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Edited by André Lepecki

Documents of Contemporary Art

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In recent decades artists have progressively expanded the boundaries of art as they have sought to engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment. Teaching, curating and understanding of art and visual culture are likewise no longer grounded in traditional aesthetics but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political.

Documents of Contemporary Art

The Documents of Contemporary Art series emerges from this context. Each volume focuses on a specific subject or body of writing that has been of key influence in contemporary art internationally. Edited and introduced by a scholar, artist, critic or curator, each of these source books provides access to a plurality of voices and perspectives defining a significant theme or tendency.

For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has offered a public platform for art and ideas. In the same spirit, each guest editor represents a distinct yet diverse approach - rather than one institutional position or school of thought - and has conceived each volume to address not only a professional audience but all interested readers.

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André Lepecki Introduction//Dance as a Practice of Contemporaneity

It is a curious and still rather under-theorized phenomenon that dance, over the past decade, has become a crucial referent for thinking, making and curating visual and performance-based art. This can be seen as the intensification of a movement that gradually yet continuously took shape throughout the second half of the twentieth century. It is a tendency fully consolidated by the mid 1960s, leading American choreographer Yvonne Rainer to diagnose in 1966 an 'unprecedented [...] close correspondence between concurrent developments in dance and the plastic arts'.1 This simultaneity of concerns, which starts coalescing in the early 1950s, has gained a new momentum and intensified significantly since the mid 1990s. The present volume aims to contribute to a better understanding of this process, helping to map the centrality of dance in current artistic and curatorial practices. However, if artistically the influences and synchronicities are many, at the level of critical discourse and the public perception of dance there remains a lack of knowledge about dance's own historic and aesthetic developments, its immanent concerns and multiple manifestations. As French choreographer Boris Charmatz provocatively stated in 2003: 'We still put up with the notion that contemporary art has (by definition) to be art made by visual artists; or that art history, in the end, must be reticent in incorporating performative or even musical dimensions. As for the history of "body art", it seems to ignore Western dance. For example, we might read in a contemporary art magazine a whole essay on falling bodies without a single mention of this fundamental concept's history in modern dance.'2 A decade later, Charmatz's criticism still rings true. This volume aims to bridge that discursive gap: gathering texts from the early 1950s onwards by practitioners and theorists from around the world, it privileges the voice of dancers and choreographers themselves, still misperceived as non-verbal artists creating a supposedly 'visceral' art whose sole purpose is to move gracefully, flawlessly, to the sound of music ...

But such misperceptions are exactly what make the following questions more intriguing and pressing: Why does dance gain such an increasingly catalysing role for the arts throughout the second half of the twentieth century? And why does dance become such an inescapable force in the art scene of the past decade, operating as a powerful attractor and making its appearance not only in works by visual, performance and video artists (such as Vito Acconci, Marina Abramovic, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Matthew Barney, Kelly Nipper,

Isaac Julien, among many others) but also in the programmes of contemporary art galleries and museums, even being acquired by visual arts collections? We could even venture, somewhat ironically (citing the title of a piece by the German/British artist Tino Sehgal, whose relationship to dance and choreography is quite direct), that the inclusion of dance in an artistic project today (whether an object, exhibition or performance) is that necessary gesture which allows it to affirm about itself: *This is so contemporary!*

