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Unsettling “Third Wave Feminism”

Feminist Waves, Intersectionality, and Identity Politics in Retrospect

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The body of scholarship associated with “third wave” feminism has had a transformative impact on contemporary feminist intellectual agendas. Such work spans a vast set of writings that have addressed the ways in which multiple forms of inequality have shaped women’s subjectivities, lives, and modes of resistance. One of the distinctive features of third wave feminism was the systematic challenge that such work explicitly posed to previous conceptions of feminist thought and practice. In the language of one of the classic texts that marked the emergence of this challenge, *This Bridge Called My Back*,¹ U.S. feminists of color sought both to decenter conceptions of feminism based narrowly on the experience of white, middle-class women and to call attention to inequalities that have historically shaped relationships between women in the United States.² The forceful political and intellectual challenges of such writing had far-reaching implications as feminist and women’s studies programs sought to redefine intellectual agendas and curricula in order to address systematically and to integrate questions of difference.

Although the call for feminists to address questions of difference such as race, sexuality, and class was not new, the impact and breadth of this new surge of writing and activism by feminists of color led to the characterization of this work as a new wave of feminism that had moved past the exclusions of past (and in particular second wave) feminist approaches. This classification sought to capture the significance and distinctiveness of this new flourishing field within feminist scholarship. However, the application of the conventional form of the historical periodization of feminism as distinctive

waves also has inadvertently led to misreadings and misrepresentations of the substantive contributions of emerging paradigms within this scholarship. Dominant narratives of third wave feminism tend to focus on three central paradigms—multicultural inclusion, identity politics, and intersectionality. Although these have certainly been key paradigms within feminist scholarship, third wave feminism represents a more complex and various set of debates and interventions than these paradigms suggest.

This essay seeks to interrogate and move beyond the dominant narratives that currently depict third wave feminism within the field of interdisciplinary women’s studies. As Chela Sandoval has argued, the term *third wave* casts this field of knowledge into a teleological historical narrative that misses the ways in which such work has simultaneously occupied intellectual spaces in past feminist intellectual traditions even as it has often argued against or sought to move beyond dominant paradigms within women’s studies.³ Drawing on Sandoval’s theory of differential consciousness, the essay interrogates the institutionalization of third wave feminism through narratives of multiculturalism, intersectionality, and identity politics. The essay then moves beyond these dominant narratives and elaborates on both the points of connection between recent third wave feminist theory and other waves of feminist scholarship and the substantive theoretical contributions of third wave feminist theory that have often been rendered invisible by the three-wave approach to multiculturalism, identity, and intersectionality. I engage in this effort through a series of theoretical reflections that draw in part on my own observations of the ways in which third wave feminism is often deployed within and institutionalized by interdisciplinary feminist practices. My arguments are not intended to represent a comprehensive survey of third wave feminist theorists but instead draw on engagements with the intellectual work of various feminist scholars including Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandoval, Patricia Hill Collins, Jacqui Alexander, and Norma Alarcon.

Third Wave Feminism: Narratives of Multiculturalism, Identity Politics, and Intersectionality

The emergence of third wave feminism within the academy is conventionally associated with the trend within women’s studies and feminist scholarship to focus on questions of differences, with a particular emphasis on the

integration of studies of race, class, and gender within the United States.⁴ One of the underlying effects of the three-wave model of feminism is the inadvertent representation of feminist thought as a teleological historical narrative of progressive inclusion. By framing new challenges to the existing terms of feminist thought and practice as a new “wave,” such work is defined primarily as a move toward the increasing inclusion of women of color within feminism. In other words, according to this historical narrative, if second wave feminism was the preserve of white, middle-class women, third wave feminism marked a new phase in which feminists of color and questions of race and gender were now included. The feminist wave model thus implicitly rests on a narrative of multicultural inclusion.

Aspects of third wave challenges to the existing feminist terrain certainly included political and intellectual claims for inclusion within institutional and intellectual feminist sites.⁵ However, the substantive challenges of these writings also represented a theoretical challenge to narratives of multicultural inclusion. Norma Alarcon, for instance, argued that writings by feminists of color in *This Bridge Called My Back* represented a theoretical challenge to the “logic of identification” that had characterized the subject of feminism as “an autonomous, self-making, self-determining subject.”⁶ This project called for a rethinking of feminist languages of inclusion that sought to integrate “difference” within existing models of subjectivity. At one level, this challenge sought to create a feminism that did not presume gender as its foundational category or “common denominator.”⁷ As Alarcon put it, “The female subject of *This Bridge* is highly complex. She is and has been constructed in a crisis of meaning situation which includes racial and cultural divisions and conflicts. The psychic and material violence that gives shape to that subjectivity cannot be underestimated nor passed over lightly. The fact that not all of this violence comes from men in general but also from women renders the notion of ‘common denominator’ problematic.”⁸

