

## The Constructive Mind

*The Constructive Mind* is an integrative study of the psychologist Frederic Bartlett's (1886–1969) life, work, and legacy. Bartlett is most famous for the idea that remembering is constructive and the concept of schema. For him, 'constructive' meant that human beings are future-oriented and flexibly adaptive to new circumstances. This book shows how his notion of construction is also central to understanding social psychology and cultural dynamics, as well as perceiving, imagining, and thinking. Wagoner contextualizes the development of Bartlett's key ideas in relation to his predecessors and contemporaries. He also applies Bartlett's constructive analysis of cultural transmission in order to chart how his ideas were appropriated and transformed by others who followed. As such, this book is also a case study in the continuous reconstruction of ideas in science.

**Brady Wagoner (Ph.D. University of Cambridge)** is Professor of Psychology at Aalborg University, Denmark. His research focuses on social and cultural psychology, constructive remembering, social change, and the development of dynamic methodologies. He was the co-creator of the *Sir Frederic Bartlett Internet Archive* and is an associate editor for the journals *Culture & Psychology* and *Peace & Conflict*. He has received a number of prestigious professional awards, such as Sigmund Koch Prize and the Early Career Award from the American Psychological Association (History of Psychology division).

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*Bartlett's Psychology in Reconstruction*

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*Aalborg University, Denmark*



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## Foreword

### Active and Developing Patterns: Remembering into the Future

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*Jaan Valsiner*

This book is a carefully crafted monument to one of the most profound thinkers in twentieth-century psychology. Frederic Bartlett's name in psychology is usually associated with his 1932 book *Remembering*, and in psychologists' habitual discourses about their own field of knowledge his contributions are located in the domain of the so-called 'memory research.' Of course, combining the terms 'memory' and 'research' has all the allure of basic science. 'Research' is the unquestionably glorious central term in the social discourses about science, and the value of 'memory' for our everyday lives goes undisputed for anybody who is worried about finding one's parked car in a humungous parking lot of an equally grandiose shopping center. Pressures upon our ordinary psychological capacities are not necessarily reduced in the 'Internet age.'

Yet there is a twist. While at first glance that label seems very clear – we all worry about how not to forget important events of the past – the content of this category of 'research' is extremely wide. Everything ranging from the neuroscientific study of retaining the information at neuronal levels to that of countries' maintenance of their national identities may end up labeled as 'memory research.' Yet when a certain corpus of perspectives is grouped together as 'X-research,' it is likely to be seen as a conglomerate of empirical presentations ('the literature') and dismissive of theoretical integration efforts, and often opposed also to 'practice.' Such dependence on 'research' is detrimental to any science where theoretical goals come first, and practices determine if the empirical investigations are of any real value.

The value of ideas prevails over classifications. I would claim here that Frederic Bartlett was never involved in 'memory research,' even if – for his intellectual interests – the phenomena of remembering were of utmost importance. As the reader of the present book soon understands, Bartlett's actual contributions to science are much wider and more multi-faceted than their usual presentation in history of psychology narratives has been. As the reader can discover from Brady Wagoner's careful analysis of Bartlett's intellectual history, he can be

seen as one of the revered and mis-presented (as well as misunderstood) scholars in psychology who are considered ‘classics,’ while their constructive ideas are left to gather intellectual dust on the pages of introductory textbooks-dominated knowledge base of the field.

What is at stake in the case of Bartlett’s contributions is the study of human processes of construction of novelty. This is the core issue for all developmental perspectives in the biological, social, and human sciences (for detailed coverage, see Carré et al.<sup>1</sup>). In this, Bartlett’s thinking resonates well with the major developmental thinkers of the twentieth century – James Mark Baldwin, Lev Vygotsky, and Hans Driesch. Yet Bartlett was unique, linking the ideas coming from social anthropology of his time with the best of psychology of his time. Uniting the intellectual input from his Cambridge interlocutors with the best of German psychological heritage – the introspective focus of the Würzburg tradition of Karl Bühler and Oswald Külpe – Bartlett was educated by the life-worlds of the (at that time labeled) ‘primitive’ people of the Torres Straits and other far corners of the world. Variations in cultural practices between different societies were the basis for Bartlett to work toward creating a general science of the human *psyche*. All human beings are involved in the universal process of negotiating the adoption of new ways of living while trying to adhere to their established historical traditions. The tension on the border of the tradition and innovation is what Bartlett studied. That issues of memory are important on that border goes without saying. But equally important is the future – pre-knowable only through imagination.

The place where the history of a society and its future are collectively under the process of re-negotiation is its folklore and traditions of material culture. Hence Bartlett’s basic interest is on how images and stories become reconstructed from generation to generation, across persons in a society, and – ultimately – in any person’s reconstruction of the socially relevant myth stories. Social conventionalization of newly reconstructed traditions is a universal process that is both necessary and inevitable. As the readers of this book find out, that is what *remembering* is about – it is *memory needed for the future*, rather than the test of accuracy about reflecting upon the past.

