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**DOCUMENTA 11 AS EXEMPLAR FOR
TRANSCULTURAL CURATING: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS**

by

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SUMMARY

Title of thesis:

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KEY TERMS:

Artistic agency, art market, curatorship, Documenta, globalisation discourse, identity politics, mega-exhibitions, multiculturalism, pluralism, postcolonial theory, public spheres, Third Cinema, transculturality.

This study investigates to what extent the curatorial project of Documenta 11 offered an operative cultural concept beyond multiculturalism by favouring a transcultural approach to difference in the global sphere. It questions whether the central strategy employed – of postcoloniality as tactical manoeuvre to expand both the public and aesthetic spheres in order to create the conditions for an ethical engagement with difference – could facilitate a workable exemplar for showing art from different production sites, yet resist levelling of differences for an ever-expanding global art market.

Proceeding from the postcolonial institutional critique envisioned by the artistic director, Okwui Enwezor, this study engages critically with the notion of opening-out Documenta in terms of inclusivity and equality of representation. It is argued that while the proposed postcolonial reinvigoration of overlapping public spheres held the promise of heterogeneous participation and minimised the formation of hegemonies, the expansion-project of Documenta 11 could on another level be interpreted to function as a globalising instrument usurping previously unexplored territories and discover marketable 'others' for a neocolonial cultural marketplace. Documenta 11 set out to subvert the expansionism of a global art market by constructing the global as postcolonial

space in which proximity became the ethical space of engagement. It is the contention of this study that by emphasising the production of locality, the five Platforms localised the global discourse and expressly addressed how inclusivity and pluralism could be approached against the disparities created by globalisation processes.

Historically, for artists from the South denial of proximity and coevalness based on colonial conceptions of space and time had meant exclusion from the canon and, where modernist notions persist, being labelled as deficient. In order to breach gaps, de-hegemonise cultural coding and aid transcultural translation, Documenta 11 located its project in its entirety in Homi K. Bhabha's *in-between* space, in the gap, as it were. This orientation towards the gap is examined in terms of homelessness, displacement and nomadic subjectivity that impact the archiving logic of Documenta to become anarchival: memory production turned into counter-memory and the work of remembrance was shaped as counter-memorials.

Criticised for a skewed commitment to social engagement, rather than aesthetics, the exhibition of Documenta 11 was nonetheless informed by a threshold aesthetic. Different kinds of oppositionality employed by artists, and adversarial approaches reinvigorated by Situationist and Third Cinema strategies put forward by the curators, are evaluated in this regard. An agonistic positioning is explored as, firstly, a counter-localisation to multiculturalism in a transcultural exhibition and, secondly, to resist assimilation and co-optation. It is argued that the embrace of the threshold, of thirdness and littoral curating by Documenta 11 could be considered an exemplar of a global trickster positioning aiming for an expansion of critical visual strategies. The contention of this study is that, having set out to grapple with the construction of multiple public spheres and the space of the transnational exhibition as a creole location, this Documenta at the very least opened up discursive spaces that could expand artistic discourses. At best, Documenta 11 uncovered routes by which difference in the transcultural field could be (re)negotiated.



Hierdie studie ondersoek tot watter mate die kuratoriese projek van Documenta 11 beskou kan word as werkbare alternatief tot multikulturalisme deur 'n transkulturele oriëntering tot kulturele verskille in die globale sfeer. Dit bevraagteken of die sentrale strategie – postkolonialisme as manewer om die beide die publieke en estetiese sfere te verbreed met die doel op 'n etiese betrokkenheid met *différance* – as eksemplaar kan dien om kuns van uiteenlopende produisie-lokaliteite ten toon te stel, maar tog die gelykmakende dinamiek van 'n immer groeiende globale kunsmark te ondermyn.

Met die beoogde postkoloniale institusionele kritiek van die artistieke direkteur, Okwui Enwezor, as invalshoek word daar krities gekyk na die projek om Documenta te verruim in terme van inklusiwiteit en gelykheid van representasie. Terwyl 'n postkoloniale reaktivering van oorvleuelende publieke sfere die belofte inhoud van heterogene deelname en die formasie van hegemonieë teenwerk, sou 'n uitgebreide Documenta kon funksioneer as 'n instrument van globalisering wat onontdekte terreine beset en bemerkbare 'ander' vir die neokoloniale kultuurmark lewer. Documenta 11 het gepoog om die ekspansionisme van die globale kunsmark te ondermyn deur die globale sfeer te benader as postkoloniale ruimte waarin naburigheid 'n etiese ruimte vir betrokkenheid skep. Daar word geargumenteer dat die beklemtoning van die produksie van lokaliteit in die vyf Platforms die globale diskoers gelokaliseer en ongelykhede aangespreek het wat deur globalisering-prosesse geskep word.

Histories was kunstenaars van die Suid weens koloniale konsepsies van tyd en ruimte as nie-eietyds benader en van die kanon uitgesluit; waar modernistiese idees volhard, word hulle steeds as minderwaardig afgemaak. In 'n poging om sulke leemtes uit te wys, kulturele narratiewe en kodering te de-hegemoniseer en transkulturele vertaling te bevorder, is Documenta 11 se projek in die geheel geposisioneer in Homi K. Bhabha se '*in-between*', as't ware in die gaping self. Hierdie oriëntering word ondersoek in terme van tuisteloosheid, verplasing en nomadiese subjektiwiteit wat die argivering-



rasionaal van Documenta in 'n anargivale projek verander: die produksie van herinnering word kontra-herinnering, die herdenkingstaak word omgekeer in die konstruksie van kontra-herdenkings.

Hoewel die tentoonstelling van Documenta 11 gekritiseer is vir die verbintenis tot sosiale betrokkenheid eerder as estetika, sou die kuratorspan se benadering as 'n drumpel-estetika beskryf kon word. Verskeie vorms van oppositionaliteit word ge-evalueer wat deur kunstenaars geimplimenter is, asook strategieë van die Situationiste en 'Third Cinema'-bewegings wat deur die kurators vir (her)oorweging aangebied was. Die idee van 'n agonistiese estetika word ondersoek as, eerstens 'n teenpool vir multikulturalisme in 'n transkulturele tentoonstelling en, tweedens, as strategie om koöptering en assimilasië teen te werk. Die standpunt word ingeneem dat die ontginning van die drumpel, tussen-posisie en grens met die doel om visuele strategieë te verbreed, Documenta 11 uitsonder as 'n subversiewe kulkunstenaar op die front van globale mega-tentoonstellings.

