

Vision Research Seminar Series

Sponsored by the **VANDERBILT VISION RESEARCH CENTER**

Jeremy M. Wolfe

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Cambridge, MA

“Condillac’s Chateau to Concourse B: Adventures in Visual Attention”

In the late 18th century, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac imagined guests coming to a chateau in the dark of night. In the morning, the curtains are thrown open for a brief moment revealing farms, hills, and sky for the first time. Condillac proposed that his guests would have instant sensations of color and form across the visual field but that they would perceive and understand objects only after attending to them. 225 years later, we will revisit this idea and ask what happens to that perception when we attend away from a previously attended object.

One of the important consequences of the need to attend to objects is that clearly visible stimuli can be missed if not properly attended. This has rather serious consequences if you are searching for cancers in mammograms or threats in luggage. Worse still, the structure of those tasks; specifically, the very low rate of target-present trials, makes matters worse. Well, you ask, what are you going to do about it? I will tell you.

Jeremy Wolfe (Princeton AB, '77, MIT PhD '81) spent the early part of his career at MIT working on binocular rivalry, visual aftereffects, and accommodation. In the late 1980s, the focus of the lab shifted to visual attention where it has remained to date. In 1991, Wolfe moved to Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School where he is Professor of Ophthalmology. He teaches various Psychology courses at MIT and Harvard.

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

4:10 pm

115 Wilson Hall

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