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The Intellectual Destroyer: Michel Foucault and The Iranian Revolution

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ABSTRACT

Interpretations of Michel Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 tend toward three basic stances. The critical-explanatory approach argues that an infantile leftistism set Foucault up for an uncritical approval of a backward and premodern Isalmist regime. The interpretive-neutral position refrains from value judgments preferring instead to view Foucault's reportages as valuable insofar as they reveal lesser-known aspects of his work. Finally, Foucault's defenders interpret the Iran writings as his movement toward humanism and liberalism, a reorientation, they argue, that ought to absolve Foucault from guilt in the case of Iran. In this paper I survey the existing positions on the *reportages* and ultimately deliver an alternate explanation. Grounded in the sociology of knowledge, I argue that the case of Foucault and Iran is best understood as Foucault maintaining a sense of biographical coherence in the production of knowledge. Using a theory of intellectual self-concept, I show that three identity traits: the anti-prophetic philosopher; the philosopher of the present; and infatuation with the theme of the revolution drove Foucault toward the Iranian events, and colored his interpretations of it.

In the autumn of 1978, the Iranian people began an energetic and vital campaign to put an end to the half-century reign of the ruling Pahlavi dynasty. In one hundred days, the non-violent protest movement immobilized the largest military in the Middle East, and dismantled a regime that was backed by the United States and the Soviet Union. The corrupt and modernist-leaning government of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was replaced with a retrograde, fundamentalist Islamic theocracy, led by the religious cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

During this period, the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, acting as a special correspondent for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera*, travelled to Iran on two occasions to document the revolutionary events. He published thirteen articles on the Iranian Revolution; including interviews and rebuttals to criticism that appeared in the French newspapers *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Observateur,* fifteen documents from this period make up what are known as Foucault's *reportages d'idées*.

Foucault wrote that in Iran, he wanted to be present for "the birth of ideas," and he described his project as one where "intellectuals will work together with journalists" to document "where ideas and events intersect" (in Eribon 1991: 282). The philosopher's commitment to the Iranian Revolution was more than a disinterested journalistic endeavor however. Much to the dismay of the secular Parisian intelligentsia, Foucault celebrated the Iranians for introducing "a spiritual dimension into political life" and he solidly lent his support to their movement (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 207).[1] His optimism faded, however, when in the spring of 1979, it became apparent that an oppressive and brutal religious regime had taken control of the Iranian republic, and after his final article, published on May 11th-12th 1979, Foucault never spoke again of the Iranian Revolution.

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, every quote from Foucault's Iran writings are from the appendix of Afary and Anderson's book.

The study of Foucault's Iran writings has been made difficult for Anglophone readers because only three of the fifteen reports were available in English. This changed in 2005, when Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson translated and published the entire collection of writings in the appendix of their book, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*. To be sure, analyses of the *reportages* existed prior to the publication of Afary and Anderson's book (see Eribon 1991; Stauth 1991; Keating 1997; Carrette 1999; Leezenberg 2004), but these studies were difficult to assess because the authors translated only small fragments of the reports from the French.

Interpretations of Michel Foucault's *reportages* of the Iranian Revolution present three conflicting explanations for his attraction to the events in Iran. On one pole are Foucault's critics (Afary and Anderson 2005; Duschinsky 2006; Almond 2007), who have determined that the documents are evidence of deep and irresolvable problems contained within the logic of his philosophical project. On the second pole are his defenders (Paras 2006; Ghamari-Tabrizi 2012), who view his Iran writings as a manifestation of a humanistic and liberal reorientation in his thought. The neutral position (Stauth 1991; Keating 1997; Carrette 1999; Kurasawa 2004; Beaulieu 2010), located between the critical and the defensive, argues that Foucault's Iran writings provide insight into lesser-known aspects of his philosophical concerns.

The contribution of this study is to demonstrate that a particular intellectual self-concept, developed in the 1970s, drove Foucault to the Iranian Revolution. Contextualized through a decades worth of interviews and lectures, I argue that Foucault, in speaking of himself as an intellectual, understood his intellectual identity as being an anti-prophetic philosopher of the present moment, one who was preoccupied with the desirability of "the revolution." Moreover, I show that this intellectual self-concept attached itself to Foucault's interpretations of the events

in Iran, and that this peculiar set of writings are colored through the paradigm of his self-understanding.

The second-order contribution of this paper is to organize all of the extant literature on the *reportages* into one location and to provide analyses of these documents. I argue that both the critical and defensive literature suffers from privileging certain writings and components of the Iran texts over items that do not conform to the studies' images of the author. In this respect, I suggest that the preferable mode for understanding the Iran writings is to be found in the interpretive-neutral register. Moreover, I argue that understanding Foucault's conception of the role of the intellectual greatly enriches the studies of the Iran writings within the context of these studies' normative judgments.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section "Foucault's Iran Writings at a Glance," provides a brief overview of his reporting from Iran. The second section "Contested Explanations," describes the three relevant tendencies in the literature for understanding Foucault's Iran endeavor. In the third and final section, "An Alternative," using insights from the sociology of knowledge, I argue that Foucault's intellectual self-concept was the mechanism that drove him to the Iranian Revolution, and the apparatus by which he interpreted the events on the ground.

Foucault's Iran Writings at a Glance

Shortly after the September 8th, 1978, Black Friday disturbances in Zhaleh Square, Michel Foucault arrived in Tehran to begin reporting on the Iranian Revolution. His early reports are of a typically journalistic nature; he examined the lack of cohesion within the Iranian army, explained the economic and political history of Iranian modernization, and illustrated the

connection between Islam and the protest movement. Foucault noted that the Iranians were hesitant to accept the fact that their own soldiers were capable of firing machine guns at them, instead preferring to believe that Israeli fighters had been airdropped into Tehran.

The vision for political transformation in Iran was nothing other than a complete rejection of the shah, his regime, and all that they represented. He reported that the Iranian revolt was not due to the inability of traditional society to conform to encroaching modernization, but rather, that Iranian society was rejecting "a *modernization* that is itself an *archaism*" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 195 emphasis in original). Foucault explained that corruption and modernization were one and the same in Iran, and that the shah and his family were to blame. Acting against the current of modernization, he believed that Islam provided the Iranians with a sense of political identity, and that it animated their collectivity into formidable force with which the Iranians could oppose the shah and his army.

As Foucault continued to report on the Iranian Revolution his writings developed an emotional content and commitment not found in his earlier reporting. He praised the Iranians for their affective and courageous non-violent opposition to the military and he celebrated the almost mystical quality of Ayatollah Khomeini as the spiritual leader of the revolution. In lieu of a program for the future, Foucault incorrectly declared that in Iran, the uprising would not result in a Khomeini government or a hierarchal religious regime. This period would also find Foucault on the defensive against the Parisian intelligentsia who regarded his writings on Iran as an uncritical approval of fundamentalist Islam. He argued that such criticisms collapse all forms of Islam into one "for the sake of rejecting them in their entirety under the thousand-year old reproach of 'fanaticism'" and that in order to understand Islam "the first condition is not to begin by bringing in hatred" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 210).

Foucault was fascinated by three paradoxes that he located in the Iranian events: a barehanded insurrection successfully incapacitated one of the most powerful armies in the world; the protest movement did not disintegrate due to internal splits or conflicts; and the absence of long-term objectives—apart from the removal of the shah—was a strength, not a weakness. He admired the ways in which the Iranians used existing religious structures, such as the dissemination of cassette tapes through the mosque network, to spread counter-information against government censorship. Foucault argued that the Iranians exhibited "a perfectly unified collective will," (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 221) and he later recalled in an interview that before Iran, he believed that the collective will "was like God, like the soul, something one would never encounter" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 253).

As the revolutionary events came to a close, it became apparent to Foucault that the events in Iran had resulted in disaster. The despotic forward-looking regime of the shah was replaced with a retrograde, fundamentalist Islamic theocracy, and Khomeini was its leader. On April 14th, 1979, Foucault published a letter to the new prime minister of Iran, Mehdi Bazargan, reminding him that it was not the desire of the Iranians to be ruled "by a government of mullahs" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 262). Alluding to the execution of political dissidents, homosexuals, and other undesirables, Foucault warned Bazargan that it was the obligation of the government to protect human rights, and that if this obligation was violated the same religion that brought the new regime into existence could be used against it.