Such criticisms have now become well institutionalized as part of a broad series of debates on the category of “woman.”⁹ However, at a second level, Alarcon’s argument points to a deeper challenge, or what Alarcon called “a process of disidentification” with the existing subject of feminism that was inherent in writings characterized as third wave feminism.¹⁰ Although Alarcon does not elaborate at length on the meaning of disidentification, her argument gets at the heart of some of the substantive theoretical challenges of this phase of feminism. Yet it is precisely this politics of

disidentification (a point I turn to later in the essay) that has been rendered invisible by the wave model of feminism. Instead, the three-wave model of feminism has largely tended to highlight paradigms that fit within or represent a logical expansion of the narrative of inclusion.

Consider two of the central paradigms that dominate feminist intellectual narratives now associated with third wave feminism—identity politics and intersectionality. In the first case, hegemonic feminist narratives have often sought to depict the impact of third wave feminism through the frame of identity-based claims. At one level, this framing has often shaped attempts at integrating work associated with third wave feminism within existing curricula and feminist research agendas. In this narrative second wave feminism is (erroneously) associated purely with the essentialized figure of “middle-class, white woman.” Third wave feminism then becomes an expansion of this subject to include the voices and experiences of women marked by a diverse set of identities. The politics of inclusion rests on the marking of identities that can subsequently be integrated within the subject of feminism. This project of inclusion in effect rests on the logic of identification that Alarcon describes.

Given that the wave model of feminism lends itself to a misclassification of the substantive contributions of this period of feminist thought through the politics of identification, it is perhaps unsurprising that critical responses to third wave feminism have often been founded on this depiction. Thus in both everyday discourses in academic settings and intellectual writings, such critiques have generally rested on dominant narratives of the limits of “identity politics.” At one level, this critique tends to cast the challenges of third wave writing in terms of a set of static, discrete identity frames. This tendency is perhaps best captured in Judith Butler’s early critique of this serial approach to identity in which she calls attention to “an embarrassed ‘etc.’” which concludes the list of identities (“race, class, gender, sexuality etc.”) when feminists attempt to address diversity.¹¹ Butler was pointing to the theoretical limits of multicultural models of identity politics that provide a surface understanding of subjectivity. However, this narrative of identity politics has often been mistakenly used to classify and then criticize third wave feminist writing. The underlying assumption in this conflation of multiculturalism and third wave feminism is that the contributions of U.S. feminists of color is reducible to a series of political-intellectual claims for inclusion within the discursive and institutional sites associated with

feminism. In this narrative, the varied intellectual contributions of U.S. feminists of color become reducible to the creation of “women of color” as a singular identity category.¹²

The model of women of color feminism as third wave has thus proved problematic in a number of ways. I have been suggesting that this evolutionary model of feminist progression has served to reinforce an identity-based framing of feminist thought that reproduces hegemonic models of multiculturalism. Feminist thought is presented as a series of expanding identities that need to be included within contemporary feminism. This approach has little to do with the substantive contributions and challenges of writing classified as third wave. However, the impact of this framework is not just a question of rhetoric about identity politics. At a deeper level, the use of feminist waves as an epistemological device has produced gaps in our understandings of feminist scholarship. On the one hand, the discrete periodization of feminist waves has tended to miss both intellectual continuities and discontinuities between work that has been classified within second and third wave feminisms. On the other hand, the idea of feminist waves tends to present an image of homogeneous waves of knowledge that underestimates the differences and divergences among writers located within specific waves. Let us consider this problem further through a central model that is now conventionally identified with third wave feminism—the paradigm of intersectionality.

Intersectionality has become one of the most recognized paradigms associated with third wave feminism. The concept of intersectionality refers to a series of cross-disciplinary interventions that analyzed the ways in which the intersection between inequalities such as race, gender, and class shaped women’s lives and structured the social location of specific groups of women of color in distinctive ways. For instance, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s groundbreaking work analyzed the relationships among gender, race, and the law in the United States. In one of her seminal essays on violence against women, she analyzed the ways in which both the experiences of such violence and the effects of institutional and political responses were structured in distinctive ways by the intersections of race and gender.¹³ Or, to take another example, Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s classic essay on the stratification of reproduction illustrated the ways in which systemic historical inequalities of race and gender structured the labor market in ways that tracked specific groups of women of color into paid domestic work in different historical periods.¹⁴

