How people use the past

Neisser’s observation

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

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

Neisser’s attempt to change the category called “memory”

• 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 (Elizabeth Loftus)
- Remembering history
- Flashbulb memories
- Kunagesa’s memory for magic

Kunagesa
A magician from Okaiboma Village

An ecological view

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

Memory for an Everyday Object

What does a penny look like?

- Get out a piece of paper
- Sketch the “heads” side of a penny from memory.
The real deal

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.