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Mirror Cognition
What we can learn from what people cannot learn about mirrors

May 12, 2016, 05:00 pm, lecture hall G
Psychologicum, Liebiggasse 5, 1010 Wien

Mirrors are familiar objects in our environment, we use mirrors effectively, and we recognise ourselves without effort. Yet many simple aspects of mirror reflections are surprising for a large number of children and adults. This difficulty in understanding how mirrors work leads to prediction errors. We can identify two types of errors. The first type relates to questions of what can be seen from where. This issue is linked with the role of the viewpoint in perception and in memory. It is the explanation for the Venus effect (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_effect). The second type relates to information on the surface of the mirror itself. This issue relate to size constancy, distance perception and the nature of the distal stimulus. In this respect mirrors are transparent surfaces akin to glass windows. The nature of these two types of errors is different, and I will also illustrate both of them with a series of studies and also in relation to some works of art in which mirrors are present. Indeed artists across the centuries have taken advantage of certain aspects of mirror cognition. In addition I will illustrate the difficulty in detecting mirror reversals using two famous films by Kurosawa, to test whether mirror reversal affects what we like. Mirrors remain unique tools to study many aspects of human perception and cognition.

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