

**SYDE 556/750**

**Simulating Neurobiological Systems  
Lecture 11: The Semantic Pointer Architecture**

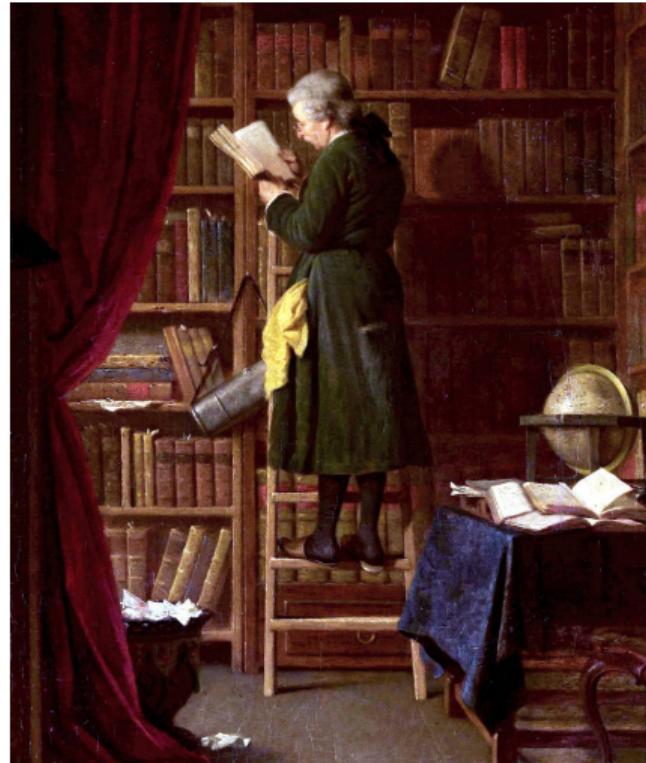
Chris Eliasmith

November 15 & 20, 2023

- ▶ Slide design: Andreas Stöckel
- ▶ Content: Terry Stewart, Andreas Stöckel, Chris Eliasmith



FACULTY OF  
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## Administrative Notes – Remaining Deadlines

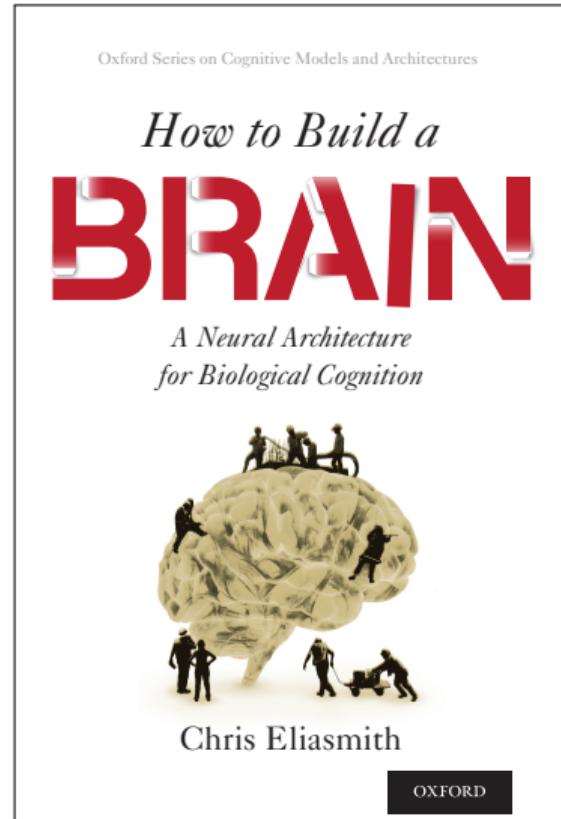
- ▶ **Assignment 4** – Due Nov. 20\*
- ▶ **Assignment 5** – Due Dec. 4\*
- ▶ **Project Presentations** – Nov. 29 & Dec. 4
  - ▶ 5-10 min. presentation (see the ‘project summary document’ on the website for instructions)
  - ▶ Worth 4 marks (20%) of the final project
- ▶ **Final Project** – Due Dec. 18\*
  - ▶ Worth 20% of the final mark

\* All deadlines are 11:59pm EDT

# The Semantic Pointer Architecture (SPA)

## ► SPA

- Semantics
- Syntax
- Control
- Learning and memory



# The Semantic Pointer Hypothesis

The Semantic Pointer Hypothesis states:

*Higher-level cognitive functions in biological systems are made possible by semantic pointers. Semantic pointers are neural representations that carry partial semantic content and are composable into the representational structures necessary to support complex cognition.*

# Shallow Versus Deep Semantics

TREE

0x54 0x52 0x45 0x45

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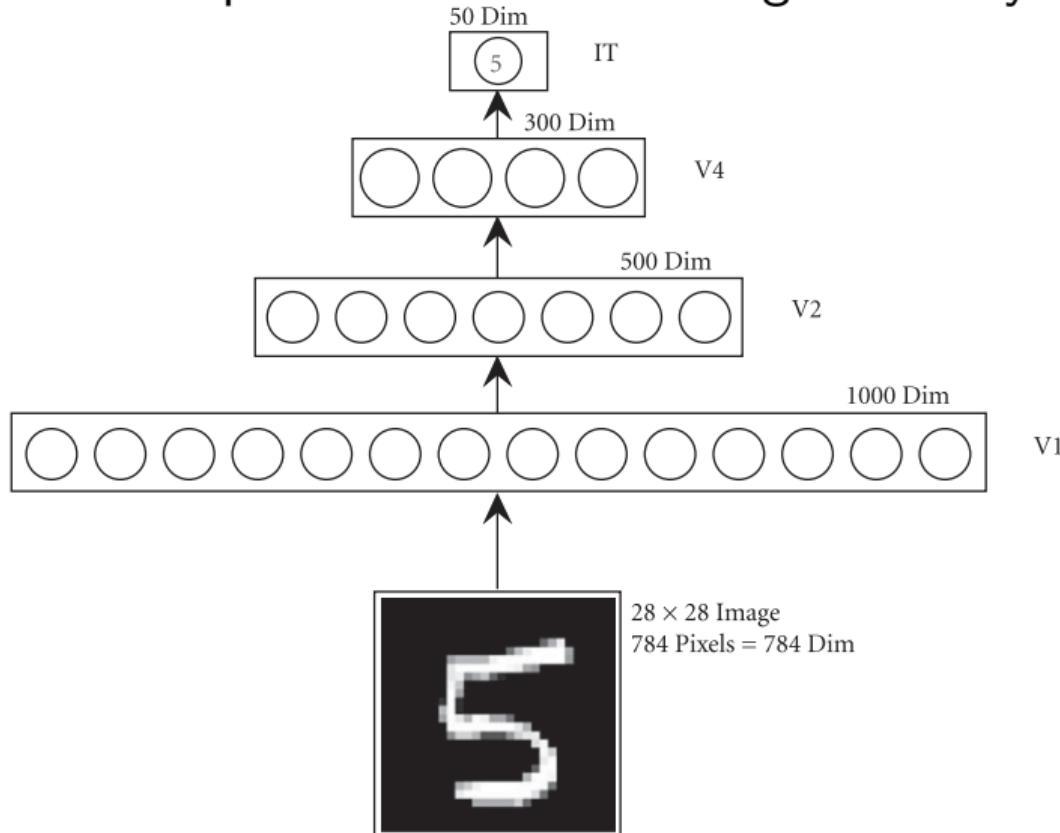
*Shallow semantics (relational)*

