Methods of Analysis
Conceptual History
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Conceptual history is often used interchangeably with intellectual history and the history of ideas. Conceptual historians assert distinctions, however, between ideas, which are assumed to be somewhat durable or enduring and concepts, which are more contingent, mutable, and dynamic. Ideas are often reduced to the agency of human actors while concepts are often assumed to have agency as a nonhuman actor. This latter point of the performativity of terms and associated concepts is suggested in Austin's (1955/1962) *How to Do Things with Words*. Nonetheless, whether concepts are deeds *and* doers remains contentious. Inasmuch as concepts are not isolated from various signifiers and practices and mediate or shape experiences, conceptual historians often refer to "conceptual matrices," "conceptual systems," "conceptual networks and patterns of conceptualization" (ECHP, 2011, p. 111).

Conceptual history can be defined as the "study of conceptual change" or "study of the semantic transformations" (Plotikov & Swiderski, 2009, p. 72). White (2000/20002, p. ix) places emphasis on the history of conception and conceptualization— on "the invention and development" of concepts or the history of "conceptual change," "semantic innovation" and transformation (ECHP, 2011, p. 112). Just as beings and things to which concepts refer travel, concepts travel. As Bal (2009) observes,

> concepts are not fixed. They travel— between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during and after each 'trip'. (p. 20).

She continues: "Between historical periods, the meaning and use of concepts change dramatically" (p. 20). For Bal (2002), concepts morphing and moving through space and time are "travelling concepts." But as Coppedge (1999) cautions, "the more elaborately a concept is defined, the narrower it becomes. The more baggage it has to carry, the less widely it can travel" (p. 468). Such is fate of the "floating signifier" or "sliding signifier."

Conceptual histories are distinguished from etymologies but of course it depends on how one writes histories and etymologies. Williams' (1976/1983) *Keywords*, for example, provides a critical sense of etymology that is, for all intents and purposes, conceptual history of "key concepts." Ball's (1988) distinction may be a bit forced but the point is made: "What distinguishes critical conceptual history from philology or etymology is its attention to the arguments in which concepts appear and are used to per form particular kinds of actions at particular times and at particular political sites" (p. 16). Etymologies certainly help us historicize and understand concepts but are incomplete when an analysis of words points to a concept rather giving an analysis of the concept *per se*. This is where etymology and conceptual history are complementary. The best etymologies are conceptual histories while the best conceptual histories provide nuanced, rich etymologies.

1. Definitions and Scope of Conceptual History
   a. White (2000/2002): a methodology of historical studies that focuses on the invention and development of the fundamental concepts (Begrijfe) underlying and informing a distinctively historical (geschichtliche) manner of being in the world. (p. ix)
   b. Jakobsen (2005): Conceptual history as an approach emphasizes the study of conceptual change… [acknowledging that] struggles over the contents of concepts are important being that they are parts of political struggle in general.
      i. These questions— the what, when, where, who, how and why— are posed by the methodological approach of "(critical) conceptual history," where the history of concepts becomes an important point of entry to the analysis and understanding of contemporary political struggle, on the assumption that changes in the meanings of concepts are a condition for political changes. The inspiration for this approach to "conceptual history" is Koselleck's [1972] idea of concepts as a relationship between Erfahrungsraum and Erwartungshorizont— in other words, that concepts, on one hand, are an accumulation of experiences from the past and, on the other hand, horizons or scenarios of expectations for the future, and as such, contemporary vehicles of… change. (p. 202)
   c. Plotikov & Swiderski (2009): The basic premise of conceptual history is the Kantian principle that experience is mediated by concepts, or fundamental linguistic distinctions. The idea acquired substance in hermeneutic philosophy (Dilthey, later Gadamer): the basic concepts or categories, with the help of which human experience takes form, be it in science or in ordinary life, are not static but historically mutable. The deep structure of human consciousness and communication is not given once and for all but rather undergoes a historical evolution. Thus the study of the semantic transformations of the basic concepts in culture provides a key to exhibiting the character and direction of change in culture as a whole. (p. 72)
   d. European Conceptual History Project (ECHP) (2011): Concepts have a history; but far from being a simple reflection of changing socio-political contexts, the conceptual matrices shape historical events and experiences. One of the main objectives of conceptual history is therefore to shed light upon the complex relationships between social and political change and semantic innovation, both in the short and medium term and during longer historical periods. (pp. 111-112)
      i. the capacity to devise concepts with a degree of coherence, flexibility, and durability is common to all cultures, [and] certain conceptual networks and patterns of conceptualization are defining features. (p. 111)
2. Ages of the Concept
   a. Deleuze & Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1990/1991/1996):
      i. Finally, the most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the disciplines of communication, seized hold of the word *concept* itself and said: "This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the *ideas men* [*conceptors*]! We are the friends of the concept, we put it in our computers." Information and creativity, concept and enterprise: there is already an abundant

bibliography. Marketing has preserved the idea of a certain relationship between the concept and the event. But here the concept has become the set of product displays (historical, scientific, artistic, sexual, pragmatic), and the event has become the exhibition that sets up various displays and the "exchange of ideas" it is supposed to promote. The only events are exhibitions, and the only concepts are products that can be sold. Philosophy has not remained unaffected by the general movement that replaced Critique with sales promotion. The simulacrum, the simulation of a packet of noodles, has become the true concept; and the one who packages the product, commodity, or work of art has become the philosopher, conceptual persona, or artist. (p, 10)

ii. Certainly, it is painful to learn that *Concept* indicates a society of information services and engineering. But the more philosophy comes up against shameless and inane rivals and encounters them at its very core, the more it feels driven to fulfill the task of creating concepts that are aerolites rather than commercial products. (p. 11)

iii. The post-Kantians concentrated on a universal *encyclopedia* of the concept that attributed concept creation to a pure subjectivity rather than taking on the more modest task of a *pedagogy* of the concept, which would have to analyze the conditions of creation as factors of always singular moments. If the three ages of the concept are the encyclopedia, pedagogy, and commercial professional training [business training] [*la formation professionnelle commercial*], only the second can safeguard us from falling from the heights of the first into the disaster of the third— an absolute disaster for thought whatever its benefits might be, of course, from the viewpoint of universal capitalism. (p. 12)