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Cognitive Daily reports nearly every day on fascinating peer-reviewed developments in cognition from the most respected scientists in the field.

Greta Munger is Professor of Psychology at Davidson College whose works include *The History of Psychology: Fundamental Questions*. Dave Munger is a [writer](#) whose works include *Researching Online* and *The Pocket Reader*. And yes, he is married to Greta.

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Euro-update 6: Create your own illusion!

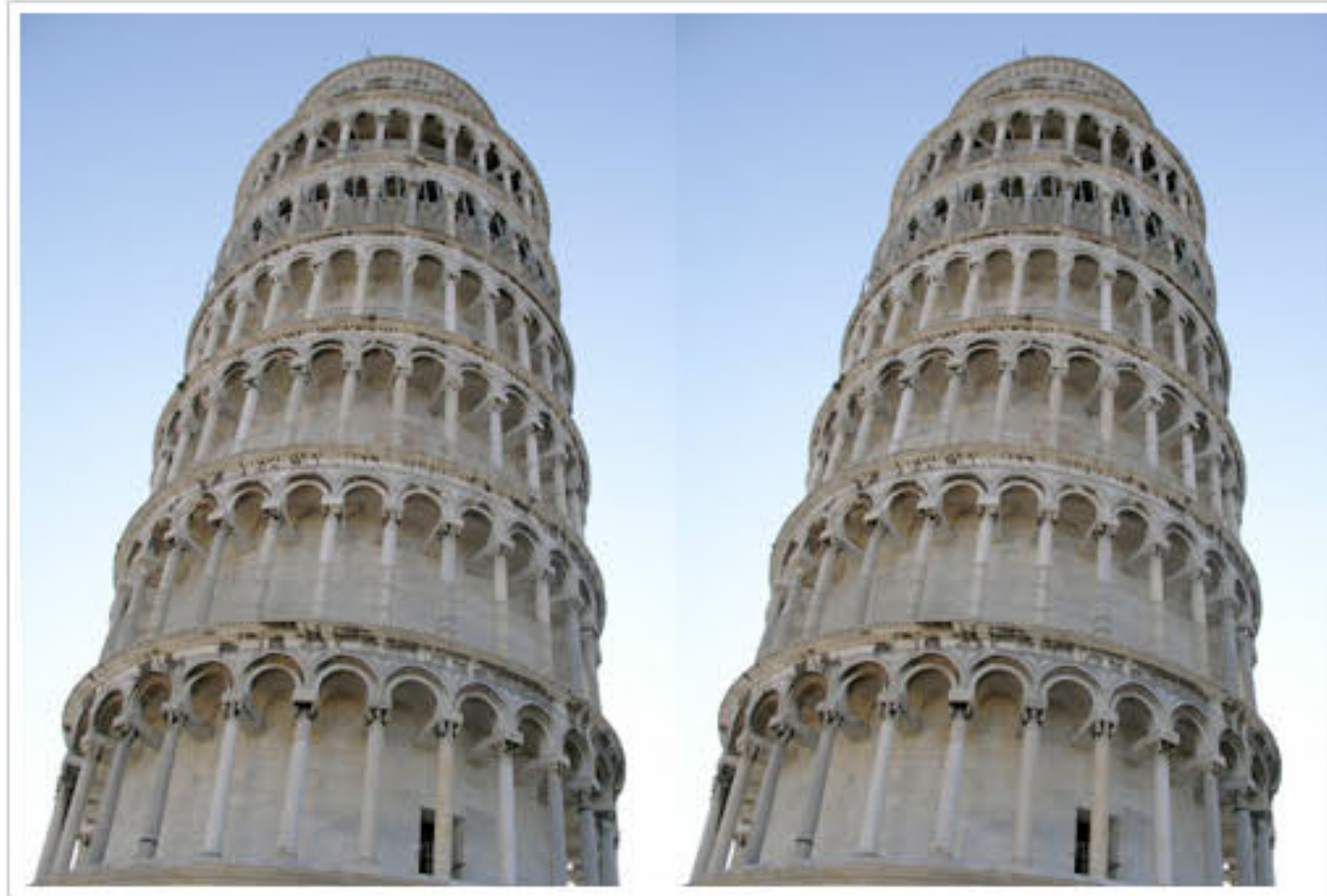
Category: Fun and games
Posted on: July 10, 2007 9:49 AM, by Dave Munger