Die bevinding van hierdie studie is dat Documenta 11 se poging tot die konstruksie van meervoudige publieke sfere asook die transnasionale tentoonstelling as gekreoliseerde ruimte ten minste diskursiewe openinge skep wat artistieke diskoerse kan uitbrei. Maksimal sou dié Documenta roetes kon uitwys waarvolgens die transkulturele terrein (her)gekaart kan word.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND AIMS

1.1.1 Background

My interest in Documenta 11 started a few months before the opening in Kassel with meeting and listening to Sarat Maharaj at a conference in Copenhagen, where I was living at the time. Enthused by his elegant theorising as South-African-born co-curator and the fact that for the first time four South African artists would be participating in this Documenta, I offered my freelance-services to the Afrikaans daily newspaper *Beeld* in Johannesburg – where I worked for longer than a decade, the last few years as art writer. I thus joined the press corps in Kassel where I spent four days wrapped up in the hype of the opening and viewing of the exhibition, and interviewing the South African artists. Upon relocation to South Africa a few months later, I decided to get to grips with the extensive theorising around this Documenta-project on a formal basis.

Having been part of the press contingent during the Second Johannesburg Biennale, I was sensitised to the issues that Okwui Enwezor, the artistic director of both the biennale and Documenta 11, engaged with and shared expectations that this would, as South African-born artist Kendell Geers (2005:130) described it, be “our” Documenta. The aim of this study is, therefore, to ascertain what this notion of an inclusive Documenta could mean from the point of view of what used to be a ‘peripheral’ site of art production and what Documenta 11’s achievements were in shifting the historical Euro-American axis of the exhibition. The particular focus of the investigation is to analyse if Documenta 11 could be considered as in any way exemplary for a transcultural curatorial approach that eschews reductive-orientalist and multiculturalist approaches to representation on a global scale.



The mega-exhibition *Documenta* – held every four or five years¹ in Kassel, Germany – has achieved the prominence of a world-class cultural event, part Olympic Games and part World Fair. Among proliferating transnational exhibitions, *Documenta* retains the status of being possibly the premier art event for curators, artists, critics and the art viewing public alike. Hence, *Documenta* has a normative influence commensurate to, what curator-critic Nicholas Bourriaud (1992:131) terms, “the legendary aura which surrounds it, somewhere between pilgrimage, religious ceremony, and the expectation of a miracle”.

Since its inception in 1955 by Arnold Bode at the *Bundesgartenschau* (Federal Garden Show) as a one-off event, titled “*documenta: kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts*” (*documenta: art of the twentieth century*), (Platform_5 *Documenta 11, Exhibition Documenta 11 2002:[sp]*) this exhibition was “founded not just as artistic statement but also as a political one” (Bauer 2002:103). The first *Documenta* in the wake of the exclusion of *Entartete Kunst* was a retrospective and reconstructive showcasing of major artistic movements in a “broad, if initial, attempt to regain international contacts across the board and thus at home re-engage in a conversation that has been interrupted for so long, as it were”, according to art historian Werner Haftmann, the conceptual force behind *Documentas 1-3*.² Rebuilding Kassel, a former strategic munitions production centre, coincided with reinventing a role for the city as “democratic outpost” (Galloway 1993:55). Given Kassel’s close proximity to the border of, what was then, East Germany, *Documenta* subsequently became a bastion of Western excellence. Artistically *Documenta* showcased avant-garde artists and, more specifically, the work of Joseph Beuys from the third *Documenta* (1964) until *Documenta 8* (1987), a year after his death. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and dissolution of the East/West conflict ensuing from the end of the Cold War, director Jan

¹ The current time span of five years between exhibitions has been institutionalised since *Documenta 5*, held in 1972.

² Haftmann quoted in an overview of the history of each *Documenta* on the official *Documenta 11* website, which can be viewed at:

<http://www.documenta12.de/archiv/d11/data/english/index.html>



Hoet seems to have relinquished any pretence at a visionary role for Documenta 9 (1992). By the last Documenta (Documenta 10 in 1997) of the century and the first to be directed by a woman, Catherine David, the European-American axis of the exhibition became irrevocably unhinged.

The first non-European, black director of Documenta 11 (2002), Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor, could be considered to be the first artistic director to shift Documenta's axis in line with the focus on the North-South divide of former colonial powers and developing countries in a globalised art network.³ Enwezor (2002b:47) interpreted the bombing of the World Trade Centre as a loss of the utopian imaginary of Westernism; as "the instance of the full emergence of the margin to the centre":

Ground Zero as the *tabula rasa* defining global politics and cultural differentiation, points toward that space where the dead certainties of colonialism's dichotomizing oppositions, and Westernism's epistemological concepts for managing and maintaining modernity, have come to a crisis.

Approaching the venerable Northern institution of Documenta within this framework, Enwezor (2002b:43) posed postcolonial space⁴ as the site in which Documenta 11 could rethink "the historical procedures that are part of its contradictory heritage of grand conclusions". In contrast to postmodernism's preoccupation with "contesting the lapses and prejudices of epistemological grand narratives, postcoloniality does the obverse, seeking instead to sublimate and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation", claims Enwezor (2002b:45).

³ Given the hybridity of culture in the postcolonial world "South" refers here to more than a geographical designation and can also be descriptive of "internal Third Worlds" or Souths that exist inside states of the centre (Deleuze & Guattari 1997:467).

⁴ *Postcolonialism* refers in the context of Documenta 11 to what theorist Gayatri Spivak (1999:172) describes as "the contemporary global condition" – contrasted to European colonialism from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries and inclusive of neocolonialism, the prevailing uneven economic, political and cultural power structures. An engagement with postcolonial space therefore entails an exploration of the conditions of postcoloniality, and in particular, those constructions of colonial discourse that impact art production and institutions.



Enwezor's project of structuring a mega-exhibition⁵ around postcolonial thinking and transcending the institutional framework of avant-garde art was hailed by some as "ahead of its time" (Hoffman 2002:106) and presenting a new, practical curatorial model (Hasegawa 2002:105).

For the first time, Documenta was deterritorialised as an institution by transcending the confines of space and time historically placed on it through the staging of four discursive platforms on four continents before the fifth platform, the exhibition in Kassel. Thereby the traditional hundred days of the exhibition was extended to 18 months, from 15 March 2001 to 15 September 2002. The four platform-themes – Democracy unrealised (Platform 1); Experiments with the truth: transitional justice and the processes of truth and reconciliation (Platform 2); Créolité and creolization (Platform 3); and Under siege: four African cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos (Platform 4) – were presented respectively in both Vienna and Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia and Lagos. These innovations were in keeping with the role of Documenta as site for the production of art history. Art historian Walter Grasskamp (1996:71, emphasis added) describes Documenta in this regard as "an *exemplar* for the production of art history, because it is the most distinguished exhibition venture of the post-war era that has continually survived its own difficulties".