A preliminary answer to these questions might begin by invoking dance's main constitutive qualities: ephemerality, corporeality, precariousness, scoring and performativity. These qualities or traits are responsible for dance's capacity to harness and activate critical and compositional elements crucial to the fusion of politics and aesthetics that characterizes so much of the contemporary art scene and sensibility. Dance's ephemerality, the fact that dance leaves no object behind after its performance, demonstrates the possibility of creating alternative economies of objecthood in the arts, by showing that it is possible to create artworks away from regimes of commodification and the fetishization of tangible objects. Dance's inescapable corporeality constantly demonstrates to dancers and audiences alike concrete possibilities for embodying-otherwise - since a dancer's labour is nothing else than to embody, disembody and re-embody, thus refiguring corporeality and proposing improbable subjectivities. As for dance's precariousness - which springs at a physical level from dance's necessary and ongoing play with forces, and at a social level from its subaltern position in the general economy of the arts - we can say it performs, bespeaks and underlines the current and implacable precarization of life, brought on by the momentarily triumphant neoliberal globalization of financial capitalism. Dance's deep relationship to scoring, or choreographing, exposes all those commanding and imperative forces embedded in the practice of choreography. Indeed, as a system of command, choreographic scoring reveals the formation of obedient, disciplined and (pre) formatted bodies - technically and subjectively fit to produce and (more importantly perhaps) to reproduce certain staged images conveyed by an authorial will. A crucial element in the formation of dance as an artform, choreography as a technology of scoring does have inevitable political reverberations across contemporary art practices, since choreography, once enacted, displays disciplined bodies operating in a regime of obedience for the sake of bringing an art piece into the world. Here, we might think of the early performance scores by Bruce Nauman that invariably start with the innocent yet provocative line: 'Hire a dancer ...'3 Critiques of this type of body and subjectivity, 'ready to comply', are a central theme for certain visual artists (for instance, in Santiago Sierra's Veteran of Iraq War Facing the Wall, 2011) and choreographers (for instance, in Félix Ruckert's Hautnah, 1998). Scoring also links choreography

to conceptual art, as linguistic instructions have been used by a number of conceptual artists (such as Acconci and Robert Smithson) and their Fluxus precursors (such as Yoko Ono, George Brecht and Allan Kaprow) to articulate sets of possible as well as impossible actions, revealing how any system of command is always filled with the cracks that will bring it down. Finally, because dance does what it sets itself up to do, because it always establishes a contract, or promise, between choreographic planning and its actualization in movement, it inevitably reveals an essential performativity at the core of its aesthetic project (if we understand performativity as a general theory of the ways in which citational effects are implemented and reproduced, and where statements and particularly promises acquire world-making force). This link between dance and $performativity \, demonstrates \, a \, non-metaphoric \, implementation, or \, actualization,$ of that which preconditions dance: endless citationality of an always singular yet always dispersed (or semi-absent) source, which nevertheless insists on making a dance return: again and again, despite (or rather because of) its ephemerality. This insistence on returning with a difference, this ethics of persisting while facing the demands of absence, constitutes dance's particular affective-political force within the broader field of contemporary art.

Once we take all these aspects (which, again, are all constitutive of dance as an aesthetic practice, are dance's main identity-traits within what Jacques Rancière has termed the 'aesthetic regime of the arts'),4 it starts to become clearer why dance appears as an energizing and catalysing element in contemporary art and critical thought. Recently, we have seen dance become central to art exhibitions such as 'Move: Choreographing You' (Hayward Gallery, London, 2010-11) where the curatorial focus was on links between dance and the visual arts since the 1960s, and 'Danser sa Vie' (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2011-12), extending such a reappraisal back to 1900. And dance has entered into curatorial concerns even in exhibitions that are predominantly about the 'visual', as in the case of a dance concert series at MoMA, New York, throughout 2011 in the context of 'On Line: Drawing through the Twentieth Century'. The series included choreographers as distinct as Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Ralph Lemon and Xavier Le Roy, from Belgium, the US and France respectively. Also notable were two exhibitions on the choreography and drawings of Trisha Brown: 'Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961–2001' (New Museum, New York, 2003–4) and 'Trisha Brown: So That the Audience Does Not Know Whether I Have Stopped Dancing' (Walker Art Center, 2008/Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, 2010). In the US, the Dia Art Foundation also held an important series of dance events at its Beacon location with the Cunningham Dance Company throughout the 2000s, with the Trisha Brown Dance Company (2009-10), and with a retrospective of Yvonne Rainer's main dance works (2011-12). In 2012, the Whitney Biennial programme included two 'residencies' and daily performances by choreographers Sarah Michelson (UK/USA) and Michael Clark (UK).

