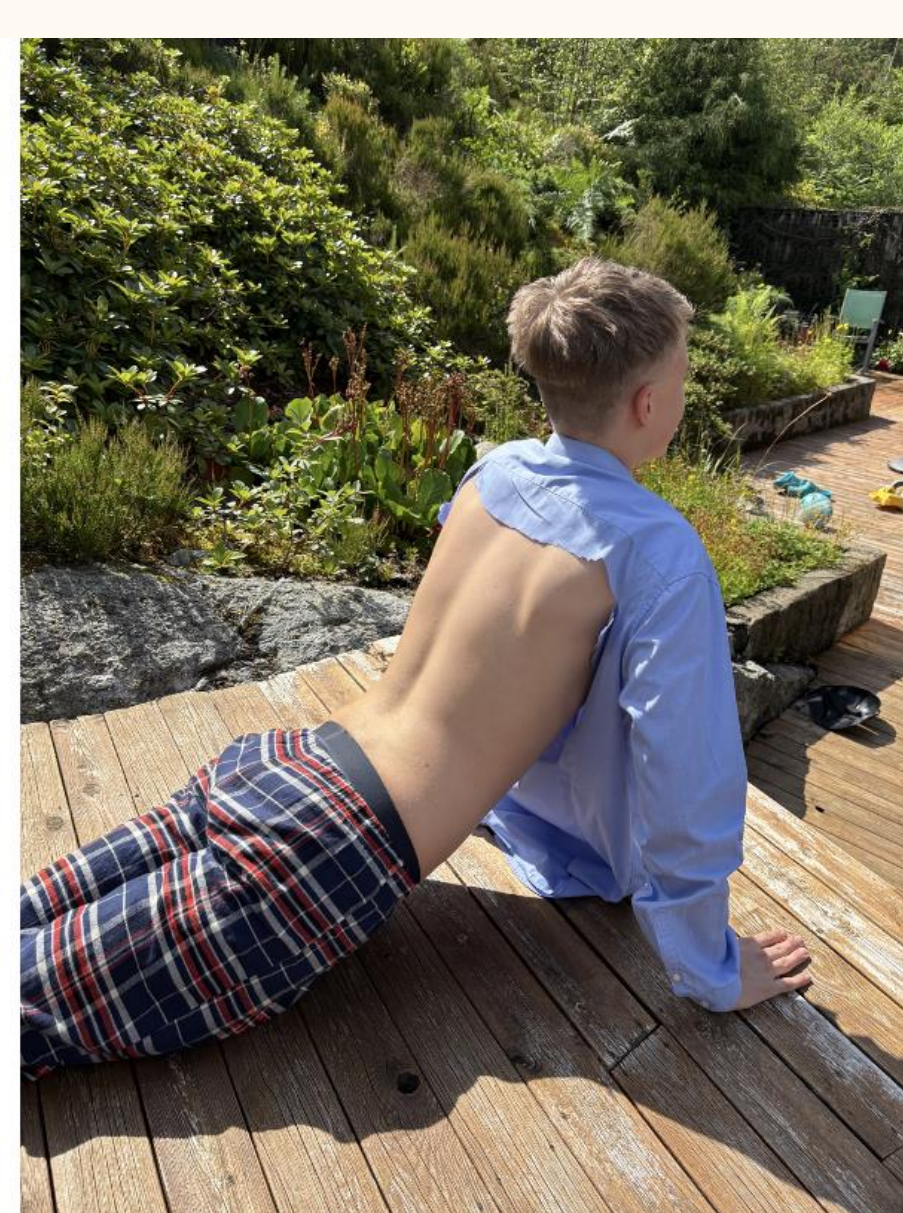
1. that things appear out of nowhere or vanish into thin air,

2. that things levitate, or  
(see poster by Forster et al. tomorrow)

