

What is it to perceive?

Finding out about the world and the self in the world through

We begin the course working on understanding how pervasive perception is in the life of every animal. The word "perceiving" for this course refers to the sensitivity of an animal to its environment. You need to understand that any animal (and maybe anything alive) must be perceiving ALL of the time --- from birth to death for most animals. There is never any time when an animal is not perceiving its environment.

The Argument from Illusion

Applies to hallucinations and dreams as well.

The essence of the argument is this: An illusion shows you that you can be wrong about what you are seeing. That is, seeing fooled you.

If seeing fooled you in some cases, then it is untrustworthy in those cases.

If vision is untrustworthy in some cases, then it might be untrustworthy in all cases.

Are reasonable people required to be persuaded by the argument from illusion?

[NOTE: This is not the pure form of the “argument from illusion,” as given in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, but it will do for our purposes.]

NOT

Sometimes people say “that’s only your perception,” using the word “perceive” to mean an “interpretation.”

The word “perceiving” in this course refers to all of your “sensory” [we’ll return to that word soon] experience. Read the comments on the syllabus carefully, under the heading “Topic Description.”

Perceiving is the bottom line

Perceiving is your awareness of your body, the environment around you, and the relation of your body to the environment.

You perceive yourself sitting or standing, moving or being still.

You perceive the ground under your feet if you are standing, and the ground extending away in all directions from you.

You perceive the walls and ceiling of a room you are in. All the doors and windows.

If you want your notebook, you perceive the notebook and the actions you take in picking it up.

You perceive picking up the notebook and placing on the desk (which you also are perceiving).

You perceive the pen in your hand and writing in the notebook.

Arguments against the proposition that we perceive the world as it is

1. Each person (animal)'s point of view is unique. So everyone doesn't see the same thing in that sense.
2. People can't see everything at once.

Consider the case of looking at a person standing in the middle of the room – surrounded by people on all sides. Some of the people seated in the class see the front of the person, some see the back, others see each side. Does it make sense to say that the class members are ALL looking at the person in the middle? Do people have to see ALL of a person to qualify as SEEING the person?

Continuing the same case --- When people see a person from a subset of perspectives, we don't have a problem in saying that we see the person. But notice that we do not see ALL of the person. We never see ALL of anyone no matter who it is or how well we know them. By the same token, we can sit on the chair or walk on the floor without sitting on ALL of the chair or walking on ALL of the floor.

Therefore, saying that we have unique perspectives on the things we see does not count against the reality of what we see; and saying that we do not see ALL of what we see does not count against the reality of what we see.

Pictures and Movies

We will be studying visual perception often by looking at pictures and movies.

Keep in mind that when you clearly see that you are looking at a picture or a movie, it means that you are NOT looking at the “real” thing directly. This is so obvious that it is taken for granted and frequently not mentioned.

If I show you a picture and ask you who it is, you answer the same way as you would if you saw the person across the room and were asked who it is.



Who is this?

How far away is he?

Presumably you know the difference between the picture and the real person. You won't shake hands with the picture, and you know right now if you can reach out and touch the picture (and not the real person).

