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# Preface

When George A. Kelly, a renowned psychologist in the United States of America, published his *magnum opus* of 1218 pages, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, in 1955 the book was welcomed by many of his contemporaries as a milestone in the development of the new discipline of Clinical Psychology which was at that time dominated by two major approaches, psychoanalysis and behaviour therapy.

Two decades later, the 1976 ‘Nevada Symposium on Motivation’ which was dedicated to the Psychology of Personal Constructs initiated a series of International Congresses with its 22nd incarnation completed in Montreal, Canada in 2017. During the last thirty years PCP has spread to Europe, especially the UK and Italy, and Australia but has lost traction in the United States. In the official curriculum of ‘academic’ psychology everywhere PCP has at best acquired the status of a quasi-footnote as an early approach to a cognitive personality psychology.

While a ‘constructivist’ paradigm has become attractive for scholars and practitioners unhappy with the by now domineering positivist and/or biological approach PCP, as one of its earliest manifestations, has not really benefitted from this trend. And although the arrival of the Internet in the 1990s made communication and information easier PCP has still not acquired the status it deserves. This is probably in part due to a preference for ‘loose construing’ in the PCP community itself, a certain reluctance to adopt organisational structures. Attempts to establish regional (i. e. continental) PCP associations in the United States, Europe and Australia have not been very successful in the long run, and Asia, South America and Africa have hardly been infected by the PCP virus. Some national groups however have been thriving, especially in the UK, Italy, Australia, Spain, and Serbia. In spite of economic problems some international conferences are still well attended, and hopefully, the foundation of the *George Kelly Society* in 2016 will increase the ‘visibility’ of the PCP movement.

I ‘discovered’ PCP in the 1980s, included the Repertory Grid methodology in my research, and became increasingly interested in the theory which appeared to be ambitious but also open-minded in a pleasant way. So were the many colleagues I met in various circumstances. I then organised, with the help of friends and colleagues, several conferences of the emerging (but now sadly defunct) German PCP group as well as international meetings: the *European Personal Construct Association (EPCA)* Conference in 1994, in St. Andreasberg, in Germany and the *International Congress on PCP* in 1999 in Berlin. The arrival of the Internet made it possible to set up a variety of websites dedicated to PCP, including the *Internet Encyclopaedia of PCP* (with Beverly

Walker) and the online journal *Personal Construct Theory & Practice* (with Trevor Butt and Viv Burr), and most recently, the *George Kelly Society*.

What is in this book?

Over the years, apart from numerous research papers with a limited focus I wrote a number of articles of, I hope, more general interest. Some of them are out of print, about half of them have never been published. The scope of topics reflects my personal interests.

*Construing PCP.* The first section comprises a couple of papers reflecting on the history, the present situation, and the future of PCP.

*Construing the world.* I became involved in political activities (in the pacifist movement) when I was 15, in 1956, and have been a ‘political animal’ ever since. Hence my interest in what PCP might contribute to political thinking and acting. That PCP as an international discipline communicates mostly in English caught my interest when I began attending its international conferences. This in turn led to my ‘personal’ involvement in Australia and sharpened my awareness for cross-cultural issues. The edited book on *Crossing borders – going places: Personal constructions of otherness* bears witness to this.

*Construing research.* Anyone involved with research in an academic environment will share the experience of a discrepancy between PCP as a science of the person and the academic requirements of ‘tough science’ and the inherent consequences for careers and reputations. This is seen by some as a divide between ‘idiographic’ and ‘nomothetic’ research interests. I think that this discrepancy can be resolved not in principle but pragmatically. From the various areas of research that I have been involved in I have selected a few papers that may illustrate these issues. They are co-authored by *Viv Burr, Rolf Deubner, Julie Ellis* and *Hildegard Felder* respectively.

*Construing the arts.* During some of the international PCP conferences that I attended I discovered that several participants shared my interest in the arts. This resulted in conference sections, edited books and journal special issues on ‘PCP and the arts’, together with *Kenneth Sewell* and *Viv Burr*. The *Evening of creative construing* with performances by participants that has become a fixture in recent conferences shows the intimate relationship between PCP and artistic creativity. My own ‘artistic’ self-construal is rooted in playing jazz, writing short stories and taking photographs.

*Construing the personal.* A remarkable feature of the ‘academic’ discipline PCP is that it can be applied ‘reflexively’ to one’s own life. I found a PCP rooted thinking helpful in dealing with my own health issues and the process of ageing. I am pleased to note that my plea to expand the range of convenience of PCP, by construing PCP not only as a way of dealing with suffering and loss but also with everyday issues including fun and pleasure, has been heard.

*Pictorial constructs.* When I set up a website with portraits of PCP personalities years ago (now closed) many viewers welcomed the opportunity to see the authors of famous and classical texts ‘in person’. Since I have been taking ‘PCP pics’ for more than 25 years I am concluding this volume with a ‘Hall of Fame’, along with pictures from the history of PCP.

As this book is not an ‘official’ publication I did not bother about copyright issues related to my own papers, and to the photographs I did not take myself. Where possible, credits are given, though.

Finally, I would like to thank all the wonderful PCP friends that I had the privilege of meeting during the last 30 years, especially my co-workers, co-authors, and co-editors *Viv Burr, Ana Catina, Julie Ellis, Kenneth Sewell, Beverly Walker*, and of course the late *Trevor Butt*.

Hamburg, Germany, December, 2017