A defining element of such contributions was the reconceptualization of our understandings of the structural reproduction of inequalities and the move away from unitary understandings of social structure to what Patricia Hill Collins called “interlocking systems.” As she argued, “Viewing relations of domination for Black women for any given socio-historical context as being structured via a system of interlocking race, class, and gender oppression expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect. Assuming that each system needs the others in order to function creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulates the rethinking of basic social science concepts.”¹⁵ As these scholars illustrated, conventional understandings of structural inequality as a series of discrete, singular, and homogenized categories failed to capture the unique structural location of women of color in the United States. However, as Collins noted, the need for an analysis of intersecting inequalities was not purely a descriptive project for women of color but a theoretical analysis of the broader “matrix of domination” that has shaped contemporary U.S. society.¹⁶ The paradigm of intersectionality provided a broad theoretical reconceptualization of the systemic nature of domination and inequality in order to redress the erasure of women of color by existing concepts.

Given the focus of these approaches on structural and systemic inequality, the paradigm of intersectionality has proved particularly fruitful in shaping research agendas in the social sciences. The modular nature of the paradigm has allowed social scientists to use it in a range of methodologically diverse empirical studies.¹⁷ Meanwhile, within interdisciplinary feminist writing and teaching, intersectionality has now become the central paradigm associated with third wave feminist scholarship. Although such developments have produced a rich intellectual agenda, the institutionalization of intersectionality also forecloses a richer and broader understanding of the field. Intersectionality has increasingly become the paradigm that both stands in for third wave feminism and signifies a break from second wave feminism. This use of the paradigm overlooks some of the intellectual continuities between second and third wave feminisms. At one level, for instance, Collins’s rethinking of systemic inequality drew heavily on standpoint theory even as it challenged and sought to rethink the concept of “standpoint.” Or, to take another example, Glenn’s work represented a critical engagement with existing strands of materialist feminist research on

labor and pushed that analysis in new directions. At another level, the transformation of intersectionality as a signifier of third wave feminism has led to homogenized understandings of both intersectionality and third wave feminism.¹⁸ In its institutionalized forms within women's studies curricula and intellectual agendas in the academy, intersectionality is increasingly becoming a marker of multicultural inclusion in many of the same ways that previous narratives of identity politics were.¹⁹ Intersectionality in this context has been transformed into a heuristic device that is used to signify a politics of inclusion.²⁰ This incorporation of the paradigm has the unintentional effect of disciplining existing intellectual histories of feminism in ways that produce silences and erasures. Despite the richness of much of the writing on intersectionality and the growing complexity of research in this field, the mainstreaming of this paradigm has entrenched the three-wave approach to contemporary U.S. feminism in ways that marginalize alternative political and intellectual visions of subjectivity and resistance.

In Between the Waves of Feminism: Shifting Fields of Consciousness

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval uses a reading of works by feminists of color to challenge conventional historical accounts of feminist intellectual history that emerged in the 1980s.²¹ Sandoval argues that these accounts presented the evolution of feminism through four phases of intellectual development—liberal, Marxist, radical/cultural, and socialist feminism. Drawing on a reading of typologies by leading feminist scholars writing during this period, Sandoval argues that this historical narrative corresponded to four conceptions of feminist consciousness.²² Liberal feminism rested on the notion of women's equality with men, Marxist feminism sought to focus on the primacy of class, and radical/cultural feminism focused on differences between men and women and the superiority of such feminized differences. The last phase, socialist feminism, according to Sandoval, sought to confront racial and class divisions between women. Sandoval argues that this feminist typology both subsumed critiques by U.S. feminists of color and erased the specific theoretical alternatives produced by these critiques.

Sandoval argues that writings by feminists of color in the 1970s and 1980s—when second wave feminism occupied a central role among feminists in the academy—provided the groundwork for an alternative theory and

method of oppositional consciousness. "U.S. Third World Feminism," as Sandoval identifies this approach, represented a distinctive form, the "differential mode of oppositional consciousness."²³

I think of this activity of consciousness as the "differential," insofar as it enables movement "between and among" ideological positionings (the equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness) considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them. In this sense, the differential mode of consciousness functions like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power. The differential represents the variant; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises.²⁴

According to Sandoval's theory/method, the writings and challenges that feminists of color produced did not represent a simplistic rejection of or progression beyond previous modes of feminist consciousness or practice. Rather these writings produced a distinctive form of consciousness that simultaneously occupied, moved between, and produced new spaces and sites of thought and practice.