- $$\begin{aligned} \forall x \text{is\_a}(x, \text{PINE}) \rightarrow \text{is\_a}(x, \text{TREE}) \wedge \text{has}(x, \text{NEEDLES}) \wedge \text{is}(x, \text{EVERGREEN}), \\ \forall x \text{is\_a}(x, \text{TREE}) \rightarrow \text{is\_a}(x, \text{PLANT}), \\ \forall x \text{is\_a}(x, \text{PLANT}) \rightarrow \text{is}(x, \text{ALIVE}). \end{aligned}$$
- 

*Deep semantics ("subjective experience")*



# Deep Semantic in Perception: Visual Processing Hierarchy

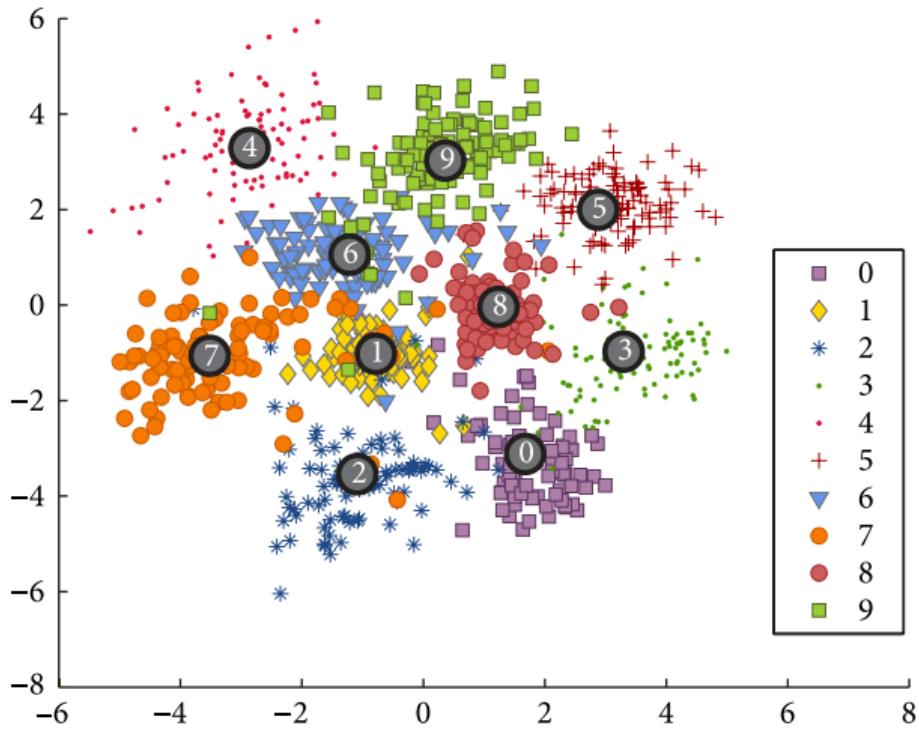


# Deep Semantic in Perception: Dereferencing

A.

7	8	3	/	7	6	3	6	6	8
5	2	0	4	5	3	6	8	4	9
4	1	1	7	5	0	3	8	7	6

D.



B.

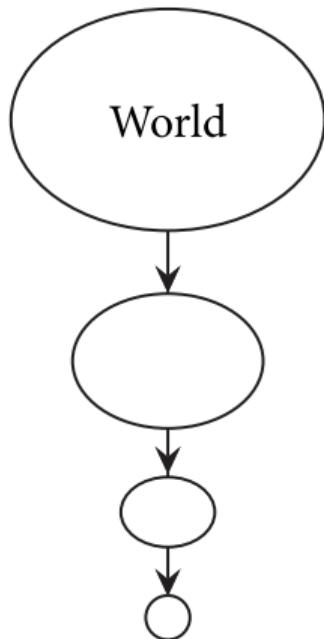
7	8	3	/	7	6	3	6	6	8
5	2	0	4	5	3	6	8	4	9
4	1	1	7	5	0	3	8	7	6

C.

