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Spatial memory about familiar and unfamiliar environments

Much research in spatial cognition has examined how unfamiliar spatial layouts are represented in memory. Overall, this research has documented that, in general, people create orientation-dependent representations that are influenced by both environmental (e.g., geometry of the enclosing space, the internal structure of the layout etc) and personal factors (e.g., the study viewpoint, the viewpoints of conversational partners, instructions etc). However, what remains unclear is whether these representations change after repeated experience with a spatial layout. For example, does an orientation-dependent memory become orientation-free following prolonged exposure to a layout from all possible viewpoints? In this talk, I will present data from a new study carried out in my lab comparing the spatial memories of participants about their own rooms in the halls of the university vs. those of other participants studying the same rooms for the first time through Virtual Reality. The implications of the findings for the representation of spatial information in memory will be discussed.