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Foucault's Adventure in Iran and His Last "Turn"

Revolt: Foucault and Jesi

Michel Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: an encounter that drew a great deal of criticism from the very beginning, as it could be considered the most controversial political adventure of his life. To many of those who had already read works such as *The Order of Things* (1966) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), reading a series of sympathetic reportages on the Iranian uprising in 1978–79 seemed to be indigestibly repugnant. Among his critics, there are ones who do not miss any opportunity to vehemently excoriate him, pointing out that Foucault's account of the Iranian revolt is but a sheer scandal; sometimes they even go beyond this and mockingly maintain that Foucault's affirmative account of Khomeini's movement as a manifestation of "political spirituality" is a side-effect of his *mind-blowing* LSD trip in Death Valley in 1975. There are also other critical voices that, without being surprised by Foucault's reportages, find a reason for such a sympathetic account in an "anti-Enlightenment" approach he took in the archaeological and genealogical periods of his work. They go so far as to accuse Foucault of being involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, because they think that he, by supporting the Iranian uprising, paved the way for the formation of a religious government that sowed the seeds of "Islamic fundamentalism" in the world. Those severe criticisms made Foucault very upset, as he preferred to say nothing more directly about his account of the Iranian uprising. The last time he talked about it goes back to August 1979, ten months after the victorious revolution, when he was interviewed, unpublished in French until 2013, by a Lebanese journalist, and maintained his previous statements about political spirituality. After that until his death in 1984, he no longer spoke publicly about Iran. Of course, apart from those harsh criticisms, some observations defend Foucault's account of the Iranian uprising and, contrary to those who condemn his sympathy for the uprising as an anti-Enlightenment phenomenon, they maintain that the 1979 Iranian Revolution is a moment of the Enlightenment movement. Here, we are not going to stage another trial against Foucault. We mean the trials, of

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course, which prosecuted Foucault not because of his reportages on the Iranian uprising before the victory of the 1979 Revolution, but because of what happened afterwards. His critics, indeed, without taking into account the *structural* difference between the 1978–79 revolt and the state formation that occurred after the 1979 Revolution, take Foucault's account of the Iranian uprising as an endorsement of what took place in the wake of the revolution under the Islamic Republic. Not only were almost all of Foucault's texts written *before* the victory of the revolution, but even in the very first text that was published just a few months after the revolution, an open letter to the then Prime Minister of Iran, Mehdi Bazargan, he explicitly criticized the violence perpetrated by the government, considering such to be unacceptable and undermining the revolutionary spirit of the Iranian uprising.

Foucault's journeys to Iran (he visited Iran twice: first, from 16 to 24 September 1978; and the second time from 9 to 15 November 1978) took place when he was probably preparing the materials for his well-known lectures on biopolitics in which he was to deal with, in a genealogical way, the various formations of the modern state, including liberal and neo-liberal ones. Thus, there seems to be no direct link between what Foucault's intellectual project was in that particular period of time and his reportages on the Iranian revolt – one can say that in his "historicist" approach to *history* or *the historical*, there was no room for a certain event that interrupted the continuity of historical time itself. However, the fact that Foucault was seriously involved in Iran just weeks before his lectures began is not something that happened all of a sudden and without any precedent. First of all, there was an invitation from the Italian publishing house Rizzoli, which was the publisher of his works in Italian, proposing that he regularly collaborate with *Corriere della Sera* in the form of "points of view". Foucault accepted the invitation and started to launch a *philosophical journalism* project by gathering a group of intellectuals and reporters whose task was to "'witness the birth of ideas and the explosion of their force' everywhere in the world, 'in the struggles one fights for ideas, against them or in favour of them.'"[1] The aim of this project was to "[develop] a new form of journalism. Such 'reportage of ideas' (*reportage des*

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[1]   Michel Foucault, "Les 'reportages' d'idées", in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988 (III 1976-1979)*, D. Defert and F. Ewald (eds.), Paris, Gallimard 2001, p. 707; quoted in L. Cremonesi, O. Irrera, D. Lorenzini, and M. Tazzioli, "Foucault, the Iranian Uprising and the Constitution of a Collective Subjectivity", in L. Cremonesi et al. (eds.), *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, London, Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2016, p. 12.

idées) would affirm the significance of everyday notions. In addition to portraying the opinions, beliefs and thoughts of 'simple people' – and calling attention to 'overlooked' ideas – the project sought to investigate matters in social context and in relation to historical events. The point was to examine how ideas orient and motivate actions."[2] Foucault's account of the Iranian revolt was the first one in this journalistic project to be published. Following his reportages, there were published only two more, one by Alain Finkielkraut on the United States under the Carter administration and the other by André Glucksmann on the boat people – the two members of the group of intellectuals who had gathered under the banner of The New Philosophers (*Les Nouveaux Philosophes*) with whom Foucault had a friendship.

In addition to this journalistic project, one could point to the other conditions that made Foucault's journeys to Iran possible. In his interview with Sassine, Foucault addresses his impression of reading Ernest Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (1954) when news of the mass protests in Iran was broadcast as another reason behind his becoming interested in the Iranian revolt:

> It really left an impression on me because, after all, the book remains rather unknown in France, and it's had relatively little influence. And yet it seems to me that the problem it poses is absolutely crucial. I mean, the problem of that collective perception of history that begins to emerge in Europe during the Middle Ages, most likely. It involves perceiving another world here below, perceiving that the reality of things is not definitively established and set in place, but instead, in the very midst of our time and our history, there can be an opening, a point of light drawing us towards it that gives us access, from this world itself, to a better world. Now, this perception of history is at once a point of departure for the idea of revolution and, on the other hand, an idea with a religious origin. Religious groups and especially dissident religious groups were basically the ones who held this idea—that within the world of the here-below, something like a revolution was possible. Yes, that's it. Well, this theme really interested me because I think it's true historically, even if Ernst Bloch doesn't really demonstrate all that in a very satisfying way, in terms of the methods of academic history. [...] So, well, I was in the middle of reading about all that when the newspapers informed me that

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2   Thomas Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality: A Critique of Political Reason*, trans. E. Butler, London and New York, Verso, 2019, p. 330.