On May 11th-12th, 1979, Foucault published *Is It Useless To Revolt?*, his final statement before his total silence on the Iranian Revolution. In it, he was determined to preserve the force that animated the Iranians against the shah. He wrote, "the spirituality of those who were going to their deaths has no similarity whatsoever with the bloody government of a fundamentalist

clergy" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 265). Foucault did not feel that it was necessary to recant; he wrote that his support for the Iranians was compatible with his criticism of the new regime:

> It is certainly not shameful to change one's opinions, but there is no reason to say that one's opinion has changed when one is against hands being chopped off today, after having been against the tortures of the SAVAK[2] yesterday. (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 266)

He explained that as an intellectual, his ethics were "antistrategic," he did not feel that it was his responsibility to moralize or to judge the outcome of the revolution: "One must be respectful when a singularity arises and intransigent as soon as the state violates universals" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 267). After May 11th 1979, Foucault never again spoke of the Iranian Revolution, and his writings on it have remained as one of the most controversial aspects of his career.

Contested Explanations

Foucault and His Critics

Critics of Michel Foucault's engagement with and writings on the Iranian Revolution emphasize the consistency between his philosophical oeuvre and his controversial approval of Khomeini's Islamist regime. In opposition to those who regard Foucault's encounter with revolutionary Islam as a mistake due to his ignorance of Iranian culture and history (see Stauth 1991; Keating 1997; Beaulieu 2010) and those who read the matter as evidence and demonstration of his intellectual development toward the acceptance of liberal ideals and humanistic principles (see Paras 2006; Ghamari-Tabrizi 2012), the critics of Foucault's engagement with the Iranian Revolution explain it as the inevitable outcome of a philosophical orientation that set him up for an uncritical stance toward a politically and socially retrograde regime. At the level of explanation, the thread that

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[2] The SAVAK was the Iranian secret police.

connects this literature is not simply its criticality; rather, it derives from the idea that Foucault's

sympathetic stance toward the uprising in Iran is a manifestation of irreconcilable problems with

his philosophical project. The critical explanation proceeds as follows.

-- Foucault was attracted to Iran because of a sympathetic Orientalism that sought out non-

Western societies and premodern temporalities as a curative for his resentment of Western

modernity.

Afary and Anderson (2005) explain that a dominant theme throughout Foucault's writings, both

before and after 1978, is a resentment of the liberal tradition brought forth by the Enlightenment,

and subsequently the forms of social control that this tradition intimated. In Foucault's words,

"the 'Enlightenment', which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines" (1978 [1975]:

222). Foucault's "one-sided critique of modernity," as Afary and Anderson describe his project, is

demonstrated by his propensity to favor premodern political and social arrangements:

> In *Madness and Civilization*, he argued that the Renaissance regarded madness as a fact of life and even endowed it with a certain amount of wisdom and creativity. In *Discipline and Punish*, he held that the seemingly more brutal disciplinary practices prevalent until the mid-eighteenth century exerted less control over mind and body than modern forms of punishment. And in *The History of Sexuality*, he claimed that premodern marriages of the elite…allowed for greater sexual freedom, including same-sex relations, and were hence more desirable when compared to the monogamous, heterosexual marriages of modern bourgeois society and their normalizing power. (Afary and Anderson 2005: 26)

For Foucault, the principles and discourses of the Enlightenment, those of negative-freedom,

human rights, and the promotion of scientific knowledge and reason, ushered in an era of

sophisticated and elegant social control that produced self-governing and docile subjects.

Accordingly, as Afary and Anderson suggest, Foucault's philosophical orientation left him

predisposed to an uncritical stance towards an Islamist regime that "clung to idealized notions of

premodern social orders" which were "disdainful of modern liberal judicial systems" (2006: 13).

The problem of course, is that premodern political and social arrangements disproportionately

punished women, children, and homosexuals. As such, the principle critique found in Afary and

Anderson's study is that Foucault minimized or altogether dismissed the ways in which the

Islamist regime would fetter basic human rights, especially for women, children, and

homosexuals. The authors attribute Foucault's admiration of the Iranian Revolution to

> …something deeper than ignorance of Iranian history and culture, something more organic to
> Foucault's core theoretical stance, was at work in creating the deep flaws that marked his writings
> on Iran. Foucault's positions on Iran are not only rooted in his better-known writings, but they also
> accentuate some of the problematic consequences of his overall theoretical enterprise. Did not a
> post-structuralist, leftist discourse, which spent all of its energy opposing the secular liberal or
> authoritarian modern state and its institutions, leave the door wide open to an uncritical stance
> toward Islamism and other socially retrogressive movements, especially when, as in Iran, they
> formed a pole of opposition to an authoritarian state and the global political and economic order?
> (Afary and Anderson 2005: 136)

In sum, and in accordance with the title of their book, Afary and Anderson claim that Foucault,

due to his philosophical prejudices, was "seduced" by the possibility of finding in Iran—and in

Islam—that which the West had been missing for a long time. Afary and Anderson's "seduction"

hypothesis is strong, and taken at face value, it is convincing. However, as Duschinsky (2006)

argues, Foucault may have been "seduced" by Islam, and yet, this explanation is incomplete. It

does not take into account Foucault's intellectual milieu, most notably the deep influence of

Martin Heidegger, whom Foucault called "the essential philosopher." As he put it, "my whole

philosophical development was determined by my reading Martin Heidegger" (Foucault in

Barbadette 1984: 8; see also Beaulieu 2010 on Foucault and Heidegger).

Foucault and Heidegger had striking similarities in their political engagements.

Foucault's attraction to the Iranian Revolution and to Khomeini is akin to Heidegger's seeking of

the Nazis and Hitler in an attempt to "think himself out of Western metaphysics" (Duschinsky

2006: 554). It appears too that Foucault sought an alternative to Western modes of thinking. For

instance, shortly before the disturbances in Iran, in an April 1978 interview with a Zen Buddhist

monk, Foucault noted that the era of Western thought had reached a point of crisis, which he

linked with the end of imperialism. He identified no European philosopher as able to rise to the

occasion:

> The crisis of Western thought is identical to the end of imperialism. The crisis has produced no
> supreme philosopher who excels in signifying that crisis...There is no philosopher who marks out
> this period. For it is the end of the era of Western philosophy. Thus, if philosophy of the future
> exists, it must be born outside of Europe or equally born in consequence of meetings and impacts
> between Europe and non-Europe. (Foucault 1999 [1978]: 113)

Foucault continued this interview, echoing a statement he made in 1977 that "everything this

socialist tradition has produced in history is to be condemned" (in Paras 2006: 86), by pointing to

"the crisis of the Western concept which is revolution, the crisis of the Western concept which is

man and society" (1999 [1978]: 113). Duschinsky theorizes that Foucault's admiration of the

uprising in Iran and of Khomeini, much like Heidegger who found an alternative to Western

metaphysics in Nazism and Hitler, was "caused by the seductive desire to see in a contemporary

radical movement the solution to [his] theoretical problems and a possible path out of Western

metaphysical thought" (2006: 554-5). Whereas Afary and Anderson explain Foucault's Iran

engagement as the product of a philosophical enterprise that privileged how the West once was,

Duschinsky argues that Foucault's oeuvre sought to emancipate itself from the West altogether.

Noting Foucault's insistence that a philosophy of the future must be found outside of Europe,

Duschinsky argues that "clearly part of the legacy of Heidegger" Foucault actually prophesized

and theorized the need for a Khomeini months before he began his journalistic reporting on the

Iranian Revolution (2006: 555). Noting the emphasis and problematic features that Foucault's oeuvre has attributed to the West, and his latent conception of alterity, Almond (2007) identifies Foucault's peculiar form of Orientalism as being the agent responsible for his Iranian endeavor.

The classical form of Orientalism described by Edward Said (1978) consists of a system of cultural imperialism delineated by geographic boundaries and space, one in which European scholars essentialized the Orient as backward and in need of cultivation. Foucault, however, engaged in a "philosophical and temporal" Orientalism (Afary and Anderson 2005: 18) that privileged tradition over modernity, one in which his critiques of Western practices and systems of thought essentialized the West and implicitly assumed an "inverse" Oriental other (Almond 2007: 24). Almond explains that Foucault's essentialization of the West was characterized by "tragedy, individuality, inauthenticity, and repression" but also complexity (2007: 25). Thus, Foucault's Orientalism works by negation; it includes geographical difference, but also philosophical and temporal alterity. Foucault's Orient is adumbrated by "honesty, authenticity, collectivity" and "permanence/immutability" (Almond 2007: 25), wherein the Japanese have a candid relationship with suicide, where Greek and Roman sexual authenticity leads to a laudable acceptance of pederasty, and where the Iranians, who remain "in touch with the old dreams that were once familiar to the West, when it too wanted to inscribe the figures of spirituality on the grounds of politics" offer an alternative to Western modernity (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 265). In his words, Iran contains "forms of life unchanged for the last thousand years" but that the uprising is "perhaps the first great insurrection against global systems, the form of revolt that is the most modern and the most insane" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 222). As an explanation,

Foucault sought Iran for its mixture of stasis and energy. The uprising contained a curative, albeit a violent and insane one, to the crisis of Western thought that Foucault lamented only month's prior. This inverted Orientalism, one in which an intellectual seeks to escape their milieu to import remedy to a languishing culture, has a long tradition in French thought. In the case of Michel Foucault, it should be attributed, in part, to the lasting influence of the French Orientalist Louis Massignon.

