

## Book Review

*Perception*

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T. L. Hubbard, ed.: *Spatial Biases in Perception and Cognition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2020; 503 pp. £34.99 Paperback, ISBN 9781316607077.

**Reviewed by:** Austen Smith , *Department of Psychology, University of Regina*

*Spatial Biases in Perception and Cognition* is a collection of reviews from a wide array of contributors about a very broad range of topics, published by Cambridge University Press. This book is well suited for senior undergraduate and graduate courses in psychology or cognitive science, or for students of all ages interested in spatial relations and spatial abilities.

The heterogeneity between chapters makes any broad praise or criticism complicated, but I offer some evaluations, both broad and specific, below.

It is hard to overstate the breadth within these pages. Grouping the 24 chapters into four general sections provides some structure, however, there is still a wide variety within each grouping. For example, the *Perception and Action* section contains a chapter examining *Spatial Bias after Brain Damage* as well as a chapter on *Grounding Social Cognition in Space*. This breadth is advantageous overall, making it a “one stop shoppe” for anyone interested in spatial biases from a cognitive perspective. The tradeoff for this magnitude of coverage is that the common thread running throughout is sometimes lost. The task of integrating and keeping the information straight falls to the reader as there is no commentary, aside from a brief introduction from the editor.

Apart from the *Conclusion* section found in each chapter, there is no template to guide the structure of the reviews and contributors appear to have been given the freedom to decide how to present information, which I am quite sure they appreciated. While a standardized element consistent between chapters (such as summary bullet points or an information box) may aid readers, overall, the variety between chapters works to keep readers engaged. One criticism of this format used by *Spatial Biases in Perception and Cognition* is that assumptions pertaining to the baseline knowledge of the reader tend to vary between contributors.

The use of visuals is an invaluable tool when explaining a spatial concept. I am likely not alone in often only fully understanding an idea after seeing an associated image. While the chapters that incorporate images tend to do so effectively, there were a few instances where I was looking for an explanation to be accompanied by a visual. However, these cases were exceptions as excellent writing and smart image use predominate each chapter and immerse the reader in the topic. At this point, it is also worth noting the dedicated plate section in the middle of the book that includes helpful colorized figures.

I would like to touch on three specific areas covered in this book: aesthetics, laterality, and native reading direction. I am fascinated with aesthetic experiences, and I was very excited to see the inclusion of the chapter written by the book’s editor on *Aesthetics and Preferences in Spatial and Scene*

*Composition.* It is an important contribution because it aggregates and reviews, in a comprehensive manner not previously seen, much of the existing research relevant to spatial bias and the potential neural cognitive mechanisms underlying aesthetic preferences. This resource is not only useful to those of us working in this field, but it also exposes readers coming from different backgrounds to the breadth of spatial biases and acts as an introduction to aesthetics.


Laterality influences all my work in one way or another and I was pleased that space was dedicated to considering lateral spatial biases throughout several chapters. I found these chapters particularly refreshing because contrary to much of the reading I typically do, these discussions include laterality without primarily focusing on it. I anticipate that readers from all backgrounds might have a similar experience to my own, where the views shared in *Spatial Biases in Perception and Cognition* give new context to your thinking.

Lateral spatial biases, generally following from hemispheric differences, are an important component of the spatial bias literature more broadly. The modulation of lateral biases by outside factors such as native reading direction has increasingly received more attention. While the native reading direction is touched on throughout several chapters in this collection, I think it would have been appropriate to have more space dedicated to this topic. I am particularly interested in the growing evidence that suggests the leftward spatial bias typically observed in left-to-right readers is attenuated, or even reversed, in monolingual and bilingual right-to-left readers (see, e.g., Rinaldi et al., 2014).

In closing, given the subject matter at hand, the asymmetrical front cover *must* be mentioned. The text overlaid on the kaleidoscopic background image requires a careful eye to see that the front cover text is off-center. Comparing my copy to the cover image on the publisher's website reveals that the leftward biased words appear to be intentional (perhaps an Easter egg from the editor?)!

It is worth mentioning that the copy of the book that I was provided with is holding up well after a few months. I would suggest that at just over \$50 (Canadian) for the paperback, adding this book to your library is an easy decision and, importantly it is not a cost-prohibitive text for students.

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### References

- Rinaldi, L., Di Luca, S., Henik, A., & Girelli, L. (2014). Reading direction shifts visuospatial attention: An interactive account of attentional biases. *Acta Psychologica*, *151*, 98–105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2014.05.018>