

*Short interview with Adrian Brock at the XIX Meeting on History of Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry in Córdoba, Argentina. The interview was held in conjunction with the launch of the first edition of *Nombrar la Mente* by Kurt Danziger. 19 October 2018.*

Interviewer: Dr. Fernando Ferrari (National University of Córdoba, Argentina)

[What was the research process behind the book?]

I can only speak about my limited role in this research and that was on the concept of emotion. Danziger already knew that it had been preceded by the word, “passion” and that the change occurred around the 18th century. It was also likely that David Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature* was a key text in this regard and so it proved. It was also not difficult to guess that Charles Darwin’s *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* would have popularized the use of the term. Other than that, it was just a matter of looking through the works of key philosophers of the period, such as Bishop Butler and Lord Kames. Much of it involved looking at familiar literature with fresh eyes. Whereas previous writers had discussed Hume’s theory of emotion or Darwin’s theory of emotion, assuming that there was something called, “emotion” that existed above and beyond their theories, we were interested in the origins and development of the concept itself. There is of course a tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte* or conceptual history in Germany and there was also a book called, *Keywords* by Raymond Williams. Danziger was familiar with this previous work.

[What were the objectives of the first edition of the book? What kind of impact can this Spanish edition have on the history of psychology in a non-English language context?]

Only Kurt Danziger can tell you definitely what his objectives were but I can make an educated guess. One thing he wanted to overcome was what he and others call, “naive naturalism”. This is the view that there is a one-to-one correspondence of our words to something out there in the real world. In fact most of the words are categories. When we talk of “emotion” or “motivation”, we are talking about a class of objects that we believe have something in common. Anyone who has any knowledge of other languages, especially non-European languages, will be aware that they don’t all divide the world up in the same way. This is why the colleague in Indonesia that Danziger encountered could make no sense of these terms. His language had a different set of categories to explain the non-material aspects of human beings. Of course it is not just the relativity of these categories that we are interested but also the fact that they intimately related to the other aspects of the society in which they exist. We can also see from a historical point of view that they change over time. For example, “intelligence” arose in connection with the introduction of universal education in European countries and the practice of assigning children to different classes and schools.

One of the major themes of the book is that psychology does not just exist inside the head, as many people suppose. It is firmly rooted in the things that people do and, in particular, the things that they do to each other. This can also be seen in Danziger’s later work on the history of memory, *Marking the Mind*. Towards the end of the book, he explicitly asks, “Is memory in the head?” and suggests that it is rooted in social practices.

The question about a non-English language context raises separate issues. I once saw some ridiculous criticism of the book because it was focussed solely on the English language. It

was done in a context where English is the international language of business, diplomacy and, most importantly here, science. This is the situation whether we like it or not and if one wants to go to the roots of power, one has to go to where that power lies. Spanish is of course a world language, as is French, but most psychologists need English if they want to take part in global events. Another point that needs to be made here is that most European languages have common roots. That together with the influence of English has led to a situation where the language of psychology in other languages is often the same. I know enough Spanish to be able to say that there are direct equivalents in Spanish for many of the English words that are discussed in *Naming the Mind*.

[Can Naming the Mind be used as a textbook in university courses? What kind of difficulties can arise from teaching critical history in a university context?]

It can be used as a textbook and I know that because I have used it as a textbook. I used in a course called, “Advanced History of Psychology” that was directed at final year undergraduates. The course covered a sample of the professional literature, typically 6 books, and it worked well in that situation.

Critical history raises a set of complicated issues. Danziger discussed the topic in his article, “Does the history of psychology have a future?” (*Theory & Psychology*, 1994) and I discussed it further in “The future of the history of psychology revisited” (*History of Psychology*, 2016). There is no question that it can lead to an adverse reaction among psychologists. I see it in terms of ego identification. If you criticize someone’s home town or their country, you will often get a negative response and the situation will be no different if you criticize their discipline or their profession. I saw this reaction among a small minority of students but most of them were open to critical approaches. Not so many of my colleagues who had more of an investment in the discipline, though they refrained from criticizing me openly. This point has to be qualified with the observation that psychologists do not speak with one voice. As Danziger (1994) pointed out, there are minorities like feminists and third-world scholars who are themselves critical of mainstream psychology. We can add to that the substantial number of psychologists who identify with the field known as “critical psychology”. Many of them do not have historical interests but they do represent a potential constituency for this kind of work. There are also different social contexts. For example, the recent history of South Africa and the ongoing attempts to overturn the legacy of apartheid have led to many psychologists being more receptive to critical ideas. This may also be the case in some parts of Latin America, which have also seen substantial political change. Others would be better qualified to talk about this topic than me.

[What kind of impact could the book have on psychology?]

I think we have to be realistic here. Most psychologists have no interest in the history of their field and do not consider it to be relevant to their work. In this respect, they are similar to physicists and chemists. The history of these disciplines is usually considered to be part of a separate discipline, the history of science. They might encourage their students to take a course in the history of science to give them a broader education but it is not regarded as essential to the practice of science itself. We therefore have to talk in terms of potential impact and this takes us back to Danziger’s objectives in writing the book. Psychologists have in general adopted a position of naive naturalism. While they themselves have added to our language with terms such as “Oedipus complex” and “conditioning”, they have for the most part taken their language from the society around them and they have done it without

questioning this language. If we see them more in terms of social constructs, one way of approaching psychology would be to analyze how these constructs are used in everyday life and how they relate to the practices of the society in which they are employed.

[Which aspects of the book could lead us to revise our view of the history of psychology?]

The most original part of the book is its subject-matter. There is some related work but hardly any of it has been done by psychologists. It is mostly the work of professional historians. The history of psychology as a branch of psychology is heavily oriented towards biography. This is perhaps to be expected in a discipline that is mainly concerned with individuals. The other major approach is through the systems of psychology so that the field is commonly known as “history and systems” in the United States. A small amount of work deals with the history of institutions, such as university departments or professional organizations, and the history of psychological instruments but the idea that the very objects that psychology investigates have a history is perhaps too radical for some historians of psychology who have adopted the naive naturalism that pervades the discipline as a whole. Thus Danziger is taking history to a part of psychology where it has not traditionally been seen as relevant. He did something similar in *Constructing the Subject* where he took what psychologists call their “methods” and showed that these have a history as well. These points relate to the last question about the relevance of this work for psychology. It is taken for granted that individual psychologists come and go and that systems of psychology have changed over time but these points are of little relevance to ongoing work. In historicizing the methods and the subject-matter of psychology, Danziger is showing that history is more relevant to the ongoing practice of the discipline than is commonly supposed.