MENTAL IMAGERY AND HUMAN MEMORY

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Dedicated to Sonia

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Preface

Over the last eight years, I have carried out a variety of experimental investigations of the role of mental imagery in human memory. In common with many other research workers, I have found mental imagery to be a fascinating, yet extremely elusive phenomenon to study in the psychological laboratory. Under many circumstances, it is possible to demonstrate substantial empirical effects which may be attributed to the operation of mental imagery, as I shall explain in the central chapters of this book.

Be that as it may, our understanding of the significance of mental imagery for remembering in everyday life is still very limited. The obvious experiments, the easy, well-controlled studies of remembering under artificial conditions have now been done; the much more difficult problem of saying anything meaningful about the cognitive tasks which confront ordinary people in their everyday activities has yet to be faced. Nevertheless, the considerable amount of laboratory research which has been carried out to date may be seen as an important preliminary to the latter activity. In this book, I have tried to give a perspicuous summary of this research within a reasonable and reasoned theoretical context.

The experimentation on mental imagery has been heavily influenced by the behaviourist tradition in experimental psychology. To understand the research which has been carried out, it is necessary to understand that tradition, and to assess its conceptual adequacy as a scientific methodology for the investigation of personal experience. I hope that I have given a fair and balanced account of the behaviourist tradition, even though I believe its effects upon the development of cognitive psychology to have been largely detrimental. More generally, I hope that it will become clear to the reader that advances in human experimental psychology are likely to result from the combined use of empirical investigation and of conceptual analysis.

To the extent that this book is able to make any contribution to the development of our knowledge and understanding of the role of mental imagery in human memory, it is because I have been able to focus my training and research experience both in human experimental psychology and in philosophy. Accordingly, I am pleased to be able to acknowledge my gratitude to those who have been instrumental in determining such skills as I have in these areas. In particular, I would like to thank Alan Baddeley for his guidance and example

when I began my research on mental imagery as a graduate student at the University of Sussex; Allan Paivio, for the inspiration of his writings, and for his continued encouragement of my own efforts; and Peter Hacker, for his patient instruction and specifically for his helpful advice on the conceptual problems discussed in this book. I am also grateful to my colleagues and students at Brunel University for their various reactions to my ideas over the last four years. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Sonia, for her patience and tolerance during the months in which this book has been written, and for her careful reading of the final draft.

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