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Ruth E. Bryan



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A NEW CONCEPT OF "HISTORY":
A DIALOGUE BETWEEN REINHART KOSELLECK
AND CHELA SANDOVAL

Ruth Bryan
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"Experience" is a word which carries the heavy weight of a lot of meaning for feminist theorists. Describing and theorizing "Women's experience" is the often-announced goal of much of feminist theory, with the understanding that only through raising the consciousness of women to their experience of oppression (oppressed because of being female) and raising the consciousness of men to women's different experience (because of being female) will any kind of action occur to change this oppression. Nannerl O. Keohane and Barbara C. Gelpi write in their "Foreword" to Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology (1982) that

For this reason, feminist theory is fundamentally experiential. Its subject is women's lives...It brings to consciousness facets of our experience as women that have hitherto escaped attention because they have not been part of, and may even have contradicted, predominant theoretical [male] accounts of human life. (vii)

This assumption of a universal sisterhood based in a universal Women's experience has been roundly critiqued by many scholars, among them Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1992). In her critique of this hegemonic feminist theory, she points out that making one kind of experience visible --gender--makes other experiences invisible, for example, race and class. The experience of one group of privileged women becomes the experience of all women: "We are all oppressed and hence we all resist" (80), with the result that "...men and women are seen as whole groups with already constituted experiences as groups, and questions of history, conflict, and difference are formulated from what can only be this privileged location of knowledge" (81).

But even for Mohanty, because she too is committed to action to change oppressions throughout the world, the terms of feminist analysis remain "experience" and "history" (74).

One of the tasks of feminist analysis is uncovering alternative, non-identical histories which challenge and disrupt the spacial and temporal location of a hegemonic history...In these rewritings, what is lost is the recognition that it is the very co-implication of histories with History which helps us situate and understand oppositional agency. (84)

Mohanty cites Bernice Johnson Reagon's reworking of "coalition" where, in order to work for change, people forge coalitions not based on an ahistorical, universal experience of shared oppression (i.e. Sisterhood), but upon the common desire for survival across many different experiences. Politics, then, define and inform experience, rather than the other way around, and thus "...feminist discourse must be self-conscious in its production of notions of experience and difference" (87). Mohanty calls this mobile, political response to oppression a "temporality of struggle" (87) where experiences are not fixed but are historically interpreted and theorized in order to become the basis of solidarity and struggle. She ends her essay with a strong call for links between history and experience (identity):

...[W]e cannot afford to forget those alternative, resistant spaces occupied by oppositional histories and memories...By not insisting on a history or a geography but focusing on a temporality of struggle, I create the historical ground from which I can define myself...(87)

Chela Sandoval also writes against a universal experience in her piece "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World" (1991). But instead of linking

"experience" with "history," she returns to Keohane and Gelpi's concept of "consciousness." Thus she uses "consciousness" and "history" as the terms of her analysis. And rather than a "temporality of struggle," Sandoval posits a theory of "differential oppositional consciousness," which like Mohanty's "temporality of struggle" is mobile and can be used as a basis for coalition.

But Sandoval differs from Mohanty in that, rather than using the terms "histories" and "History" without delineating what that might mean, she outlines a specific "history of oppositional consciousness." She begins with what hegemonic feminists have identified as their historical, progressive steps in the development of a feminist consciousness and then expands on that "typology" to suggest a "topology" of consciousness which, like Johnson Reagon's idea of coalition, can be used to organize for change not on the basis of shared experiences but on the basis of survival.

What Sandoval is also doing, however, is something even more radical and exciting than using different words for similar meanings. The thesis of this paper is that Sandoval is conceptualizing a different kind of history, one that is, according to her, more appropriate to the late-twentieth century time in which we find ourselves, where resistance is effectual only when it is mobile, self-consciously historical and experiential, and located outside of the dominant social order's assigned space for opposition.