Over the past decade dance can also be found in projects created by artists who would not necessarily consider themselves choreographers. Examples include the German artist Nevin Aladag's Dance Occupations, featuring hundreds of regular citizens 'invading' art festivals and biennial openings (or sometimes gloomy cafés in some city) to start dancing wildly to no music (2009 to the present); Tino Sehgal's Instead of Allowing Some Thing to Rise up to Your Face, Dancing Bruce and Dan and Other Things (2000), where a body revolves in a gallery space for hours as a slow choreographed sculpture; or Mike Kelley's Day is Done Judson Church Dance (2009). If we consider the realm of video art the presence of dance is overwhelming: from Mike Kelley's A Dance Incorporating Movements Derived from Experiments by Harry F. Harlow and Choreographed in the Manner of Martha Graham (1999/2010), to Tracey Emin's Why I Never Became a Dancer (1995), Kelly Nipper's Weather Center (2010) and Lillibeth Cuenca's Family Sha la la (1998). It is important to clarify that in these cases it is not a question of 'collaboration' between the visual arts and dance - we should rather speak here of a generative will to confuse the arts away from neat divisions; but added to that liberating impetus coming from the 1960s, such fusion or confusion is driven by a dynamic and mobilizing force of articulation whose proper name is dance. The alliance of this proper name with its improperly fugitive qualities is what makes dance become a preponderant modality for thinking and creating in contemporaneity.

However, when Boris Charmatz proposed in 2009 'seriously and joyfully' the foundation of a 'Dancing Museum', we witnessed a significant shift in the dynamics of this impetus, stemming now directly from dance and choreographic concerns. If in the visual arts the question was how to draw from dance tools that could lead to reimagining the status of the image, for Charmatz's Dancing Museum the question was how to infuse institutional modes of presenting 'art' with a renewed approach informed directly by some of the constitutive traits (or forces) of dance listed above:

We are at a time in history when a museum in no way excludes precarious movements or nomadic, ephemeral or instantaneous ones. We are at a time in history when a museum can modify BOTH preconceived ideas about museums AND one's ideas about dance. [...] In order to do so, we must first of all forget the image of a traditional museum, because our space is firstly a mental one. The strength of a museum of dance consists to a large extent in the fact that it does not yet exist, that it doesn't yet have a suitable place ... that the spirit of the place emerges before the place ... that everything remains to be done, and that the daily life of this construction site makes room for every audacious idea and every eccentricity.⁵

Charmatz's notion of the Dancing Museum as primarily a 'mental space' denotes a conceptual-theoretical-philosophical impetus in contemporary approaches to making dance. Gilles Deleuze, of course, privileges in his philosophy the figure of 'movement', but in ways not always identical to usual notions of 'displacement', but understood rather as an eventful 'intensity'. This means that movement may happen even in stillness, as pure intensity, as long as it is linked to the actualization of an event. Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero echoes Deleuze's notion that movement should not be understood only as the displacement of limbs or bodies, when she notes how, quite often, 'the principle of staying in eternal flailing leads us nowhere'.6 Thus we find some recent and direct choreographic-philosophical collaborations defining this 'mental space', such as the one between French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and French choreographer Mathilde Monnier. In their collaboration Allitérations (2002) Nancy appears performing along with four dancers (including Monnier) - the philosopher as dancer, the dancer as philosopher. We can think also of Portuguese philosopher José Gil tackling the dance of Cunningham and de Keersmaker in order to reassess the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari; or Giorgio Agamben and Paolo Virno musing explicitly on dance and gesture while developing their political philosophies of modernity and contemporaneity; or Rancière, Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Erin Manning, all rearticulating their philosophical concepts thanks to the impact on their thought not only of dance understood as metaphor but of actual choreographic and dance practices.