Interlocutors of the Foucault debate have pointed to the French Orientalist Louis Massignon and his student Henry Corbin as influencing Foucault's reading of Shi'ite Islam (see Stauth 1991: 268; Carrette 2000: 139; Leezenberg 2004: 108; Beaulieu 2010: 803; and Ghamari-Tabrizi 2012: 282). However, apart from Carrette's *Foucault and Religion* (2000) and Leezenberg's *Power and Political Spirituality* (2004), wherein the authors explicate Corbin's— and therefore, to some extent Massignon's—influence on Foucault, these interlocutors simply state this influence and move on. This is a curiosity, especially in the case of Foucault's defenders who invoke Massignon's influence in the name of absolving him from wrongdoing in the matter of his Iran writings.

Massignon spent most of his career studying the life and work of the tenth century Sufi poet al-Hallāj "the mystical martyr of Islam, crucified for the inaccessible pure love of God" (Massignon in Laude 2010: 35). Said (1978) explained that, while Massignon's Orientalism was one of "overwhelming intelligence," he nonetheless rendered an interpretation in which "the essence of the difference between East and West is between modernity and ancient tradition" (1978: 269) and that he "assigned the Islamic Orient to an essentially ancient time and the West to modernity" (1978: 270). Massignon belonged to a long tradition of Frenchmen who sought the

Orient to reclaim "spirituality [and] traditional values" a tradition that sought the "Orient as a therapeutic for the West" (1978: 271). We should pause here for a moment and consider the critical explanation for Foucault's engagement with Iran. If it is understood that Foucault privileged tradition over modernity, and if as Almond suggests, when Foucault was traveling in Iran he was "actually traveling back in time," (2007: 36) and if as Afary and Anderson explain, Foucault's interest in Iran was "tied to a search for alternate forms of non-Western modernity that could rejoin spirituality and politics" (2005: 10), then Massignon's influence appears to be critical. Foucault's claim that in Iran he found a political spirituality "this thing whose possibility we have forgotten since the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity" appears to indicate as much (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 220).

LIMITATIONS

Foucault's critics argue that Iran presented to him a society that was in the process of restoring what the West once was. The critics suggest that a central theme throughout his philosophical writings was one wherein he was searching for an alternative to the suffocating effect of Western modernity on the body and mind. They argue that a mixture of a postmodernist resentment for the Enlightenment and of modernity, along with a naïve preoccupation with forms of premodern political and social arrangements, was at work in his embrace of the Iranian Revolution. But what about the evidence that does not conform to this picture?

The claim that Foucault was in search for alternatives to modernity, as evidenced by a tendency in his oeuvre, is suspect, with respect to how he understood his project. During an interview in 1983, Paul Rabinow asked Foucault if, in his volumes on the history of sexuality, he

was arguing that the Greeks offered "an attractive and plausible alternative" to contemporary Christian sexual ethics, Foucault responded, "No! I am not looking for an alternative, you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people" (Foucault 1984a [1983]: 343). Further, he argued that Greek society was reprehensible for its treatment of women and children, that exclusionary and dissymmetric sexual relations were "quite disgusting!" (1984a [1983]: 346) and that "there is no exemplary value in a period which is not our period…it is not anything to get back to" (1984a [1983]: 347).

Foucault certainly did not conceive of his philosophical project as one that was intended to be a corrective for the disenchantment of the modern West. In his comments to Rabinow, Foucault indicated his detestation for the ways in which a pre-modern society unevenly coerced and punished women and children. This alone does not invalidate the critics' argument, but it does uncover the selective nature of the evidence they deploy against Foucault. The residual of evidence that Foucault's critics leave behind should not be ignored, and further, it points to their arguments' weakness as a maximal explanation.

A Position of Neutrality

Reflections on Michel Foucault's encounter with the Iranian Revolution have produced a substantial body of literature that encourages a reading of the texts as evidence of particular philosophical and theoretical insights contained in his reporting as they are related to his larger research program. A fundamental characteristic of this literature is its refusal to neither condemn nor defend Foucault from wrongdoing in the case of Iran. While pointing to Foucault's mistakes and errors during the Iranian Revolution, this literature also urges a sympathetic reading of the

texts. The theoretical-neutral explanation for Foucault's interaction with the Iranian Revolution proceeds as follows:

-- Foucault wanted to investigate his philosophical and theoretical ideas in a contemporary event, outside of the archive.

Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution have been interpreted as his attempt to formulate a theory of resistance (Keating 1997), as an empirical example of bio-politics and governmentality (Stauth 1991), and as a manifestation of his search for a revolutionary form of spirituality (Beaulieu 2010). There is no consensus as to what theoretical concerns Foucault was investigating in Iran apart from a burgeoning interest in religious practices (see Carrette 1999 and 2000). Some argue that Foucault's interest in Iran stemmed from his seeing it as an opportunity to work out new or unresolved ideas in his thought (Beaulieu 2010), while others claim his writings are related to his most immediate projects because "[The Iranian Revolution] posed a great threat to his philosophical concerns" (Stauth 1991: 262). As an explanation for Foucault's engagement with Iran, these insights suggest that he was searching for contemporary manifestations, or perhaps, refutations, of historical and philosophical principles found in his analytical project.

What is distinctive about this literature is its neutrality in regards to condemning or defending Foucault from wrongdoing during the Iranian Revolution. In fact, this body of literature is both critical and defensive. The authors point to Foucault's ignorance of Iranian culture and history, calling it "shameful" and "flagrant" (Keating 1997), while others liken his endorsement of Khomeini and his unawareness of Khomeini's lectures on Islamic government to

Heidegger "who forgot to read Hitler's Mein Kampf" (Beaulieu 2010: 806; see also Duschinsky 2006 for more on Foucault and Heidegger). At the same time, the authors encourage a sympathetic reading of the texts so that we may gain insight into "the most coherent attempt to theorize a model of revolution 'in our times'" (Stauth 1991: 259) and to understand the place of Iran in Foucault's writings as the "cross-cultural alter ego to Western modernity" (Kurasawa 2004: 145).

Of the tendencies, critical, interpretive, and defensive, found in the study of Foucault's Iran writings, I am of the opinion that this neutral-interpretive approach is the most superior. The strength of this approach is to set aside the normative judgments in regards to Foucault and instead to focus on different lenses to understanding the content of the writings. In this way, the authors do not to need to reconstruct the reportages as though they conform to an overall moralizing purview. Further, the interpretive tendency respects the intelligence of the reader insofar as it allows them to decide the merits of the writings. The drawback to this method is that in order to fully understand the richness of the Iran writings, one must collect and read a large amount of literature.

In Defense of Foucault

Defenders of Michel Foucault's engagement with the Iranian Revolution argue that his support for the people's movement against the shah evinces his embrace of humanistic principles and liberal values. Against the charge that Foucault held an uncritical stance toward fundamentalist Islam and other retrograde ideologies, Foucault's defenders advance an explanation that illustrates his resentment of Marxism for its detrimental impact on human freedom. In light of the fact that the revolution in Iran ended with the installation of an oppressive religious

theocracy, Foucault's defenders distinguish between the revolutionary experience and its outcome. A theme throughout this literature is Foucault's affinity with Kant, who celebrated the French Revolution and identified a moral disposition in the human race that inspires sympathy with acts against injustice. Foucault's defenders construe his interaction with the Iranian Revolution as evidence of a political and philosophical turn in his thought during the late 1970s that signifies the possibility of resistance to state-power outside the determinism and totalizing discourse of Marxist theory. In sum, the defensive explanation for Foucault's engagement with the Iranian Revolution proceeds as follows.

-- Foucault was attracted to the Iranian Revolution because he saw in it an expression of human sovereignty over the universalizing aspects of European revolutionary tradition.