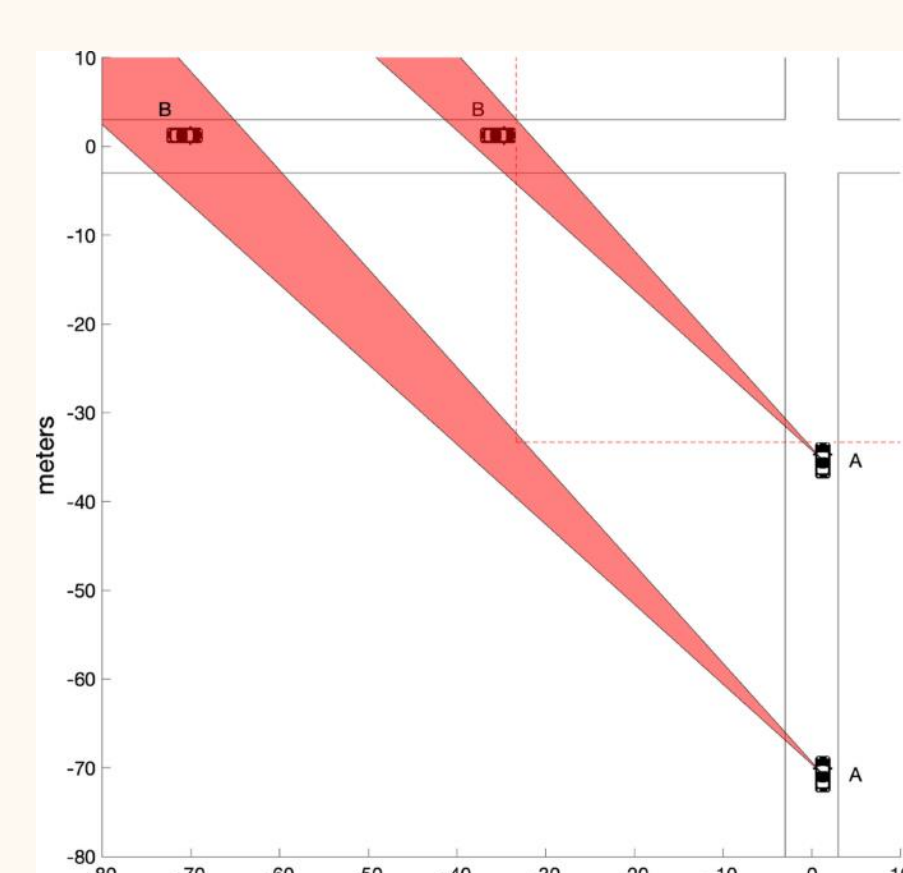
3. that body parts are missing:



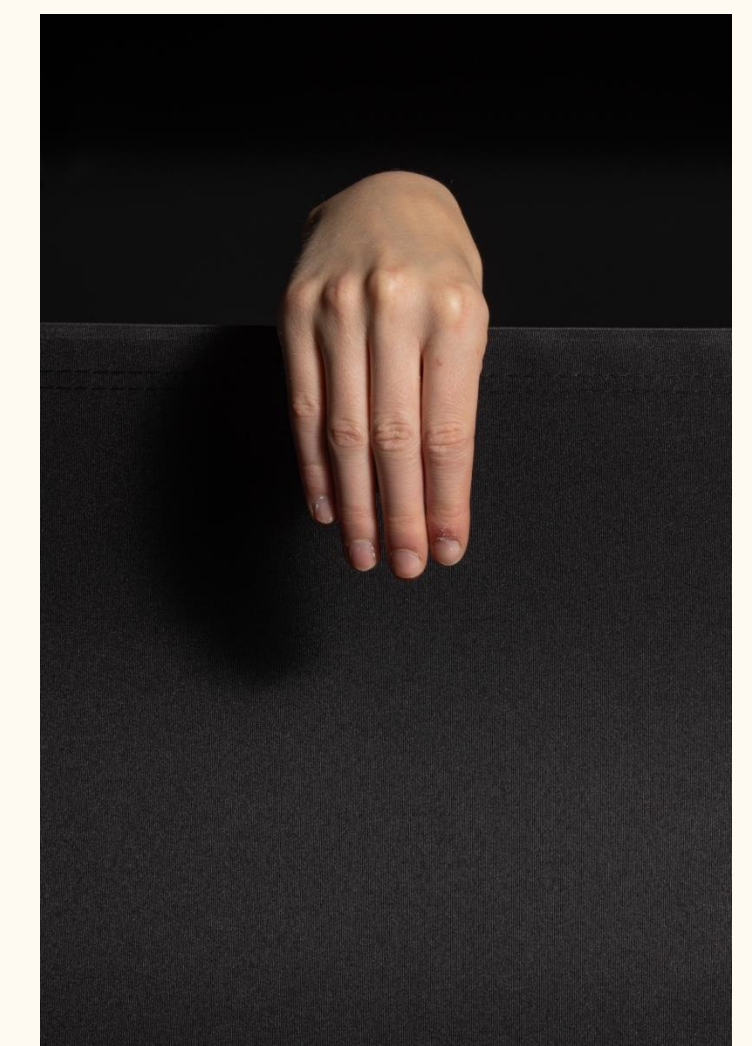
Dr. Lynn's Thaumia illusion  
(Garenne, 1886)



The illusion of absence may also play a role in **road accidents** involving obstructions of view, such as the windscreen pillar (Ekroll et al., 2021).



In the **art of photography**, the illusion of absence aids photographers in creating an intriguing sense of the surreal by suggesting that large or even essential parts of a body are absent.



