

Cambridge University Press

0521330319 - Remembering Reconsidered: Ecological and Traditional Approaches to the Study of Memory

Edited by Ulric Neisser and Eugene Winograd

Frontmatter

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Emory Symposia in Cognition 2

**Remembering reconsidered:
Ecological and traditional approaches
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Preface

This is the second volume in the Emory Symposia in Cognition series. It was originally conceived in a seminar on memory that the two of us conducted together in the fall of 1984—a seminar characterized, like all Cognition Project seminars, by a vigorous airing of many different points of view. Although we devoted a good deal of time and thought to the ecological approach (as is also typical of Cognition Project seminars), more traditional lines of research were not neglected. Indeed, we could not neglect them if we were to do justice to our topic. The study of memory has undergone a remarkable renaissance in the past few years; good ideas and important research have begun to appear from many different directions. There are new findings everywhere: in the naturalistic study of memory, in the laboratory study of basic processes, in development, in neuropsychology, in the understanding of clinical memory disorders. Although we could not do justice to all of those areas in the seminar (nor, alas, in this volume), we did our best to focus on good ideas wherever they might come from. A lot of those good ideas are in this book.

Although the primary goal of the seminar was to understand as much as we could about memory, it was clear that we were working toward a conference as well. The first Emory Cognition Project Conference—whose results have since been published by Cambridge University Press as *Concepts and Conceptual Development: Ecological and Intellectual Factors in Categorization* (1987)—was held that same fall, and we were pleased with its success. It, too, had grown out of a seminar held the year before. The way to get on top of critical areas in cognitive psychology, then, is as follows:

- Begin by spending a semester or so on the area to be covered in a seminar, and try to figure out what is going on in it.
- Identify the people who are doing the most interesting and important work in the area, whether from the ecological point of view or any other.
- Persuade those people to come to a conference to present and discuss their work.

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Provide discussants at the conference who not only will take the speakers' views apart (as necessary) but also will show how they fit together.

We did all that; the result was the Second Emory Cognition Project Conference, held October 10–12, 1985. Like the first conference, it was an extraordinarily stimulating intellectual experience. Again, like the first conference, it left us with a sense that our field of study was considerably more coherent than we had supposed. The two introductory chapters that follow this Preface (one by each of us) try to express that coherence; it is for the reader to judge whether or not we have succeeded.

If the understanding we gain at such a conference is to be shared with (and tested by) the larger community of psychology and cognitive science, one more principle must be added to the foregoing list:

Get all the conference participants to contribute chapters to a book based on the conference, and try to make sure that the book as a whole reflects the character and quality of the original meeting.

We think we have done that too—or, rather, it is the participants themselves who have done it. Every contribution to the 1985 conference has now become a chapter in this volume. Some of the chapters have been substantially reworked (this is especially true of Brewer's chapter; he had only preliminary data available at the time of the conference), whereas others are almost unchanged. There are also three new chapters: our two introductory chapters plus Chapter 11 (on train-wreck ballads) by Wallace and Rubin. David Rubin had described this work with some preliminary data at an Emory Colloquium the previous spring; it was so obviously an appropriate contribution that we did not want to leave it out.

We are grateful to all our contributors, not only for their contributions but also for their responsiveness to our suggestions and their patience with our delays. We want to note, for the second time, what a pleasure it is to work with Susan Milmoe and the Cambridge University Press. We also want to express our appreciation to the Emory graduate students who were so helpful in organizing the details of the conference, particularly JoNell Usher, Pamela Mink, Ira Hyman, Marion Eppler, and Eric Bergman. Finally, we are grateful to Emory University for its continuing support of the Cognition Project and its activities. In the last analysis, it is the university that has made this book possible.

Ulric Neisser
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