We've been away from the internet for a while now, but finally have a slow connection here in rainy Prague. While in Pisa, however, we were able to avail ourselves of a unique opportunity. The favorite trick of the amateur photographers here is to create the "illusion" of their friend/family member "saving" the tower from falling down, like this, admittedly poor attempt:



I've neglected to instruct Nora on the proper angle to hold her fingers, and I should probably have held the camera lower.

But a different illusion is both easier to create and, I think, more impressive. A similar photo won [Best visual illusion](#) for 2007. All it requires is placing two identical photos of the leaning tower side by side. The tower on the right appears to be leaning further:



I built the illusion from a single photo I took myself with no Photoshop trickerations. Any guesses as to why this illusion is so effective? Let us know in the comments.

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Comments

The left frame of the photo is our reference for the left tower, while the right side of the left tower (which slopes up to the left!) is our reference for the right tower. #1

Posted by: Andy | July 10, 2007 11:37 AM

It would have to do with the larger expanse of blue between the two pictures. I'd guess that ye olde brain is comparing angle based on relative amount of "free space" on either side of each tower image, so that when the left border of one is merged with the right border of the other, it confuses that comparison. Instead of the brain catching the faint darker vertical line that's the true border, it gauges based on tower-to-tower and makes the right one look far closer to its right border than the left one appears, thus the lean. #2

I'd bet that even 1/8" of white space between the two would be enough to break the illusion.

Posted by: G Barnett | July 10, 2007 11:40 AM

G Barnett: You lose that bet. Visit the link referenced in the article (or [this](#)) to see the illusion work with whitespace in the middle. #3

I'm quite impressed with this illusion. It took me several minutes before I realized what I was seeing. For the longest time, I was trying to figure out why two pictures of the tower with slightly different rotations of the camera qualified as an optical illusion. Only later did I realize it was the SAME picture twice!

Posted by: Michael Chermiside | July 10, 2007 5:40 PM

Fascinating what our eyes do or refuse to do. Since I'm an artist I'm very well acquainted with "negative space" and looking at each picture individually as well as comparing the negative spaces in each picture I can logically see they are identical; yet the illusion remains. #4

Posted by: roseindigo | July 10, 2007 11:51 PM

I used this visual illusion in a presentation I gave June 6 in Montreal at the 3rd World Congress on Fear of Flying. #5

I was attempting to show the virtues of using Virtual reality in treating fear of flying, as opposed to cognitive therapy which appears ineffective for substantial proportion of patients. Can you guess why I used this illusion (amongst others)?

BTW, the same day of my presentation the Montreal Gazette published the same photo with a story about its constructors, based at McGill U.

Posted by: Les Posen | July 11, 2007 5:38 PM

The funniest photo I've seen of the Tower of Pisa didn't actually have the Tower in the photo, which was published in Photography Magazine back in the '90s. It showed a bunch of people scattered on a lawn, seemingly doing Tai Chi moves or some such. It was just a photo taken at the Tower, with the Tower not in the frame, of a bunch of tourists who happened to be striking the "I'm holding up the Tower" pose at that moment. #6

Posted by: lori | July 12, 2007 3:27 AM

interestingly, the traditional design of a schooner style sailboat has the rear mast raked slightly more than the forward mast just to counteract this illusion... [some examples](#) for those unfamiliar with the schooner. #7

Posted by: peter | July 12, 2007 1:32 PM

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