If personal experience is the basic raw material for psychology, why do all the major psychologies of the past century marginalise or deny it? In this thought-provoking new book Benjamin Bradley shows how our everyday experiences need to be at the core of the scientific discipline. He calls for a move away from attempts to reconcile the many contrasting and often opposing theories and philosophies of contemporary psychology, and instead puts forward a scholarly and exciting new vision for psychology which focuses on the ‘here-and-now’ and the importance of others as equals in teaching and research. He encourages the reader to reconsider the very basis of our understanding of what experience is. This uniquely inspiring and practical text will prove an invaluable resource for all those interested in teaching, learning and researching about the mind.

Benjamin Bradley is Professor and Sub-Dean of Psychology at Charles Sturt University, New South Wales. He has published extensively in the areas of developmental and social psychology and is the author of *Visions of Infancy: A Critical Introduction to Child Psychology*, which has been translated into French, Spanish and Italian.
Psychology and Experience

By

Benjamin Bradley
Dedicated to
the memory of my brilliant and much-missed
father-in-law Bill Selby (1924–2003)
and
the indefatiguable intelligence of my mother, Joan
Sylvester Bradley (1917–2002)
All experiences are true.

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Preface

This book has had a long genesis. An early draft was completed in 1994, focusing on psychology’s language. 1994 also saw my first attempts to democratise the dynamics of language within the classes I taught, often with surprising and inspiring results, thanks to the quality of my students in North Queensland. On the strength of these experiments, I proposed to write a new kind of textbook for psychology, using an experience-based pedagogy. Publishers responded cautiously to this idea. They could see that students might well favour an experience-based approach. But they argued a different kind of book needed to precede such a textbook, making the case for rethinking the place of experience in psychology.

The book’s history makes sense of its form. I set out by debating the discipline’s pedagogy, arguing the need for both students and teachers to be aware of the ‘here and now’ of collective classroom experience. The next five chapters go on to examine in detail the psychological research and theory that cast light on the ‘here and now’, arguing immediate experience to be constituted through a synchronic field of intersubjectivity. I show that this argument has a powerful bearing on how psychologists approach explanation and understand change. Chapters 8 and 9 then return to practical questions, demonstrating how the conceptual framework worked out in the book makes good sense of research and reframes the curriculum in psychology. Overall the book aims to provide grounds for a just, reflective and informed empiricism that reinforces the discipline’s status as the strategic science of enlightenment and emancipation, an idea familiar to its founders.
I am particularly grateful to the students who have shared with me the excitement of working out these ideas. I also thank my friends for their continued interest in what I have been doing. I owe Wendy Hollway a great deal for her generosity in reading the penultimate draft and for her insightful commentary both on what I had written and on my difficulties in writing it. As she will see I hope, her comments have had a big impact on the final version. Thank you Wendy. My greatest debt is to Jane Selby, who has not only read many versions of this book with great perceptiveness but has by turns inspired by her own work and intellectual courage, challenged, cheered, fed, backed up and despaired of my progress towards publishing these chapters – and, throughout, has managed to live with me and love me, for all of which I am undyingly thankful. I have been lucky in knowing many psychologists and intellectuals who have inspired, taught or helped me. The authors of *Changing the Subject* form one such group, especially Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin and Valerie Walkerdine. Standing high on the same list are Colwyn Trevarthen, Bill Kessen, Shep White, Edwin Ardener, Bernie Kaplan, Ken and Mary Gergen, Jill Morawski, John Morss, Martin Richards, Joseph Koerner, Niamh Stephenson, Anna Gibbs, John Shotter, Carol Gilligan, Peter Raggatt, Mike Smithson, Mike Summerfield, the International Society for Theoretical Psychology, the Centre for Cultural Research into Risk (at Charles Sturt University, 1999–2002) and CHEIRON. I am also grateful for the support the universities who have employed me have given me to do the work contained in this book – although it is an odd world in which universities that support intellectual labour earn one’s gratitude. I give thanks for the inspiration of four people whom I have never met, Erasmus Darwin, Frances Yates, the extraordinary William James and Katherine Pandora (whose excellent history of American psychology in the 1930s gave me a fillip just when I needed it). I am sad that neither of my parents, Peter and Joan Sylvester Bradley, have lived to see this book published. I would love to know what my father, a paleontologist and a great enthusiast for big
ideas, would have had to say about it. Finally I would like to say a big thank you to my son Peter, whose fate it has been to grow up fathered by a psychologist preoccupied with writing about synchrony, but who has borne this fate with patience, love and good humour.