something like an uprising was taking place in Iran. [...] So, it seemed to me that there was a relationship between what I was reading and what was taking place. And I wanted to go and see. And I really went to see it as an example, a test of what I was reading in Ernst Bloch. There you have it. So, you could say, I went there with one eye conditioned by this problem of the relationship between political revolution and religious hope or eschatology.[3]

We can also mention another factor that played a major role in making Foucault's Iranian adventure possible. Several months before his first visit to Iran, he met with some Iranian "dissidents" who had formed a committee in Paris to monitor the situation of Iranian political prisoners. Foucault, who had previously been actively engaged in the experience of the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* (GIP, 1971-1972), became increasingly aware of the situation in Iran through those meetings and began to seriously study Iran as well as follow the news about it. Needless to say, we are simply referring to these three conditions (an invitation from the Italian publisher, reading Ernest Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*, and meeting with Iranian political activists living in Paris) that made Foucault's involvement in the Iranian political scene possible, to just provide the context in which he was led to his account of that scene, and not reducing "the conditions of the possibility" for his engagement in the Iranian uprising to only those three ones.

Now if we turn to the texts themselves, three main points need to be emphasized regarding what Foucault wrote about the Iranian uprising. First, it should be said that what caught Foucault's attention in the Iranian uprising was the fuel that energized it, which, from his standpoint, was different from what can be taken as the driving force of a typical revolutionary uprising in the West. For him, in contrast to the European revolutionary movements, which were largely formed on the basis of class struggle, the Iranian uprising was strongly rooted in religious soil. In addition, Foucault emphasizes that even when we pay attention to how the Iranian uprising manifested itself, we can see a remarkable difference in its organizational approach from that of the revolutionary movements in the West. If, in the case of the classic revolutionary movements, it was the parties and unions that were in charge of organizing movements, in Foucault's

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[3]   Michel Foucault and Farès Sassine, "There Can't Be Societies without Uprisings", in L. Cremones et al. (eds.), *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, pp. 25–26.

view, the religious force of the Iranian uprising was organized without any effort from such parties or unions: "this uprising stood out because it wasn't obviously governed by a Western revolutionary ideology, it wasn't governed or directed by a political party either, not even by political organizations—it truly was a mass uprising."[4] It was because of these differences that Foucault was reluctant to use the term "revolution" for the Iranian uprising – he used the term "revolt" instead. The second point to be emphasized in those writings, which prompted the sharpest criticism of Foucault, is his insistence on the notorious *political spirituality*. Foucault not only distinguished the form of the Iranian uprising by using the term revolt from conventional revolutions, but also maintained that what determines the content of that revolt is a kind of political spirituality that is unparalleled in modern revolutions – the intertwining of religion and politics that, in Foucault's view, has been forgotten in Europe since the Renaissance. And the last point is related to what affected Foucault personally in his observations of those Iranians who radically risked their lives and stood up courageously, with "bare hands", against the armed-to-the-teeth regime. Foucault drew his readers' attention to the impressive scenes in the streets of Tehran where the revolutionary protesters raised their bloody hands and smiled triumphantly after being shot in the body by soldiers of the Pahlavi regime: a vivid example of what Foucault was told in his meetings with many revolutionaries. They had told Foucault that they were not afraid of death and sacrificing their lives for the victory of the revolution because in their view death was easier than living under the Pahlavi regime. Thus, "revolt," "political spirituality," and "courage and no-fear-of-death" are the three main points that Foucault highlighted in his journalistic account of the Iranian uprising.

Foucault does not discuss any of these three points in detail in his reportages. He tries to further explain the term political spirituality in his interviews in order to address the misunderstandings that this term had fuelled and which led to vehement criticism against him; however, we argue that even his further explanation of political spirituality is not sufficient to conceptually digest what he observed in Iran in 1978-79 as a scene of the intertwining of politics and religion. We will discuss these three points from a different theoretical perspective than that of Foucault himself so that what he observed in Iran can be more understandable than what his reportages provide.

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4   *Ibid*., p. 26.

As mentioned above, Foucault tries to distinguish the Iranian uprising from Western ones through the name he chooses for the former. Whenever he refers directly to the Iranian uprising in the title of his reportages he uses the term revolt, while he does not mention the word revolution in such titles even one single time. In a discussion published in March 1979 between Foucault and two other journalists who had also visited Iran amid the uprising, he sought to clarify the difference between the Iranian uprising and what he called a revolution:

> Now, we recognize a revolution when we can observe two dynamics: one is that of the contradictions in that society, that of the class struggle or of social confrontations. Then there is a political dynamic, that is to say, the presence of a vanguard, class, party, or political ideology, in short, a spearhead that carries the whole nation with it. Now it seems to me that, in what is happening in Iran, one can recognize neither of those two dynamics that are for us distinctive signs and explicit marks of a revolutionary phenomenon.[5]

Also, a few months before this interview, in one of his reportages, he emphasized this difference even more strongly, explicitly stating that he did not hear the word revolution even once during his entire stay in Iran. If in Foucault's view the manifestation of class struggle in its ultimate form is one of the known characteristics of a revolution, in the uprising of the Iranian people, despite some hidden class struggle in society, this struggle was not effective enough to "find expression in an immediate, transparent way" – which is why he maintains that, for example, the economic difficulties at the time were not so decisive as to encourage people to take to the streets in protest. Underestimating the role of class struggle is even more obvious when Foucault points out that, in contrast to the Cultural Revolution, in the Iranian uprising we do not see some kind of struggle between different factions, groups, parties, and elements. For him, "what has given the Iranian movement its intensity has been a double register. On the one hand, a collective will that has been very strongly expressed politically and, on the other hand, the desire for a radical change in ordinary life."[6]

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[5] Michel Foucault, "Iran: The Spirit of a World without Spirit", in J. Afary and K. B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 251.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 260.

