

INTERVIEWING VICTIMS



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Reporting a crime entails memory processes of victims and requires the opportunity, for operators, to have a basic knowledge of such processes, so they can help victims to improve trustworthiness and details of their report.

MEMORY

Ability to encode, retain and recall information

MEMORY OF A CRIME

Crime happens.....

Encoding



*Nicolas Poussin, Rape of the Sabine women (1637-1638)
(Paris, Museo del Louvre), detail*

Report/interview

Recall

Retention



Time between crime and reporting





intentional
explicit
student

Incidental
implicit
everyday life



*Pieter Bruegel il vecchio, Il censimento di betlemme, 1566
Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles*



*Rembrandt, 1631 The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp.
Mauritshuis dell'Aia (detail)*

Intentional
Implicit
professional

**ENCODING
AND RECALL**

WITNESS

- ✘ Incidental, explicit



- ✘ Policemen and victims have a different way to approach the crime event.
- ✘ Victims don't have the same cognitive structure and knowledges.

ATTENTION:



Bottom up



Top down

Episodic memory is widely conceived as a constructive, rather than reproductive, process that is prone to various kinds of errors and illusions.

Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable, fixed lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude toward a whole active mass of organized past reactions or experiences, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form.

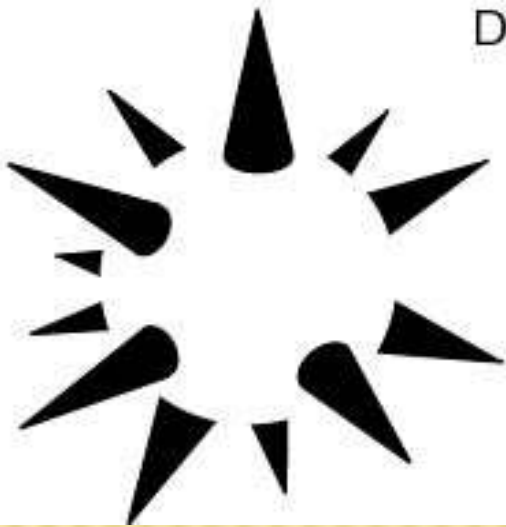
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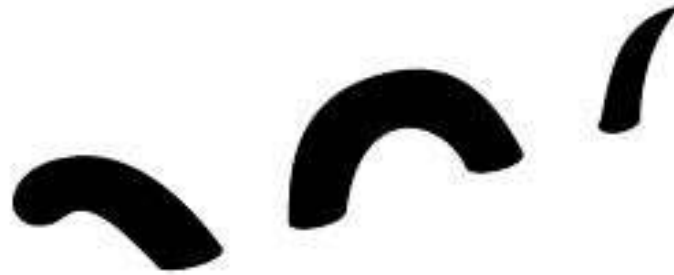
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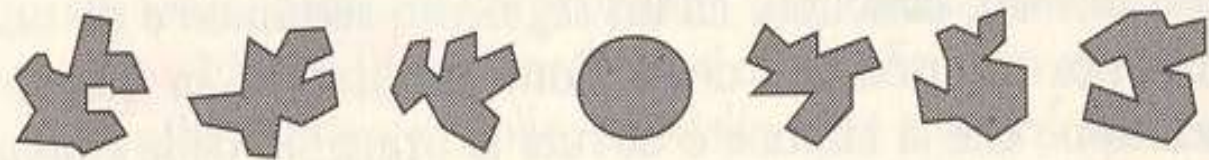


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SIMILARITY IS PERCEIVED AS A WHOLE





VON RESTORFF EFFECT

- ✘ An isolated item is more likely to be recognized and remembered than items that are homogeneous and repeated.
- ✘ Stand out like a sore thumb



✘ Effects of cognitive context on memories



merano's defense

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZATION FOR RETENTION

- ✘ When the information has features that facilitate its organization, retention in memory is easier.
- ✘ Experience and previous knowledge play a central role

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- ✘ The spectrum of our knowledges shapes our expectations and represent the context where we insert the message to understand. Our knowledges are the information we use to unify pieces of conversations, images, events.