Although Sandoval's theoretical formulation does not explicitly address the current three-wave model of feminism, it provides critical insights that can be used to think through and move beyond some of the limits of that model. The idea of third wave feminism took us beyond the four-phase model, which Sandoval criticizes. Third wave feminism is meant to represent the body of thought that Sandoval argues was rendered invisible by previous feminist typologies, which subsumed scholarship on race and ethnicity. In that vein, the delineation of a third wave of feminism has represented an advance over past histories of feminist thought. However, the wave approach to feminism reproduces the underlying epistemological framework of these previous typologies in ways that miss the dynamic movement of differential consciousness that Sandoval presents. What remains unchanged is a teleological approach that divides feminist thought into a series of discrete and progressive stages of evolution.

Consider the ways in which Sandoval's theory/method of differential consciousness enables a rethinking of the concept of intersectionality. Within the wave model of feminism, intersectionality often has the appearance of a

somewhat static model of identity. Karen Barad, for instance, has criticized the use of this metaphor, arguing that it reproduces a limited Euclidean geometric imaginary. Thus, Barad argues, “The view of space as container or context for matter in motion—spatial coordinates mapped via projections along axes that set up a metric for tracking the locations of the Inhabitants of the container, and time divided into evenly spaced increments marking a progression of events—pervades much of Western epistemology.”²⁵

This depiction captures some of the dangers by which dominant narratives now depict intersectionality as a mechanistic tool that stands in for difference and inclusion. However, drawing on an understanding of differential consciousness, intersectionality is a theory that is both located within Western epistemological foundations associated with past waves of feminism (such as standpoint theory and materialist feminism) and a move to represent social locations, subjectivities, and forms of consciousness that cannot be captured by previous conceptions.

From this perspective, intersectionality is neither a static formulation nor a signifier of a homogeneous field of third wave feminism; intersectionality is a method/theory that expresses one aspect of the mode of differential consciousness of which Sandoval speaks. This conceptualization moves us far away from mechanistic formulations that take intersectionality as an all-inclusive paradigm that can then be applied in diverse disciplinary or interdisciplinary fields. This mechanistic approach misses both the rich diversity and the deep political implications of the writings that are now in danger of becoming homogenized by the narrative “third wave feminism as intersectionality.” Sandoval’s discussion of differential consciousness, for instance, foregrounds the way that the mobile and fluid nature of this form of consciousness stems precisely from the intersectional nature of the social location of women of color. As I noted before, a key focus of this theory has been on the workings of intersectional structures that shape social locations of social groups. The mobility of this form of consciousness is thus tactical because of the complex material/discursive “intersectional” nature of this location. This tactical mobility is not reducible to poststructuralist understandings of the fluidity of identity and difference. This subject simultaneously occupies the contained space of a structured social group even as it moves beyond the limits of these contexts and forms of consciousness.²⁶ Sandoval’s concept of differential consciousness is thus not a rejection or critique of intersectionality; rather the subject of differential consciousness

provides us with a broad understanding of the theoretical, political, and historical context of third wave feminism that is not reducible to a singular paradigm such as intersectionality.

Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* and the Disidentified Subject

Consider further how this theory/method of differential consciousness necessitates a break with the three-wave model of feminism. One of the classic works often associated with third wave feminism is Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*.²⁷ Anzaldúa’s articulation of a “new mestiza” consciousness provides an important example of a text that disrupts the discrete periodization between second and third wave feminism. The new mestiza subject that Anzaldúa creates occupies spaces of opposition associated with second wave feminist conceptions of patriarchy and feminized spaces even as it moves and is transformed into the liminal spaces of the “borderlands” that are the well-known identifiers of her work. Consider Anzaldúa’s analysis of the gendering of culture and religion: “Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. . . . The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males.”²⁸ Anzaldúa presents a critique of the reproduction of patriarchal culture that has long been associated with previous feminist thought. As she further notes, echoing Simone de Beauvoir, “Woman is the stranger, the other. She is man’s recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast.”²⁹ Anzaldúa moves in and out of this intellectual/political narrative of woman as a foundational source of otherness throughout the text. Consider, for instance, the remaking of subjectivity that is considered one of the distinctive markers of her work. The liminal identities associated with the borderlands (in-between cultures, U.S.-Mexico territorial borders, racial-ethnic-gender identities, and psychic-material spaces) have meant that Anzaldúa is often classified along with theorists of diaspora and hybridity.³⁰