0	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9

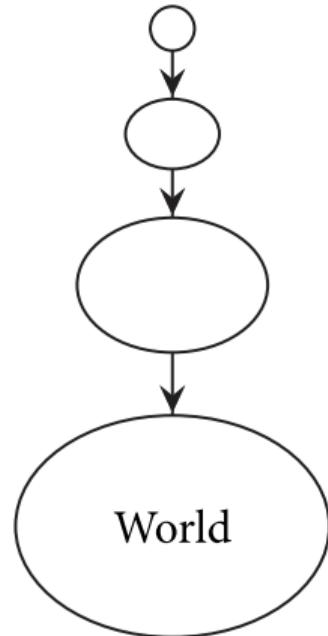
# Perception vs. Action

Perception



$\text{World} \rightarrow \text{Representation}$

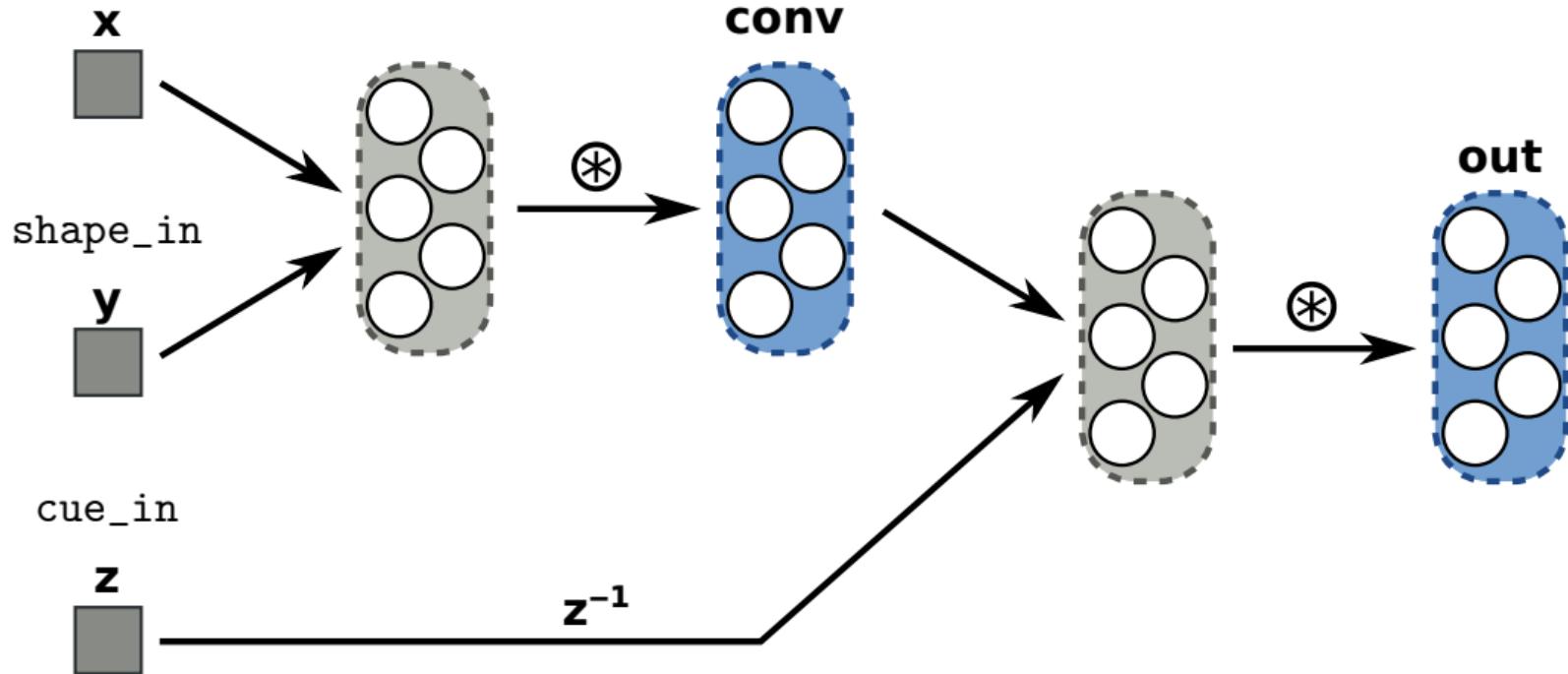
Motor Control



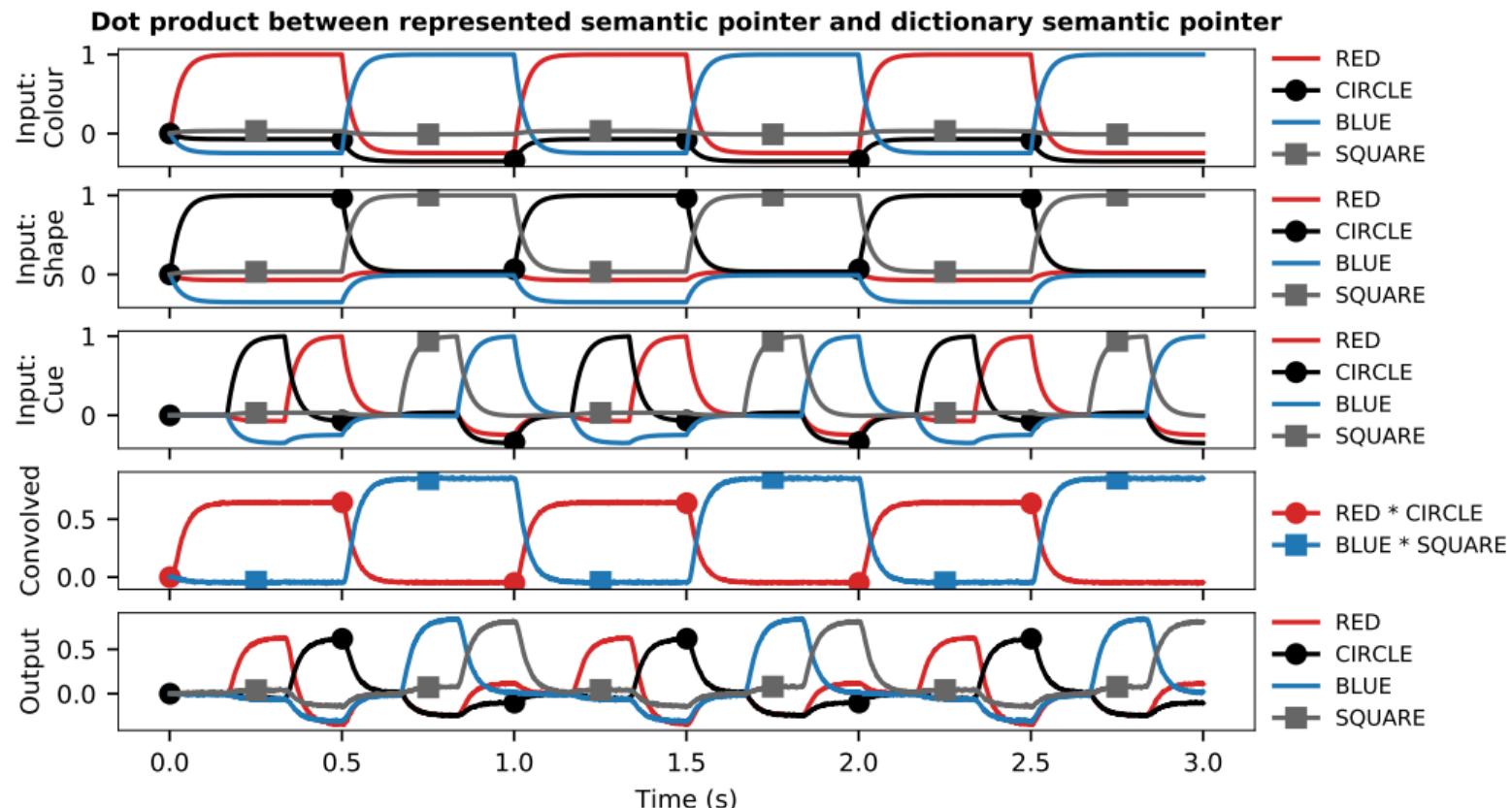
$\text{Representation} \rightarrow \text{World}$

