

Study watches the brain 'shutting off'

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Israeli scientists say they have observed the human brain in the act of losing "self" as it shuts down introspection during a demanding sensory task.

The researchers -- led by Rafael Malach and Ilan Goldberg of the Weizmann Institute of Science -- say their findings show self-related function stops during such intense sensory tasks. Thus, an "observer" function in the brain does not appear to play an active part in the production of our vivid sensory experiences.

The findings contradict common models of sensory experience that assume there is some kind of "homunculus," or observer, function in the brain that "looks at" sensory brain areas. The finding, they say, has significance for understanding the basic nature of consciousness and perception.

The research is detailed in the April 20 issue of the journal *Neuron*.

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