But my use of the word "time" signals a shift in the current drift of this paper. Sandoval does not explicitly tell us her intervention into the concept of history, and as we have seen, other feminist scholars tend to invoke the word without thinking carefully about the meaning it contains. The essays in Reinhart Koselleck's book Futures Past (1985) are precisely

concerned with just that: What is historical time (rather than, say, physical-astronomical time or biological time)? What meanings does the concept "history" carry in different time periods? His thesis is that in order to identify historical time in a given present, we have to look at "the semantics of central concepts in which historical experience of time is implicated" (xxiv). These central concepts are "experience" (the past) and "expectation" (the future) and their relation to each other in a given present. In fact, as Koselleck points out, what in effect he is doing is tracing the concept of History itself, so that as specific ways of "assimilating experience" become apparent then History is "experienced as a new temporality" (xxiv).

Koselleck's method seeks out "the linguistic organization of temporal experience wherever this surfaces in past reality" (xxv) in texts which articulate a "historical experience of time" (xxiii) or that deal with the relation of a particular past to a particular future. By clarifying the changing meanings in concepts over time, not only can a history of the concept be developed, but at the same time, the "distinctions" which organize history can be discovered. So even as structures in a society and the concepts that refer to them may not always correspond to each other, "concepts become the formal categories which determine the condition of possible history" (90).

Koselleck identifies the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" as the formal categories through which history is articulated, meaning that they outline the conditions for possible histories, not a specific history itself. This is because, according to Koselleck, "experience" and "expectation" are metahistorical: Specific experiences and expectations cannot be deduced from the concepts themselves. Therefore, the history

that they make possible is a general one which is constituted through the general experiences and expectations of "active human agents" (269). In fact, without them, history is not possible nor is it conceivable. Together and in temporal relation to one another, they produce and demonstrate the relation "between past and future earlier, today, or tomorrow" (270), driving history's forward movement.

"Experience" is "present past" (272), where events become part of a totality in the memory: "[M]any layers of earlier times are simultaneously present" (273). Hence, Koselleck uses the term "space of experience." Expectation, however, is "future made present": the hope, fear, curiosity, rational analysis, caring, etc. about the "not-yet" (272). But experience and expectation do not symmetrically relate the past and the future, because the anticipation of the future is "scattered among an infinity of temporal extensions" (272) while the experience of the past is all located in one present. This is why expectation is a horizon--the future can never be experienced; there's a limit to its "legibility" (273), even though we can make prognoses about it.

Historical time can be inferred from this tension between experience and expectation. That is, if "[c]ultivated expectations can be revised" while the "experiences one has had are collected" (273), then we cannot base expectations completely upon experience. Although we should be wise enough to learn from our experiences and can expect something similar in the future, events often occur differently from what we supposed. In addition, experience itself is not so simple. Memories might be faulty, and new experiences (surprising events in the future which do not fulfill expectations) can open up new perspectives. So, not only can "experiences had once in the past ...change in the course of time" (274), but also "[t]he

penetration of the horizon of expectation...is creative of new experience" (275).

For example, Koselleck identifies a new time (Neuzeit), from the Enlightenment on, when experience and expectation are increasingly different from each other. In fact, Neuzeit can only be conceived of when expectations can no longer be founded in experience. Before Neuzeit, expectations could be entirely based on the experiences of previous generations; if change occurred, it happened so slowly that tradition was not undermined. The belief that "the objective of possible completeness" (278) was possible only in the Hereafter meant that the coming of the End of the World, the Final Judgement, "set an immovable limit to the horizon of expectation" (277). However, the idea of progress--"directed towards an active transformation of this world" (278)--made possible the idea of improvement on earth, rather than in heaven. The horizon of expectation became changeable and detached from experience. Because if the future (which is being constantly remade by discoveries and inventions) will and should always be better than the past, then "experience of the past and expectation of the future were no longer in correspondence, but were progressively divided up" (280).