Paras (2006) suggests reading Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution "in the context of larger changes in his thought in the late 1970s" (2006: 78). The manifestation of this transformation, Paras argues, is a turn from a "defiant antihumanist" stance to an orientation that found Foucault celebrating liberal principles, ethics, and humanism (2006: 77; see also Beaulieu 2010 for more on ethics). Tracing the origins of this turn, Paras highlights Foucault's growing dissatisfaction with Marxism as a political alternative to liberal democracy. Foucault pointed to the Soviet Union, China, Cambodia, and Cuba as examples of Marxism's failure. In 1977, Foucault announced that "the Communist party is no longer Marxist" and along with the "crisis of Western thought" was "one of the most important things that is called the crisis of Marxism" (in Carrette 1999: 114). Foucault articulated skepticism toward the viability of Marxism. He argued that it was "no longer useful as [*sic*] theoretical guarantee to the Communist party" and

he expressed resentment for the theme of the revolution that had dominated European thought

since 1789, declaring: "It is exactly this idea that's in the process of disappearing at the moment"

(in Carrette 1999: 114). "Europe is the birthplace of universality," Foucault warned, and because

Marxism had been configured into a "vision for the world" he believed it posed a threat to the

society at large (in Carrette 1999: 141). Therefore, the Iranians, who expressed no great political

vision for the future—outside of the removal of the shah—and whose movements lack of

outwardly Marxist elements, led Foucault to proclaim that they were "breaking away from all

that marks their country and their daily lives with the presence of global hegemonies" (in Afary

and Anderson 2005: 222). Paras argues that "Iran was the light of hope of which Foucault had

despaired in 1977," and adds that

> Its legitimacy as a force for liberation was established, in Foucault's eyes, by the fact that it was
> *not* Marxist, *not* revolutionary, *not* political, *not even* philosophical. It was a Sobibor[3]—a
> collective uprising from within the walls of the concentration camp—and Foucault was
> determined to stand with it. (Paras 2006: 97 emphasis in original).

Therefore, Foucault sought Iran because it was an occasion that broke from the universalizing

discourse of the European revolutionary tradition; it was "outside" of the telos of Marxist theory

and other philosophies of history. Although Paras's argument is convincing, he leaves behind a

remainder. The problematic component of this explanation lay in the fact that the Revolution

replaced global hegemonies with a brutal and theocratic Islamist regime. To defend Foucault

from the charge that he held an uncritical stance toward fundamentalist Islam, one must construct

an explanation that can account for, or dismiss altogether, the outcome of the Iranian Revolution.

Ghamari-Tabrizi (2012) advances an explanation that follows the course set by Paras,

arguing that Foucault's attraction to Iran "lay in witnessing a moment of making history outside

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[3] Sobibor was a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. This is a reference to Foucault's
claim that "Warsaw will always have its ghetto in revolt and its sewers populated by insurgents"
(in Afary and Anderson 2005: 263).

the purview of Western teleological schemes" (2012: 274). He augments this position by

suggesting that the temporal window through which one should view Foucault's engagement

with Iran ought to be narrow and limited to the revolutionary experience alone. As the

denouement to his study, Ghamari-Tabrizi stresses Foucault's claim that his role in Iran was not

one of a clairvoyant, but rather in "try[ing] to grasp *what is happening right now*" (in Afary and

Anderson 2005: 220 emphasis in original). In doing so, Ghamari-Tabrizi construes Foucault as

celebrating the Iranians for "reviv[ing] the spirit of revolution," while not at all prognosticating

the uprisings outcome (2012: 285). Singling out Foucault's emphasis on the "right now,"

Ghamari-Tabrizi essentially reconstructs the philosopher's writings on the Iranian Revolution

squarely in the tradition of Kant, as a philosophy of the present moment. During the French

Revolution, Kant wrote that the uprising "in a nation of gifted people may succeed, or it may

fail," that it might be bloody and violent, and yet:

> I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not
> themselves caught up in it a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very
> utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger. It cannot therefore have been caused by
> anything other than a moral disposition within the human race. (Kant 1991 [1798]: 182 emphasis
> in original).

Kant identifies a moral disposition in the human race that kindles solidarity with those who act

against tyranny. The moral disposition overrides one's better judgment, and as such, it is an

emotional response to revolt that is aligned with the pursuit of justice. In his final statement on

the Iranian Revolution, Foucault demonstrated just such an emotional inclination. He wrote that

the revolution, in itself, does not guarantee positive results, and that outsiders have no obligation

to stand in solidarity with the Iranians, but that for himself, the voices of the Iranians deserved to

be heard. He wrote, "It is enough that they exist and that they have against them all that strives to

silence them, to make it meaningful to listen to them and to search for what they want to say" (in

Afary and Anderson 2005: 266).

Foucault's dissatisfaction with Marxism and his condemnation of Communist regimes, combined with his praise for the Iranians who risked their lives to bring down the despotic shah, transfigure his engagement with the Iranian Revolution into a manifestation of a humanistic impulse, in step with the best tradition of Western liberalism. The defensive explanation suggests that Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution should not be interpreted as the product of a positive-Orientalism that fetishized premodern political and social arrangements. Rather, for Foucault, it was Marxism that was retrograde; preordaining the uprising in Iran to an outcome denies the Iranians agency and a sense of self-determination. As such, Foucault sought Iran because he was searching for expressions of human liberty against the totalizing discourse of historical and philosophical determinism. When he arrived in Tehran, he found himself predisposed—as a human being—to support the courage of the Iranians who wanted to absolve themselves from the tyranny of the shah. Such an argument, however tacit, serves to refute claims (see Fraser 1985; Lukes 2005 [1974]) that Foucault's oeuvre was intrinsically nihilistic, and did not contain room for the possibility of resistance to state power.

LIMITATIONS

Certainly, as Foucault's defenders suggest, he resented teleological conceptions of revolutionary action, and yet, there is much more to this picture: Foucault called into question the very concept of "the revolution." Rarely did he refer to the disturbances in Iran as "revolution," and he argued that the language of "the revolution" dismissed the complexity and irreducibility of revolt, that for two centuries, the age of revolution, "acclimat[ed] uprisings within a rational and controllable history" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 264). Moreover, he noted that that he did not seek Iran for its "deep reasons," and not for a profound claim to truth. Foucault wanted to preserve the

intangibility of the experience in Iran without reference to history or politics, and possibly even to language. For Foucault, Iranians were "a real force, one that could raise a people not only against the monarch and his police, but against an entire regime, an entire way of life, an entire world" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 239).

I believe it is questionable as to whether Foucault's interpretation of the Iranian Revolution was a product of his seeking it out because the Iranians were "reviv[ing] the spirit of revolution" (2012: 285) as Ghamari-Tabrizi suggests, or, as Paras claims, because "[the Iranian Revolution] was not Marxist" (2006: 97). No doubt, Foucault was interested in the theme of "the revolution" but, as I explain in the forthcoming portion of this study, his interest in "the revolution" was but a dimension of an intellectual identity that sought to capture those moments that interrupted historical understandings of revolutionary action. Moreover, the defensive position attributes to Foucault a coherence—a sense of understanding Iranian culture and history—that he did not possess. This claim is supported by the numerous errors and mistakes found in the Iran writings.

For instance, Foucault announced that in Iran, the notion of Islamic government was not conceived as "a political regime in which the clerics would have a role of supervision or control" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 206) and he took pleasure in describing the "personal and intense attachment" that the Iranians felt for Khomeini, who, as Foucault described him "*is not a politician*," along with the prediction that "there will not be a Khomeini party; there will not be a Khomeini government" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 222 emphasis in original).

We know, from his lectures in the early 1970s, that Khomeini had always conceived of Islamic government as a religious monarchy. He wrote that one jurist "will possess the same authority as the Most Noble Messenger (upon whom be peace and blessings) in the

administration of society, and it will be the duty of all people to obey him" (in Kurzman 2004: 65). Evading these comments, as Foucault's defenders do, is to attribute Foucault with a cultural and historical knowledge that he did not possess; one that is artificial and highly problematic.

Ghamari-Tabrizi, for instance, praises Foucault for his reading of the French Orientalists Corbin and Massignon, and he enthusiastically announced: "the religion that animated [Foucault's] writings on the Iranian Revolution was not *spoken* by the mullahs or articulated by any other exponent of the divine text" arguing instead that Foucault's conception of Islam was a non-Orientalist spirituality emanating from the "hermeneutics of the subject" (2012: 282 emphasis in original).

The real reason for the mullahs' reticence is that Corbin and Massignon's conception of Islam—and therefore Foucault's—was a non-representational fantasy (see Leezenberg 2004: 99 for more on Foucault's non-representational Islam). In a remarkable inversion, Corbin and Massignon argued that Sufism, which is practiced by less than ten percent of Muslims, delivered a softer, more spiritual, "access to the true heart of Islam," as opposed to the institutional/hierarchical and materialistic Sunni and Shi'ite orthodoxy (practiced by ninety-percent of Muslims) (Laude 2010: 29).