# Nengo SPA Example (I)

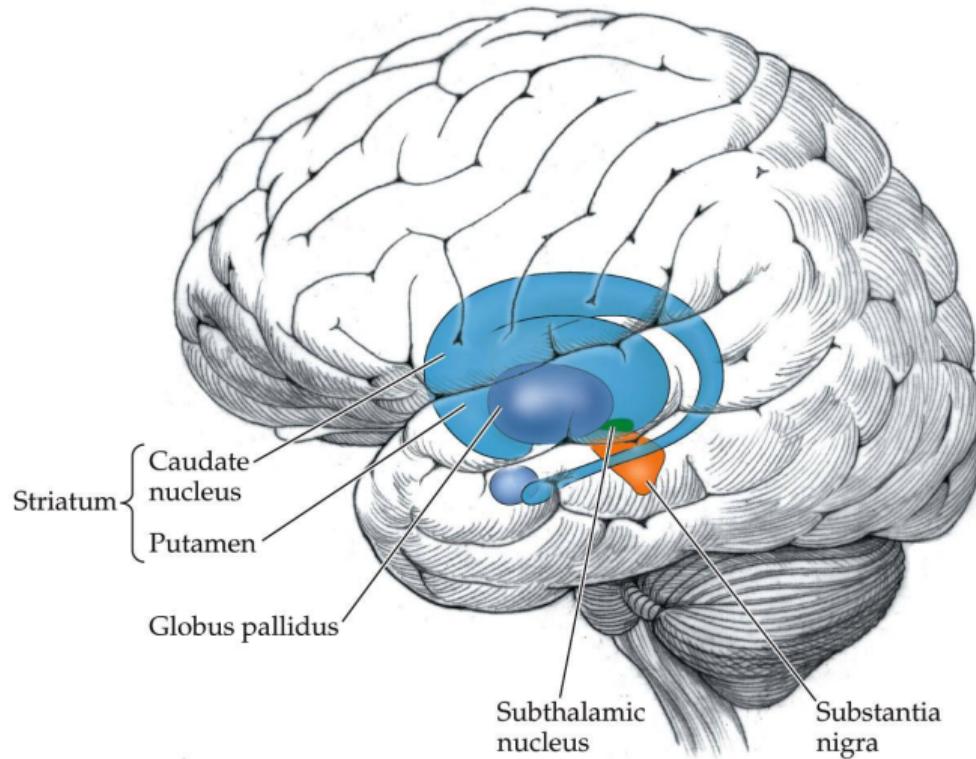
colour\_in



## Nengo SPA Example (II)



# Basal Ganglia (BG)



*Biological Psychology 6e, Figure 11.18*

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# Clinical Evidence for the Role of the BG in Action Selection

## Parkinson's disease

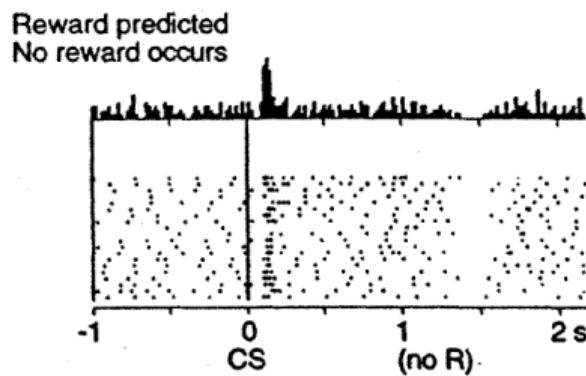
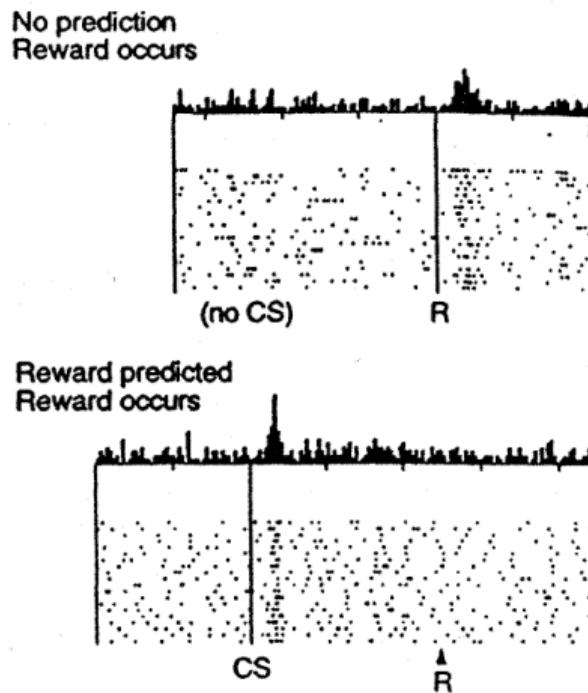
- ▶ Neurons in the substantia nigra die off
- ▶ Difficult to trigger actions to start
- ▶ Usually physical actions
- ▶ Cognitive effects in later stages