The notion of exemplar is partly entailed in the meaning of the word *documenta* from *dōcūmentum*, which according to the Latin dictionary (Harpers' 1907:605) means a lesson and example (in the sense of instruction or warning); a pattern; a proof, an instance or specimen. The term *exemplar* will in this study refer to Documenta's own designation and the sense referred to by Grasskamp of a "standard", a formulation that is close to philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn's (1996:187) use of exemplars as sets of concrete and technical problem-solutions in the paradigmatic matrixes within which

⁵ Artist/writer John Miller (1996:271) refers to the ideology of the *mega-exhibition* as an institution that: "purports to tell the viewer 'what's going on' in an internationally commensurable field [...]. It treats the terms of discourse as pre-existent and mutually agreed upon, rather than transformed in the course of art production and therefore subject to contradiction and conflict".



scientific communities function.⁶ Considering the historical mission that the Documenta invented for itself and the actual role that the exhibition played as disciplinary matrix in the writing of art history, I decided to utilise the various connotations of “exemplar” to guide this analysis. The title of this dissertation therefore refers to Documenta 11 as exemplar on various levels: as historical benchmark and measure of theoretic beliefs; as instance and possible model of curatorial practice.

Given its significant influence on both art history and practice, Documenta became the yardstick by which artists were measured for a place in the hallowed canon of Western art history.⁷ Compared to other mega-exhibitions like the biennials of Venice and São Paulo, Documenta is not organised along national lines where the jury has limited choice in determining who represents each nation. The wider scope, symbolic influence and considerable financial means at its disposal – Documenta 11 had a budget of €12.8 million – could present Documenta with a unique opportunity to affect change and redress distortions. In this regard Ute Meta Bauer (2002:103), one of six co-curators for Documenta 11, positioned Documenta 11 as a site to reformulate art history, maintaining that:

[...] Documenta has an opportunity to function as a corrective. For Documenta 11 in particular this can mean taking up the long overdue challenge to reformulate a history of art that is linear and focused on the West, and this in turn would necessitate that from now on we would have to address artistic positions from all parts of the world and the specific conditions under which they are produced.

⁶ Kuhn (1996:182-186) postulates a “disciplinary matrix” of shared theoretic structures, facilitating communication and commitment of scientists as a group, is made up of four elements: symbolic generalisations, models, values and exemplars. Allowing for the much more diffuse nature of artistic communities, a similar mechanism could be applied to, what art historian Arthur Danto (1964:584) formulated as, “The Artworld”: a community and works of art constituted by rules, theories, histories and a “style matrix”.

⁷ In reference to the grievances and protest actions of uninvited artists, such as Wolf Vorstell and Jörg Immendorf with Documenta 4 in 1968, Grasskamp (1996:72) maintains “the myth of *documenta* becomes more palpable than all the attacks of its critics, a myth according to which whoever was chosen is thereby accepted into a pantheon for which those who remain outside know no substitute”.



In the context of Documenta 11 a postcolonial approach could therefore be construed as, first of all, an engagement with the conditions of art history in the present. If one accepts the thesis of art historian Donald Preziosi (1998a:514) that “art history makes colonial subjects of us all”, Documenta 11 could be considered as a significant attempt to decolonise art history and, by extension, art practice. Preziosi (1998a:514) maintains that the notion of the aesthetic as an Enlightenment invention was “an attempt to come to terms with, and classify on a common ground or within the grid of a common table or spreadsheet, a variety of forms of subject-object relations observable (or imagined) across many different societies”. As such, aesthetics were instrumental in justifying hierarchies – between objects ranging from art to fetishes and between people as either advanced or primitive – as well as setting the parameters of ‘progress’.⁸ In this regard art history plays a major role in museology, in making “the visible *legible*” (Preziosi 1998a:509) and fabricating collective memory. Any rethinking of art-historical premises, therefore, has to come to terms with these conditions and their sediments in art practice. The success of the project of Documenta 11, specifically, would depend on how the curators – without replicating colonial power relations – found a way to engage with those previously constructed by Western narratives and excluded from, or granted limited access to, the dominant centre.

In an increasingly globalised world transnational mega-exhibitions particularly have to come to terms with, what postcolonial theorist Timothy Mitchell (1998:459) defines as, the “dominating European gaze” inherent in the exhibition order that organise the world as a picture, a view with cultural ‘others’ objectified and essentialised.⁹ An exhibition proposing to show the work of artists from around the globe for a primarily Northern audience in

⁸ Art and cultural theorist Griselda Pollock (1996:12) asserts that attempts to unsettle canonicity depend on reconstructing “the past not as a flow or development, but as conflict, politics, struggles on the battlefield of representation for power in the structural relations we call class, gender and race”.

⁹ This kind of Orientalism, Mitchell (1998:463) claims, is constituted by the reinforcement of “two distinct orders of being – the order of things and the order of their meaning, of representation and reality”. How curators approach the production of meaning in an exhibition is therefore crucial in order to avoid replicating the domination dynamics of colonial viewing.



some kind of egalitarian forum, thus has to deal with its own function of framing others. The curators of Documenta 11 positioned their project in this regard transculturally, eschewing both nationalist and multiculturalist agendas. The emphasis of such an approach could be framed in terms of a politics of difference rather than a politics of identity; the exhibition is set up as a space for engagement with hybridity, with “translating and transvaluing cultural differences” (Bhabha 1994:252), while emphasising the plurality of inputs in any cultural location.

This approach differed drastically from previous ‘identity exhibitions’ where the meaning and reception of artworks by non-Western, in particular African, artists were curated within the framework of modernist Eurocentrism, such as *‘Primitivism’ in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* in 1984 at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, *Les Magiciens de la Terre* in 1989 at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, *Africa Explores* at the Museum for African Art in New York in 1991 and *Africa 95* in London in 1995. However well intentioned, these exhibitions served to perpetuate colonial power structures and relations, reinforced hierarchies and, above all, exposed lingering assumptions of Western art as universal and visual experience as undifferentiated. The exhibitions in First World capitals displaced and emptied out the meanings of the non-Western context of the works and situated artists as guests; having to behave according to their hosts’ rules. Ultimately the essential aesthetic differentiation of two different orders for the centre and peripheries were maintained as, what artist and critic Rasheed Araeen (1989:3) describes as, “Our Bauhaus, Others’ Mudhaus”. For artists from the peripheries, and curators aiming to construct an inclusive, egalitarian exhibition, the critical issue is, therefore, how to approach equal exchange given the disparities between the centre and peripheries.