However, Anzaldúa’s new mestiza consciousness also rests on the writing of a matrilineal history. The new mestiza subjectivity is inextricably linked to Anzaldúa’s reworking of embodiments of a conception of a “divine feminine.” She reclaims the goddess Cihuacoatl from early Aztec society, and this figure provides the material-psychic passageway into new mestiza subjectivity. Anzaldúa describes this formation of subjectivity as a complex

process that is simultaneously an engagement with a primordial sense of selfhood and bodily knowledge and an engagement with the liminal political-discursive spaces produced by intersecting identities. This “Coatlque state” of transformation is, for Anzaldúa, “the consuming internal whirlwind, the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche. *Coatlque* is the mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb. Goddess of birth and death, *Coatlque* gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic processes.”³¹ This process of engaging with her inner self (which Anzaldúa also depicts materially as a process that “pulsates in my body”)³² embodies concepts of the self that are clearly at odds with later “third wave” feminist writings, which claim a sharp break with any form of essentialism. One of the discursive effects of the wave model of feminism has been the erasure of such dimensions of Anzaldúa’s thought. Scholars writing from a third wave perspective have sought to secularize Anzaldúa’s work in order to fit it within conventional narratives that seek to represent third wave feminism purely through concepts such as intersectionality, diaspora, and hybridity. In dominant representations of third wave feminism, Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands is usually invoked and disciplined by such concepts.³³

Anzaldúa’s work in fact exceeds the binary opposition between second and third wave feminism. If Anzaldúa’s new mestiza cannot be disciplined by the concept of intersectionality, neither can she be reduced either to previous conceptions that identified patriarchy as the foundational concept of feminism or to essentialist ideas of feminine culture. As Sandoval’s theory/method of differential consciousness indicates, the new mestiza tactically occupies and moves between fields that have been territorialized as second wave or intersectional locations. However, the nature of differential consciousness is such that the new mestiza is marked by a process of disidentification from such spaces. Anzaldúa argues:

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counter-stance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. . . . At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are

on both shores at once, and at once, see through the serpent and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory.³⁴

Her phrase “separate territory” does not denote a cultural nationalist narrative of separatism. Rather she is speaking of a politics of disidentification that moves beyond conventional oppositional modes of thought that demarcate oppositions such as those between subject and object, male and female, and the psychic/spiritual and rational/material.³⁵ This disidentified subject occupies the material space defined by intersectional structures of inequality and recognizes the reality of identity categories, yet it moves us far from dominant narratives of identity politics and static understandings of intersectionality. Such a form of subjectivity cannot be contained within homogenized waves of feminism even as it represents the heart of the distinctive intellectual and political challenges associated with third wave feminism.

Unsettling Epistemologies: Memory, Time, and Knowledge

These reflections on Anzaldúa’s work point to the ways in which the wave model of feminism rests on a flawed form of historical periodization. The intellectual and political challenges that provide the foundation for what is now classified as third wave feminism unfolded in and were in effect temporally part of (or at the very least overlapped with) second wave feminism. Leading feminist thinkers such as Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga, and Audre Lorde were clearly located within the historical period associated with the second wave. A critical reconsideration of the wave framework of feminism thus asks us to pause and consider some of the deep implications of the conception of time that is now commonly used to periodize the history of feminist thought. I argue that two key issues produce this (mis)framing of feminist history. The first rests on the ways in which this periodization stems from misunderstandings of the substantive contributions of feminists of color that I have been discussing. The second issue stems from links between race and conceptions of temporality.

One of the distinctive features commonly associated with third wave feminism is the challenge to the category of “woman.” It is now unremarkable in feminist discussions to speak of differences among women and the

varied and complex construction of gender. However, this intellectual shift was marked by the convergence of two distinct (though sometimes overlapping) streams—the thinking of U.S. feminists of color and poststructuralist feminism. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the growing dominance of poststructuralist challenges to conventional categories and forms of feminist thought. Joan Scott's seminal book on gender as a central category of historical analysis was emblematic of the use of gender to denote the process of historical and cultural construction (as opposed to essentialist understandings of "woman").³⁶

The assumption that such critiques occurred in a distinctive temporal phase after the explosion of feminist writings and activism in the 1960s and 1970s stems partly from a misunderstanding and erasure of the writings of U.S. feminists of color during this period of second wave feminism. Many poststructuralist feminists writing in the 1980s and 1990s constructed the previous writings and political claims of feminists of color as lodged within static identity claims. These claims were then depicted as another version of essentialism. For instance, feminist poststructuralist critiques of the use of "experience" as a basis for feminist knowledge were targeted as much at U.S. feminists writing about racism as they were at second wave, middle-class, liberal feminists.³⁷ The theoretical contributions of these writings (and the complexity of simultaneously making identity-based claims while providing alternative theories of subjectivity) were not recognized by most poststructuralist feminists as an existing theoretical approach to the construction and interrogation of categories such as difference, experience, and identity (rather than simply as an expression of difference).³⁸ Thus, ironically, the shift from an emphasis on equality, associated with second wave feminism, to an emphasis on differences among women, associated with third wave feminism, was temporally conflated with the rise of the poststructuralist feminist emphasis on difference. This conflation was also unintentionally facilitated by the ways in which new feminist discussions of race and post-coloniality began to draw on poststructuralism as a tool for decentering Eurocentric conceptions of feminism.³⁹