It should be emphasized that Foucault, in his reportages, still keeps using the same approach that characterizes his historicism based on "differentiation" and "periodization". Nevertheless, such a historicist method could not provide a full-fledged *descriptive* account of a new phenomenon that fundamentally *ruptured* the very continuity of history *as* discourse. In other words, Foucault's historicist method faces its limit where it fails to deal with the Iranian uprising as a *structural* rupture. What he was witnessing in the streets of Iranian cities brought to the surface a series of untouched questions in his historicism: *How, beyond the descriptive "differentiation" and "periodization", is a discourse structured? What are the conditions of the possibility for a discourse? How is a discourse structurally ruptured, and what are the consequences of this rupture?* These are the questions that bring us to the quandary of *the transcendental* and the tension between the latter and *the empirical* in Foucault's work. However, instead of taking the structural rupture of the Iranian revolt as an opportunity to focus on answering these questions, he approached his Iranian experience as an appropriate answer to his main preoccupation at the time. One of the key claims of Foucault in his two lecture courses, *Security, Territory, Population* (2004) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004), between 1977 to 1979, which is the period he was also engaged in the Iranian political scene, "is that specific governmental rationalities were accompanied by equally specific forms of resistance, or 'counter-conducts.'"[7] We are arguing that for Foucault, who himself failed to introduce the forms of counter-conduct appropriate to the neoliberalism of Freiburg and the Chicago school as a new governmental rationality in the above-mentioned lecture courses, the Iranian revolt could be considered to be an exemplary phenomenon of such counter-conduct. Being preoccupied with the question of counter-conduct appropriate to the new governmental rationality in the late 1970s and his adventure in Iran led Foucault to walk a new intellectual path that determined the orientation of his thinking till the end of his life – a new path which some of his commentators improperly refer to as the "ethical turn". It is, indeed, a path that allows him – four years after his adventure in Iran – to return to the questions raised by his reading of the new governmental rationality and the Iranian uprising, and this time, through his interpretation of Kant's answer to the question of

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[7]   Jessica Whyte, "Is revolution desirable?: Michel Foucault on revolution, neoliberalism and rights", in B. Golder (ed.), *Re-reading Foucault: On Law, Power and Rights*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 209.

Enlightenment, he tries to address such questions on a more sophisticated theoretical level. We will return to this point below.

Here, let us take the concept of revolt itself as a matter to be scrutinized and, characterizing its distinguishing features, suggest a more extended conception of the Iranian uprising than what Foucault tried to provide in his texts. Unlike Foucault, whose account of the Iranian uprising did not provide a specific conceptualization of revolt, Furio Jesi, the Italian mythologist and historian, in his *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt* (2000), articulated the relationship between revolt, time, and myth, and introduced a kind of "phenomenology of revolt" that can be very helpful in conceptually elaborating on the Iranian uprising.

Like Foucault, Jesi distinguishes between revolution and revolt. However, he does not stop there and focuses on the relationship that each has with time:

> I use the word *revolt* to designate an insurrectional movement that differs from revolution. The difference between revolt and revolution should not be sought in their respective aims; they can both have the same aim—to seize power. What principally distinguishes revolt from revolution is, instead, a different experience of time. If, following the ordinary meaning of the two words, revolt is a sudden insurrectional explosion, which can be placed within a strategic horizon but which does not in itself imply a long-distance strategy, and revolution is a strategic complex of insurrectional movements, coordinated and oriented over the mid- to long term towards ultimate objectives, then we could say that revolt suspends historical time. It suddenly institutes a time in which everything that is done has a value in itself, independently of its consequences and of its relations with the transitory or perennial complex that constitutes history. Revolution would, instead, be wholly and deliberately immersed in historical time.[8]

In Jesi's work, the suspension of historical time as the main feature distinguishing revolt from revolution leads to the introduction of mythical time into history. On the one hand, *revolution*, *historical time*, and *history*; on the other hand, *revolt*, *mythical time*, and *myth*. In order to elucidate such a relationship between revolt, myth, and mythical time, we need to briefly paraphrase the main

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[8]   Furio Jesi, *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt*, trans. Alberto Toscano, London, Seagull, 2014, p. 46.

points raised in Jesi's reading of myth. Influenced by his teacher during the period 1964-1969, Károly Kerényi, the Hungarian mythologist and philologist, Jesi makes a fundamental distinction between myth and mythological materials: the former is defined as something that is not given by representation, something that is *not* there, and the latter as the product of a mythological machine that, presuming myth as its "immovable mover", produces products that are historically verifiable:

> If by *myth* we mean that 'something' alluded to by the mythological machine as to the existence of its presumed immovable mover; and if by *mythological materials* we mean the machine's historically verifiable products, then the science of myth is a typical science of what is historically not there, whereas the science of mythology is the study of mythological materials as such. The science of myth, in my view, tends to be actualized as a science of reflections about myth, and thus as an analysis of the various modalities of non-knowledge of myth. The science of mythology, consisting as it does the study of mythological materials 'as such', tends to be actualized first and foremost as a science of the workings of the mythological machine, and thus as an analysis of the internal, autonomous linguistic circulation that makes those materials mythological. I use the word *mythology* precisely to indicate that linguistic circulation and the materials that document it.[9]

Also, in line with this, we can quote Jesi's letter to Gershom Scholem at the end of 1966 where he writes: "I have found that my atheism increasingly turns into a hesitation to name the darkness I perceive in the depths of being—into the refusal of a naming that appears blasphemous to me."[10] This negative dimension of myth, "*the darkness in the depth of being*" that prompts Jesi to take the science of myth as "an analysis of the various modalities of non-knowledge of myth," is an original negativity. It is a negativity *which is already there* when an analysis of the different ways *to not know* myth gets started, a negativity which conditions the very process of analysis as such. This process gets started only because there is already a fundamental negativity there from which every experience will be generated. Thus, one could say that "an analysis of the various modalities of non-knowledge of myth" could be paraphrased as an analysis of the various

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[9]   Furio Jesi, *Time and Festivity*, trans. Cristina Viti, London, Seagull, 2021, pp. 190–191.
[10] Furio Jesi, quoted in Andrea Cavaletti, "Festivity, Writing, and Destruction", *Theory & Event*, 22 (4/2019), p. 1059.

ways to tarry with "the darkness in the depths of being" (myth as that which is *not* there) that repeats itself through an analysis of its unknowability in different ways. *There is no such thing as Myth*. What there *is* is the in-existence of Myth. It is this in-existence of Myth, the darkness or *non-being* in the depth of being that is taken as the immovable mover of the mythological machine.