## Huntington's disease

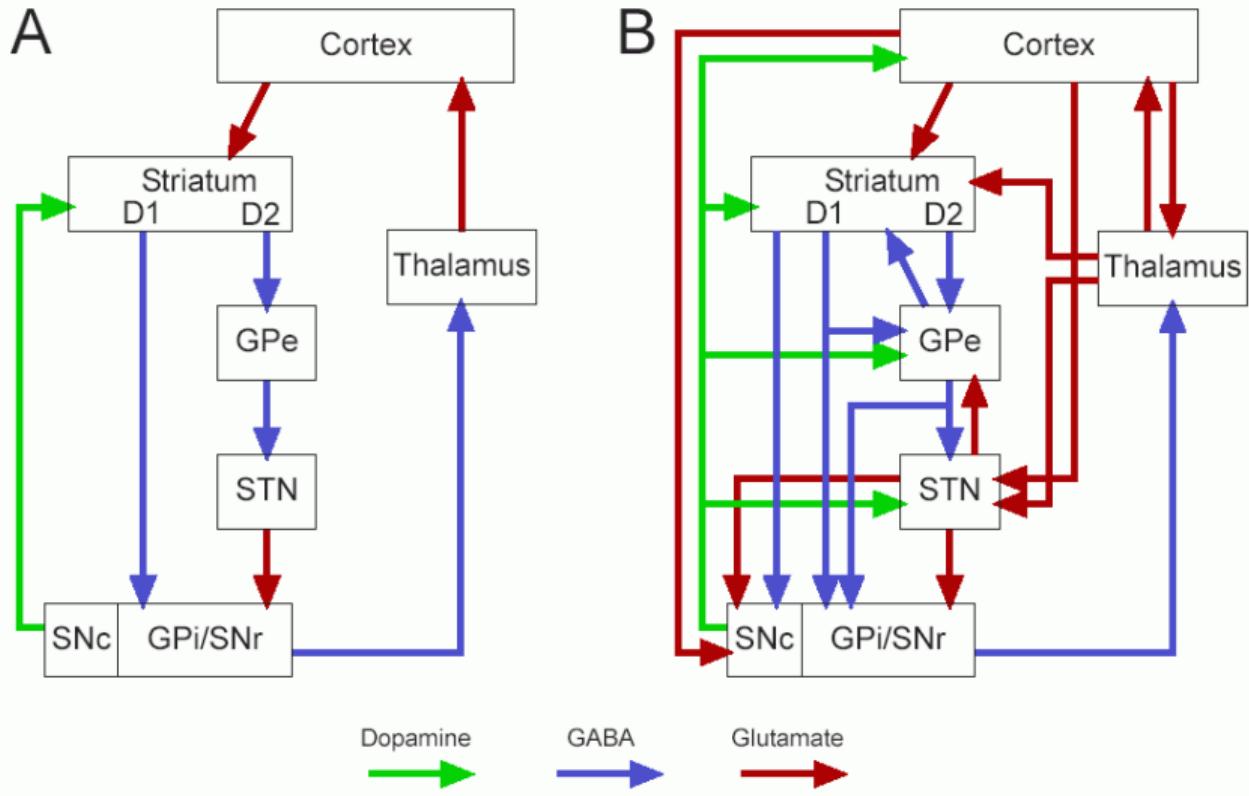
- ▶ Neurons in the striatum die off
- ▶ Actions triggered inappropriately
- ▶ Small uncontrollable movements
- ▶ Trouble sequencing cognitive actions

# Neurophysiological Evidence for the Role of the BG in Action Selection

- Role in reinforcement learning
- Dopamine levels map onto reward prediction error



# Microcircuitry of the Basal Ganglia



# Simplified Model

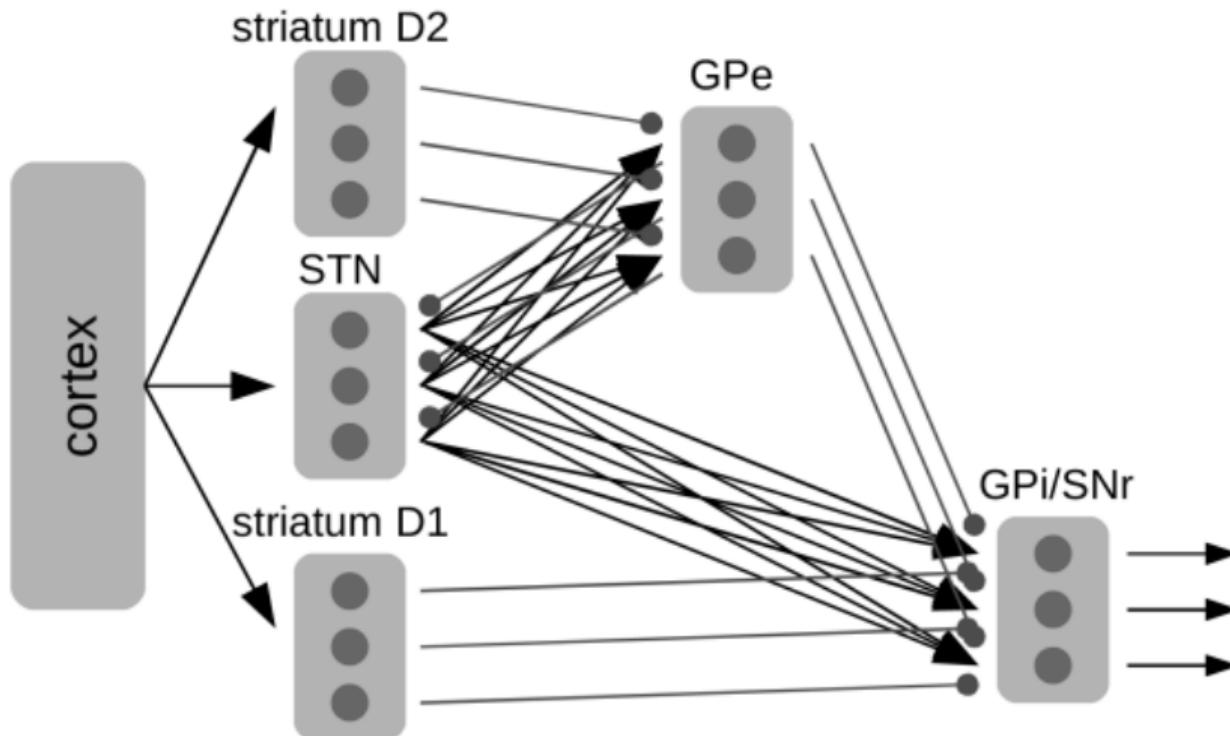
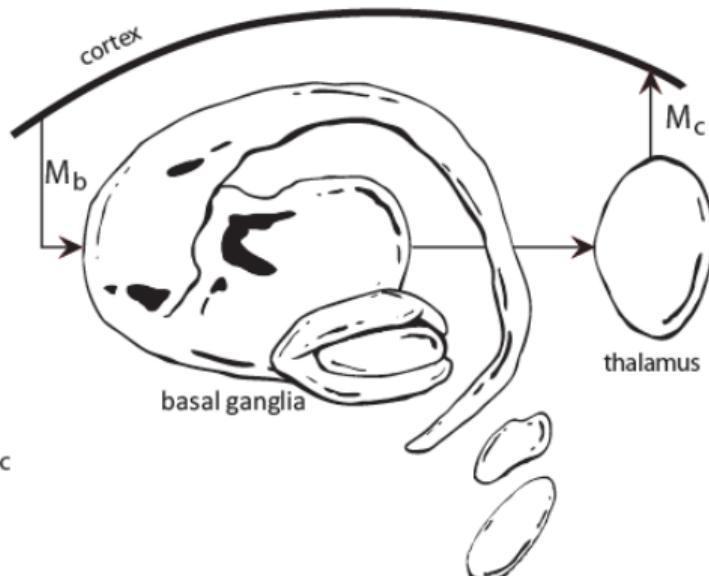
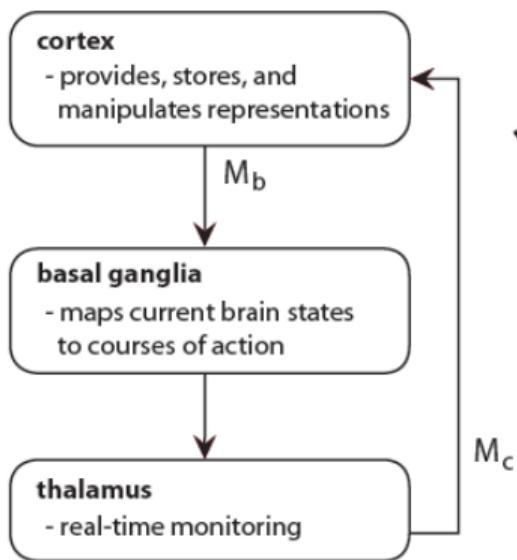
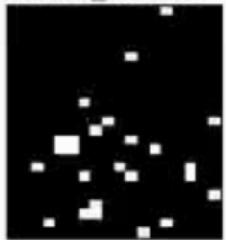


