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User: elfs

Name: Elf M. Sternberg

Website: Elf Sternberg's Pendorwright Projects

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## Elf M. Sternberg - Inattention Blindness

08:21 am August 5th, 2008



elfs



### Inattention Blindness

There's a fascinating news article. Apparently a paper has appeared in *Nature* penned by, among others, Teller and James Randi, on how our awareness is a cobbled-together illusion of low-resolution perceptions combined with the both a shallow memory and our anticipatory mechanisms, good enough for us to survive wild beasts on the grassy plains of our evolutionary environment, but so flawed as to be easily exploitable by magicians and tricksters. (If you haven't watched-- and followed along with Keith Barry's "Brain Magic"-- at least watch the first four minutes of it.)

The article cites [The Awareness Test](#), in which you are shown two teams of four people each, passing two basketballs back and forth. Your responsibility is to count the number of passes made by the team wearing white.

The trick, however, is that the task of watching and counting is so all-consuming of our attentional faculties that we fail to notice a guy dressed in a bear suit moonwalk through the entire scene. The researchers noted:

In this situation no acute interruption or distraction was necessary, as the assigned task of counting passes was absorbing. Further, the observers had to keep their eyes on the scene at all times in order to accurately perform the task. Memmert showed, using eye-tracking recordings, that many observers did not notice the bear even when they were looking directly at it.

I thought of this because I often miss details, and so does Yamaraashi-chan. One of Omaha's favorite refrains is "How could you not see it? You were looking right at it." And my response is usually something lame along the lines of, "It's not what I was looking for."

Well, now I have research backing me up: it's not what I was looking for, and so my mind doesn't have a pattern ready to recognize it. It's part of the blurry background, not part of my attentional space at that moment. [Attention and awareness in stage magic: turning tricks into research](#), by Stephen L. Macknik, Mac King, James Randi, Apollo Robbins, Teller, John Thompson & Susana Martinez-Conde.

Tags: sighting

Current Mood: thoughtful

13 comments or [Leave a comment](#)

### Comments

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From: [amythis](#)

Date: August 5th, 2008 04:12 pm (UTC)

[\(Link\)](#)

**How I know I'm not an intellectual**

My first thought was *Penn and Teller?*

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)



From: [elfs](#)

Date: August 5th, 2008 04:17 pm (UTC)

[\(Link\)](#)

**Re: How I know I'm not an intellectual**

Yes, exactly that Teller.

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Parent\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)

Thread started by [Solarbird](#)



From: [solarbird](#)

Date: August 5th, 2008 04:19 pm (UTC)

[\(Link\)](#)

That test is bullshit. because it actively sets you up to active ignore anyone wearing black, and then goes HA HA YOU DIDN'T SEE THE GUY WEARING BLACK WHO ALSO HAD FAKEY BEAR EARS. (And I actually *did* see that blurry cross-motion and disregarded it because I was actively trying to ignore anyone dressed in black, and that was clearly some guy dressed in black.)

I mean hell, even in the replay with the pointout, I was going, "That's supposed to be a bear costume? What the fuck? At best he looks like a teletubby."

What's annoying more tho' is that there are *much* better examples of this optical factor that are also much more interesting. There's this one with a fishing boat, for example, that's just *astounding*... but that I'm not finding in Google. Dammit. This one doesn't require a voiceover setting you up to ignore the thing they're trying to slip past you, which I suppose makes it less magician-like, but *more* surprising once it's pointed out to you.

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)



From: [elfs](#)

Date: August 5th, 2008 04:27 pm (UTC)

[\(Link\)](#)

Did you get caught by Barry's hand trick?

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Parent\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)

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From: [solarbird](#) Date: August 5th, 2008 04:28 pm (UTC) [\(Link\)](#)

Is that in the other video? I didn't run that one.

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Parent\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)



From: [solarbird](#) Date: August 5th, 2008 04:34 pm (UTC) [\(Link\)](#)

Okay, I played it.