"Progress" contains within its meaning a concept of acceleration. Part of this modern temporal difference between experience and expectation is that the gap between the past and future becomes ever greater: the rate of invention/change increases. This is true not only for science and technology, but also in the social and political realms. "[T]he future will not only change society at an increasing rate, but also improve it" (283). So according to Koselleck, we today in modern times conceptualize experience and expectation differently from people who lived two centuries ago.

This semantic change in the relationship between experience and expectation produced and occurred simultaneously with a change in the meaning of "history" from many histories in the plural to a History in the singular. Before approximately 1780 and the French Revolution, history could only be investigated with an object which underwent change; for example, "the history of the Roman empire" or "Imperial history." But as experience and expectation came to be asymmetrically related to each other, the difference between them was conceptualized as "history in general" (284): a category that transcends a specific time and is thus no longer exemplary. This made it possible for people to not only record the process of events, but also to reflect upon them, opening up a space for action, planning, and foreseeing the future. In other words, a belief in the certainty of a linear course of progress and a conception of "history in general" worked together to create a situation where people believed they could manipulate fate and thus make history. These people were activists who wanted to establish something new: "To be part of a history moving under its own momentum, where one only aided this forward motion, served both as personal vindication and as an ideological amplifier which reached out to others and caught them up" (206).

However, writes Koselleck, "[t]he voluntaristic association of history with one's planning obscures the potential for the surplus and surprise characteristic of all history" (205). For him, there are definitely boundaries to the makeability of a properly conceived history. If a group achieves its goals, then the end of history has also been reached. Yet, history is characterized by the fact that, in the course of time, foresight, plans, and their execution always diverge. "So, "history in and of itself" always has an open future and thus cannot be made.

But there is a problem with this conception of history, and it is this issue which Chela Sandoval addresses in her article. Those activists who believe they can make history are working toward progress (or what they see as progress). Yet Koselleck's idea of history, which contains within its definition per se a concept of progress, does not allow for any further progression except that which will happen naturally in the course of "history in general." So a person who does not agree that this progress will be good progress is left without a conceptual space from which to work for change.

This is also because Koselleck's conception of history relies on a definition of experience which is metahistorical--the implication being that all people have the same general experience (a conception of the past), therefore we all experience the same distancing between experience and expectation, therefore we all conceptualize history in the same way, therefore we are all equally happy with and benefit from the course of "history in general" and its concomitant progress.

It is manifestly obvious, however, that groups of people as well as individuals experience the same event in different ways. For example, California's increasing strawberry production, tripling from 1974 to 1994, could be considered "progress" (The Atlantic Monthly, November 1995): American's eat more fruit, the US does not need to import so much, and strawberry growers become successful business people which helps the economy to grow overall. At the same time, however, growers rely on a supply of cheap labor to plant and harvest the strawberries. These workers are mainly illegal Mexican immigrants who are exploited at every turn from low wages to terrible living conditions to being coerced into economically ruinous sharecropping arrangements.

A second example: Eli Whitney's cotton gin, invented in the early 1800s, was a boon to cotton growers in the US, responsible for increasing cotton production by 50 times (50 pounds of cotton could be cleaned in the same time that one pound had been cleaned by hand) (Wolf, 1982). This is definitely a machine whose technology could be considered progress. However, cotton growing is labor-intensive, and the increasing demand for it led to an increase in the slaves required to produce it. Wolf writes, "Growing cotton was not the cause of slavery in the United States, but it proved an important factor in the continuance of slavery well into the nineteenth century" (280). For those people enslaved to feed the demand for cotton, this was not progress.

A third and final example, much closer to the feminist specifics of Sandoval's article, involves the trend for both parents in middle-and upper-middle class families to work. This is considered progress by many people in the white feminist movement, because it means that more women are employed and have careers (experiencing success in a man's world). However, as Mary Romero (1992) points out, this success is possible only because these women are employing other, working-class women to do their housework and take care of their children. Not only are these workers poorly paid (with no benefits or social security), they are also often treated with disrespect and oftentimes racism by their employers. In addition, these women usually receive no recognition of success by the women's movement, which ignores the fact that they, too, are employed and have a career.