Pablo Ricasso Le portrait de Dora Maar 1937 Musée Picasso, Paris (B); Andy Warhol, Marilyn, (on red ground), 1967 Stampa (A), Picture of Marilyn Monroe (C) and Dora Maar (D)

A face is perceived as a whole, a gestalt, and we recognize the global face more than one single feature. The key of face recognition is in spatial relations. We encode faces as a whole, not like a sum of features.

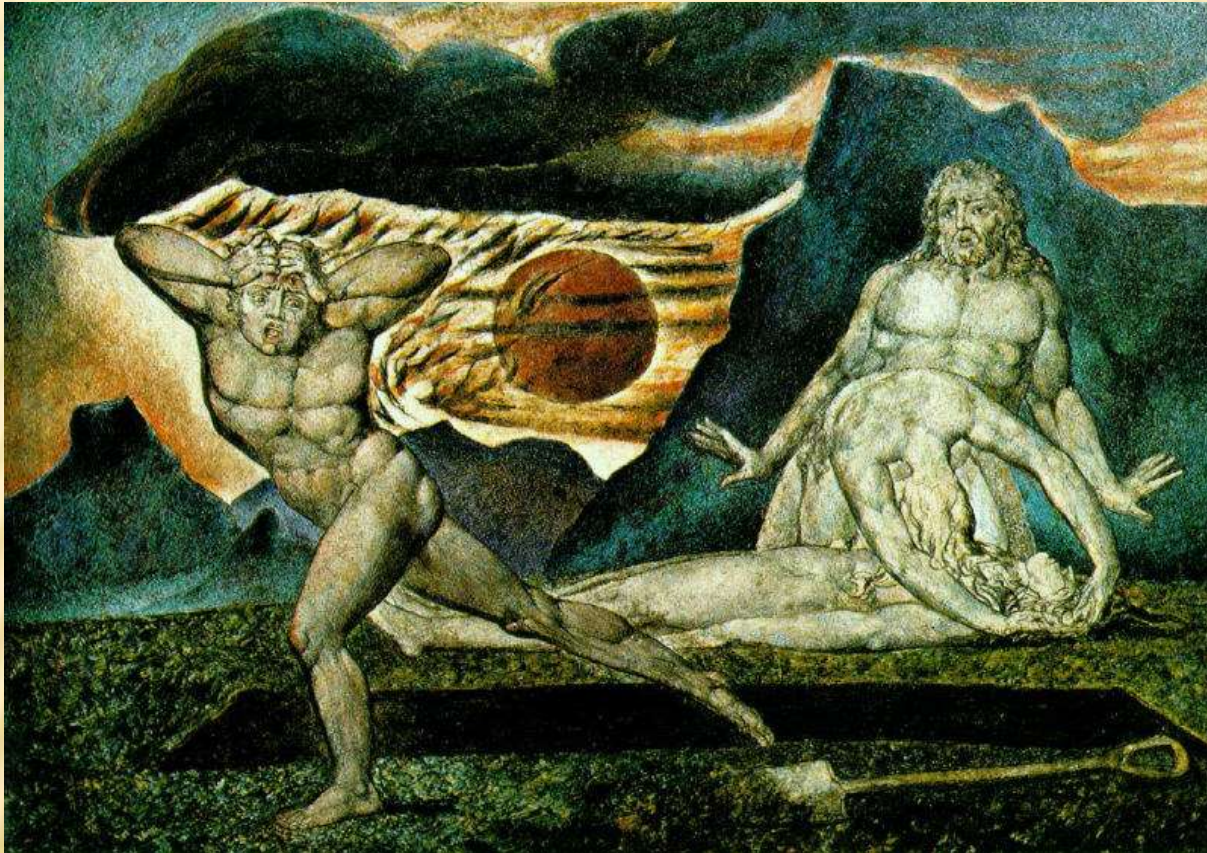
VON RERSTORFF EFFECT ON FACE'S PERCEPTION

- ✘ It is possible to focus attention on a particular feature of a face such as a large nose, a broken tooth, cross eyes.
- ✘ In this case the gestalt of face can get lost.