The disciplinary impetus to classify discrete waves of feminism in effect ended up drawing boundaries that displaced the substantive interventions of second wave feminists writing about race into a different temporal space. As Becky Thompson has argued, this chronology has suppressed the centrality of both feminist women of color and white antiracism feminism in second

wave feminism.⁴⁰ This displacement has had two key effects. First, it has produced a construction of second wave feminism as a white, middle-class movement rather than a complex and conflicted social and intellectual movement that struggled with defining the terms of feminism. Second, it has produced a historical narrative that constructed feminists of color as a kind of temporal other. This practice stems from a broad connection between race and the construction of narrative that has permeated epistemological practices in the Western academy. Johannes Fabian, for instance, has argued that the discipline of anthropology was marked by a set of practices in which Western anthropologists constructed the subjects of non-Western cultures as being located within a different temporal space. Drawing on an evolutionary conception of time, this form of narrative thus constructed the Western subject as the marker of progress and development through making the non-Western object the other.⁴¹ The process is intrinsic to the hegemonic form of temporality produced by these disciplinary practices. The wave model of feminism, I suggest, inadvertently engages in a similar kind of process by transforming feminists of color writing within the historical period of the second wave into a subject dislocated from their historical context. The construction of such a narrative ends up removing a sense of dynamism and contestation from the historical periods associated with second and third wave feminism.

This question of time and historical narrative points to the political and intellectual significance of historical memory. In an essay reflecting on her memories of *This Bridge Called My Back*, Alexander writes:

What brings us back to re-membrance is both individual and collective; both intentional and an act of surrender; both remembering desire and remembering *how* it works ([Toni] Morrison, *Beloved*, 20). Daring to recognize each other again and again in a context that seems bent on making strangers of us all. Can we *intentionally* remember, all the time, as a way of never forgetting, all of us, building an archaeology of living memory which has less to do with living in the past, invoking a past, or excising it, and more to do with our relationship to time and its purpose. There is a difference between remember *when*—the nostalgic yearning for some return—and a living memory that enables us to re-member what was contained in *Bridge* and what could not be contained within it or by it.⁴²

It is precisely this living memory—which embodies the original insights of works such as *This Bridge Called My Back*—that is lost within a three-wave model of feminism. Alexander's eloquent discussion of the transformative power of memory provides us with a deeper possibility for producing a richer and more transformative narrative than we now have to capture the complexities of feminist intellectual and social history.

What would such a living memory of the histories of U.S. feminism look like? It would potentially be more powerful but also more challenging than the current alternative. In one sense, such a living memory would enable successive generations of feminists to realize that nonlinear understandings of history (breaking from evolutionary conceptions of temporality) in fact necessitate periodic and tactical returns to earlier political/intellectual strategies and visions. This is in effect one of the central implications of Sandoval's method of differential consciousness. A move from the wave model of feminism to a history rooted in living memory is not simply a symbolic strategy for honoring the contributions of previous generations of feminists. Rather it is a question of remembering that successive generations of feminism can never move beyond past histories through a simplistic attempt at creating a clear temporal break from the past.

Consider the example of *This Bridge We Call Home*, a text published both as a commemoration of and a continuation of the intellectual work of *This Bridge Called My Back*.⁴³ The volume provides an important example of Alexander's discussion of an alternative approach to memory and history. *This Bridge We Call Home* presents both substantive continuities and critical engagements with the first *Bridge*. Like the first *Bridge*, the volume presents a series of essays that speak to the persistence of discrimination—in particular, forms of racism and homophobia—both within contemporary society and as persistent elements within feminist spaces. Yet several of the contributors also speak to some of the discrepancies with the first book. AnaLouise Keating, co-editor of the volume, introduces the collection with a cautionary note, "If you've opened this book expecting to find a carbon copy of *This Bridge Called My Back*, don't bother. Stop now."⁴⁴ In contrast to the first *Bridge*, this volume includes contributions by both men and white women (a decision that, Keating writes, produced some significant criticism as a violation of the spirit of the first *Bridge*). This question of inclusion reflects a critique of identity in the volume as several of the contributors provide critical theoretical and substantive alternatives to concepts such as "identity"

and "authenticity."⁴⁵ Taken together the two *Bridges* provide a rich illustration of an alternative to the history of feminism understood as a series of discrete waves. The second *Bridge* embodies the continued intellectual and political relevance of the first volume even as it produces new visions for social change. Helen Shulman Lorenz calls this a theory of "reframing and restoration," which was embedded in *This Bridge Called My Back*.⁴⁶ Such an approach, Lorenz argues, both continually ruptures naturalized borders and inclusions and looks for restoration in the resources of prior histories—"with one foot in older discourses and another at a growing opening edge."⁴⁷