This leads us to another important point. Although Jesi defines myth as *something* that is not given by representation, that does not mean that myth is separated from history. In *Spartakus*, Jesi tried to articulate the relationship between myth and history by interpreting the defeat of the Spartacist revolt in 1919. There, he portrayed revolt as *an epiphany of myth within history* that suspends historical time and introduces mythical time into history instead. In the experience of a revolt, the "I" involved in that experience finds herself in a different situation from her historical experience. As soon as she takes part in the revolt, her presence in historical time is suspended, and, gaining access to myth that emerged as an epiphany through the revolt, becomes the "I" who is the point of the intersection of myth and history:

> In the moment that it gains access to myth, the I that is subject to historical time while nevertheless participating in mythical time, 'pours forth like a spring'; it destroys itself in a dynamic process that involves its historical duration. In other words, the I really participates in the flow of history when it succeeds in identifying history with the course of its own destruction and therefore with its access to myth.[11]

The disappearance of this point of intersection of myth and history is the most important factor that paves the way for the defeat of a revolt. In other words, in revolt, it is always possible that, after suspending historical time and getting access to myth, one can no longer separate oneself from mythical time and return to historical time. Thus, maintaining the point of intersection allows one to move back and forth between myth and history, and, without absorbing and integrating myth into history or vice versa, ensures the permanence of history, while myth is not abandoned. Speaking of the need for a "*double Sophia*" that serves as a common denominator between history and myth, Jesi proposes a new mode of subjectivity in the last chapter of *Spartakus*. The double Sophia

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[11]   Jesi, *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt*, p. 156.

as the mode of subjectivity that he proposes emerges topologically at the point of the intersection of myth and history where, as Jesi points out, at the moment of self-destruction in myth, the "I" who underwent such a destruction, to quote Rainer Maria Rilke, "pours forth like a spring"[12] flowing through history:

> The I that saves itself from the collaborating play of all oppositions is the one that situates itself precisely at the point of their intersection. It is an I which in knowing itself also 'knows [...] permanence and self-destruction, historical time and mythical time [...] it is the common element, the point of intersection, between two universes—of [...] historical time; of [...] mythical time.'[13]

Maintaining the point of the intersection of revolt as an epiphany of myth and history that ensures self-destruction and permanence simultaneously is the most difficult task on which the fate of any revolt depends. As Andrea Cavalletti points out in his introduction to *Spartakus*: "The revolt is the suspension of historical time. But this suspension remains an isolated interval; after its cruel end, the normalizing *dispositif* starts functioning again. Monster/man, historical time/ mythical time, life/death—these are actually collaborating oppositions. *One must therefore ward off their interplay, which separates and isolates the revolt from history*."[14] This provides us with an insight into better understanding the failure of the Spartacist revolt. Given the duration of that revolt, it could be said that its failure to survive for more than just eight days is due to the lack of a collective "I", a double Sophia, that could move back and forth between myth and history – a double Sophia whose existence means resisting to the absolute isolation of revolt as *only* a rift in historical time and consequently its separation from history.

Now, let us, in the light of Jesi's symbology of revolt, address Foucault's reading of the Iranian revolt in a context in which Foucault himself did not step.

Given the triplet nexus of revolt, myth, and time in Jesi's thought, we discuss the Iranian revolt with a controversial claim: the state of revolt, which erupt-

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[12]   Rainer Maria Rilke, "Duino Elegies: The Sonnets to Orpheus", trans. Robert Hunter, https://chimerapoetry.wordpress.com/2014/11/21/the-sonnets-to-orpheus-by-rainer-maria-rilke, accessed 2 October 2022.

[13]   Andrea Cavaletti, "Introduction", in Jesi, *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt,* p. 18 (emphasis added).

[14]   *Ibid*., p. 17.

ed about a year before the victory of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, lasted for a decade, that is, until the end of the Iraq-Iran war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Here we are faced with an ostensibly paradoxical situation. It seems to be the case that the Iranian uprising achieved victory in the form of a revolution on 11 February 1979, leading to the establishment of a new regime called the Islamic Republic. With the new government in power, it was expected that sooner or later "the normalizing *dispositif* [would start] functioning again." However, if we take into account the set of events that took place after the revolution, it could be said that in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, the mythical time of the 1978–79 revolt still prevailed over historical time. In that situation, the revolution should no longer be seen as a phenomenon opposing the revolt, as Foucault and Jesi believed; on the contrary, it has to be understood as the culmination of the revolt itself. In addition to this, the establishment of the new government failed to completely pave the way for "the normalizing *dispositif* to start functioning again." In other words, the revolt is a ten-year phenomenon that began in the winter of 1978, reaching its pinnacle on 11 February 1979, and ended in June 1988. How could this paradox – that revolution itself is the most intense form of revolt – be understood?

In the light of Jesi's *Spartakus*, the Iranian revolt, as portrayed by Foucault in his account, should be recognized as a *rupture* in the continuity of historical time that introduces myth into history. That revolt, in the absence of any specific demand from the Pahlavi regime, was triggered by a total rejection of the regime as such: "At any rate, we want nothing from *this regime*."[15] Foucault was told by an active participant in the revolt that the Pahlavi regime as "the modernization-despotism-corruption combination is precisely what we reject."[16] The regime, which in the eyes of the Shah was to become, thanks to petrodollars and by implementing a "modernization" project, "the world's fifth-largest economy," was, according to Foucault, rejected by "a whole culture," "a whole people," and "by all social classes." For Foucault, the 1978-79 revolt was the interruption of such a project that, despite its so-called *modernized* guise, was built on what he described as *archaism*. In other words, it was the abolishment of an archaic regime that was producing *mythological materials* by its *mythological*

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[15] Foucault, "The Shah Is a Hundred Years Behind the Times", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, p. 195.