The troubling consequence of such a position is that it relegates the majority of Muslims—and therefore Iranians—as not representative of the true essence of Islam. As such, it should be asked if Foucault's rendering of Iranian spirituality, as that which "distinguishes between what is mere external obedience to the code and what is the profound spiritual life," is really so valid? More likely, Foucault inscribed his own interpretation of Islam on the Iranian events, one that was not spoken by the mullahs because it was nowhere to be found.

The idea is not to reproach Foucault for his mistakes, but rather to underline his ignorance of significant cultural matters. In avoiding such difficulties, Foucault's defenders, much like his critics, privilege certain writings over others in order for their vision of Foucault to conform to their understanding of the Iranian events.

An Alternative

In this portion of the study I want to offer an alternative approach to understanding Foucault's engagement with the Iranian Revolution. Grounded in the sociology of knowledge, and specifically in the sociology ideas, I intend to demonstrate that Foucault, over the period of 1967-1978, developed a particular intellectual identity that found him infatuated with the sociopolitical role of knowledge and knowledge-making.

During this period, his attention shifted to contemporary political struggles, and often, he questioned and speculated as to the desirability of the theme of "the revolution." He expressed dissatisfaction with intellectuals who espoused great visions of how we ought to live in the future at the expense of forgetting or disregarding the present moment.

I put forward an argument that shows how the ideas and opinions Foucault developed and held over this period were the product of personal experience with witnessing popular unrest in Tunisia and in Paris, his sexual orientation, and with his brief engagement with Marxism. Often, these experiences and transformations were highlighted in moments where Foucault spoke of how he envisioned himself as an intellectual. Using Neil Gross's (2008) theory of intellectual self-concept, I demonstrate that external forces—Foucault's social milieu—were imprinted on the narration of his intellectual self-concept, and that this narration set Foucault up for his attraction to and for his stances on the Iranian Revolution.

The idea here is not to argue that I have a better interpretation for the Iran writings than the others for which we have surveyed, but rather to offer an alternative explanation that gives insight into the ways in which intellectual output is socially situated. There is also the matter of evidence. Foucault was extensively interviewed throughout his career in Paris, and often, he clearly explained how he envisioned himself and the role of the work he was engaged in. One of the central weaknesses, I think, of *all* of the available explanations and interpretations of the reports, is that an analysis of these statements is not to be found. Often, there are good reasons for the omission of certain pieces of textual evidence in the conducting of research; normally this corresponds to practical matters of time and space. However, Foucault's reflections on the role of intellectuals in society are not marginal, peripheral, or tangential to the matter of the Iranian Revolution: they are fundamental. A single example can serve my point.

Afary and Anderson dedicate the last chapter of their book to arguing that intellectuals such as Foucault, Chomsky, and Zinn, through their sympathies for the Middle East, bear a certain amount of responsibility for the proliferation of Islamism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the case of Foucault, Afary and Anderson argue that his interaction with Khomeini in Paris, and his support for the Iranians, legitimized the brutal Islamic regime that was put into place after the removal of the shah (see 2005: 163-177). The assumption of this argument holds that public intellectuals have a moral responsibility to the publics that they serve or are engaged in. However, nowhere in their text do they give the reader a glimpse into how Foucault understood the role of the intellectual, rather, they construct their argument through what they perceive to be a tendency in his oeuvre. This is an astonishing omission. It is remarkable, I think, because their argument could only be greatly enriched through an analysis of these statements.

For example, as we will see, Foucault resented intellectuals who had a future vision for society in the name of universal conceptions of justice and freedom, preferring instead, those who were obsessively attentive to the present. Afary and Anderson's argument could only benefit from making the point that if intellectuals do not *critically* speculate as to the future implications of social action they are then in great danger of not seeing events for what they truly are. This is what happened in Iran, and it is also what happened to Chomsky in Cambodia. Foucault's unwillingness to speculate, in a critical fashion, on the social implications of Islam, and of a charismatic figure like Khomeini, led to his not seeing the potential detrimental impact of this new regime.

Thus, what I hope to offer in this portion of the study, aside from the sociological significance, is a clearer picture of how Foucault understood himself as an intellectual and how this intellectual self-concept imprinted itself on his interpretation of the Iranian texts. In understanding this dimension of Foucault's life, I believe that we are in a better position to evaluate the Iran writings on a normative basis.

In order to complete the tasks I have outlined for this portion of the paper, first I must take a brief detour into the sociology of knowledge, and specifically Gross's theory of intellectual self-concept. Next, I situate the Iran writings within the broader context of transformation in Foucault's thought during the late 1960s and into the 1970s, while identifying key components of Foucault's intellectual self-concept. Finally, I demonstrate how this self-concept motivated his encounter with the Iranian Revolution and colored his interpretations of the events on the ground.

INTELLECTUALS, KNOWLEDGE, AND SELF-CONCEPT

The early study of intellectuals and knowledge production had, as its area of concern, the structural and ideological functions of capitalism's emergence and reproduction. For instance, Marx, in *The German Ideology*, identified the "means of mental production," that is, the capacity and opportunity to produce ideational products, as being bound to "the ruling material force of society" (1978: 172). Marx conceptualized the role of the intellectual as a cryptographer of sorts; the intellectual, and her ideational products, served to justify and obscure the true nature of economic relations within capitalism, thereby operating as a means of social control for the bourgeoisie order of things.

Gross (2008) notes that Marx's and others' (see Durkheim 1974; Mills 1964; Mannheim 1936; Parsons 1951; Marcuse 1964) broad formulation of the relationship between knowledge and society focused on large, macro level factors that ordered and constituted entire societies without accounting for the specific institutions, operations, and social factors that could explain the specificity of the content of intellectuals' output and the variation of these ideas over the life-course (see also Swidler and Arditi 1994; Camic and Gross 2008). Moreover, when specific intellectuals had been isolated for study, the traditional approach was to concentrate on their "world-views and politics" (Swidler and Arditi 1994: 306) such as Martin Heidegger's relationship with the Nazi Party, for instance.

The weakness of the structural and ideological approach to the study of intellectuals and knowledge lies not in the inaccuracy of its insights. Rather, the limitations of this macro-social level of analysis stem from the assumption that the specific content of intellectuals' ideas are psychologically innate, as though intellectuals' nature is akin to that of the Kantian genius, who are emancipated from the Platonic cave, endowed with a preternatural connection to the "truth" and a special ability to express it. A representative example of such a view is Edward Shil's

declaration that intellectuals are those "with an unusual sensitivity to the sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of their universe and the rules which govern society" (1958: xx; see also Camic and Gross 2008: 241). Coming dangerously close to an objective "standpoint theory" of the intellectual, such a position is entirely unsociological. For it ignores the fundamental insight of sociology: all actors are inscribed within the social, and capacity and merit are realized and inculcated within mechanisms of socialization, interaction, and life-chances.

With the advancement and increasing sophistication of social theory since World War II, the sociologist of ideas, Neil Gross (2008), theorizes that the explanatory gap left by the traditional form of sociological investigation into intellectuals and ideation can now be repaired. Gross argues that we now have the tools to account for the specificity of an intellectual's output, the content of her ideas, and the social processes by which these ideas come to vary and change over time (see Camic and Gross 2008 for an overview of "the new sociology of ideas").

As a point of departure, Gross focuses on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Randall Collins, who both argued that the intellectual field, like all social arenas, is a site of strategic action where actors vie for status and prestige (Gross 2008; Bourdieu 1990; Collins 2004). Focusing their attention on philosophers, Bourdieu and Collins argued that philosophers' ideational undertakings, and the value bestowed to their research questions, are largely organized around how much status, prestige, and recognition a particular line of inquiry is thought to garner within a disciplinary community.

As Swartz (1997) points out, for Bourdieu, "theories, methods, and concepts are therefore weapons of struggle for intellectual recognition. Their selection, whether fully conscious or not, are governed by the search for distinction" (1997: 228). Using a Durkheimian/Goffmanian

perspective, Collins argued that actors are driven to experience high levels of positive social

solidarity, the storage of which he rendered as "emotional energy" (Collins 2004 in Gross 2008:

248). Under Collins's formulation, Gross explains that intellectuals "seek to maximize their

levels of emotional energy…this means coming up with ideas that will win the attention of other

thinkers and secure for oneself a place in the intellectual elite" (2008: 249).