Ah! No, I didn't. I had a moment of confusion about what he wanted us (the audience) to do and then it was too late, he'd already done the flippy thing and the reveal. This was because of visual-bodymap cognitive dissonance which I didn't resolve in time. I also know a variation on that trick which wasn't quite so timing dependent and which I did the right thing when shown, which also creates that moment of visual/bodymap cognitive dissonance.

*Edited at 2008-08-05 04:34 pm (UTC)*

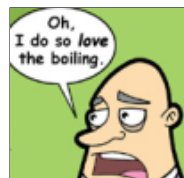
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From: [elfs](#) Date: August 5th, 2008 04:34 pm (UTC) [\(Link\)](#)

Yeah. It's a 20-minute long TED talk, but the first four minutes have a slight of hand moment that nails the entire audience quite impressively.

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Parent\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)



From: [en\\_ki](#) Date: August 5th, 2008 05:24 pm (UTC) [\(Link\)](#)

Also, rumor has it it's a woman in a gorilla suit.

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Parent\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)



From: [solarbird](#) Date: August 5th, 2008 05:26 pm (UTC) [\(Link\)](#)

It's youtube. With that video quality, It could be a giraffe in a space shuttle.

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Comment by Capt Alexsandyr Troutnoodler



From:  ionotter

Date: August 5th, 2008 04:51 pm (UTC)

[\(Link\)](#)

This is interesting, and I wonder if I'm not partially immune to it?

I got caught by the video, yes, but I had an experience while driving that makes me think I'm a bit more aware than most.

I was about to change lanes, and as per usual, I put my blinker on and then I dip forward to look in my right side view mirror to make sure the right lane is clear. I put my blinker a full five to ten seconds before I even start to make my move so everyone behind me has a chance to compensate. It's a move that's saved my ass more than once.

Anyway, the right lane is clear, so I get ready to start my move. I'm just starting to drift over when *something* says, "Check again!" So I lean much farther forward and catch a glimpse of a *handlebar*.

**SHIT!**

I pull back to the left with minimal fuss, but it still spooked me. I almost crowded and swiped a motorcycle cop. He passes me with a minimum of fuss and bother, which was a relief, as I was doing 70 at the time, and we both go on our way.

Thing is, I wasn't *consciously* looking for motorcycles in particular? I was just searching for input on *anything* that would qualify as a hazard.

All of this is all well and good, mind you, but I should also point out that I also have the occasional "Brain Fart of Dumb Luck", whereby I manage to walk on water while counting the angels on the head of a pin and avoid creaming either myself or some other poor bastard I never even saw coming.

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)

Comment by Bo Lindbergh



From:  bolindbergh

Date: August 5th, 2008 06:36 pm (UTC)

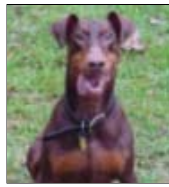
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You could probably turn "But did you see the moonwalking bear?" into the next internet meme with very little effort.

[\(Reply\)](#) [\(Thread\)](#)

Comment by norin.craft

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From: [norincraft](#)

Date: August 6th, 2008 12:20 am (UTC)

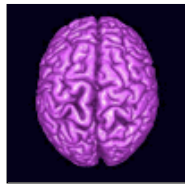
[\(Link\)](#)

I saw a blur that seemed out of place but couldn't dwell on it as the task blocked out the possibility. But on second viewing I was thinking:

*... that isn't moonwalking! That's walking backwards poorly!*

(Reply) (Thread)

Comment by [Ace Lightning](#)



From: [acelightning](#)

Date: August 6th, 2008 07:09 am (UTC)

[\(Link\)](#)

It's possible to train oneself to pay attention to much more of what's going on around one, without decreasing the amount of attention paid to the "main event" very much. I would think that this has something to do with the differences between male and female brain structure... except it was my father who taught me. (I'm a lousy audience for stage magic - I already know how many of the tricks are done, and unless the performer is very skilled, I can often see the trick being worked. The ones I *don't* catch leave me trying to figure out how the effect was produced.)

I consider paying attention to everything around me a survival skill.

(Reply) (Thread)

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