[16] *Ibid.*

machine in order to eliminate, if it could, the possibility of a manifestation or epiphany of *genuine myth*. For Kerényi, genuine myth, as the "original phenomenon" (*Urphänomen*) spontaneously arising in man and forming the basis of all mythologies, is distinguished from *inauthentic myth*, a dangerously "technicized" myth that is reduced to an instrument of political power.[17] From a Jesian standpoint, however, one could say that the most dangerous threat to a revolt is getting completely stuck in the epiphanic moment of revolt, the manifestation of myth as "the darkness in the depths of being," without being able to return to historical time. This is where, for Jesi, the importance of a double Sophia comes to the fore, *where getting access to myth and destructing oneself in its epiphany must be accompanied by constructive permanence in history*. The existence of such a double Sophia allows the collective "I" of the revolt to move constantly from self-destruction to construction and vice-versa – a constant back and forth between myth and history without separating the former from the latter, as well as without sacrificing one for the sake of the other. As Cavalletti puts it:

> The "I" saved from sacrifice is neither the one glorified in the images of the hero [...], nor, clearly, the one who survives by chance or escapes the battle to rejoin the ranks of bourgeois society. For Jesi, the saved "I" is the one who can escape the collaborating game of myth vs. history, positioning itself exactly at their intersection and "knowing at one and the same time [...] permanence and self-destruction, historical time and myth time." It is "the common element, the point of intersection between two universes [...], that is subject to historical time while being part of mythical time"; or again, with the Rilkean formula much loved by Kerényi, it is the "I" who "in the instant of its access to myth "pours forth like a spring", i.e. destroys itself in a dynamic process that involves its own historical duration. In short, the "I" is truly part of the flow of history when it succeeds in identifying with that flow the course of its own destruction, and hence its own access to myth.[18]

What Foucault observed in the Iranian revolt was only one side of the story, that is, the self-destruction of the collective "I" in myth. The climax of such self-destruction can be seen in his descriptions of the people who, with bare hands and without any fear of dying, exposed their chests to the bullets shot by the Pahla-

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[17]   Cavaletti, "Festivity, Writing, and Destruction", p. 1060.

[18]   *Ibid.*, p. 1062.

vi armed men. Foucault was so impressed by such scenes that he was not sure if those bare-chested people, profoundly fascinated with death, were more focused on martyrdom than on the victory of their uprising.[19] Although they finally celebrated the victory of their uprising on 11 February 1979, their self-destruction in the epiphany of the revolution was not accompanied by moving back and forth between myth and history, self-destruction and permanence. They were caught up in the moment of self-destruction without moving back to history. This paved the way for a decade-long dynamism of self-destruction, which took on its most dreadful form in the Iraq-Iran war.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Last Foucault, and the Quandary of the Transcendental

Considering the works of Foucault's last years, that is, the period that started with the publication of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and continued until the end of his life, we are arguing – contrary to those who think that Foucault's account of the Iranian revolt is a scandalous exception in his works – that there is a strong connection between his Iranian experience and his other works in this period, which is inattentively referred to as Foucault's "ethical turn". This so-called "turn" should not be understood as Foucault's withdrawal from politics and turn to ethics; rather, as Judith Revel points out, "ethics must be conceived as a continuation of politics, and not as its 'retreat'."[20] Catherine Malabou goes even further and leaves no room for ethics in Foucault's last seminars:

> Foucault never sought shelter in ethics; neither did he elaborate a neoliberal and individualist affirmation of life. On the contrary, through his reading of the Cynics, he announces a transition towards what he calls 'the *other* politics'. Such a passage is precisely not a dismissal of politics, but of the necessity of government, which is of course dramatically different.[21]

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[19] Foucault, "Tehran: Faith against the Shah", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, p. 201.

[20] Judith Revel, "Between Politics and Ethics: The Question of Subjectivation", in L. Cremonesi et al. (eds.), *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, p. 163.

[21] Catherine Malabou, "Cynicism and anarchism in Foucault's last seminars", in P. Osborne (ed.), *Afterlives: transcendentals, universals, others*, Kingston upon Thames, UK: CRMEP Books, 4 (2022), p. 147.

This is why Malabou, contrary to those scholars who find an implicit affirmation of neoliberalism in his last works, refers to the late Foucault as a thinker of anarchism, despite the fact that he "expressed many times his distance from anarchism."[22]

Foucault's encounter with the Iranian revolt was, as mentioned above, like a new door to what he, just a few months before his first trip to Iran, called "the art of not being governed quite so much."[23] If, for him, the result of the genealogy of various ideas, forms, and practices of government in the West was that, despite this diversity, the government was always reproducing the pattern of "commandment and obedience," a popular uprising in a Middle Eastern country with Shia Islam as its main content was something completely new that, in his view, could promise a new form of politics, a new counter-conduct. His sympathetic remarks on "political spirituality" and "Islamic government" are in line with his concerns in the years that followed, when he was involved in a project that could be named, following Foucault himself, "the inventing of self" beyond the governmental pattern of "commandment and obedience":

> By "Islamic government," nobody in Iran means a political regime in which the clerics would have a role of supervision or control. To me, the phrase "Islamic government" seemed to point to two orders of things. "A utopia," some told me without any pejorative implication. "An ideal," most of them said to me. At any rate, it is something very old and also very far into the future, a notion of coming back to what Islam was at the time of the Prophet, but also of advancing toward a luminous and distant point where it would be possible to renew fidelity rather than maintain obedience. In pursuit of this ideal, the distrust of legalism seemed to me to be essential, along with a faith in the creativity of Islam. [...] It is often said that the definitions of an Islamic government are imprecise. On the contrary, they seemed to me to have a familiar but, I must say, not too reassuring clarity. [...] When Iranians speak of Islamic government; when, under the threat of bullets, they transform it into a slogan of the streets; when they reject in its name, perhaps at the risk of a bloodbath, deals arranged by parties and politicians, they have other things on their minds than these formulas from everywhere and no-

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22   *Ibid.*, p. 161.
23   Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?", trans. L. Hochroth and C. Porter, in *The Politics of Truth*, S. Lotringer (ed.), Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2007, p. 45.

where. They also have other things in their hearts. I believe that they are thinking about a reality that is very near to them, since they themselves are its active agent. It is first and foremost about a movement that aims to give a permanent role in political life to the traditional structures of Islamic society. An Islamic government is what will allow the continuing activity of the thousands of political centers that have been spawned in mosques and religious communities in order to resist the shah's regime. [...] I do not feel comfortable speaking of Islamic government as an "idea" or even as an "ideal." Rather, it impressed me as a form of "political will." It impressed me in its effort to politicize structures that are inseparably social and religious in response to current problems. It also impressed me in its attempt to open a spiritual dimension in politics.[24]

