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magicology

n. The study of the neuroscience behind magic tricks and illusions.

Example Citations:

A couple of years ago, Teller joined a coterie of illusionists and tricksters recruited by Stephen Macknik and Susana Martinez-Conde, researchers at the Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, Arizona, to look at the neuroscience of magic. Last summer, that work culminated in an article for the journal *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* called "Attention and Awareness in Stage Magic." Teller was one of the coauthors, and its publication was a signal event in a field some researchers are calling **magicology**, the mining of stage illusions for insights into brain function.

—Jonah Lehrer, "[Magic and the Brain: Teller Reveals the Neuroscience of Illusion](#)," *Wired*, April 20, 2009

What do you get when you bring scientists and magicians together? **Magicology**, according to *New Scientist*. Magicians often use a range of methods to manipulate and trick the human mind. So cognitive neuroscientists believe that by teaming up with magicians they can gain insights into how these tricks work and learn how the mind operates.

—"Science news in brief from around the world," *London Lite*, December 18, 2008

Earliest Citation:

Over the past couple of years, neuroscientists and magicians have been getting together to create a science that might be called "**magicology**". If successful, both sides stand to benefit. By plundering the magicians' book of tricks, researchers hope to develop powerful new tools for probing perception and cognition. And if they find any tricks they can't explain, that could lead to new knowledge about how the brain works.

—Devin Powell, "[Magicology: Casting a spell on the mind](#)," *New Scientist*, December 24, 2008

Notes:

The word **magicology** has been around for a while in various guises, so what I'm highlighting here is a new sense of the word. Of the old senses, "the study of magic tricks and illusions" is the most common, and it dates to about 1970. Other senses include "the anthropological study of magic as a supernatural power" (1966) and "the use of magic to detect disease," which is the earliest sense I could find:

A fellow with a foreign name, claiming to have come from the old "Paradise of Quacks," London, circulates in San Francisco a newspaper filled with a great variety of miscellaneous reading, and containing in one corner his private advertisement as a fortune teller, &c. He offers to read the paste, present, and future, and to detect disease through "Magicology!"
—"An Impostor Who Should be in the State Prison," *Pacific Medical and Surgical Journal* v. 19, 1877

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