Image Sources. Gurney, Prescott, and Redgrave, *Model of Action Selection in the Basal Ganglia*, 2001

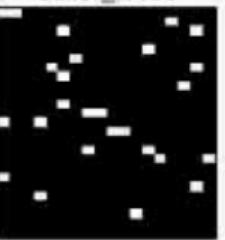
# The Cortex-Basal Ganglia-Thalamus loop



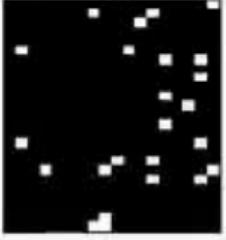
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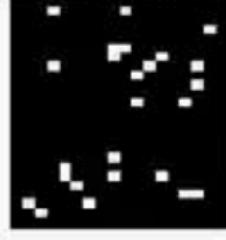
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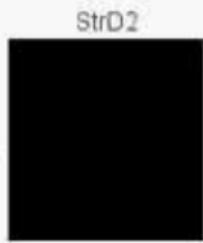
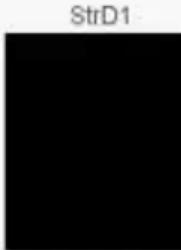
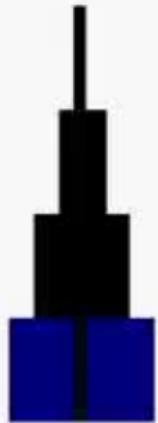
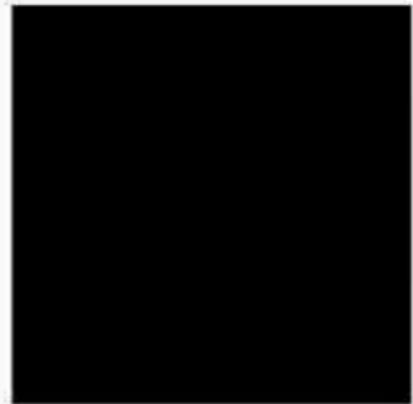
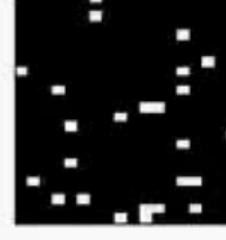
buffer\_goal



