

Déjà vu: A window into the human recognition memory system

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Déjà vu is an infrequent and striking mental experience, where the feeling of familiarity is combined with the knowledge that this feeling is false. While until recently it was an aspect of memory largely overlooked by mainstream cognitive psychology, there is now a growing scientific literature on déjà vu. I will review our neuropsychological and experimental studies and present déjà vu as a memory phenomenon; an illusion that exposes the metacognitive processes at work in memory. Far from being an unexplained phenomenon, it can help us understand familiarity processes in human recognition decision making. In short, I will defend the proposal that déjà vu arises when erroneous familiarity is detected in the cognitive system, and I will propose that it is evidence for a set of higher order processes that operate in human memory more generally.