The notion of dance as 'metaphor' emerges at the end of the nineteenth century, when the problem of extracting dance from its deep binds with music, narrative and symbolic gesture was at the forefront of the attempt to establish dance as an autonomous art. The question was how to abstract dance from the other artforms and through this search for aesthetic autonomy finally affirm dance's modernism. The poet Stéphane Mallarmé, in a series of texts gathered under the title Ballets (1896-97), wrote that a female dancer evolving before his eyes was not a woman, nor even the character she was representing, but a pure metaphor: she 'does not dance' but is a visible actualization of the tracing of a (virtual) poetic movement. As important as this move towards abstracting dance was for its development as an artform (since it allowed for the coming into being of modern dance throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century), the dance documents gathered in this anthology reflect a very different sensibility in regard to dance and choreography. This difference derives from the openly criticalpolitical inflection in the arts after the Second World War, a period marked by the shock of the combined horrors of the Holocaust, the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the geopolitical realignment resulting from anticolonialist independent movements in the 1950s and 60s, the intensification of the cold war, and what we now perceive as the implementation of the 'society of the spectacle'7 necessary for the current deterritorialization of capital and the globalization of the neoliberal financial system. These movements in politics, economy and social life throughout the later twentieth century obviously also manifested themselves in cultural production and artistic practice. They led many artists to link their practice directly to questions of freedom and participation, sometimes even aiming radically to recast the whole conception of 'man' and the human. This double juncture of politics and subjectivity within the aesthetic proposed new priorities for the arts: to be concrete, anti-metaphorical, and above all, to experiment. Since the late 1950s concrete experimentation was linked to a particular mode of enacting: 'to perform'. Thus bound together, to experiment became to animate the body's capacities and potencies beyond and besides formations of the 'human' as general category for subjectivity. To experiment was to open up the body to new areas of the sensible, the perceptible and the meaningful, of affects and sensations as moving and mobilizing corporeal assemblages. Thus to experiment meant to get closer to problems deeply linked to questions that are constitutive of dance and choreography. Here any notion of metaphor as basis for artistic practice was impossible to sustain. Biopolitical projects that experimented with embodiment provided the necessary and corporeally concrete lines of flight for debunking such unsustainable metaphoricity, and offered byways for exploring alternative modes to live and to scramble systems of subjugation and their preconditioned behaviours. It was not that dance had the 'natural solution' for these issues. Dance had also to find its own modes of experimenting and performing subjectivities and corporealities. But given the five constitutive traits mentioned above, dance was already equipped to tackle the problems at hand. However, it still had to rediscover itself, away from the paradigms of aesthetic modernism (thus it had to form a critique of the notion that dance was 'the art of movement') and of choreonormative modes of training, composing and presenting dance. Thus the importance of 'pedestrian' dance, 'task-oriented' dance, dance in galleries, streets, museums or empty beaches in the 1960s.

However, with the advent of post-minimalism and conceptual art, and thanks to their particular mode of dematerializing the artistic object, tied to their strong political dimension (accomplished through a fusing of the poetic with the aesthetics of agit-prop), one might think that the 1970s would mark the demise of this concurrence between dance and visual arts. Yvonne Rainer had moved from choreography to film; performance art and body art were booming, rethinking and activating the body in ways dance had not dared to do; while theatrical dance, especially throughout the 1980s, became concerned again with displaying dance technique (the major exceptions from the mid 1970s onwards were Pina Bausch, with her TanzTheater Wüppertal, and Steve Paxton, Lisa

Nelson and Nancy Stark Smith's collaboration in the invention and development of Contact Improvisation). However, two forces coalesced at the beginning of the 1980s to redefine the affective-political-aesthetic horizons of the decades to come. These forces reignited the political and aesthetic capacities of dance. Firstly, the AIDS pandemic and its effects around issues of identity, corporeality and mortality as essentially biopolitical issues. Secondly, the breakthrough of hip-hop into a hypervisual and nascent music video culture which mediated to a global audience images of a radical moving blackness that proposed an altogether different kind of assemblage between dance, words, rhythm and politics.