buffer\_goalpeg



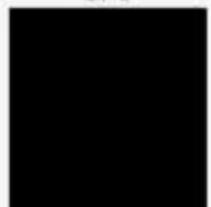
buffer\_tocusppeg



GPI



GPe



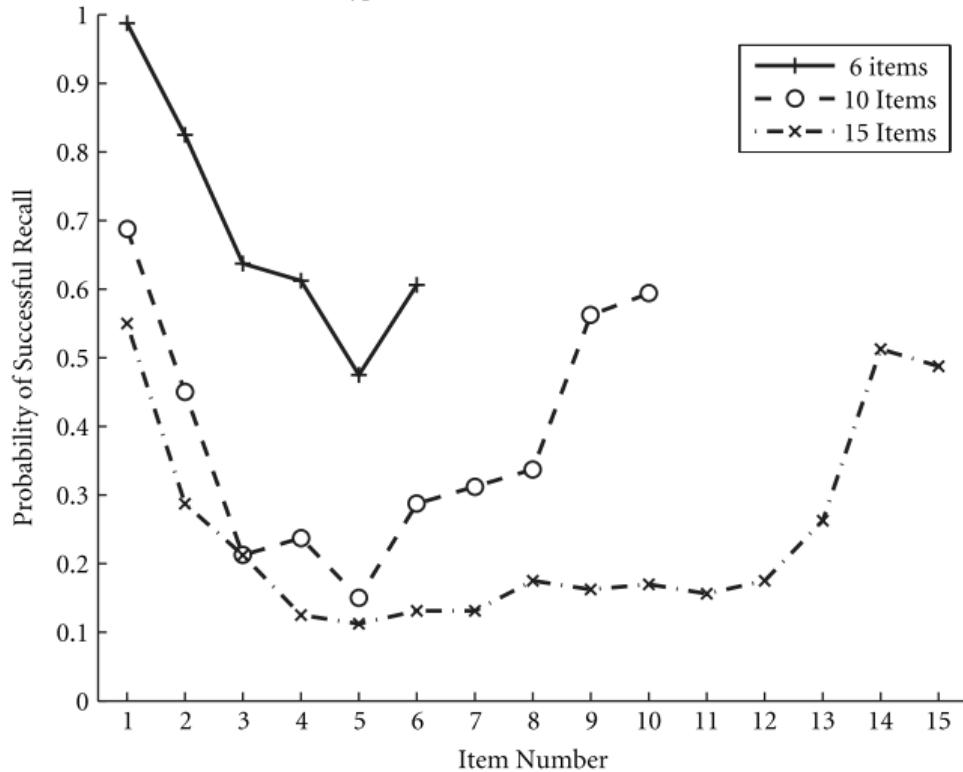
## Recency and Primacy Experiment

**Experiment:** Remember this list (presented one at a time)

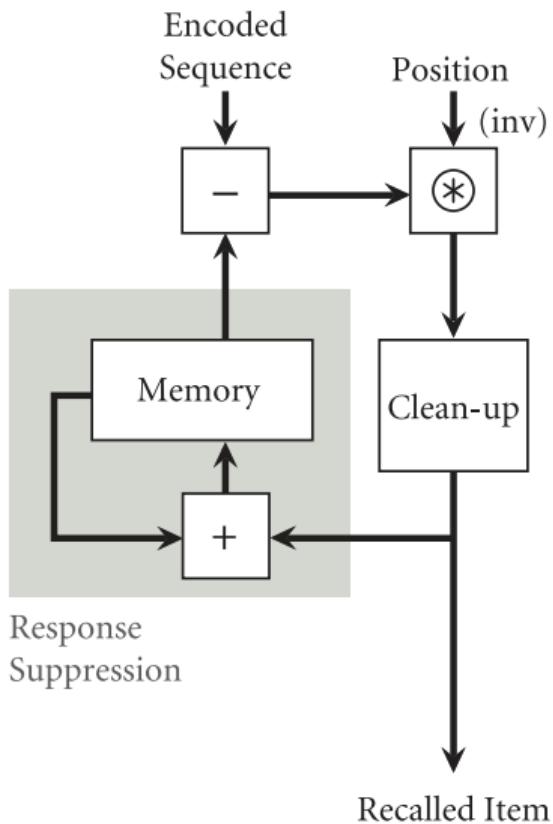
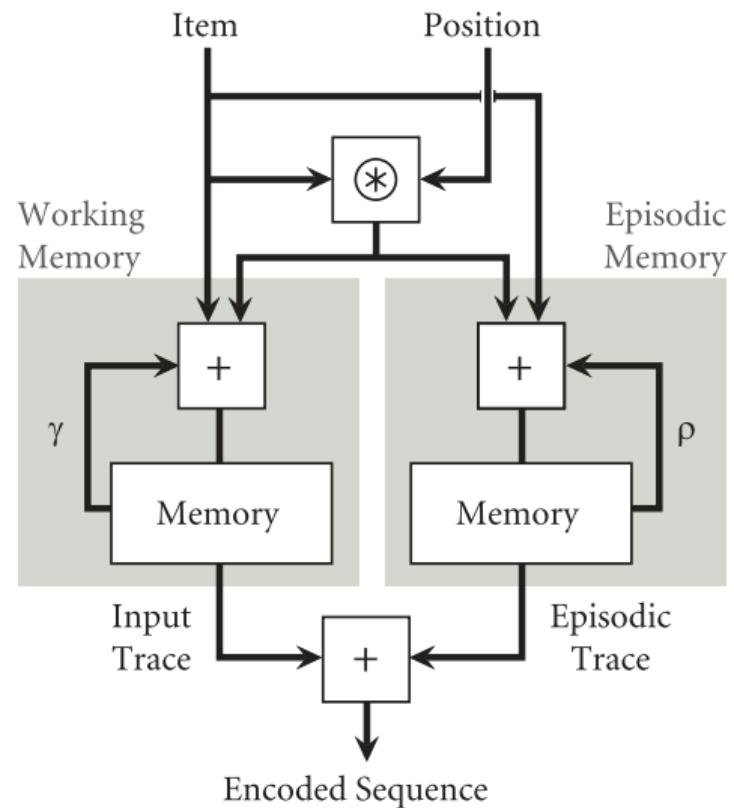
- |                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. robot          | 6. conglomerates |
| 2. teflon         | 7. waxberries    |
| 3. kettlemaking   | 8. electrograph  |
| 4. big-league     | 9. overjoyous    |
| 5. troubleshooter | 10. unquailing   |

# Recency and Primacy Data

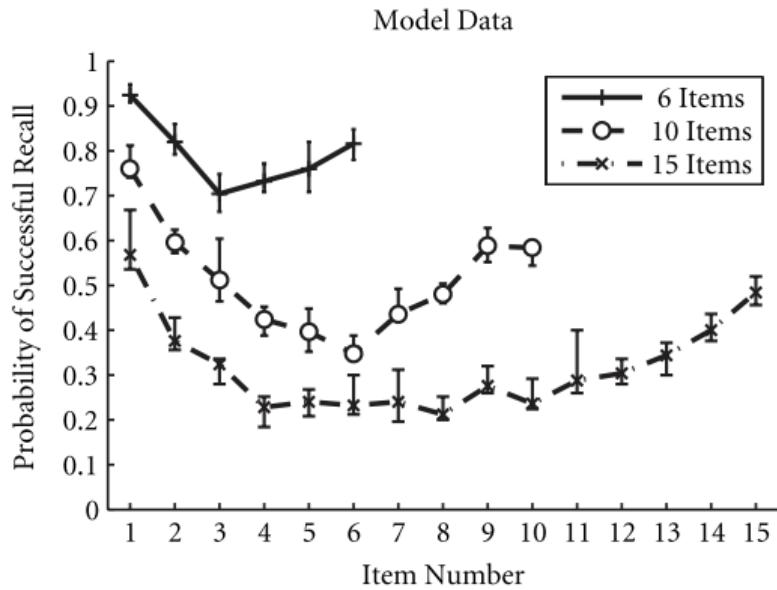
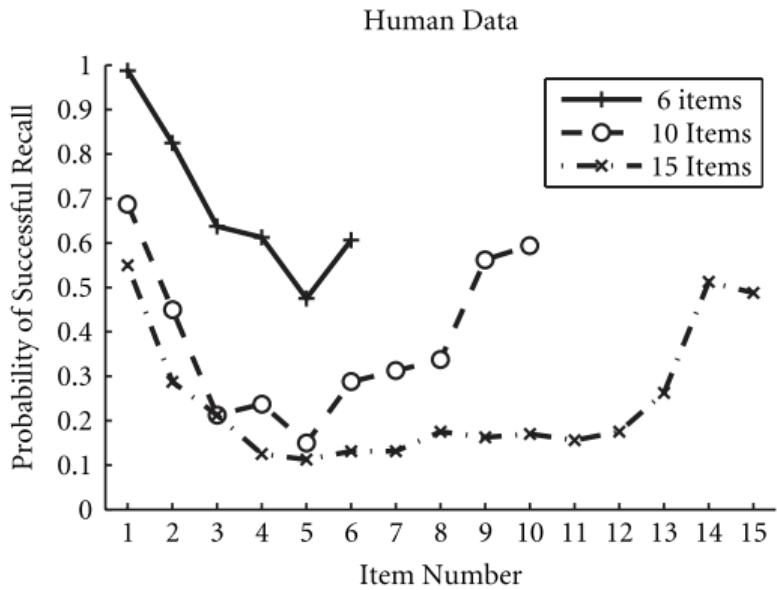
Typical Forward Serial Recall Curves