These inequalities are intensified through the uneven dynamics of globalisation impacting on artistic production, addressed in the context of Documenta 11 through postcoloniality, which, according to Enwezor (2002b:45), presents us with “counter-models through which the displaced – those placed on the margins of the enjoyment of full global participation –



fashion new worlds by producing experimental cultures”. In this way “experimental cultures” functioned as not only manifestations of counter-histories to claims of modernity as a single trope, but also staged counter-hegemonic resistance strategies to forces of globalisation. It is the contention of this study that Documenta 11 achieved some success towards facilitating equilateral exchange within the limits and limiting structures of a Northern institution by presenting these practices not as marginal, but as viable tactics to counteract global forces of homogenisation and fragmentation affecting art production everywhere.

1.1.2 Aims

It is the aim of this study to critically examine how, and to what extent, the ambitious curatorial aspirations of Documenta 11 were realised; in constructing, what Enwezor (2002b:43) encapsulates as, nothing less than a constellation of “forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures that are part of [Documenta’s] contradictory heritage of grand conclusions”. To this effect the impact of rethinking and restructuring Documenta will be evaluated around the following five main focal points concerning discourses in postcolonial approaches to art history and the functioning of transnational exhibitions:

1.1.2.1 The intention is, first and foremost, to investigate the claims of inclusivity and expansion of the institution of Documenta and evaluate whether any such institutional critique constituted a fundamental rethinking of the museum or canon. In this regard the promise and limits of Documenta, in particular, and mega-exhibitions *per se*, will be critically explored. Given the history of Documenta as ideologically bound to the view from Europe and funded by the North, the crucial question is whether Enwezor’s engagement with postcolonial narratives had affected changes in curatorial approaches for Documenta specifically and North-South relations in general, or whether his chance at the helm in Kassel could be interpreted as merely a politically correct gesture.



1.1.2.2 This study also sets out to demonstrate that Documenta 11's emphasis on cultural hybridity and creolisation in its exhibition spaces indeed set the tone for a new liberating exemplar for art practice, and that this approach moved beyond a global form of multiculturalism. Two crucial questions that will be considered in this regard are: firstly, under which conditions do the championing of hybridity turn into a levelling of differences, and secondly, how does a transnational exhibition avoid becoming an all-embracing global showcase in which exotic others are managed and packaged for an insatiable art market?

1.1.2.3 Another central objective is to engage with the functioning of the notion of transculturality in the exhibition and to identify elements of a possible exemplar for such a practice. If transculturality is postulated not only as a construct for cultural formation, but also as a value to be aspired to, how did this impact on the curatorial choices? If the lead of Documenta 11 – of the construction of the exhibition as a space of translation – is indeed followed, does this mean that curators are then cast in the role of translators and artworks expected to deal with translation in some form or another? Did transculturality become a new dogma in the hands of Enwezor?

1.1.2.4 In order to come to terms with the uneven conditions plaguing cultural production in the South, the aim is to examine forces of homogenisation and heterogenisation in a time of global transformation and its influence on art practices, both globally and locally. In its prescriptive role as a major, if not the *premier*, international exhibition, Documenta 11 acted as a force for homogenisation in the art world. In turn, discourses in the broader cultural context impacting on large-scale art exhibitions like Documenta – globalism, multiculturalism, imperialism, postcolonialism and neocolonialism – define what will be considered contemporary art practice and what local artists will aspire to. Considering how fluent the “local” has become, with artists travelling and working abroad and artworks themselves being transported around the world, are the visual fields being levelled or is a matrix of endless possibilities rather created?



1.1.2.5 This study aims specifically to engage with visual art discourses and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the global arena impacting local, that is South African art production. The objective is to seek out possible strategies for the production of locality by assessing discursive and artistic responses to global challenges employed by curators and artists in Documenta 11.¹⁰ Throughout, the focus will be on the success of tactics to bring about transformations and offer resistance to co-optation.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

In a globalised art network artistic practitioners are confronted with incongruous forces of liberalisation and hegemonisation: on the one hand, decolonisation on political, economic and cultural levels empowers artists and affects the way their work is received by audiences who transcend traditional borders, yet on the other hand, the emergence of a global culture with homogenised values and ideals – mediated by corporate marketing – could render critical art powerless. Formulating “strong, critical responses” (Enwezor 2002b:45) to hegemonic global configurations were therefore a key concern of Documenta 11. Specifically for artists from the South aiming to participate in the expanded global art field, coming to terms with the challenges of globalisation is crucial.

After the 1994 elections, previously marginalised South African artists became fashionable in the global art market. Four South Africans were invited to Documenta 11 – Kendell Geers, David Goldblatt, Santu Mofokeng and William Kentridge – compared to only two representations by Italians. This does not, however, mean that the playing field has been levelled for local artists – not inside nor from outside the country. As curator-artist David Koloane (1997:34) points out:

¹⁰ In this regard South African artist Kathryn Smith (2001:73) maintains South African artists have not yet come to terms with their locality, nor have they asserted themselves in and on the centre: “Two tumultuous Biennales later and no promise of a third, we aren’t any closer to understanding ourselves, apparently still doomed to being constructed rather than constructive. Groundbreaking as they were, neither Biennale appears to have wrought any real change on the cultural topography of this country.”



The recent developments in the country have not affected the visual arts structure. The marketplace is still controlled by whites. The operational infrastructure is still situated in white residential areas. Artists are still viewed ambivalently within black communities as an enigma, documenting day-to-day events for the benefit of an affluent white clientele.

Increased demand for 'African Art' in the global market conversely resulted in more restrictions for black South African artists, who used to be doubly marginalised by their exclusion from the *local* art world by colonial apartheid-structures that restricted access to education and the art market.¹¹ Euro-American institutions still have reductionist expectations of South African artists, especially black artists, to be exotic or 'authentic'. In this regard artist Kathryn Smith (2001:73-74) comments: "South African contemporary visual artists are exquisitely aware of our potential to become curiosities. It is something that we guard ourselves against, or strategically embrace for better or for worse."

Such a position is, however, deeply precarious, since artists run into all sorts of pitfalls in dealing with demands from the centre if they decide to 'play to the gallery'. If they try to make the kind of work valued by international institutions, artists are stymied by, what Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera (2001:29) calls, an "axiological monism" or catch-22, posed by specialists and collectors:

[T]his circle tends to regard – with suspicions of illegitimacy – art from the peripheries that endeavours to speak the 'international language'. When it speaks properly it is usually accused of being derivative, when it speaks with an accent it is disqualified for its lack of propriety toward the canon.