Therefore, for Bourdieu and Collins, the specific content of intellectuals' ideas and

undertakings, and the success or failure of these endeavors, ought to be attributed to their

capacity to wield symbolic power, to store large quantities of emotional energy, and to seek out

and maintain high-status relationships, in the attainment of cultural capital in an economy of

ideas.[4]

Gross's contribution to this approach, "the theory of intellectuals' self-concept," is

"intended to be complementary to the theories of Bourdieu, [and] Collins" by inserting insights

from social psychology and narrative theory, thereby bridging the meso/micro divide (2008:

264). Gross argues that intellectuals, like all actors, have and maintain a sense of self-

understanding, and this sense of self does not naturally correspond to the field-analytic

framework envisioned by Bourdieu and Collins. This personal self-understanding is not mutually

exclusive to one's identity as an intellectual however; self-understandings cross over,

contaminate, and influence what Gross calls "intellectual selfhood" (2008: 263). Intellectuals are

individuals first, and individuals have particular preferences, tastes, and personal beliefs about

who they are that do not necessarily or overtly have a direct relationship to strategic action

within an intellectual field, but nevertheless contain a powerful influence over the production of

one's thoughts and the attraction to particular ideas and lines of inquiry over the life-course.

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[4] For Bourdieu, in essence, we are dealing with a crypto-Marxism, because cultural capital is
destined for conversion into economic capital (see Swartz 1997).

Therefore, for Gross, a complete theory of intellectuals' ideas "must recognize that individuals have selves that form a crucial point of departure for their interpretations of situations, the formation of their intentions, and the eventual emergence of their lines of action" (2008: 263).

Essentially, Gross reduces the potentially deterministic framework of Bourdieu and Collins by building room for micro-social agency and self-determination within an intellectual's life-course. He rejects a totalizing, instrumentalist account of knowledge making among intellectuals, in place of a theory wherein "cognitive and affective processes in which actors' conceptualizations of themselves and their lives figure prominently" (2008: 261). To be sure, intellectuals do act in an instrumental fashion within a field of cultural production, however, he notes that "instrumental action…just like every other form of social action, is mediated by interpretations of the action environment colored by actors' past experiences and self-understandings" (2008: 261).

Drawing on elements of narrative research, namely, the idea that individuals create and maintain identity through the construction and enunciation of stories that weave together contingent and disparate elements of experience into a coherent and ordered narrative, drawing on cultural and historical symbols to create a unified and recognizable sense of self (see Holstein and Gubrium 2012; Gubrium and Holstein 2009; Reissman 2008) Gross defines his theory of intellectuals' self-concept as the following:

> Thinkers tell stories to themselves and others about who they are as intellectuals. They are then strongly motivated to do intellectual work that will, inter alia, help to express and bring together the disparate elements of these stories. Everything else being equal, they will gravitate toward ideas that make this kind of synthesis possible. (Gross 2008: 272)

The mechanism that motivates the alignment of self-narration with knowledge making is what Gross identifies as "self-concept" coherence (2008: 272). Building on Erikson's (1968) claim that individuals strive to unite the disparate elements of their identities to maintain ego

coherence, Gross argues that intellectuals seek to maintain a similar sense of coherence "where one's intellectual output is seen as an essential feature of oneself" (2008: 272). In this way, a thinker's intellectual output, and its fluctuation and transformation over time, is a reflection of broader changes in ones engagement in other fields of experience.

In the following portions of this paper, I intend to operationalize Gross's theory of intellectual self-concept in light of Foucault's reportages during the Iranian Revolution. I first contextualize the Iran writings within larger changes and developments in Foucault's career. Then, I identify moments of intellectual self-narration and connect these elements to complimentary components of his oeuvre. Finally, I demonstrate the relationship between Foucault's intellectual self-concept and the specific content of the Iran writings.

TRANSFORMATION

The years from 1967-1972 were a time of intellectual transformation for Foucault. Unrest in Tunisia, where he had been working, and in Paris, solidified his growing interest in the sociopolitical role of knowledge and knowledge-making. This period would find Foucault, for a short time, embracing Marxism and then quickly abandoning it. More permanently, he underwent a major methodological shift from the archaeological approach to a Nietzschean genealogical method. Tracing such transformations highlights how Foucault's intellectual choices reveal a larger pattern of his growing social and political commitment to historical transformation, social control, and responsibility in the practice of knowledge-making. Moreover, in tracing his intellectual choices and transformations, which often went announced in his speech-acts' adumbration of his intellectual self-concept, we uncover a certain momentum that drove Foucault toward the Iranian Revolution.

Returning to Paris from Tunisia, where he wrote *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1967-68, and where he witnessed the anti-government student revolts; Foucault became the director of the philosophy department of the new Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes in January of 1969. The institution was created as a response to the anti-capitalist May 1968 student protests that sought to liberate French society from traditional institutions, among other things. The idea was to build a highly interdisciplinary educational facility that brought together thinkers from different disciplines with an emphasis on social issues and Foucault was tasked with building an entire philosophy department from the ground up.

Perhaps due to his consistent role as an outsider to academia, and to his growing awareness of the political function of the university system, Foucault recruited a group of far left-leaning, Marxist Maoist philosophers such as Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, and Henry Weber into the ranks of the Vincennes. Further, Foucault's longtime partner, Daniel Defert, joined the Maoist group, Gauche Prolétarienne, thereby placing Foucault in close proximity with what Paras identifies as "one of the most extreme leftist groups then in existence" (2006: 60).

Marxism provided Foucault with a vocabulary to express his growing concern with the sociopolitical role of knowledge and knowledge-making. The language and rhetoric of Marxism, were his first baby steps, as it were, into the more sophisticated analysis of modern technologies of social control found in his major texts of the middle and later 1970s. During this period, Foucault reinterpreted his prior studies within the paradigm of Marxism. For instance, he argued that the insane were locked away, not because the medicalization of madness, as argued in *Madness and Civilization*, but because "capitalist industrial society could not tolerate the existence of groups of vagabonds" (in Paras 2006: 61). Additionally, in post-1968 France, the

rhetoric of Marxism was a shared vocabulary wherein Foucault and other members of the French left could speak and act together on matters of social protest.

However, his engagement with Marxism did not last long. By 1972, Foucault's Marxist rhetoric began to retreat in favor of a more pervasive conception of knowledge, one that was as socially situated as the Marxist configuration but did not locate knowledge-making as being possessed by any one single party. Connected with this shift, between 1969 and 1972, Foucault evinced skepticism toward his archaeological method in the study of historical systems and ultimately abandoned it in favor of a genealogical approach. In understanding this methodological shift, we can see that even something as abstract and as conceptual as method was intimately tied to Foucault's concerns in regards to the social implications of knowledge-making.

In the archaeological method, knowledge, and clusters of knowledge, known as discursive formations, are treated as autonomous and exterior to the parties that wield them. The origins of these formations are secondary in importance to discourses that are excluded as illegitimate, i.e., the knowledge of the insane, the pervert, the deviant. In this approach, the archaeologist sets aside the material, political, and social milieu of a particular era and instead traces and documents how discursive systems influence, contaminate, and refine each other.

Genealogy, in contrast, analyzes how knowledge is deployed on the whole of the social body as well as the historical conditions through which certain forms of knowledge become legitimized as "the truth." Moreover, the genealogical approach investigates the social desire to possess knowledge within any given epoch—*the will to knowledge,* as Foucault put it—which is also influenced by social and political conditions.

Therefore, in the archaeological approach, knowledge and discursive formations are treated as not possessed by any subject or institution but as independent enunciations of a historical period, whereas the genealogical approach treats knowledge as that which is coterminous and historically contingent on the desires and vulnerabilities of a social body. The archaeologist traces knowledge's exclusionary effects, while the genealogist uncovers its truth-constituting aspects.

In 1971, Foucault left the Vincennes and began his tenure at the Collège de France, a position he would hold until his death in 1984. During his tenure at the Collège, he operationalized his newfound methodological approach in the form of his two most overtly political works, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*. In these works, Foucault was no longer committed to a pure description of discursive formations. Rather, he investigated the social implications of knowledge-making and the correlative field of power that was exercised on the human body and population as a whole.

Toward the end of his life, Foucault reflected that "[e]ach of my works is part of my biography. For one or another reason I had the occasion to feel and live those things" (1988: 11). His publications in the 1970s reflect his political commitments and social status within French society. For example, before he wrote *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault, with Defert, founded the Group for Information on Prisons to raise public awareness about the state of France's penal institutions. In addition, before describing the "power-knowledge-pleasure" nexus, in *The History of Sexuality*, that produced deviant and legitimate sexualities, he was subjected to the nexus's operations; because of his homosexuality, he had been institutionalized and made the subject of psychiatric study while in his teens (see Miller 1994).

Foucault transformed into a politically engaged public intellectual during the 1970s. His theoretical and methodological reorientation reveals his growing concern over matters of political and social justice, if not overtly, then as a subtextual implication of his writings. The role of the intellectual then—the way he understood himself and his work—was to be aware of the ways in which knowledge could be deployed against the social body and therefore to resist becoming an instrument of power. Hence, Foucault's dissatisfaction with Marxism was not simply due to its analytical inadequacies, but because of the dark, contemporary manifestations and deployments of Marxism as a social vision. To put more flesh on these assertions, and to further illuminate the self-concept that pushed him toward the Iranian Revolution, Foucault's most salient statements on the role of intellectuals from 1972 onward will lead the way.