The ravages of AIDS demarcated for both the art and dance worlds a renewed confrontation with mortality and the necessity to reconsider what constitutes a disappearing body, to identify where may lie the affective traces left after a body's passing (away). As so poignantly shown in Felix Gonzales-Torres' dancesculpture Untitled (Go Go Dancing Platform) (1991), dance could offer a concrete actualization of this political, affective and corporeal struggle. In this work, on a glamorous yet mostly empty dancing platform (only occasionally occupied by a male Go Go dancer, moving to no sound) dance's ephemerality becomes all of a sudden a necessary affective-political force to be invoked - recasting a whole system of presence predicated not on the demise of absence but on embracing its powers. In 1993 - in the aftermath of the US 'culture wars' cuts to federal funding of the arts resulting from reactionary and homophobic political lobbying that cited the AIDS pandemic to condemn artists' experimental uses of the body -Peggy Phelan identified the political ontology of performance in its disappearing act. In her book Unmarked, Phelan proposed that performance lingers as a virtual form, a memory. Rather than subject itself to the reproduction of its image, it returns only as the persistence of its trace.8 Phelan's political ontology of performance is a theoretical amplification of the differing ontological-political concreteness of dance's absent-presence.

And then hip-hop. Or rather, the rippling effects across the social and the aesthetic of an irresistible beat laced by a specific visuality, raciality and impossibility not to dance to its syncopated rhythms. We can see in hip-hop how a whole rhetoric of the image becomes saturated by a rearticulation of the body, a political re-embodiment of the body's articulations, thanks to a rhythm that necessarily convokes and revokes whole sets of subjections and subjectivations: black and white, North American and European, Northern and Southern hemispheric, Asian, African, male, female, gay, straight, whole, broken ... It was thanks to hip-hop and its globalized eruption that non-theatrical dance recaptured the social, and by extension recaptured theatrical dance and its systems of image formation. Hip-hop, with its infusion of a radical black beat across the social body, and AIDS, with the suffusion of mortality and absence as

central to contemporary subjectivity, can be seen as two major forces reframing and reclaiming the centrality of dance in the arts at large since the 1980s, and thus serving as templates on how dance remains central to contemporary political-aesthetic projects. The pressing issues of our times may be different: precarization, lawful torture in the United States, endless energy wars, fundamentalisms everywhere, ecological catastrophes ... But the choreo-political questions remains, of identifying what forces and apparatuses, non-metaphorically and daily, choreograph subjection, mobilization, subjugation and arrest; of figuring out how to move in this contemporaneity; and of understanding how, by moving (even if still) one may create a new choreography for the social. As long as these questions remain relevant, dance will remain a crucial practice and system of critical thought within the aesthetic regime of contemporary art.

Compiling this anthology posed some difficulties linked to the particularity of an artform whose 'documents' still consist mostly of journalistic reviews and interviews - despite the expanding field of critical dance studies since the late 1980s and more recently publications by choreographers such as Ralph Lemon, Bill T. Jones, Mårten Spångberg, Meg Stuart and Nicole Beutler among others. Furthermore to know what is a document and what is the contemporary are imminently political questions, involving archival inclusion and exclusion, linguistic hegemony and subalternity. Following the template of the series, most documents are reproduced here as fragments. Within this logic of fragmentation, it is inevitable that such repositioned texts can become amplified as strong statements or function as resonating boards, proposing links between each other, across time and locality, sometimes between artists with very different aesthetic views, which one might not otherwise have construed. There is a kind of unexpected movement, a transformation, performed by the document itself, an unruly metamorphosis beyond authorial or even editorial intentionality and control. But isn't, as Michel Foucault wanted, the logic of the fragment that which allows any archive to fulfil its function of being not a passive 'repository' but 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements'?10 In the end, editorial decisions as well as limits in sources delimited the field of possibilities and the system of discursive presence in this anthology. However, the archival dynamics of trans-historical and trans-geographic transformations hopefully will reveal zones of generative resonances and dissonances, lines of convergence and divergence between texts, authors, choreographers and artists. As much as I could, I tried to overcome the language barrier and translated from the French and Portuguese texts that I found essential to present as documents of contemporary dance.