The human *psyche* is inevitably personal. Human psychological constructivity is always individual – even if that individual is embedded in a social group, community, or society as a whole. Hence, the methodology of its study is necessarily based on individual case studies – with a focus

<sup>1</sup> Carré, D., Valsiner, J., and Hampl, S. (Eds.) (2016). *Representing development*. London: Routledge.



of the tensions on the border of past and future. Bartlett did not have to face the naïve normativity of his colleagues who could ask “how big was your sample?” to evaluate his work. Generalization based on single cases was the accepted scientific norm in Bartlett’s time – only to vanish from psychology in the second half of the twentieth century. It is only in our time that it is coming back to its appropriate relevance for psychology as science.<sup>2</sup> All basic knowledge in history of psychology has come from careful analysis of single cases, even if subsequent efforts have been made to replicate these on samples. These would necessarily fail because of the non-ergodic character of psychological phenomena.<sup>3</sup> Mathematical proof of non-ergodicity leads to one – but fundamental – epistemological conclusion: *inter-individual variability is not isomorphic with intra-individual variability* in case of the open systems. This has profound significance on how psychology as science needs to operate: inference from samples (inter-individual variability) to the organization and development of individuals over time (intra-individual variability) is in principle impossible. All the empirical work conducted on samples *and extrapolated to interpret the functioning of individuals* is consequently useless. Empirical research practices – supported by social norms of what is called ‘good methodology’ (i.e., large samples, random sampling, etc.) – are rendered mute because of the wrong starting axiom (that of ergodicity). Psychology, as science, needs to return to careful analysis of single cases, in new ways.

The contrast between non-developmental and developmental views on the processes of remembering is best exemplified on the simple issue – what is an ‘error’? Researchers who have tried to continue Bartlett’s work have demonstrated their own non-developmental axiomatic stances by projecting the notion of ‘error’ into the accounts persons give in the Bartlettian re-telling experiments. Omitting some detail from a re-told story is de facto indeed an ‘error’ until it becomes linked with a confabulation that introduces a novel extension to the old. Here the omission – forgetting – works for the future. Movement through ‘erring’ in relation to what was the case in the past is potentially

<sup>2</sup> Molenaar, P. (2004). A manifesto on psychology as idiographic science: Bringing the person back into scientific psychology, this time forever. *Measurement*, 2, 201–18; Valsiner, J. (2015). Generalization is possible only from a single case (and from a single instance). In B. Wagoner, N. Chaudhary, and P. Hviid (Eds.), *Integrating experiences: Body and mind moving between contexts* (pp. 233–44). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> Molenaar, P.C.M., Huizinga, H.M., and Nesselroade, J.R. (2002). The relationship between the structure of inter-individual and intra-individual variability. In U. Staudinger and U. Lindenberger (Eds.), *Understanding human development* (pp. 339–60). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

the starting point for innovation. The whole of the human mind works at the intersection of ‘erring’ and imagining.<sup>4</sup> The basic principle introduced by James Mark Baldwin over a century ago (‘persistent imitation’) – “trying, erring, and trying again ... and so on!” – guarantees the uniqueness of human striving for a better future.

This book also illustrates the short-sightedness of orthodoxies in science. Not only can (dead) authors be dealt with as such, but also their ideas can be declared ‘dead.’ This happened to Bartlett’s schema concept in the 1970s, and has happened – directly by declaration or indirectly through omission – to many other fruitful perspectives in psychology. Introspection as the core for psychological investigation is a good example – dismissed over the whole twentieth century, it necessarily re-emerges in new forms when psychology moves toward the study of higher psychological processes that indicate what *being* human is.<sup>5</sup> In our multitude of feelings into the world, we live, love, kill one another, pardon the violence under the banners of national heroism, and gossip about our neighbors. The mundane, the monstrous, and the sacred are deeply intertwined in our ordinary lives, where we are making our ways of being, relating the desired or dreaded imagination of the future with the selective reconstructions of the past. A return to the heritage of Frederic Bartlett is actually an act of remembering into our futures.

Last (but not least), I have deep personal satisfaction in seeing the present book published. Its author has been my student and friend whom I consider to be the most careful analyst and further developer of my own scientific *oeuvre*. His careful and constructive elaboration of ideas is visible from the first to the last page of this book. Contemporary academic scholarship would have much to learn from the present book and its author, and I hope the readers will appreciate the deep scholarship they encounter on the pages of this book. Through such work, remembering the ideas from the past is illuminating the future of a discipline that is in great need for constructive innovation.

<sup>4</sup> Sato, T., Mori, N., and Valsiner, J. (Eds.) (2016). *Making of the future: Trajectory equifinality approach in cultural psychology*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> Valsiner, J., Marsico, G., Chaudhary, N., Sato, T., and Dazzani, V. (Eds.) (2016). *Psychology as the science of human being*. Cham: Springer.

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This book is the result of over a decade of research and discussion. If I had to give it a beginning, I would place it toward the end of my first term at the University of Cambridge at which time Alex Gillespie recommended I read Bartlett's book *Remembering* to develop my own research ideas. I was fascinated and went on to do a study of conversational remembering using the method of repeated reproduction, published as 'sociocultural mediators of remembering.' The summer after my first year in Cambridge, Gillespie and I won a British Academy grant to build an online archive for Bartlett, which put me to work on gathering most of Bartlett's *oeuvre*. I am also grateful to my then Ph.D. supervisor (late) Gerard Duveen for introducing me to social representations theory, which as he showed owes much to Bartlett's theorizing and as such is covered in the present book. The Cambridge adventure itself would not have happened if it was not for the support of Jaan Valsiner, my parents and the Gates Cambridge Scholarship.

The conception and writing of this book did not begin until after I had already left Cambridge and started working at Aalborg University. At around the same time, Ivana Marková began her book *The Dialogical Mind* for Cambridge University Press; it has been helpful and supportive to share the journey with her, as well as many others who have been a part. I am particularly grateful to many of my Aalborg colleagues for their interest, ideas, and feedback on my writing. Principally, I would like to thank Jaan Valsiner, Vlad Glăveanu, Ignacio Brescó de Luna, Svend Brinkmann, Luca Tateo, David Carré, and Sarah Awad. This excellent group of researchers was brought together thanks to the Danish National Research Foundation, which awarded a grant to create *The Niels Bohr Professorship Centre for Cultural Psychology*. Outside of Aalborg, I must also thank Rainer Diriwächter, Eric Jensen, and Seamus Power for their suggestions on the book manuscript.

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