In these three examples those who benefit from history and those who do not belong to camps which are markedly divided from each other along race, class, and gender lines. Their "experiences" (and thus their

"expectations") are not the same at all. Joan Scott (1992) points out that what she calls "orthodox history" is a foundationalist discourse: it takes for granted certain categories and premises without which the discipline seems unthinkable. One of these categories is "experience" ("...what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through" (24) which orthodox history uses as a reliable, true source of knowledge because it assumes that the identities of subjects are stable and always already the same. However, experience itself needs to be historicized. She writes, "[i]t is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (26). So, leaving aside the issue that Koselleck is using the term "experience" solely as a concept while Scott is referring to it solely as something people physically live, we still have to ask: Whose "history in general" is Koselleck actually describing, since the experience (and progress and expectation) on which it is based cannot be generalized?

Here we move into Sandoval's terms. She begins her article by briefly examining and then supplementing Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970) in which he writes that humans are citizen-subjects who, even when resisting it, act to support the dominant social order and its ideology. It is this dominant power structure's history which Koselleck is conceptualizing as "history in general," because it is precisely those who will benefit from its progress who have dominant power (and whose power rests on progress). But Sandoval believes that Althusser begins to suggest that there is a way to remain within dominant ideology while self-consciously breaking with it. "[T]he subject-citizen can learn to identify, develop, and control the means of ideology" (2). Thus, I am suggesting that Sandoval is conceptualizing a "history" appropriate to

our time which makes room for oppositional consciousness and theory (growing out of the experience of living through various and varying oppressions) while continuing to keep "experience," "progress," and a sense of a "new time" as important aspects of this history.

Sandoval's stated purpose in writing the article is to work for coalition within and ultimately among liberation movements in this late-twentieth century time¹ (which often end up being internally divided and so are not a threat to the dominant social order) by reconceptualizing the theories of oppositional consciousness found in the white (modernist) feminist movement. To do this, she turns to U.S. third world feminism² as the model for new consciousness both because it has "remained just outside the purview of the dominant feminist theory emerging in the 1970s" (1) and because it offers a way to organize oppositional activity and

¹ Sandoval uses the terms "postmodern cultural condition" and "late capitalism" to index a "new time" which she believes requires a new or at least a revitalized oppositional consciousness and activity. Along with "history," these are concepts which she does not define, but which, I believe, could be fruitfully investigated as to their meaning. I realize that by concentrating on "history" I am slighting the rich territory of "postmodernism," and may in fact be weakening my argument about the first concept. However, there had to be a limit to the scope of this paper, and this is where I chose to draw it.

² Sandoval uses many different terms throughout her article to distinguish feminist theory promulgated by people (women) who have experienced being parts of "varying internally colonized communities" (1) from feminist theory made by people (women) who have not. These terms are variously "U.S. third world feminist theory" and "theory by women of color" for the first category, and "white feminist theory," "hegemonic feminist theory," and "first world feminist theory" for the other category. Sandoval does not define her terms, and I think this is deliberate. Her goal is to change feminist theory, not argue about whether such a change is necessary. Arguments over terminology can often become a convenient way to avoid dealing with the tougher issues which words index. I follow her lead in simply using the terms and not dwelling on them.

consciousness so that different oppositional identities can meet at certain points, even as their trajectories stay the same. The praxis of oppositional consciousness is threaded throughout the experience of social marginality. As such, it is also being woven into the fabric of experience belonging to more and more citizens who are caught in the crisis of late capitalist conditions and expressed in the cultural angst most often referred to as the postmodern dilemma (17).