The anthology opens with a crucial 'choreographic turn' that arose internationally between the early 1950s and mid 1960s. The years delimiting this turn are marked by the publication in 1952 of an important document for dance:

Merce Cunningham's essay 'Space, Time and Dance'. Book-ending this period and its specific 'turn' (which is just one of many in the history of dance but due to its specificity clearly inflects the question of the 'contemporary' in dance thereafter), we find, all from 1965, Robert Morris' 'Notes on Dance', Hélio Oiticica's notes on an 'immanent dance' that would renew the status of the (pictorial, sculptural) image, and Anna Halprin's recollection of the first version of her germinal *Parades and Changes*. This section also includes Lygia Pape's writings on her *Neoconcrete Ballets* in Brazil (1958–59), the description of Hijikata's *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colours, 1959) in Japan, and Simone Forti's crucial dance constructions of 1960–62.

After opening the volume with historic material, it seemed important to move immediately to the voices of contemporary choreographers and dancers. As they position what dance is for each of them, they also demonstrate how dance is not only a kinetics, not only an aesthetics, but also a sophisticated and precise theoretical machine. This second section, *Positioning Dance/Theorizing Movement*, also includes two philosophers, on account of their deep immersion into the practice of making dance: Jean-Luc Nancy and Erin Manning. The editorial impetus was not to find 'representatives' of every concept of dance but to identify some constant components in experimental dance that propose a refiguring of what we might understand by contemporary art (or by the contemporary in art).

Section three, *Practices of Embodiment*, aims to show how 'embodiment' is always a concern in dance even when it apparently offers the most 'conceptual' of works. The opening text is Richard Serra's *Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself* (1967–68). This list brings to mind the philosophical insight of Deleuze that verbs are not made to describe movements but to express events. Dance in general is linked to the occasion of events, but contemporary dance's experimental impetus is tied to the *willing* of events. Its most singular event is dance's capacity to demonstrate that the body is an 'open system of exchange', ready for all kinds of metamorphosis, revealing a forever unfinished and unfinishable self, and occasioning the event of becoming – as choreographer Le Roy notes in his 'Self-Interview'.

Section four is dedicated to *Choreopolitics*. Gathering texts from dance studies as well as from political philosophy this selection focuses on the notion that choreographers and dancers articulate their own political concepts, so necessary to the development of a better understanding of the choreographic and of dance, not as metaphors for politics but as concrete activations of political practice and thought.

The book closes with the section Dancing in an Expanded Field: Image/Object/Score. This has the widest range of contributors and here we can see the force of dance structuring film and of film structuring dance (Bojana Cvejic); the sculptural as 'choreomania' (Joan Jonas); the choreographic as a theatre of time

(Deleuze); the choreographic as object (William Forsythe); dance as image of thought (Tim Etchells); movement as installation (Eiko & Koma); the choreographic as conceptual impetus (Nauman, Ono); and dance as the minimal, concrete and vibrating link between body and object (Adrian Heathfield on La Ribot). Together, fragmented, articulated ... the hope is that the texts in this volume activate, in a rather unpredictable yet moving composition, a discursive plane whose name is perhaps, and oddly, contemporary dance.

- 1 Yvonne Rainer, 'A Quasi Survey of Some "Minimalist" Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*', in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Geoffrey Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton) 269; reprinted in this volume, page 58.
- 2 Boris Charmatz and Isabelle Launay, Entretenir Texte imprimé à propos d'une danse contemporaine, Parcours d'artistes (Pantin: Centre National de la Danse/Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2003) 163; my translation.
- 3 See Bruce Nauman's proposals/scores from 1969 and 1970 in *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman's Words: Writings and Interviews*, ed. Janet Kraynak (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003) 51; 53; 59; one of these texts is reprinted in this volume, page 215.
- 4 See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2000); trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).
- 5 Boris Charmatz, op. cit.
- 6 Vera Mantero, in Claudia Galhós, 'História de Uma Revolucionária' *Jornal de Letras* (Lisbon, 12–25 August 2009) 8; reprinted in this volume, page 76; my translation.
- 7 See Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle (1967) (New York: Zone Books, 1994).
- 8 See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
- 9 See David Gere, How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracing choreography in the age of AIDS (Madison, Winsconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).
- Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (1969); trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 130 (original emphasis).