How people use the past

Neisser’s observation

- “If X is an interesting memory phenomenon, psychologists avoid it like the plague.”

Signs of progress since 1978

Everyday Practices

Important ideas

- Does “memory” in general exist?
  - Perhaps it is a holdover from a medieval psychology.
- Ecological validity and representativeness
  - Naturalists and naturalistic observations
  - Ethology, upsets learning theory by showing that “learning” (as it was conceived in psychological theory) is not a useful category for understanding animal behavior
  - Esoteric tasks, puzzles, and the cultural process of finding good representations
- Schemata

Cognition at work
Memory as constructed in the human information processing community

The demonstration of the fact that the capacity of human short term memory is 7±2 chunks

The construction of short-term memory by the dynamical systems community

The demonstration of the fact that the human short-term memory system can form at most 7±2 periodic attractors.

Neisser’s big issue
• How people use their own past experiences in meeting the present and the future under natural conditions.

Our bigger issue
• How people use their minds under natural conditions.
Important Questions

• What is the purpose and nature of remembering?
• How do we remember?
• Why do we sometimes fail?
• Who remembers what and why?
• What do students remember of classes?
• Are there functionally different types of memory in everyday life? If so, what are they?

Using the past to construct our selves

• Involuntary memories
• Recovered (or constructed) memories
• Memory of childhood experiences
• Cole’s example “She won’t be a rugby player” (prolepsis)

Official remembering

• Eyewitness testimony
• Remembering history
• Flashbulb memories
• Kunagesa’s memory for magic

An ecological view

• Remembering as a skill
• Cultural practices as cognitive enzymes
  – We are good at remembering the information required for our skilled performances.

It is not going to be easy.

• “The psychological laboratory is the easiest setting in which to work, but it is also among the least interesting”
• “The realistic study of memory is much harder than the work we have been accustomed to.”
• To find out about how people make use of the past in their everyday lives, we must look carefully at the everyday world.

But we could do it with our cognitoscope

• If it was properly tuned.