What is divisive in the feminist movement is that first world feminists assumed that third world feminists would "submit to sublimation or assimilation within hegemonic feminist praxis" (3). As a consequence, US third world feminist praxis is a theoretical problem for hegemonic feminism and so is often relegated to the realms of merely "description," "poetry," or simply marginalized. Sandoval's example of how "this systematic repression of the theoretical implications of US third world feminism occurs" is her outlining of the histories of feminist consciousness produced by hegemonic feminist scholars in the 1980s. She identifies this history as a "typology": a "systematic classification of all possible forms of feminist praxis" (5) which is a progression from one kind of consciousness to a better one. Because this idea of progress is such an obvious component of this typology, she also identifies this history as being a "modernist mode of understanding oppositional forms of activity and consciousness" (11) which makes use of the "feminist" versions of modes of consciousness that "have been most effective in opposition under modes of capitalist production before the postmodern period" (11). So although hegemonic feminism is a "fundamental shift in political objectives and critical methods" (it does indeed challenge the assumption that all people can be described by the category "man"), it is still very much a "history in

general": one which contains an inherent concept of progress because it assumes that all women's experiences are the same.

Briefly, the four phases which hegemonic feminist histories have identified as their history of coming to oppositional consciousness begin with realizing that men and women are equal. The second step is knowing that women's lives are different from men's, and so feminists must search for the actual experiences of women to be included in male/patriarchal knowledge. The third phase hinges on the idea that women are superior to men--female experience creates a new and better society. The fourth phase is added onto this history by those hegemonic feminists who recognize that the first three phases do not include the differences of race and class. This phase "always represents the unachieved category of possibility where the differences represented by race and class can be (simply) accounted for" (6).

Sandoval calls this history an "official story"--one which allows the white feminist movement to understand itself but one which also limits what can be known within the boundaries of its separate, progressive phases. US third world feminism is either invisible outside of the all-knowing logic of this typology or its different praxis is included only when it supports the "same four basic configurations of hegemonic feminism" (9). However, although hegemonic feminism is incapable of imagining connections between its expressions of opposition and those expressions enacted in other movements, these four phases are actually versions of the same forms of oppositional consciousness which were also used in other US liberation movements after the 1950s. The difference is that a fifth, differential mode of oppositional consciousness is employed by those using the first four phases in order to resist dominant power without being co-

opted by it. The ability to use differential consciousness is based on an experience of many oppressions (not just gender) which leads to a different understanding of "progress" and "experience."

The interaction between race, culture, class, and sexual orientation means that women are not all the same. Writes Sandoval,

These signs of a lived experience of difference from white female experience in the United States repeatedly appear throughout U.S. third world feminist writings. Such expressions imply the existence of at least one other category of gender which is reflected in the very titles of books written by U.S. feminists of color such as All the Blacks Are Men, All the Women Are White, But Some of Us Are Brave [1982] or This Bridge Called My Back [1981], titles which imply that women of color somehow exist in the interstices between the legitimated categories of the social order" (4).

This "lived experience of difference" in the realms of marginality produces "new categories of social identity" (5) and generates skills and theory which can create a common culture across difference. Thus, during the 70s, U.S. feminists of color made coalitions based on a common ground which bridged individual differences. They discovered that this "survival skill" (15)--a well-defined yet mobile identity--can open the way for an ability to self-consciously choose and adopt the ideological form best suited to the current power situation.

It is this mobility which is significant for an effective theory and practice of oppositional consciousness and which Sandoval names "differential consciousness"--the "capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted" (14). It is also, according to Sandoval, the "expression of the new subject position called for by Althusser--it permits function-ing within yet beyond the demands of

dominant ideology" (3).

Thus, it is "[this] methodology and theory of U.S. third world feminism that permit the...rearticulation of hegemonic feminism" (11) to make it not a progression (thus not a typology) and not divisive and exclusionary (not specifically feminist). The first four categories which Sandoval identifies as organizing oppositional consciousness are indeed the same first four phases of hegemonic feminism, but broader. They are, first, the "equal rights" mode of consciousness, where those in a subordinate position argue that their humanity is the same as the humanity of those in power--"all individuals are created equal" (12). The second category of consciousness is "revolutionary." The subordinate group calls for a radical transformation of society to accommodate and legitimate their differences. The third ideological tactic is "supremacism": "[N]ot only do the oppressed claim their differences, but they also assert that those very differences have provided them access to a superior evolutionary level than those currently in power" (13). The fourth category is "separatism," where those in the subordinate group do not want to be integrated in any way with the dominant order. Rather, they work for a complete separation in order to "protect and nurture" (13) their differences.