This alternative to a teleological approach to feminist waves requires a challenge to some of the dominant models of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship that have become mainstreamed within the academy. Such models are implicitly defined by ideologies of newness that presuppose that intellectual innovation rests on critical ruptures from past ways of knowing. This ideology is not unique to feminist scholarship as the commercial organization of intellectual life commodifies knowledge so that the substantive nature of intellectual contributions is increasingly measured by the newness (and therefore the marketability) of the product. However, within interdisciplinary fields such as feminist scholarship this ideology of newness has been accentuated by the teleological conception of time embodied in postmodernist approaches. The suffix *post* in itself suggests the moving beyond and past older forms of thought (somewhat paradoxically as postmodernist thought has itself interrogated teleological approaches to history). The result is a strong impetus within interdisciplinary feminist scholarship to emphasize the creation of concepts or linguistic expressions that can capture this sense of newness and rupture. What is lost in such an approach is both that sense of living memory that Alexander describes and an understanding of the historical continuities and resources that are vital for feminism and feminist thought.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The three-wave model of feminism has in many ways shortchanged our understandings of the substantive contributions of scholarly writings classified as "third wave feminism." The static nature of this model has lent itself to a reduction of the rich and varied contributions of this work through modular and reductive representations of paradigms such as intersectionality

and identity politics. In this discussion I have drawn on a number of scholars who in practice bridge and simultaneously occupy feminist locations associated with second, third, and fourth wave feminism. The method of oppositional consciousness that Sandoval delineates speaks precisely to this form of simultaneity. The movement between these temporal/political spaces of feminist thought represents the spirit of much of this writing. As third wave feminist writings become mainstreamed through these singular devices, deep understandings of time, politics, and subjectivity risk being written out of history. The movement inherent in the conceptions of temporality and memory contained in the writings discussed here exceed the metaphor of a series of waves crashing onto land and then receding. Feminist thought, in retrospect, requires a conception of history that can contain both the insights of the past and the potential breakthroughs of the future within the messy, unresolved contestations of political and intellectual practice in the present.

NOTES

1. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1984).
2. See, for example, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Work," *Signs* 18, no. 1 (1992): 1–43.
3. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
4. Third wave feminism also has included work on international issues; early seminal interventions by scholars such as Chandra Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander explicitly connected such questions to U.S.-based debates on race and gender. See, for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), and M. Jacqui Alexander, "Not Just Any(Body) Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas," *Feminist Review* 48 (Autumn 1994): 5–23. Given the focus of this volume on U.S. feminism and constraints of space, I will not address such scholarship on Third World feminism and transnationalism in depth. There are also differing conceptions of what work is considered third wave. See, for example, Leandra Zarnow, ch. 12, this volume.
5. See, for example, Barbara Smith, "Racism and Women's Studies," and Maxine Baca Zinn, Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Bonnie Thornton Dill, "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies," both in *Making Face*,

- Making Soul: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990).
6. Norma Alarcon, "The Theoretical Subject of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism," in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), 357.
 7. *Ibid.*, 359.
 8. *Ibid.*
 9. These challenges to the category of woman were not limited to feminists of color but also included poststructuralist critiques of essentialism and queer-theorist critiques of heteronormative constructions of gender. See, for example, Judith Butler's now classic *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
 10. Alarcon, "The Theoretical Subject," 366.
 11. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 143.
 12. This characterization has led to a feminist variant of the backlash against identity politics in the U.S. academy that periodically resurfaces in the everyday practices and discourses of universities. My point is not that there are no streams of thought in third wave feminism that focus on identity-based claims but that that is only one aspect of a much more diverse intellectual field.
 13. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–1299.
 14. Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work." See also Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression," *Review of Radical Political Economy* 18, no. 1 (1985): 1–43, and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
 15. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 222.
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. See Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1771–1800.
 18. Most recently, the 2008 Democratic primary election provided the terrain for this distorted wave model of feminism. In an online article Linda Hirshman presented women's support for Barack Obama over Hillary Clinton as an effect of a generational shift toward a focus on intersectionality rather than gender. Hirshman reproduces the teleological approach to feminism, where she conflates differences between second and third wave feminism with a generational shift from gender to intersectional analyses (conflating third wave feminism with intersectionality). In this endeavor she essentializes and misrepresents both second and third wave feminism, implicitly coding second wave feminism as a gender-based struggle for issues raised by middle-class, white women and third wave feminism