Less than four years later, at the first session of his 1982 lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2001), Foucault described such spirituality in a more affirmative way:

We will call "philosophy" the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth. If we call this "philosophy," then I think we could call "spirituality" the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out *the necessary transformations* on himself in order to have access to the truth.[25]

This last quote clearly shows that not only did the oppressive and violent initiatives by the Islamic Republic not push Foucault to critically reconsider the concept with which he portrayed the Iranian uprising, but he took such a concept to be a means through which the subject can gain access to the truth. In other words, like Kant, who did not make his defence of the idea of revolution dependent on particular revolutions and their consequences, Foucault separated the idea of spirituality from what happened in Iran after the 1979 Revolution and did not give up on this idea for the rest of his life. Of course, this does not mean that Foucault disregarded the intensity of oppression and violence under the Islamic Republic. Two months after the victory of the revolution, Foucault,

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[24]   Foucault, "What Are the Iranians Dreaming [Rêvent] About?", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, pp. 206–208.

[25]   Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, trans. G. Burchell, New York, Picador, 2005, p. 15.

in an open letter to the then Prime Minister of Iran, Mehdi Bazargan, explicitly expressed his concern about the revolutionary trials and executions of the officials of the previous regime by the revolutionaries, and, emphasizing the issues of justice and injustice, warned that this is exactly the point at which revolutions get lost and go astray. At the end of the letter, he asks Bazargan "to do what is necessary in order that the people will never regret the uncompromising force with which it has just liberated itself."[26] Less than a month after the letter, in his last note on Iran, "Is It Useless to Revolt?", Foucault repeated his previous sympathetic stance on the Iranian uprising and made a clear distinction between that uprising and the post-revolutionary government: "The spirituality of those who were going to their deaths has no similarity whatsoever with the bloody government of a fundamentalist clergy."[27] Thus, he answers the question in the title of this text as follows: "I do not agree with those who would say, 'It is useless to revolt, it will always be the same.' [...] One must be respectful when a singularity arises and intransigent as soon as the state violates universals."[28] If we put this Foucault next to his own reading of Kant, we will see that his texts on Iran are no longer scandalous exceptions that should be ignored when measured against his other work. Rather, for him, the Iranian revolt was an example of what he tried to theorize in his reading of Kant and other later works, namely the inventing of a new kind of subject who, constantly transforming herself through certain practices, not only does not want to "be governed quite so much," but does not want to be governed at all – an anarchist subject, following Malabou. In other words, Foucault saw those who rose up "in front of the gallows and the machine guns" as examples of a subject that he conceptualized in his later works – the subject who, according to Pierre Macherey, is the product of ethical labour through which an individual transforms into a subject.[29] In his reading of Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), Foucault provides a unique definition of modernity, according to which Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi maintains that, for Foucault, the Iranian revolt was

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[26] Foucault, "Open Letter to Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, p. 263.

[27] Foucault, "Is It Useless to Revolt?", in *ibid.*, p. 265.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[29] Pierre Macherey, "Foucault: Ethics and Subjectivity", trans. T. Stolze, in *In a Materialist Way: Selected Essays*, W. Montag (ed.), New York and London, Verso, 1998, p. 97.

an Enlightenment moment,[30] although, he does not particularly mention that revolt in such reading. He, instead, sought the exemplary figure of his "anarchist" (Malabou) or "ethical" (Macherey) subject in the West in general and in ancient Greece and early Christianity in particular:

> Thinking back on Kant's text, I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity as an attitude rather than as a period of history. And by 'attitude,' I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality [*actualité*]; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. No doubt, a bit like what the Greeks called an ethos.[31]

Judith Revel sees Foucault's reading of Kant as a break from his previous two periods: archaeology and genealogy. While in the period of archaeology his analysis was limited to the study of "the differences between different systems of past thought," and in the period of genealogy to "the difference between our own system of thought and previous ones," in his reading of Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" Foucault suggests a form of philosophical research that, "taking the contemporary reality [*actualité*] as a material, interrogates itself less on the basis of existing difference between different pasts, or in relation to those pasts, than on the constancy of a 'permanent process.'"[32] That is why in this reading he emphasizes the *present* as a condition of possibility for philosophy in Kant. In other words, in his reading of Kant, Foucault addresses the difference at stake in the two periods of archaeology and genealogy in the very present, thus dividing the latter itself into two. As Revel states, "the difference is now what could be imagined between a present that we belong to and a future and that is, at least in part, ours to construct."[33] In his archaeological and genealogical works, Foucault adopted, as mentioned above, the method of periodization and differentiation, which was based on the "characteristic mark": any episteme in the past

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[30] Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. 159.

[31] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", trans. C. Porter, in *Ethics: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 1*, P. Rabinow (ed.), New York, New Press, 2003, p. 309.

[32] Judith Revel, "'What Are We At the Present Time?' Foucault and the Question of the Present", in S. Fuggle, Y. Lanci and M. Tazzioli (eds.), *Foucault and the History of Our Present*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 17.

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

can be historicized by the characteristics that differentiate it from other epistemes in the same or different historical periods. However, in his later works, Foucault abandons this methodology and instead adopts a method in which the emphasis is put on the *difference* itself, which is now inherent in the present and structurally divides it into *the present to which we belong* and *the possibility of changing it*. This possibility of changing the present as a structural possibility in the present itself encourages Foucault to read Kant's transcendental critique in such a way that he separates its two elements, the transcendental and the critique, and puts emphasis only on the latter:

> [T]he critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal necessary obligatory what place is occupied by whatever is singular contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point in brief is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression. [...] The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*].[34]

Here, according to Colin Koopman: "Foucault is a Kantian but not a transcendental idealist in that Foucault took from Kant the project of critique but not the project of transcendental critique."[35] The tension between the historical and the transcendental has always been one of Foucault's preoccupations throughout his works so that the difference between the three periods of his intellectual life did not diminish the importance of this tension, and has always been one of the points of interest in Foucault's works for scholars. Here, we can allude to the famous debate between the Cercle d'Épistémologie and Foucault in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, where the topic of the debate was Foucault's avoidance of the transcendental:

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[34] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", pp. 315–319.
[35] Colin Koopman, "Historical Critique or Transcendental Critique in Foucault: Two Kantian Lineages", *Foucault Studies*, 8 (2010), p. 106.