Articulated this way, it becomes obvious, as Sandoval points out, that there is nothing unique about the white feminist movement's tactics of resistance. However, these four reconceptualized categories of oppositional consciousness appear, similar to hegemonic feminism, to be "mutually exclusive under modernist oppositional practices" (13) and therefore are similarly ineffective "under late capitalistic and postmodern cultural conditions in the US" (12). However, differential consciousness, as

practiced by U.S. third world feminists over the last 30 years, undermines this appearance of mutual exclusivity" (13). This fifth category of oppositional consciousness

functions as the medium through which the equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness became effectively transformed out of their hegemonic versions. Each is now ideological and tactical weaponry for confronting the shifting currents of power (13).

Differential consciousness also prevents that any one ideology becomes the

"single most correct site where truth can be represented" (13). In addition, [w]ithout making this move beyond each of the four modes of oppositional ideology outlined above, any liberation movement is destined to repeat the oppressive authori-tarianism from which it is attempting to free itself and become trapped inside a drive for truth which can only end in producing its own brand of dominations (14).

Sandoval calls this five-phase set of oppositional tactics a "topography"--a set of points around which people constitute themselves as resistant and oppositional subjects who want to transform their world. Another way to put it is that these points are particular subject positions which can become effective sites for resistance when they are recognized as dominant-power created. People can thus self-consciously use various forms of oppositional consciousness as different needs for coalition and struggle arise. And it is a differential consciousness which makes such mobility possible.

Sandoval writes that this topography is not historically organized because she has in mind a concept of history which, like Koselleck's "history in general," contains within it and is made possible by a concept of

linear progress. I suggest that, in fact, her topography is a new concept of history. It also contains an idea of progress--in fact, progress is equally necessary to it; the desire for a better world is precisely what underlies Sandoval's rearticulation of a theory of oppositional consciousness. It is just that this progress is not a linear concept, nor is it monopolized by only one group who will benefit from it (the group whose "experience in general" stands for all people's experience). Thus, in addition, this topographical history still is made possible by a relationship between "experience" and "expectation," but identity or subjecthood is now a part of experience. So while experience remains a "space," expectation can no longer be conceptualized as just on the unreachable "horizon." This non-linear progress is possible because those who experience various and varying oppressions become subordinated subjects who can count on such experiences repeating. Certain experiences must be linked to expectations.

This realization makes possible the paradoxical well-defined yet mobile identity which is necessary for non-linear progress in this postmodern time. It also makes possible this change in the concept of history which goes much farther than Joan Scott's call for the "historicization" of experience. If the postmodern crisis, which Sandoval argues exists today, necessitates these tactics of oppositional consciousness in order to work toward progress using a concept of experience which is specific and linked symmetrically to expectation and thus not co-opted by the dominant social order, then a "history" which is modern, linear, and general must change to accommodate this new situation.

Koselleck writes in his last essay "Semantic Remarks on the Mutation of Historical Experience" that

[t]he categories [experience and expectation] also indicate to us the one-sidedness of progressive interpretation. It is evident that experiences can only be accumulated because they are--as experiences--repeatable. There must then exist long-term formal structures in history which allow the repeated accumulation of experience. But for this the difference between experience and expectation has to be bridged to such an extent that history might once again be regarded as exemplary (288).

In her essay, Sandoval suggests a concept of history which indeed contains a "formal structure" which bridges this difference between experience and expectation, a difference that cannot keep on growing ever wider while progress supposedly accelerates ever faster. This structure is identity, and what this ultimately means is that the concept of history must indeed become exemplary and specific. "History" can no longer have the luxury of speaking generally for all people.

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