FOUCAULT'S INTELLECTUAL SELF-CONCEPT

In 1972, during a conversation with Gilles Deleuze, Foucault drew a distinction between two different historico-political roles of the intellectual. The first, emerging after the revolutions of 1848, was the intellectual who "spoke the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth" (1996 [1972]: 75). The second was what Foucault identified as the current obligation of the intellectual, who is aware of his position within mechanisms of social control and therefore to "struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge,' 'truth,' 'consciousness,' and 'discourse'" (1996 [1972]: 75).

Two years after his conversation with Deleuze, Foucault elaborated and refined his demarcation of the intellectual. He identified the former as the "universal" intellectual and the latter struggle as belonging to the "specific" intellectual (Foucault 1984a [1974]: 68). The

"universal" intellectual, Foucault explained, was derived from a certain valorization of a nineteenth century juridical icon: "the man of justice, the man of law, who counterposes to power, despotism, and the abuses and arrogance of wealth, the universality of justice and the equity of an ideal law" (1984a [1974]: 70). This "spokesman of the universal," as Foucault identified him, was privileged with the right to speak on behalf of "truth and justice" and therefore "to be an intellectual meant something like being the consciousness/conscience of us all" (1984a [1974]: 67). The universal element of this configuration was derived from the idea that in one man, the voices of us all can be heard, and within one man "all can recognize themselves" (1984a [1974]: 70). Foucault pointed to World War II as the point of transition from the "universal" to the "specific" intellectual.

The twentieth century saw the beginning of the politicization of the intellectual, he was less idealistic, and more quotidian, the "specific" intellectual worked at "precise points" in which his social locations and identifications became more relevant and integrated with his intellectual output. One's position within an academic subfield, status within a laboratory, membership in a family unit, even sexual orientation, along with universities' privileged point as an intersection and hierarchal mediator of knowledge, found the intellectual engaged in a materialistic struggle and confronted by "the same adversary as the proletariat, namely, the multinational corporations, the judicial and police apparatuses, the property speculators, etc." (1984a [1974]: 68).

These institutions operated as a mechanism of constraint on intellectuals, and in resistance to this, intellectuals became increasingly politicized as they sought autonomy from the university and other institutions. Due to the specialization of their knowledge, and their local struggles with social institutions and norms, intellectuals deployed their knowledge and "intervene[d] in contemporary political struggles" as a means of exercising power and which had

the correlative effect of transforming local discourse into scientific truth (1984a [1974]: 68).

Foucault identified the "post-Darwinian evolutionists'" relationship with socialism and

Oppenheimer's relationship with the United States' government as being the signification of this

historical change, and thus, the intellectual was

> no longer he who bears the values of all, opposes the unjust sovereign or his ministers, and makes his cry resound even beyond the grave. It is, rather, he who, along with a handful of others, has at his disposal, whether in the service of the state or against it, powers which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life. He is no longer the rhapsodist of the eternal, but the strategist of life and death. (Foucault 1984a [1974]: 71)

There is a temporal distinction, in terms of the scale and target of intellectual action, between the

universal and the specific intellectual. The universal intellectual has, as a vision for his action,

the long-term transformation of humankind in terms of the attainment of utopia through the

alignment of men's personal will with that of universal categories. The specific intellectual, on

the other hand, is concerned with the present moment; in his local struggle to control the use of

his expert knowledge, his temporal focus is situated on the right now. Both the universal and the

specific intellectual possess great power; the specific intellectual, as Foucault mentioned, has the

power over life and death, but more concerning, the universal intellectual has the power to

transform the course of history and to alter men's subjectivities.

Because of the attractive and recognizable nature of universal categories, such as

freedom, justice, and truth, to the masses, the universal intellectual has the power to dictate a

program for the future in the attainment of these goals. For Foucault, such projects have always

ended in disaster because "even with the best intentions, those programs become a tool, an

instrument of oppression. Rousseau, a lover of freedom, was used in the French Revolution to

build up a model of social oppression. Marx would be horrified by Stalinism and Leninism"

(1988: 10).

Here, Foucault illuminated a principal element of his intellectual self-concept: *the anti-prophetic philosopher*. Repeatedly, over the course of the 1970s, Foucault warned of the dangers and irresponsibility of dictating or forecasting the future, of announcing a vision for society, and of adumbrating how people ought to live. With respect to Marxism and socialism, Foucault had good reason to feel worried: by the mid-1970s the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, and Cambodia had become despotic regimes that manipulated the universalistic concepts of freedom, human nature, and justice in the attainment of communism. These ends were catalyzed by Marxist intellectuals' prophetic vision for the world in what they believed would be the actualization of universal categories (see Foucault 1999 [1978]: 114).

Foucault called into question not only the Marxist tradition, but all forms of intellectual prognostication that would distract from the present moment, as well. When, in 1978—shortly before the events in Iran—a Japanese monk asked Foucault "how do you think Japan should be in the future?" he responded

> My answer is simple. I think the role of the intellectual, in reality, does not consist in playing prophets or legislators. For two thousand years, philosophers have always spoken of what we must do. But that's always translated itself into a tragic end. What's important, is that philosophers speak of what is going on at the present, and not of what might happen. (Foucault 1999 [1978]: 114)

Here, an important element of Foucault's intellectual self-concept fused with that of the anti-prophetic philosopher: *the philosopher of the present*. As far back as 1967 and up until his last published piece, *What is Enlightenment?*, written shortly before his death in 1984, Foucault maintained that a critique of the present was his definitive task as an intellectual (see Foucault 1984a). The functioning of the prophetic intellectual carried with it the risk of abandoning this narrow fixation in favor of a future oriented purview, one that, as history has demonstrated, ends in disaster.

Being "a historian of the present," as Foucault identified himself in 1977, ensured the best chances of "extracting oneself from [the] mechanisms" that could render his knowledge as an instrument of power (1996 [1977]: 222). Moreover, he argued that philosophy's principal question was "[w]hat is happening right now, and what are we, we who are perhaps nothing more than what is happening at this moment" (1996 [1977]: 222). Thus, for Foucault, being a philosopher of the present was both an ethical injunction to maintain responsibility in knowledge-making practices, as well as an imperative to resist a certain kind of scientific arrogance that was dismissive of current events in the name of future progress.

In addition, one final and essential component of Foucault's intellectual self-concept drove him toward the events in Iran. In the years between 1976 and 1978, Foucault became increasingly occupied with the concept and theme of the revolution within Western history. During an interview in 1977, he declared: "the return of the revolution—that is surely our problem…the very desirability of the revolution is the problem of today" (1977: 223; see also 1999 [1978]: 113). When asked by an interviewer, "[d]o you want revolution?" Foucault responded with an ambiguous: "I have no answer" (1977: 223).

Initially, it might appear as though Foucault's interest in the notion of "the revolution," with its baggage from the past and its future orientation, runs counter to his role as an anti-prophetic philosopher of the present. However, keeping in mind his interest in "specific" and "universal" categories, and noting that Foucault was the philosopher of discontinuity and historical rupture, the concept of "the revolution" signified two distinct entities that were in constant tension with each other.

There is "the revolution" as the drive toward universal concepts such as freedom and justice that hung its shadow over Europe since 1789 and to which the Marxists appropriated in

their push toward communism (see Foucault 1999 [1978]: 114). However, this philosopher of the marginal, the obscure, and the forgotten, had a latent conception of local and specific revolutions, as well.

In 1976, Foucault wrote that among the many tasks of criticism, one involved describing the "*insurrection of subjugated knowledges*" (1976: 81 emphasis in original). These "low-ranking knowledges," which Foucault ascribed to delinquents, psychiatric patients, ill persons, and disqualified others, have a "particular, local, [and] regional" character that erupt during unpredictable moments in history and which contains a force and "harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it" (1976: 82). These local and subjugated knowledges do not strive for universals, but rather, announce themselves—make themselves known—against the dominant truths and quickly sink below the surface once again. For Foucault, these local knowledges opposed the totalizing nature of scientific discourse and "the effects of centralising powers which are linked to the institution[s]" within modern society (1976: 84).

Therefore, for Foucault, "the revolution" was of primary interest insofar as it signified the tension between local knowledges and worldwide networks of power; for the task of the genealogist was to "wage its struggle" against the effects of the power of discourses "that are considered to be scientific" (1976: 84). In this way, the notion of "the revolution" is complimentary to Foucault's emphases on being anti-prophetic and attentive to the present.