The challenge for artists is, therefore, to come up with strategies that do not pander to paternalistic attitudes and risk turning into a parody. This study sets out to investigate whether artworks showcased by Documenta 11 presented such possible approaches to undermining colonial thinking entrenched in globalised art-world structures that, according to Mosquera (2001:30, emphasis in original), have "responded less to a new consciousness than to a

¹¹ Koloane (1997:34) notes how dealers, who demand a "craft-like" thematic formula of township scenes, dictate to black artists, who are still working under trying conditions.



tolerance based on paternalism, quotas, and *political correctness*". A case will be made that some selected artworks indeed managed to transcend all kinds of borders while resisting to play by hegemonic rules.

Although Documenta 11's transcultural curatorial project was instituted to transcend precisely the kind of multiculturalist posturing described above, it is questionable to what degree this was achieved. It is nonetheless the contention of this study that a transcultural positioning offers a viable approach to cultural difference and that if Documenta 11 fell short of its curatorial goals in this regard, the problems with this approach was related to implementation rather than direction.

Much has been written about how multiculturalism in its postmodern guise serves as legitimation for, what co-curator Sarat Maharaj calls, "multicultural managerialism" (Hall & Maharaj 2001:46) of difference or cultural fundamentalisms, on the one hand, and tokenisation or ghettoisation on the other. As result the subaltern is marginalised, effectively silenced, or being used as "affirmative-action alibis" (Spivak, Spivak & Gunew 1990:62). Discourses around multiculturalism further presuppose what Homi Bhabha (1994:177) terms a "liberal ethic of tolerance" based on "the consensual, ethnocentric notion of the pluralistic existence of cultural diversity". Bhabha (1994:177) poses that:

[i]ncreasingly, the issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises, and the questions of identity that it raises are agonistic; identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre: in both senses, ex-centric.

This kind of agonistic affiliation is prevalent in South African cultural politics¹² when reified notions of 'self' and 'other', of whiteness and blackness, of 'Africa' and what it means to be a 'real African', and of the ownership of

¹² South African curator Colin Richards (1999:167) attributes the intense positioning in the South African cultural field to the opening up of the export market: "Cultural 'Africa' is in demand, and 'liberated' South Africa has become a significant site for a scramble to export a (re?)nascent cultural 'Africa' to international markets. Prominent in this scramble is the question of who has the right 'nativist' credentials to affect such export? Who has the right to speak in the *agora* or the market? Who is spoken for, and who addressed?"



history, culture and ethnicity come into play.¹³ Instead of tolerance and openness multiculturalist notions could lead to chauvinism, intransigence and disempowerment. An operative cultural concept beyond multiculturalism is therefore imperative within and across societies.

Underlying the problems of multiculturalism and interculturalism, maintains philosopher Wolfgang Iser (1999:196), is an antiquated “island premise” to the inherent concepts of culture.¹⁴ Any notion of cultures as unitary, closed spheres has been thoroughly discredited: firstly, by the diverse voices within cultures asserting the heterogeneity of ‘national’ identities; secondly, in actuality cultures display a syncretic formation informed by migration and travel, routes rather than roots; thirdly, postcolonial studies have shown how displacement influences the development of culture as “middle passage” (Gilroy 1993:4), thereby changing configurations on all sides; fourthly, transnationalisation of culture in the wake of globalisation exposes the porosity of cultural boundaries. Transculturality articulates these complexities and shifts the focus to transition rather than demarcation; “away from the concentration on polarity of the own and the foreign to an attentiveness for what might be common and connective” (Iser 1999:201). The lexicographic meaning (The Oxford English Dictionary 1989:385) of the prefix *trans-* means “across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing or state to another”. This prefix, therefore, implies both a sense of *what is beyond, on the other side*, and the actual *crossing* of borders or frames. The latter connotation moves the notion “transcultural” beyond “multicultural” approaches that tend to draw ever narrowing frames around fragmented cultural groupings.

¹³ Such posturing was painfully obvious in the last panel discussion “Speaking of Others” in Cape Town – part of the conference programme of the second Johannesburg Biennale – and in the debate around the representation of black female bodies, addressed in the volume edited by Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz: *Grey Areas. Representation, identity and politics in contemporary South African art*. 1999. Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill Press.

¹⁴ Iser (1999:194-197) argues that eighteenth century notions of culture formation developed by Johan Gottfried Herder – of groupings being informed by “social homogenization, ethnic consolidation and intercultural delimitation” (Iser 1999:194) – remain unchanged when cultures are conceived as separate, autonomous spheres.



In moving beyond fragmentation and essentialised differences, transculturality does not advance a single pan-cultural position, but, instead, widens the focus to multiple transitions in indeterminate cultural spaces. Therefore, it is the contention of this study that not only could a transcultural curatorial approach be considered superior to previous approaches, but it is also of crucial importance to investigate how such an orientation could be realised in the functioning of an exhibition. Favouring a transcultural approach to difference, an analysis of the project of Documenta 11 could, as a result, offer valuable insights and possibly reveal a workable exemplar for connectivity and global exchange.

For the South, especially, finding new modalities for global cultural dialogue and forging links outside a North-South axis is important. Not only do attitudes from the centre to the peripheries remain fundamentally unchanged, maintains Mosquera (2001:32-33), but the peripheries have also not crossed ideological borders imposed by colonialism – by focussing more on the centre than on their neighbours:

The lack of horizontal interaction is a colonial legacy barely modified. This situation urges the peripheries to undertake stronger efforts to establish and develop horizontal circuits that act as cultural life spaces. Such circuits will contribute to pluralizing culture, internationalising it in the real sense, legitimising in their own terms, constructing new epistemes, unfolding alternative actions.

From their location as academics working in Australia, media theorist Scott McQuire and contemporary art theorist Nikos Papastergiades (2005a:5) propose “horizontal southern spirals” should be advanced in order to counter-act colonial power formations, and rethink the global and local. Thus, transculturality approached along horizontal lines can contribute to “providing a matrix for new modes of inclusion and forms of collaboration that might counterpoint the extension of commodity production into the interstices of everyday life” (McQuire & Papastergiades 2005a:10). As such, a transcultural approach can aid the production of critical art. Whilst Documenta 11 essentially was bound to its Northern home – however far and wide the first four platforms travelled – it could be argued that by importing production from



diverse localities in the South into its spaces the curatorial project created the conditions for critical art.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Various fields of literature are applicable to this research – including culture studies, philosophy, history and theory of art – focussed around broad discourses of postcolonialism, globalisation, exhibitions and Documenta in particular.

