

Letter to the Editor

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This is a reply to H.G. Furth's comment on the paper by R. Baillargeon, E.S. Spelke, and S. Wasserman on "Object permanence in five-month-old infants", published in *Cognition*, volume 20 (1985), pages 191–208.

In our article, we suggest that the infants in the principal experiment looked longer at the impossible than at the possible event because they were surprised to see the screen rotate through the space occupied by the occluded box. Dr. Furth points out that since the box was occluded for about 10 s in the impossible event, but only for about 6 s in the possible event, the infants might have looked longer at the former event because they forgot all about the box during the 10 s interval, and so perceived the box to be a new object when it came back into view.

We can offer several rejoinders to Dr. Furth's alternative interpretation. First, his interpretation is inconsistent with the results of current habituation and preferential-looking studies which show robust "recognition memory" in young infants with intervals considerably longer than 10 s (e.g., Moscovitch, 1983). Second, subsequent rotating screen studies in which the occlusion interval in the impossible and the possible events differed by 1 s or less revealed that infants aged 3.5 months and older looked longer at the impossible than at the possible event (Baillargeon, 1987a, b). Finally, studies conducted with different paradigms also produced evidence of object permanence in infants 5.5 (Baillargeon & Graber, 1987) and 6.5 (Baillargeon, 1986) months of age.

One last note: Dr. Furth is concerned that 5-month-old infants' visual spatial perception is not sufficiently mature to enable them to perceive the rotation of the screen. However, there is now considerable evidence that by 5 months of age, infants (1) can use both kinetic and binocular depth information (e.g., Yonas & Granrud, 1985) and (2) can recognize objects presented in different orientations (e.g., Caron, Caron, & Carlson, 1979).

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