- as shifting feminism away from women's issues. Linda Hirshman, "Looking to the Future: Feminism Has to Focus," *Washingtonpost.com*, June 8, 2008, B01.
19. In this discussion I am distinguishing between the substantive contributions of writers associated with the paradigm and the dominant intellectual discourses and institutional sites in which the paradigm has become institutionalized. On the need to retain a focus on intersectionality, see Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, "Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 75–86.
 20. For instance, in my own discipline, political science, intersectionality has just now emerged as a central paradigm of interest. Yet the paradigm as it is debated and deployed is usually decontextualized from the richer and more varied field of third wave feminist writing. The result is a mainstreaming of the paradigm in ways that have produced important research agendas but also silences and erasures as the paradigm has been "disciplined" to meet the dominant norms of political science. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), for a discussion of some of the dangers in the ways in which the concept of intersectionality has been misappropriated.
 21. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 43. Note that Sandoval uses the term *U.S. Third World Feminism* rather than *third wave feminism* in her classification of the writings by feminists of color that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.
 22. Sandoval argues that this historical narrative was shared by a diverse group of scholars including Julia Kristeva, Toril Moi, Hester Eisenstein, and Allison Jaggar. *Ibid.*, 47.
 23. *Ibid.*, 54.
 24. *Ibid.*, 57. Note that the phrase "the equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness" is Sandoval's classification of paradigms inherent within the four phases of liberal, Marxist, radical/cultural, and socialist feminism.
 25. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 223. Barad's critique of intersectionality is fully elaborated in "Re(con)figuring Space, Time, and Matter," in *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, ed. Marianne DeKoven (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 75–109.
 26. For an interesting contemporary example of similar new forms of consciousness and practice that unsettle the wave chronology, see Whitney Peoples's discussion of hip-hop feminism in ch. 17, this volume.
 27. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
 28. *Ibid.*, 16.
 29. *Ibid.*, 17.
 30. See Brah and Phoenix, "Ain't I a Woman?"
 31. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 46.

32. *Ibid.*, 51.
33. On this point, see AnaLouise Keating, *Entre Mundos / Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
34. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 78.
35. I elaborate on the question of disidentification at length in Leela Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-violence, Social Justice and the Politics of a Spiritualized Feminism* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2003).
36. Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
37. See, for example, Joan W. Scott's well known essay "Experience" in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22–40.
38. Such theories by feminists of color either were not viewed as theoretically relevant or were used as empirical, embodied references. Thus, for example, Haraway's "A Theory of Cyborgs" did draw on Anzaldúa's conception of hybridity as an example of cyborg identity but did not include an extensive theoretical discussion of Anzaldúa's work on identity and experience; Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990).
39. Classic theorists writing at the time from different perspectives but drawing on critical engagements with poststructuralist theory include Gayatri Spivak and Mohanty. Scholars such as Sandoval and Alarcon, writing about race and gender within the United States, have also drawn on and critically engaged with post-structuralist theory.
40. Becky Thompson, "Multicultural Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 337–360; ch. 2, this volume.
41. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
42. M. Jacqui Alexander, "Remembering This Bridge, Remembering Ourselves: Yearning, Memory and Desire," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 96.
43. *Ibid.*
44. AnaLouise Keating, "Charting Pathways, Marking Thresholds . . . A Warning, an Introduction," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 17.
45. See, for example, AnaLouise Keating, "Forging El Mundo Zurdo: Changing Ourselves, Changing the World," 519–529, and Sarah Cervenak, Karina Cespedes, Caridad Souza, and Andrea Straub, "Imagining Differently: The Politics of Listening in a Feminist Classroom," 341–356, both in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002).

46. Helen Shulman Lorenz, "Thawing Hearts, Opening a Path in the Woods, Founding a New Lineage," in AnaLouise Keating, *Entre Mundos / Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 497.
47. *Ibid.*, 503.
48. Thus, in the wave model that persists, it is now a common assumption that we can move past third wave feminism and thus no longer need to address issues such as racial exclusion. The issue of racism is thus increasingly viewed in women's studies as dated, as an issue characteristic of third wave feminism. The "postracial" assumptions are a somewhat ironic reflection of the "postfeminist" rhetoric in public discourses.