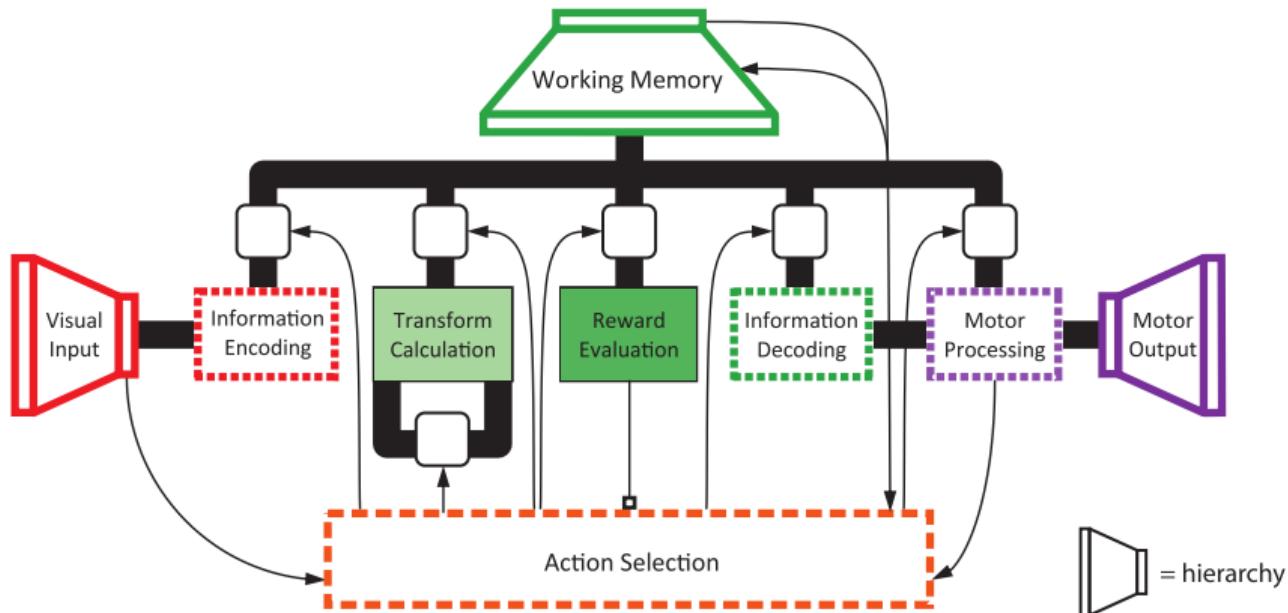
# Ordinal Serial Encoding (OSE) Model



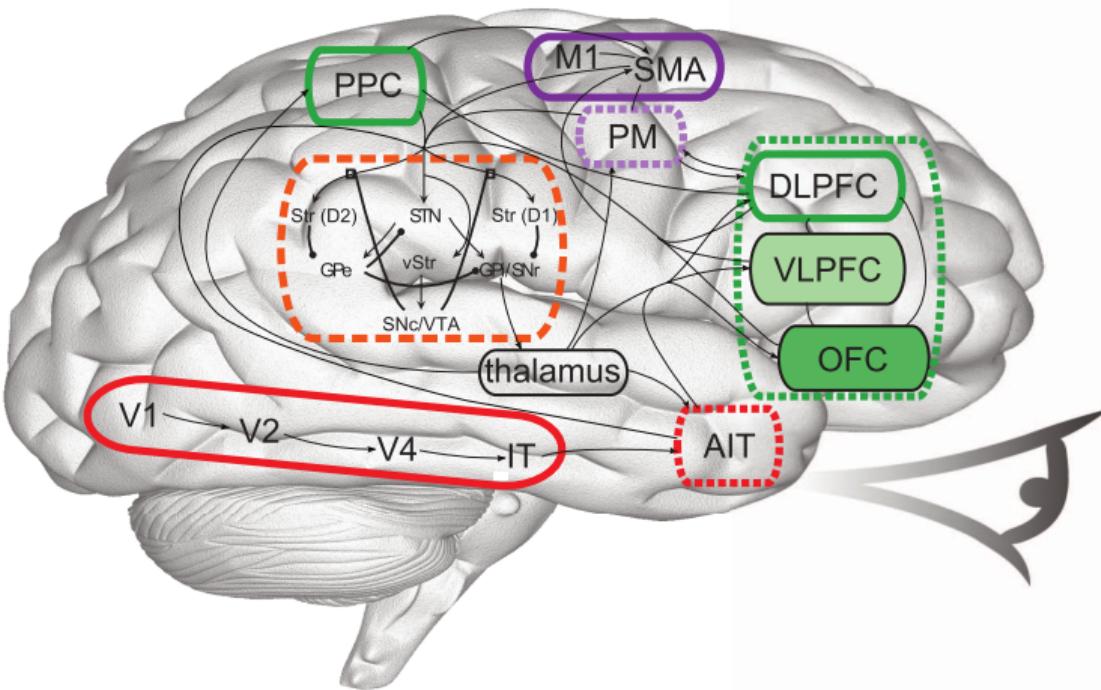
# Ordinal Serial Encoding (OSE) Model: Experiment



# Spaun – Semantic Pointer Architecture Unified Network (I)



# Spaun – Semantic Pointer Architecture Unified Network (II)



# Image sources

## Title slide

*Librarian (In a library)*, between 1850 and 1866, Georg Reimer  
Wikimedia.