*Domenico Ghirlandaio (Firenze 1449-1494)
"Portrait of an old man with his grandson", Parigi,
Louvre*

EMOTIONAL IMPACT



William Blake

Body of Abel Found by Adam & Eve, 1825

Londra, Tate Gallery

- ✘ “Weapon focus” effect
- ✘ The weapon focus effect occurs when crime witnesses focus on a weapon, impairing their memory of the perpetrators face. (Loftus, 1979)



WHAT DOES THIS MEANS FOR WITNESSING

- ✘ Witnessing is a unique process of recalling information and represent a really hard task for witnesses and victims
- ✘ Slight differences in reports between different witnesses are normal and due to how perception and memory work
- ✘ Sometimes what looks like a lie, it is merely a memory distortion
- ✘ Policemen themselves insert the contents of report in their cognitive system and might include in the process their personal interpretation.

LONG-TERM MEMORY (LTM)

LTM is divided up into two major headings:

- ✘ Declarative memory refers to all memories that are consciously available.
- ✘ Procedural memory refers to the use of objects or movements of the body, such as how exactly to use a pencil or ride a bicycle.

DUAL-CODING THEORY

- ✘ The theory postulates that both visual and verbal information are processed differently and along distinct channels with the human mind creating separate representations for information processed in each channel. Both visual and verbal codes for representing information are used to organize incoming information into knowledge. (Paivio)
- ✘ Visual and verbal information do not compete with each other.
- ✘ When verbal information integrate visual information it is helpful for remembering.
- ✘ When verbal information labels visual stimulus, later a subject can have problems in choosing the proper item amongst similar ones.

- ✘ I thought: “the suspect looks like...”

EPISODIC AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

- ✘ Periods of life refer to a main theme, a specific time or space context
- ✘ General events (synthetic experience)
- ✘ Special events: single and rich of perceptive and sensorial details

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- ✘ General knowledge, belonging to semantic system, are more prone to be used when subjects recall ordinary events (that occur more or less in the same way) than when they recall particular outstanding events.

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- ✘ Real experience: sensorial and perceptive
 - ✘ Imaginative experience. Reflective and processing

 - ✘ “I thought he could get in from the back door...”

RECALL: REPORT TIME

It needs concentration, it is a big effort.

How to apply memory theories in
witnessing recalling.

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- ✘ Don't interrupt flow of ideas
 - ✘ Questions should be synchronic with the part of the event the subject is thinking about at the moment

ENCODING SPECIFICITY

(TULVING AND THOMSON, 1972)

- ✘ Learning that takes place in one situation or "state" is generally better remembered later in a similar situation or state. This can include:
 - ✘ **Environmental context:** Subjects who learn information in one room are able to remember more when tested in the same room than in a novel room. Other environmental influences may include the time of day and the people who are present.
 - ✘ **Physical state:** Subjects who learn new information while under the influence of a drug, such as caffeine or nicotine, will perform better if tested under the influence of the same drug.
 - ✘ **Emotional state:** Subjects who are sad are better able to remember unhappy or unpleasant memories; subjects who are happy are better able to remember happy or pleasant memories.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WITNESSING

- ✘ Reactivation of the context during witnessing facilitates recalling.
- ✘ Context reconstruction during witnessing can be only mental. There is no need to go back to the place of the crime or to reconstruct physically the environment (Smith, 1988).
- ✘ How? Invite the person to think about the situation (open and generic questions).

RISKS

- ✘ Mental reconstruction of the context can reactivate negative emotions linked to the event.
- ✘ Visualize the event as if it was on a screen, imagine to have a remote control to stop the flow of images when too disturbing.

ENCODING SPECIFICITY

queen



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- ✘ A cue must be linked to the event in the learning phase in order to be useful for recalling

SO

- ✘ Initially do not suggest cues to facilitate recalling. A cue can be helpful for a cognitive system and disturbing for another.
- ✘ Only cues that comes from witnesses' memory are useful to help recalling

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- ✘ The introduction of misleading post event information impairs the memory for an original event

SO: START WITH FREE RECALLING

- ✘ It helps to understand how subjects organize information
- ✘ It helps to be aware of terminology they use, that can be reutilize later for further questions.
- ✘ It helps to understand main codes used
- ✘ Helps victims to feel more in control

VICTIMS

- ✘ Problems in attention and concentration
- ✘ Avoidance
- ✘ Difficulties to select information
- ✘ Tendency to separate memory systems

THANK YOU!

