Report

Non contact eye-tracking on cats

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Introduction

The objective of visual neuroscience has shifted over the past years from determining the receptive fields of cells towards the understanding of higher level cognition in awake animals processing natural stimuli. In experiments with awake animals it is important to control the relevant aspects of behavior. Most important for vision science is the control of eye-movements and of the direction of gaze. Here we present Dual Purkinje (DPI) eye-tracking on cats, which is one of the most accurate eye-tracking systems and as a non-contact method does not require any surgery on the subjects.

A common problem with eye-tracking on non-humans is the calibration of the system. We present an objective method, not requiring the collaboration of the subject which allows accurate measurement of gain and offset. The DPI system, together with the proposed method for calibration results in a highly accurate system for measuring the eye-movements of cats.

The Dual Purkinje (DPI) Eye-tracking System

The Dual Purkinje eye-tracking system is widely used with human subjects because of its high accuracy and the fact that it does not require any surgery on the subjects. We show that the DPI system (manufactured by Fourward Technologies Inc., Buena Vista, VA 24416) can also be used reliably with head fixed cats.

The DPI measures the orientation of the eye using the reflection of an infrared light beam at the cornea and the lens, called Purkinje images.

Advantages:
- High accuracy
- No surgery
- Insensitive to small displacements of the subject
- High temporal resolution
- Use with animals and humans

Disadvantages:
- Expensive
- Setup changes before use on cats
- Technically complicated

Accurate and Objective Calibration

Every system for eye-tracking needs calibration. In contrary to humans, which can be told to fixate given spots, calibration with animals is more difficult. For cats we propose the following objective method for measuring gain and offset. It has the advantage to rely entirely on objective criteria and not to involve the cooperation of the subject.

An Example

We are interested in how cats perceive their natural environment and how they process natural (visual) stimuli. We recorded a set of video sequences from a camera mounted to a cats head. These videos are played back to the animals under controlled conditions in the lab.

Conclusion

We showed how the DPI system, which was previously used only with primates, can be used reliably with cats. Together with the proposed method for calibration it results in a convenient system for controlling the eye-movements of cats with a precision required for the electrophysiological study of early visual areas.