1.3.1 Media-overview

Considering the extraordinary media coverage that Documenta 11 received in print, radio and TV¹⁵ – to which I contributed in the form of two reports in *Beeld* newspaper (Van Niekerk 2002a, 2002b) – this study will not endeavour to cover all angles, but instead focus on salient points in newspapers and art journals. Newspaper articles that reviewed or otherwise engaged with the issues brought up by this Documenta were selected from the German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, American *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, London-based *The Art Newspaper*, The South African *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times*, Paris-based *International Herald Tribune* and Indian daily *The Hindu*. For reviews of the last four Documentas, articles about contemporary art production, globalisation and other broad theoretic concerns, the periodicals investigated include: *Kunstform International*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *Third Text*, *Art Monthly*, *Contemporary*, *Art in America*, *International Review of African American Art*, *Frieze*, *Artforum International*, *Art Journal*, *Flash Art*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, *October*, *Journal of visual culture*, *Art southafrica*, *Variant*, *Radical Philosophy*, *Historical Materialism*, *Thesis Eleven* and *Public Culture*.

¹⁵ Since the announcement of Enwezor as artistic director of Documenta 11 in 1998 more than 15 000 reports and articles were published and in 2002 alone more than 7 000 articles appeared about Documenta 11, according to the official Documenta website: <http://www.documenta12.de/data/english/index.html>



1.3.2 Postcolonialism and globalisation

Against the backdrop of writers engaging with decolonialisation – such as Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, C.L.R. James, Achille Mbembe, and Valentin Y. Mudimbe – cultural theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, Iain Chambers, Bill Aschcroft, Garreth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have contributed seminal works in the wide ranging postcolonial critique of hegemonic Western cultural constructions and the agency of marginalised groups. My reading of Documenta has been informed by these postcolonial and other cultural discourses overlapping with works dealing with globalisation. Since Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase “global village” in the 1960s much has been written about imperialist dynamics manifesting as economic and cultural neocolonialism and neo-imperialism. Authors making valuable contributions to this discussion and investigation of the broad features of globalisation include – besides some of the above mentioned postcolonial critics – theorists from the fields of critical theory, anthropology, literature studies, sociology, economics and political studies: Fredric Jameson, Arjun Appadurai, James Clifford, Masao Miyoshi, Zygmunt Bauman, Roland Robertson, Ulf Hannerz, Saskia Sassen, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

1.3.3 Art history and theory

In the field of art theory the work of particularly postcolonial and feminist theorists have, since the late 1970s, expanded the postmodern framework in which the Western canon, history of art, curatorial practices and art criticism are discussed. Discourses on visual colonialism and chauvinism, diaspora, multiculturalism, identity, subjectivity, race and gender have been shifted by Enwezor, Olu Oguibe, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Néstor García Canclini, Donald Preziosi, Allan Wallach, Annie E. Coombes, Thomas McEvilley, Sarat



Maharaj, Kobena Mercer, Geeta Kapur, Julia Kristeva, Nanette Salomon, Griselda Pollock, bell hooks, Rosi Braidotti, Lisa Tickner and Amelia Jones.

Positions developed in this study have been substantiated with reference to broad issues raised by these theorists, as well as specific art-historical narratives about art and politics engaged within the context of Documenta 11's commitment to engage political and ethical concerns. These include contributions by the Situationists, specifically Guy Debord's theories about the society of the spectacle and counter-tactics to subvert it. Film theory, particularly Third Cinema, the cultural politics of Trinh T. Minh-ha and the political use of psychoanalysis in redirecting the gendered gaze (investigated by Laura Mulvey among others), influence positions by artists and the curators of this Documenta alike. Engaging these issues, this study employs views developed by literary theorists Mikhail Bakhtin on the carnivalesque and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks on adversarial aesthetics, the notion of agonism outlined by political theorist Chantal Mouffe and Lewis Hyde's analysis of the trickster in order to evaluate to what degree Documenta 11 could be considered subversive.

1.3.4 Documenta

Primary sources about the discourses around Documenta and the history of the exhibition are texts by the curators of Documenta were consulted: Harald Szeemann (Documenta 5, 1972), Manfred Schneckenburger (Documenta 6, 1977), Rudi Fuchs (Documenta 7, 1982), Jan Hoet (Documenta 9, 1992), Catherine David (Documenta 10, 1997), Enwezor (Documenta 11, 2002) and his co-curators Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya. Another useful source was the Documenta archive comprising exhibition catalogues, periodicals, letters of curators to artists and information on participating artists. Art historians who have written extensively about Documenta, like Walter Grasskamp, and critics writing about the various Documentas have provided me with further insights into the history of this institution and how specific exhibitions were received.



Documenta 11 has in particular generated a wealth of information in the Platform reports – accessed in published form and in video format on the documenta-website – to which diverse cultural practitioners, as well as Documenta-artists, contributed.¹⁶ Besides the exhibition viewed in Kassel, the exhibition catalogue, shortguide and photographic record of exhibition venues published by Documenta 11 were central resources for this research. Other sources were websites and digital forums, some generated as artworks for Documenta 11.

1.3.5 Exhibiting and mega-exhibitions

This study orientates the discussion of Documenta 11 within the history of contemporary exhibition practices as investigated by Ivan Karp, Stephen Lavine, Rosalind Krauss, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, Emma Barker, Irit Rogoff, Clémentine Deliss, Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, whose writings have consolidated debates about the spectacle, museum strategies, politics of representation, the role of the curator, as well as large-scale and monographic exhibitions. Specific attention is paid to innovative

¹⁶ Besides the curatorial team, the twenty-six contributors/contributing teams to **Platform 1** (*Democracy unrealized*) included major cultural theorists – Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, Chantal Mouffe and Immanuel Wallerstein – as well as some practitioners working outside Europe and America: Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, Indian historian Harbans Mukhia and Chinese political scientist Zhiyuan Cui. Civil initiatives, such as *Arquitectos Sin Fronteras-España* assisting in projects in developing countries, and Austrian association *Demokratische Offensive*, were also represented. The wide-ranging scope of **Platform 2** (*Experiments with truth: transitional justice and the processes of truth and reconciliation*) was addressed by academics, publishers, jurists, political activists and filmmakers, including: social scientist Shahid Amin, legal philosopher Yadh Ben Achour, architect Susana Torre, gender and human rights theorist Susan Slyomovics, film and literature theorist Manthia Diawara, feminist publisher Urvashi Butalia, Justice of the South African Constitutional Court Albie Sachs and project-director for Oxfam Dilip Simeon – in all twenty-three contributors. **Platform 3** (Créolité and creolization) (fourteen contributors) focussed on a specific French Caribbean model of cultural mixing, yet involved – besides regional cultural and language experts such as Jean Bernabé, Dame Pearllette Louisy, Ginette Ramassamy and writer Derek Walcott – also broader contributions by Stuart Hall, art historians Irit Rogoff and Petrine Archer-Straw and curator Gerardo Mosquera. For **Platform 4** (*Under siege: four African cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*) among the twenty contributors urbanists like AbdouMaliq Simone, Koku Konu and Carole Rakodi, were convened with activists and researchers from diverse disciplines, including: sociologist Babatunde Ahonsi, anthropologist Filip de Boeck, architects Lindsay Bremner and Rem Koolhaas, postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe, film historian Onookome Okome and dramatist Thierry Nlandu.