Pictures and Movies

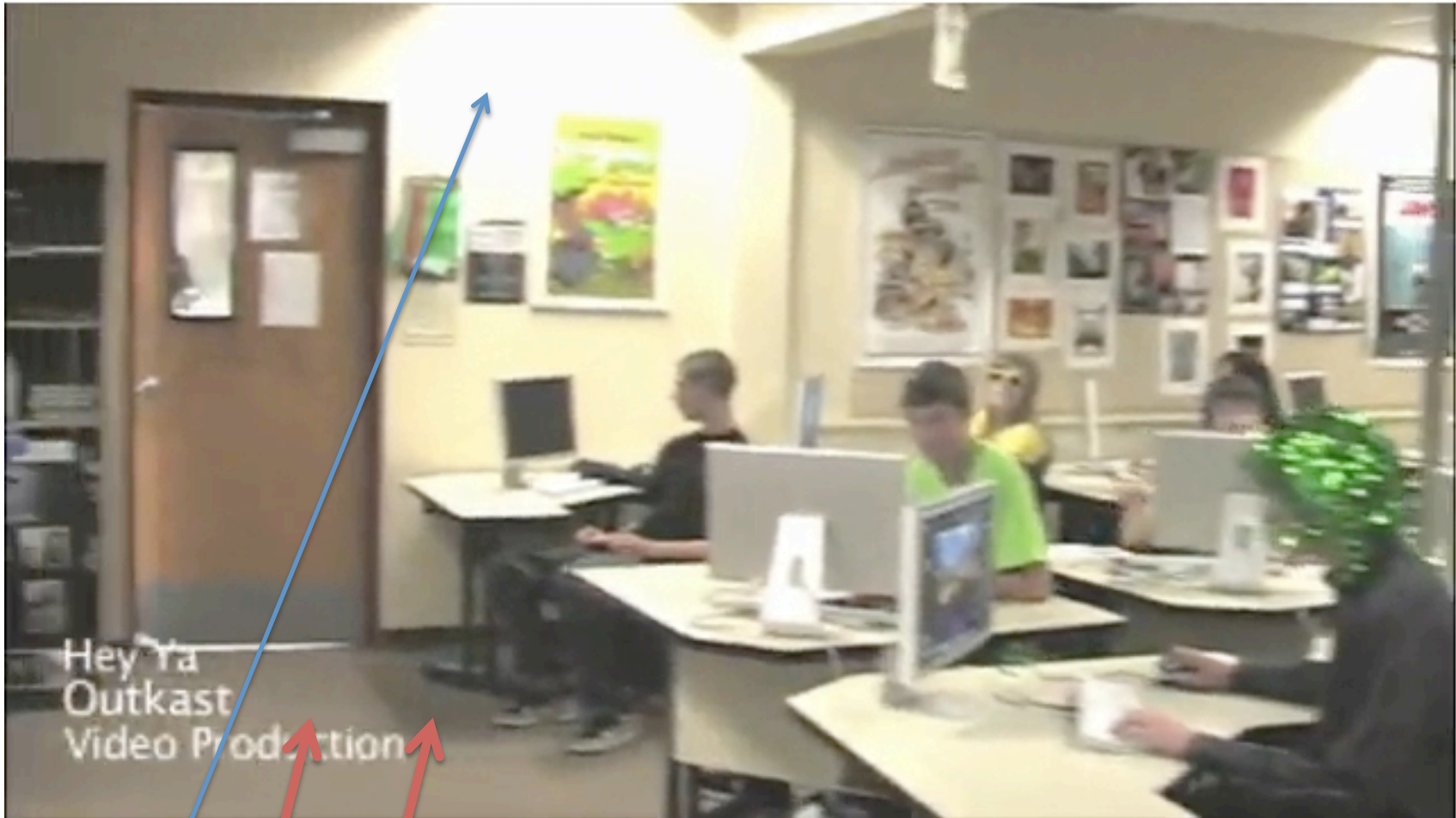
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Next we will look at some video, for the purpose of drawing attention to things we see around us in the “real” environment.

An interesting feature of this video, as a video, is that it is a single “shot.” The camera was turned on, and kept running for the entire segment. The alternative would be a video made of a sequence of “shots” that have transitions between them. You can see examples of such transitions in PowerPoint ---e.g. fades, dissolves, wipes, venetian blind effects, “push and cover.” That’s another topic, but note that the different kinds of transitions can be noticed as such.

Before going to the video, we’ll look at two frames from it in order to indicate some features to notice in helping to think about what perceiving involves.

Does the color of the floor change from one red arrow to the next?
Does the wall color change at the blue arrow?
What is behind the door?



Hey Ya
Outkast
Video Production

NOTICE: Shapes Colors Location Relative size
Camera location Camera movement



What can you say that this person is perceiving? What is the person with the camera perceiving?