> More than the superficial veneer of structuralism, what made Foucault's work an object of interest for the Cercle d'Épistémologie was the common concern to develop a methodology that avoided any appeal to the transcendental, be it phenomenological ground or synthetic consciousness. The desire for 'analysis' was integrally connected with the desire to have a theory of the subject that was consistent with such a method's disavowals of the transcendental.[36]

However, despite his "method's disavowals of the transcendental," Foucault, after this debate, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) introduced the term the "historical *a priori*," as opposed to "the formal *a priori*", appealing to a kind of transcendental that is, for him, historical:

>]W[hat I mean by the term is an *a priori* that is not a condition of validity for judgements, but a condition of reality for statements. It is not a question of rediscovering what might legitimize an assertion, but of freeing the conditions of emergence of statements, the law of their coexistence with others, the specific form of their mode of being, the principles according to which they survive, become transformed, and disappear.[37]

As we can see, Foucault's conception of the transcendental is not consistent; he takes various positions on various occasions that sometimes contradict each other. In this regard, we can mention his discussion with Giulio Preti in 1972, wherein he states that:

> I am not Kantian or Cartesian, precisely because I refuse an equation on the transcendental level between subject and thinking "I." I am convinced that there exist, if not exactly structures, then at least rules for the functioning of knowledge which have arisen in the course of history and within which can be located the various subjects. [...] In all of my work I strive instead to avoid any reference to this transcendental as a condition of the possibility for any knowledge. When I say that I strive to avoid it, I don't mean that I am sure of succeeding. [...] I try to historicize to the utmost to leave as little space as possible to the transcendental.

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36 Knox Peden, "Foucault and the Subject of Method", in P. Hallward and K. Peden (eds.), *Concept and Form, Volume 2: Interviews and essays on Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, New York and London, Verso, 2012, p. 71.

37 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 143.

> I cannot exclude the possibility that one day I will have to confront an irreducible *residuum* which will be, in fact, the transcendental.[38]

Contrary to what Foucault says regarding the possibility of confronting such *residuum* as the transcendental in the future, such a confrontation had already occurred not only in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, as mentioned above, but also in *The Order of Things*, as the main text of the archaeological period. According to Knox Peden, if we accept that in the latter, which is an attempt to historicize epistemes, the emergence of one episteme and the transition from one episteme to another means that each episteme is finite as "the episteme in which Foucault's own effort must be located bears the signal mark of finitude," then it can be concluded that "the emergence of the concept of the historicity of epistemes has *the specific episteme of finitude as its historical condition*"[39] – one could say, the epistemic finitude as the historical *a priori*. Hence, the question is not simply the confrontation with the transcendental, which we just demonstrated had already occurred in Foucault's works. Rather than confronting the transcendental, it is important to accept the consequences of such a confrontation, which he refuses to do. It is safe to say that, in this particular case, Foucault is an example of how ideology works today. Commenting on our inability to solve the problems that are unfolding before our eyes in the world today, Alenka Zupančič argues that it is "as if a precipitated recognition and knowledge about some problem (which we now know all about) actually helped us disregard this very problem (as problem.)"[40] Alluding to the psychoanalytic notion of the "fetishist disavowal" and Freud's discussion of the phenomenon of *fausse reconnaissance* (false memory), she argues that our knowledge of these problems serves as a fetish that prevents such problems themselves from being solved:

> In the case of fetishist disavowal we are dealing with the split between knowledge and belief ('I know very well that there is no X, but I keep believing there is'), in which the fetish functions as material existence (form) of our disavowed beliefs. We don't need to secretly believe what we know is not the case, because the fetish 'believes' it in our stead. The belief is outsourced to the fetish, while we know

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[38]   Michel Foucault, "'An Historian of Culture,' debate with Giulio Preti (1972)", trans. J. Becker and J. Cascaito, in S. Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961–1984)*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1989, pp. 98–99.

[39]   Knox Peden, "Foucault and the Subject of Method", p. 74 (emphasis added).

[40]   Alenka Zupančič, "'You'd have to be stupid not to see that'", *Parallax*, 22 (4/2016), p. 421.

perfectly well how things stand. [...] In the classical structure of fetishist disavow-al the fetish takes upon itself the material existence (the existence in the reality) of our disavowed belief, which thus persists against our better knowledge. What happens with the structure that we are pursuing here, however, is that *knowledge itself starts to function as fetish*: the precipitated knowledge (the awareness of how things really stand) makes it possible for us to ignore what we know, and even to actively support what we know to be wrong.[41]

Could it not be said that Foucault's confrontation with the transcendental fol-lows the same structure? As if Foucault knows very well that "there exist, if not exactly structures, then at least rules for the functioning of knowledge," but he keeps believing in avoiding "any reference to this transcendental as a condition of the possibility for any knowledge." Thus, it could be said that when the Cer-cle d'Épistémologie emphasizes that in Foucault's work the historical serves as the transcendental and Foucault himself confirms this by inventing the concept of the historical *a priori* in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, it does not mean that he has given up on refusing "an equation on the transcendental level between subject and thinking 'I'." The problem, then, is not simply whether there is the transcendental in Foucault's work. Rather, it is how Foucault avoids confront-ing the consequences of the presence of the transcendental in his works pre-cisely by affirming it as the historical *a priori* or as an irreducible *residuum*. For further explanation, we could here allude to Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis that, in this respect, stands in stark contrast to Foucault. Although it may be misleading to use the term transcendental in psychoanalysis, here we take a risk and suggest considering the "unconscious" as a specific kind of transcen-dental that "takes place precisely as a *discontinuity* (of the present, and of be-ing) [and] appears as a complication, torsion of the (present) being as such."[42] If we accept this suggestion, then it could be said that throughout its history, Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis has always been patiently and painstaking-ly dealing – both at the clinical level, through *symptoms*, and at the theoretical level, through conceptual articulations such as "*objet petit a*" – with the trac-es (*residues*) of the unconscious within the discursive (language, structure, the symbolic). Thus, unlike Foucault, who "tries to historicize to the utmost to leave