curator-theorists, such as Nicholas Bourriaud and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, who have not only changed curatorial practice but also art theory. Besides Enwezor, this study references other “Third World” curators working internationally and influencing thinking about global cultural politics, like Salah Hassan, Hou Hanru, Basualdo and Mosquera. In order to situate the curatorial practices of Documenta 11, a comparison was made with other contemporary mega-exhibition catalogues – particularly the preceding XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (1998), with Paulo Herkenhoff as chief-curator, Francesco Bonami’s fiftieth Venice Biennial in 2003, and the successive Documenta 12, curated by Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This study is contextualised in the interstices created by postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonial, and to a lesser extent, Neo-Marxist thinking. Postmodernism – here interpreted as the reversal of modernist beliefs, or *end-theory* of history, art and art history defined from a purely rationalistic Western perspective – impacted on postcolonial rewriting or reinterpreting of colonial consciousness and, what Jean-François Lyotard termed, the *grand récrits* of modernism.¹⁷ As a result beliefs in hierarchy were broken down: of the metropolises of empires somehow being superior to the peripheral former colonies; indeed, the very idea of a centre *per se*; of the “significance of the distinction between Western-non-Western, and with it history as a hegemonic discourse linked to specific covert purposes (like civilising culture)” (Denson & McEvelley 1996:122). Although legitimisations of any centre-periphery dynamics have been discredited, cultural divisions remain as, what David (quoted in Royoux 1997:86) describes as, “a series of speeds and relations based on unequal exchanges with no exteriority”.

¹⁷ Lyotard (1984:31-39) maintains the grand narratives legitimising discourses of modernity are the narrative of emancipation, in which notions of liberty and progress dominate, and the narrative of speculation, philosophical discourse as the rational meta-narration of the dialectic of Spirit, in the Hegelian sense of the rationale of history.



In order to engage with the measure of cultural differences – if disparate speeds and disproportionate relations are taken as frame of reference – and critique the legacies of colonialism in art practice, my reading has been influenced by theorists like Bhabha and Said, who view society as complex interrelations of texts and meanings, based on poststructuralist ideas developed by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Both philosophers dismissed any possibility of being outside discourse or textuality. Foucault's analysis of discursive practices reveal the relationship between mechanisms of power and the development of knowledge, as well as the historicity of notions of "truth". For Derrida, there is no end-point to deconstruction and interpretation, no final truth. His concept of *différance*, of texts that allow multiple interpretations in a surplus of possibilities, is especially meaningful when analysing postcolonial cultures. According to poststructuralist thinking, cultural constructions of meanings are regulated by rules of exclusion that will privilege some meanings while discounting others, but traces of suppressions might remain, and by looking at the gaps, silences and discontinuities which are obscured by ideology, these cultural meanings can be deconstructed. Demystification of narratives thus shows the limits of narration, but also addresses the position of constructed others, and as such is a strong theoretic tool for postcolonial projects aiming at the transformation of power relations. In the analysis of Documenta 11, I similarly attempt to show how the curatorial project could be considered to demystify narratives and, if not transforming uneven power relations, at least focussed on the scope and causes of disparities between cultural frames.

It is the aim of this study, as it was for the Documenta-curators, to create a space to deconstruct ideology, a space of ambiguity and ambivalence in the act of interpretation, that is facilitated by what Bhabha calls a "Third Space"¹⁸ and Enwezor (1999:244-275) terms the "gaps between worlds where artists disrupt and problematize the postcolonial border". A certain form of

¹⁸ According to Bhabha (1994:36), interpretation is not only informed by the "I" (subject of a proposition) and the "You" (subject of enunciation), but are "mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious".



marginality, of in-betweenness – defined by Bhabha (1996:204-205) in terms of agency as “the space of the ‘unsatisfied’” and “a space of agonism” – becomes the space of both translation and emergence. The idea of exile, of migrants crossing borders being in a position to translate cultural differences and invent “‘other’ ways of knowing and ways of knowing ‘otherness’” (Maharaj 2002b:72), was central to Documenta 11. According to Bauer (2002:105), this Documenta “tried to open up a space of in-between, of transition and of passage, a space of diaspora”. To what extent such a space could act as transgressive opening and how Documenta 11 measured up to the potential of the in-between, is a particular focus of this research.

In this regard Documenta 11 was also aligned with the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on nomadism. Deleuze and Guattari (1987:380) construct notions about nomad space and the nomadic potential for war around the position of the nomad as living “intermezzo” and moving along trajectories in open space. The anti-essentialist and transgressive potential of this position is favoured by both feminist theorists, such as Rosi Braidotti, and postcolonial thinking that emphasises diaspora and displacement. For Documenta 11 the nomadic translated to, what co-curator Basualdo (2002b:57) refers to as, a space of displacement and finding “a sort of comfort in our displacement” through aesthetic agency. An evaluation of the “agency” created by the Documenta-curators could thus be deemed crucial for the success of their nomadic focus.

Thinking about the possibilities for agency links Documenta 11 to New-Marxist ideas and critical theory that are still part of the discourses around visual art production and the critique of culture. Of particular importance is the prospect of devising counter-strategies to *hegemony* – Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the asymmetrical relationship in which subordinate classes are brought to active or passive consent to their own domination. In the context of a spectacular mega-exhibition like Documenta 11, this means above all a coming to terms with the hegemonic dynamics of the culture industry, as analysed by Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas. Since Enwezor (2002b:54) based his conception of the five platforms of Documenta



11 on the idea of a “constellation of public spheres” this Documenta endeavoured to overcome the decay of the public sphere, as outlined by Habermas.¹⁹ As such the Documenta-project was located in the rationalist tradition that Habermas is considered to defend against the poststructuralist critique of modernism.²⁰ Beliefs in the liberating force of reason and a civil duty to democratic engagement thus informed the curatorial vision of Documenta 11. An inquiry into the theoretical framework of this Documenta therefore has to critically evaluate these assumptions in terms of the subversive results aimed for by their implementation.

