

# Data-driven generative models for perception, dreaming, and imagining

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## **Topics in Computational Vision**

*Psy 8036 (Kersten)*

*Psy 5993 Section 034 (Schrater)*

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### **Abstract**

It has been proposed that perception is fundamentally a process of “analysis-by-synthesis” in which the sensory input is analyzed bottom-up, with perceptual interpretations tested and refined by top-down predictions of the input, through synthesis. However, while the computational and neural study of the analysis component is well-developed, less is known about the principles and mechanisms that underly synthesis. This seminar will explore recent advances using “deep” learning algorithms to discover hierarchical statistical regularities in large datasets of natural patterns, and the relevance of the learning results to models of human perception and recognition. These algorithms also provide the basis for the stochastic synthesis of novel, yet familiar patterns, which raises the question of whether the human experiences of dreams and hallucinations, and the ability to imagine, reflect the same statistical regularities that are discoverable using machine learning. The class format will include short introductory lectures by the instructors, and weekly student presentations of current literature. The short lectures will provide historical context as well as tutorials on machine learning (e.g. TensorFlow for neural network simulations).

## Background

There is a long history of theories of perception in which the brain “explains” sensory input in terms of external, behaviorally relevant causes. A current

hypothesis is that this process is implemented in part by cortical feedback mechanisms that synthesize predictions of early data representations in order to test how well the brain's current interpretation of the world corresponds with the sensory data. In this view, perception involves a cycle in which the incoming data triggers a set of explanations, i.e. hypotheses, which are used to measure how far the expected sensory input differs from the actual input. From a computational perspective, such generative models of perceptual inference have a number of advantages over strictly bottom-up inference. A generative model can incorporate measures of "goodness-of-fit" to decide whether to accept or reject an interpretation--some explanations are better than others. Discrepancies between sensory data and predictions may also be used to direct attentional resources and signal whether more complex combinations of hypotheses are needed. Further, with sufficient structure, a generative model could provide the basis for the perceptual interpretation of sensory input outside the range of past experience.

While computational theories for bottom-up neural mechanisms for perception have received considerable scientific attention, much less is known about top-down mechanisms. This seminar will explore the idea that the brain has hierarchically structured mechanisms that can synthesize patterns of input representations with the following constraints: 1) the mechanisms build on inductive structural biases that are innate; 2) the mechanisms reflect the statistical regularities induced by the physical causes of sensory experience, i.e. they are "data-driven"; 3) the need for cognitive processes to access semantic, perceptual content over levels of abstraction. Assumptions 1) and 2) constrain the class of generative models to be "data-driven", i.e. models that can be learned from sensory data.

Recent computational methods for data-driven pattern synthesis (e.g. VAE, InfoGAN, Adversarial Bayes, StackGAN) will be covered in this seminar. We will also explore the proposal that the same circuitry that may underly feedback in perception is used during imagery, dreams, and hallucinations.

# Tentative Syllabus

Week	Topics	Background material	Discussion topics and papers
1: Jan 16	Background Models of perception	Yuille, A., & Kersten, D. (2006). Vision as Bayesian inference: analysis by synthesis? Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 10(7), 301–308.	
2: Jan 23	Overview of machine learning	Ackley, D. H., Hinton, G. E., & Sejnowski, T. J. (1985). A learning algorithm for Boltzmann machines. Cognitive Science, 9(1), 147–169.	
3: Jan 30	Shallow image models, textures	Zhu, S. C., Wu, Y., & Mumford, D. (1998). Filters, random fields and maximum entropy (FRAME): Towards a unified theory for texture modeling. International Journal of Computer Vision, 27(2), 107–126. McDermott, J. H., Schemitsch, M., & Simoncelli, E. P. (2013). Summary statistics in auditory perception. Nature Publishing Group, 16(4), 493–498.	
4: Feb 6	Hierarchical image models, deep learning	Zhu, S.-C., & Mumford, D. (2006). Quest for a stochastic grammar of images. Foundations and Trends® in Computer Graphics and Vision, 2(4), 259–362.	Topic preview: Visual imagery
5: Feb 13	Hierarchical image models, deep learning		Topic preview: Auditory imagery
6: Feb 20	Hierarchical image models, deep learning		Topic preview: Hypnagogic imagery
7: Feb 27	Dynamic textures, patterns	Xie, J., & Zhu, S. C. (n.d.). Synthesizing Dynamic Patterns by Spatial-Temporal Generative ConvNet. arXiv.org. Vondrick, C., Saito, H., & Tanaka, A. (2016).	Topic preview: Dreams

# Sample Readings (under construction)

## Background

Ackley, D. H., Hinton, G. E., & Sejnowski, T. J. (1985). A learning algorithm for Boltzmann machines. *Cognitive Science*, 9(1), 147–169.

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## Shallow generative models: Texture synthesis

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## Hierarchical (deep) data-driven generative models

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Kulkarni, T. D., Whitney, W. F., Kohli, P., & Tenenbaum, J. (2015). Deep Convolutional Inverse Graphics Network, 2539–2547.

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Xie, J., Zhu, S.-C., & Wu, Y. N. (2016, June 3). Synthesizing Dynamic Patterns by Spatial-Temporal Generative ConvNet.

Yosinski, J., Clune, J., Nguyen, A., Fuchs, T., & Lipson, H. (2015, June 22). Understanding Neural Networks Through Deep Visualization.

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## Dreams

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