Thus, in Foucault's comment that he had no answer as to whether he desired the revolution, his response fell in line with his self-concept as an intellectual because "want" of revolution was akin to evading the present moment in favor of a speculative future event. To the extent that "the revolution" was the essential philosophical and political question of the present, as Foucault claimed, it was because past revolutionary projects had ended in disaster, and thus,

the West was currently experiencing a "crisis" which was "the concept of revolution" (1999 [1978]: 114).

Within this paradigmatic shift, Foucault conceived of his role as that of one who would not contribute to speculation on what could replace or improve "the revolution" as the motor for historical transformation and social change. Rather, he saw himself as so fixated on the present condition that, if "the revolution" were to occur, he would be in a unique position to document the great struggle of the universal against the particular. He stated in 1977, "Intellectuals…are renouncing their old prophetic function," and added:

> I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present; who, in passing, contributes the raising of the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth it, and what kind (I mean what kind of revolution and what effort), it being understood that they alone who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about can answer the question. (Foucault 1977: 225)

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

In September of 1978, one year after Foucault announced his "dream of the intellectual destroyer," the Iranian Revolution began. How could he resist it? His intellectual self-concept, that of the anti-prophetic philosopher of the present who was preoccupied with the theme of the revolution, contained a certain momentum that the Iranian Revolution took hold of. He cancelled his plans to document Jimmy Carter's America for the Italian newspaper, *Corriere della sera*, and boarded a plane for Tehran shortly after the Black Friday Massacre at Zhaleh Square, which was the first major confrontation between the Iranian people and the military of the shah. What at first appears to be a perplexing set of documents produced by a philosopher who often questioned notions of human freedom, individuality, and progress are rendered comprehensible through understanding the close relationship between Foucault's biography, intellectual choices,

and the narration of his intellectual self-concept. As discussed earlier, the narrative component of intellectual identity strongly motivates actors to synthesize their speech-acts with their intellectual output. Foucault was not immune to this; his interpretations of the events in Iran—even the language he used to describe the events and his role within it—were colored and shaped by the particular intellectual identity that he had narrated over the course of the 1970s.

As a philosopher of the present, Foucault noted that he sought Iran because "[t]here are more ideas on earth than intellectuals can imagine" and therefore "[w]e have to be there for the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force" (in Eribon 1991: 282). As one who, "in the inertias and constraints of the present"—the immanent momentum of the unknowable now—"doesn't know exactly where he is heading or what he'll think tomorrow" the Iranian Revolution afforded Foucault the opportunity to situate himself outside of the archive, and as a journalist, he was subject to the contingencies of the right now. He expressed resentment to those who were infatuated with predicting the outcome of the Iranian events, for such an orientation ignored the singularity of the Iranian moment. From Tehran he wrote:

> I cannot write the history of the future, and I am also rather clumsy at foreseeing the past. However, I would like to try to grasp *what is happening right now*, because these days nothing is finished, and the dice are still being rolled. (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 220 emphasis in original)

Foucault's preoccupation with the theme of the revolution came to the fore in Iran. The protest movement's use of religious themes and infrastructure to combat a modernized military force backed by the world's greatest superpowers was, for him, an instance of insurrection of local and subjugated knowledges.

Moreover, the Iranian Revolution provided Foucault with an answer to the question of whether the revolution was desirable: it was not, at least not in the normally understood way. The universalistic rhetoric of "the revolution," was, in Foucault's mind, saddled with the baggage of

revolutions past. Attempts to contain the uprising in Iran within the language of "the revolution"

dismissed the singularity of the protest movement and judged its results around a normative

construction of what revolution ought to look like. In his last statement on the Iranian

Revolution, Foucault wrote:

> The age of revolution has constituted a gigantic effort to acclimate uprisings within a rational and controllable history. "Revolution" gave these uprisings a legitimacy, sorted out their good and bad forms, and defined their laws of development. For uprisings, it established preliminary conditions, objectives, and ways of bringing them to an end. (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 264).

What Foucault witnessed in Iran, interpreted through the lens of local and subjugated

knowledges, was nothing other than the ur-confrontation of disqualified others against a terrible

planetary network of power:

> It is the insurrection of men with bare hands who want to lift the fearful weight, the weight of the entire world order that bears down on each of us, but more specifically on them, these oil workers and peasants at the frontiers of empires. It is perhaps the first great insurrection against global systems, the form of revolt that is the most modern and the most insane. (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 222)

Moreover, because Foucault argued that it was the task of the genealogist to document such

confrontations (see 1976: 84), he felt it necessary to capture the voices of the Iranian people. He

set aside a judgment of the validity of these voices because "[i]t is enough that they exist and that

they have against them all that strives to silence them, to make it meaningful to listen to them

and to search for what they want to say" (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 266). Thus, he

understood the Iranian events within the context of the theoretical devices he had already

developed, and therefore, he created a sense of biographical coherence through the synthesis of

his intellectual self-concept with his intellectual output.

  As an anti-prophetic philosopher, Foucault's Iran writings are marked by deep flaws and

inconsistencies concerning his resentment of the prophetic function of intellectuals. Surely, he

had an emotional commitment and vision for the result of the Iranian Revolution. He declared—

incorrectly—that Iran would not end up with a dictatorial Islamic government, that Khomeini

would not be its leader, and that the revolution would result in a utopian Islamic government that would return equality and fidelity to all sectors of Iranian society (see Afary and Anderson 2005: 206). As other commentators have pointed out, these statements stem from Foucault's ignorance on matters of Iranian history and Islamic culture, along with a naïve positive-Orientalism that obscured the reality of the events on the ground. There is, however, an aspect of the anti-prophetic intellectual that is salient in the Iran writings.

In his final reportage covering the Iranian Revolution, published in May of 1979, Foucault wrote that the Parisian intelligentsia had pressured him to renounce his earlier Iran writings and condemn the Revolution for its detrimental outcome. In the final paragraph of this article, he invoked his intellectual self-concept as an explanation for his comments on Iran and a means of avoiding apologizing for them. He wrote, "[i]f I were asked how I conceive of what I do," he would explain that "the strategist" invokes universals with respect to understanding the outcome of the Iranian events. In this light, the strategist determines that the Iranian Revolution failed because it resulted in a retrograde, Islamist regime that fettered human freedom and justice. Foucault understood himself as antithetical to the strategist:

> My ethics are "antistrategic." One must be respectful when a singularity arises and intransigent as soon as the state violates universals. It is a simple choice, but hard work: One needs to watch, a bit underneath history, for what breaks and agitates it, and keep watch, a bit behind politics, over what must unconditionally limit it. After all, this is my work. I am neither the first nor the only one to do it, but I chose it. (Afary and Anderson 2005: 267)

For Foucault, being an anti-prophetic philosopher during the extraordinary events in Iran meant avoiding a value judgment of the merits of its outcome, perhaps leaving this task to the strategist, and instead, being attentive to the fact that such an exceptional movement existed in the first place. The Iranian Revolution was worthwhile insofar as it was an instance of a massive upheaval against the weight of the world: "for what breaks it and agitates it."

Of course, the great irony of the Iranian Revolution was that the local instruments of struggle—Islam and its infrastructure—became a means of domination for those who thought it was their light of hope, a new global level of subjectivication that was perhaps more severe than that of the shah's fell upon Iran.

CONCLUSION

Of the voluminous literature that exists on nearly every facet of Foucault's career, his Iranian episode constitutes but a nine-month blip that most scholars have dismissed or forgotten. The extant literature, aside from the neutral-interpretive analyses, approaches the study of the *reportages* from a normative register that constructs and explains the Iran writings from a critical or defensive orientation. Foucault's critics argue that an infantile post-modernism, which sought refuge or remedy for the ills of the West, drove him to the Iranian Revolution. Attempting to absolve Foucault from wrongdoing, his defenders portray the Iranian episode as evidence of a burgeoning humanism and a turn to liberalism in his thought, which ought to be celebrated.

This paper set aside such an infatuation in favor of contributing a richer understanding of why intellectuals make the choices that they do. Grounded in the sociology of knowledge, and specifically in the new sociology of ideas, this paper theorizes that Foucault constructed a particular intellectual identity during the 1970s that drove him toward the Iranian Revolution, and once there, colored his interpretation of the events on the ground. Such an explanation is not meant to be exhaustive, and as I pointed out, it conflicts at times with Foucault's comments and interpretations of the protest movement. Nevertheless, this approach to theorizing Foucault's Iran encounter provides insight into how his social context, personal commitments, and self-concept narration contributed to the content of the ideas found in the *reportages*.

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