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41   *Ibid.*, pp. 421–422.
42   See Alenka Zupančič, "Hegel and Freud: Between Aufhebung and Verneinung", *Crisis & Critique*, 4 (1/2017), p. 490.

as little space as possible to the transcendental" as *residuum*, the psychoanalytic *residue* is essentially the trace of the unconscious in the discursive and what structurally divides the latter from within. In psychoanalysis, it is through such a *residue* that the unconscious as the transcendental is retrospectively determined, and not the other way around. This means that the unconscious is not a *positive* entity from which everything originates; it is, rather, the negative dimension of being, the missing signifier that we only realize later, through its trace in reality. Thus, conceptually determining such a trace, psychoanalytic theory emphasizes that there is a structural link between the unconscious and its *residue*, as the latter is always the (unconscious) *residue*. On the contrary, one could say that there is, in Foucault, a strong tendency to cut off the link between the unconscious as the transcendental and such a *residue*, banishing the former to somewhere outside the discursive and treating the latter as a *purely* historical construction. Such an approach can best be seen in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, where Foucault in his (mis)reading of the theory of sexuality in psychoanalysis, without mentioning the term the unconscious one single time throughout his book, separates sexuality from the unconscious, while these two are inseparable in Freud, and sexuality is always the (unconscious) sexuality.[43] Through his Iranian experience, Foucault was pushed toward confronting the internal difference/division of history as the discursive, leading him, in his reading of Kant, to see such a difference/division in the present itself, although he never clarifies how this structural division arises and what its relation to the transcendental is. In other words, emphasizing a structural difference within the present itself, whereby it is divided between *the present to which we belong* and *the possibility of changing it*, Foucault somehow confronts the consequences of the presence of the transcendental in the discursive, although he never explains where this difference comes from – as Lacan and Deleuze do – and how the present is divided. From now on, Foucault will be involved in this structural difference/division between what we belong to and the possibility of changing it. Here we can note a short text devoted to Pierre Boulez in 1982, where Foucault tries to illustrate how this structural difference/division within Boulez's musical thought unfolds:

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43   See Alenka Zupančič, "Biopolitics, Sexuality and the Unconscious", *Paragraph*, 39 (1/2016), p. 51.

> What he [Boulez] expected from thought was precisely that it always enables him to do something different from what he was doing. He demanded that it open up, in the highly regulated very deliberate game that he played, a new space of freedom. One heard some people accuse him of technical gratuitousness, others, of too much theory. But for him the main thing was to conceive of practice strictly in terms of its internal necessities without submitting to any of them as if they were sovereign requirements. What is the role of thought, then, in what one does if it is to be neither a mere savoir-faire nor pure theory? Boulez showed what it is – to supply the strength for breaking the rules with the act that brings them into play.[44]

Here, there is also a difference that divides thought from within and becomes its driving force for "*breaking the rules with the act that brings them into play*." However, our surprise at this new image of Foucault is yet to come.

In a text entitled "Life: Experience and Science," which is a modified version of his introduction to the English translation of George Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological* (1966), we face the most intense inversion of Foucault's thought in the last period of his intellectual life compared to the early and middle ones. Although the text was published less than a year after his premature death from AIDS in the January-March 1985 issue of *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, it was, as Giorgio Agamben pointed out, "submitted to the journal in April 1984 and therefore constitutes the last text to which the author could have given his *imprimatur*"[45] – thus, we can take it as Foucault's intellectual testament. While in his reading of Kant he transfers the *difference* to the present, and in the text on Boulez he does so to musical thought, in "Life: Experience and Science" he refers to an inherent wrongness in life which disturbs its vitality from within:

> [A]t the most basic level of life, the processes of coding and decoding give way to a chance occurrence that, before becoming a disease, a deficiency, or a monstros-

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44 Michel Foucault, "Pierre Boulez, Passing Through the Screen", trans. R. Hurley, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, J. D. Faubion (ed.), New York, The New Press, 1998, p. 244.

45 Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute Immanence", in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 220.

ity, is something like a disturbance in the informative system, something like a "mistake."[46]

Here, we see a Foucault who is opposed to the author of *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), in which he was "under the inspiration of Xavier Bichat's new vitalism and definition of life as 'the set of functions that resist death.'"[47] Now, for Foucault, life is "the proper domain of error" where:

> [L]ife – and this is its radical feature – is that which is capable of error. [...] [W]ith man, life has led to a living being that is never completely in the right place, that is destined to "err" and to be "wrong." [...] [O]ne must agree that error is the root of what produces human thought and its history. The opposition of the true and the false, the values that are attributed to the one and the other, the power effects that different societies and different institutions link to that division – all this may be nothing but the most belated response to that possibility of error inherent in life. [...] ["E]rror" constitutes not a neglect or a delay of the promised fulfillment but the dimension peculiar to the life of human beings and indispensable to the duration [*temps*] of the species.[48]

Not only do we hear the resonance of "that Nietzschean idea of 'ennoblement through degeneration' which lies at the very core of the Foucauldian notion of life as *error*,"[49] but Foucault, without being aware of it, speaks to us in a Hegelian tone wherein he takes the whole dynamism of thought and history as a *belated* response to error as the condition of possibility for such a dynamism. It could even be said that by considering history and thought as *belated* responses to error, Foucault's conceptualization of error comes closer to the concept *the death drive*. However, unlike error which serves the purpose of "the duration [*temps*] of the species," the death drive is fundamentally indifferent to any purpose, and its radicalism comes precisely from this lack of purposefulness. Not only does

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[46] Michel Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science", trans R. Hurley, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, J. D. Faubion (ed.), New York, The New Press 1998, p. 476.

[47] Agamben, "Absolute Immanence", p. 220.

[48] Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science", p. 476.

[49] Marco Piasentier, "Foucault and the Two Approaches to Biopolitics", in *Biopolitical Governance: Race, Gender and Economy*, Hannah Richter (ed.), London and New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018, p. 33.

the death drive not care about life/death and "the duration [*temps*] of the species," it also does not make of the very lack of purpose a purpose.

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