Photos by D. Szymanski

Arno Rafael Minkinen:  
Jamestown,  
Rhode Island,  
1974



Paul Nougé: La  
naissance de  
l'objet, 1929-  
1930



Eiko Hosoe:  
Man and  
Woman #20,  
1960

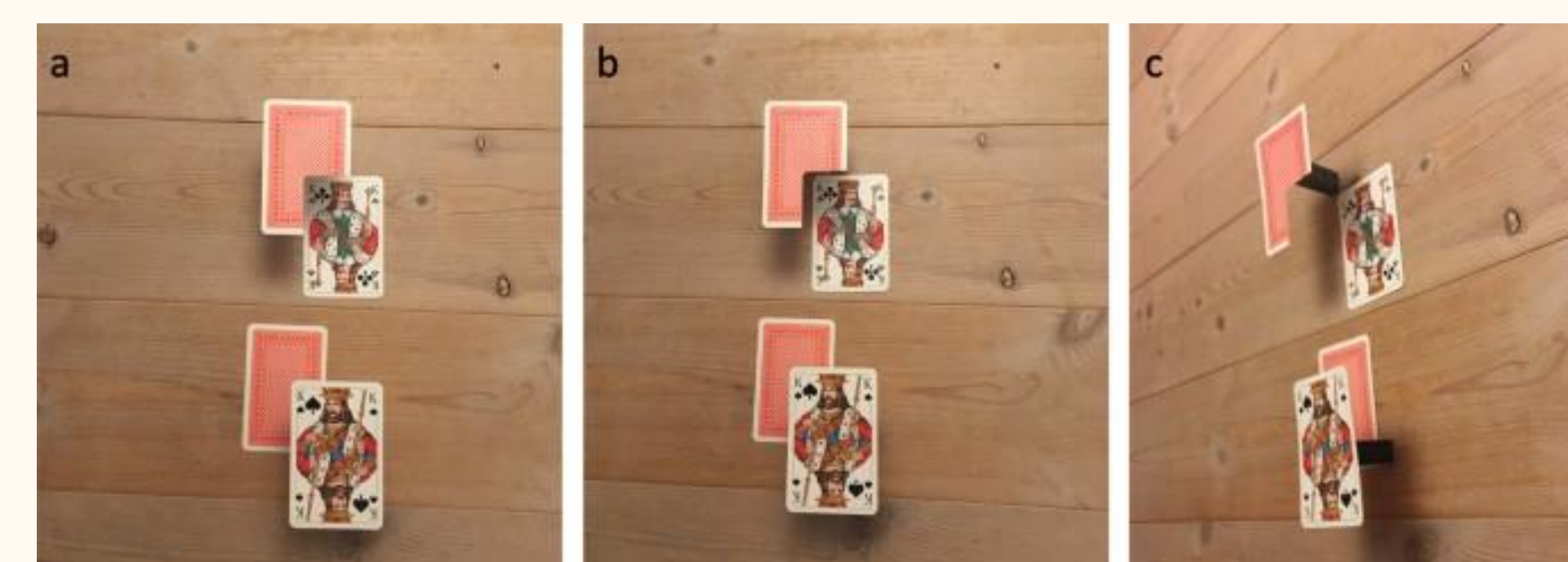


Duane Michals:  
René and  
Georgette  
Magritte, 1965



Some of the examples have an **amusing quality** to them, as if they are **visual jokes**, but others evoke an even stronger conflict between perception and conceptual understanding. Minkinen's works are commonly believed to be **unmanipulated**, but on that premise, his self-portrait in Jamestown, creates a stunning **illusion of impossibility!**

**How does it work?** The illusion of absence is created by the visual system and is cognitively impenetrable, hence the strong deceptiveness. The illusion can be accounted for based on the **principle of generic views**.



Qualitative change in the image (avoided interpretation)

No qualitative change in the image (preferred interpretation)

## REFERENCES

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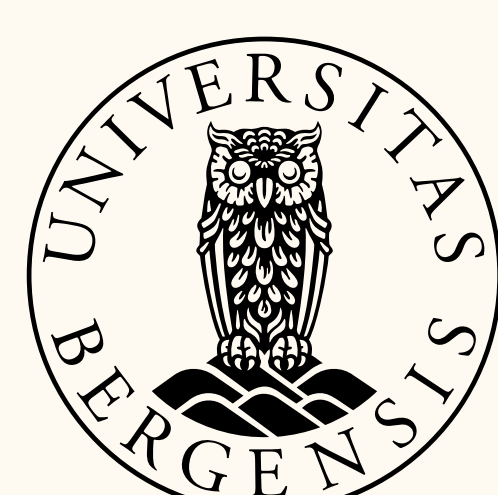
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