The main theoretical focus of this study is to measure the possibilities of a postcolonial approach to cultural difference considering the challenges posed by burgeoning hegemonies in an increasingly globalised cultural landscape. Here I align myself with Bhabha (1994:174), who formulates the main challenge for cultural practitioners as: “(i)f we contest the ‘grand narratives’, then what alternative temporalities do we create to articulate the differential (Jameson), contrapuntal (Said), interruptive (Spivak) historicities of race, gender, class, nation within a growing transnational culture?” To what extent Documenta 11 could be regarded as succeeding in this transcultural task would determine if its project could be considered as an exemplar for curators, artists and the viewing public.

While a survey of the literature pertaining to the history and practice of Documenta, and specifically to Documenta 11, is both descriptive and exploratory, this study is largely a critical exploration which is speculative in nature. The research will be based on a textual analysis of the statements and publications of the curatorial team of Documenta 11, and on a literature study pertaining to the context of this Documenta. This will include an analysis of

¹⁹ Habermas poses in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, published in 1962 and translated as *The structural transformation of the public sphere*, that the eighteenth century model of the bourgeois public sphere functioning in Britain has been corrupted by the mutual infiltration of public and private spheres, the polarisation of social and intimate spheres and the movement away from a culture-debating to culture-consuming public (Habermas 1991:141-174).

²⁰ Against the scepticism and relativism associated with poststructuralism the seminal work by Habermas, *The theory of communicative action* (two volumes first published as *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* in 1981), argues for communicative rationality as expressed in inter-personal communication directed by a *telos* of mutual understanding in the *lifeworld*.



views of curators working globally and locally, with specific emphasis on the South African context. A content and visual analysis of some of the works selected for Documenta 11 investigate to what extent they affirm or transcend the curatorial ideas expressed and create alternatives for critical art practice.

Specific criteria apply to the selection of artworks for discussion in this study, based on the localisation of the researcher and the focus of the research. This includes, firstly, South African artists or artworks referencing South African conditions. Secondly, artists or collectives who took part in the discursive platforms and also show their work in the exhibition, thereby aligning themselves with the larger project of Documenta 11: the Italian group Multiplicity (founding member Stefano Boeri participated in Platform 1), filmmakers Alfredo Jaar, Eyal Sivan and Amar Kanwar²¹ (Platform 2), Isaac Julien (Platform 3), and Thierry Nlandu as member of the Congolese collective Le Groupe Amos (Platform 4). Thirdly, artworks dealing with core-concerns of the curatorial project of Documenta 11 focussed on in this study – works that engage with transcultural issues – are considered in my critical recontextualisation of the exhibition.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This study comprises six chapters following the first introductory chapter. The themes and implications of the curatorial project of Documenta 11 are discussed in terms of the construction of a spectacularly different Documenta (Chapter 2), the expansion of public spheres (Chapter 3), curating globality while producing locality (Chapter 4), min(d)ing the *gap* in various manifestations (Chapter 5), the functioning of a threshold aesthetic of the trickster (Chapter 6) and, finally, the conclusion (Chapter 7). Rather than addressing different aspects of this study consecutively, each chapter builds

²¹ Although Kanwar did not present a theoretic contribution like Jaar and Sivan, his film *A season outside* (1997) was shown during the film and video program held concurrently with the conference at the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi in May 7-21, 2001.



rhizomatically around the central theme in order to engage with the theoretic complexity inherent to this Documenta. Opting to avoid any compartmentalised approach, the discussion of the discursive platforms is integrated into the analysis of the broad curatorial project.

The main body of this study proceeds from an examination in *Chapter 2* of the elements that could be regarded as defining the spectacular difference of Documenta 11 – those elements that struck visitors to the exhibition as extraordinary, singular and indeed exemplary in some instances. This chapter engages critically with the central strategy to affect institutional critique, namely postcoloniality as tactical manoeuvre to engage the aesthetic sphere. This opening-out involves both an expansion in terms of inclusivity and equality of representation; a creolising of the exhibition with creolisation taken as paradigm of transculturation (a notion explored in Platform 3). To this effect curatorial tactics employed in the discursive platforms and, more specifically, in the exhibition are explored, such as the notion of extraterritoriality and a rhizomatic structure. These tactics serve a further purpose of being devised to undermine spectacularisation, a critical issue for a Documenta that was committed to ethical engagement with the world outside the gallery. Curatorial approaches to agency are discussed in terms of spectatorship beyond the hegemonies of the society of the spectacle, and of artworks as ethical epistemic engines in a transcultural arena. The large amount of documentary-style works on display is in this regard assessed in relation to the ethical dimension of the postcolonial project of Documenta 11. By slowing down – despectacularising the viewing process – opening up art production to more producers and ultimately reconsidering the ‘real’, these works advanced the curatorial project and thus are reconsidered as knowledge-producing art practice. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the potential of the curatorial bag of tricks to result in any transformation of the lopsided North-South dynamics of a global art network.

Chapter 3 explores the functioning of Documenta 11’s public spheres in terms of expansion: the extension of the institution of Documenta and the postcolonial reinvigoration of the concept developed by Habermas. The



platforms expressly addressed how inclusivity and pluralism could be approached against the disparities created by globalisation processes. Significant areas of crises in the global public sphere – the collapse of civil structures in marginalised countries, the threat to democracy and dilemmas with doing justice on transnational and local levels – are examined with reference to Platforms 1 and 2, as well as artworks in Platform 5 dealing with these issues. An important criticism raised in this chapter is whether the expansion-project of Documenta 11 added new levels to the discourse around transculturality, transnational exhibitions and globalisation, or if Documenta itself functioned as a globalising instrument to usurp previously unexplored territories for a neocolonial cultural marketplace.

In *Chapter 4* Documenta 11's main approach to subvert the expansionism of a global art market and the trivialising of differences are discussed and evaluated. Although the focus of Documenta 11 was undeniably global, by emphasising the production of locality, the Platforms localised the global discourse. The global was constructed as postcolonial space in which proximity became the ethical space of engagement. In this regard this study engages with African cities in crisis (the topic of Platform 4) and art production in marginal spaces as extreme examples of the production of localities. Other showcased attempts at the production of locality on a translocal level in the form of a digital public sphere are also evaluated. The contention of this chapter is that Documenta 11's privileging of the local not only undermined homogenising of the global, but also shifted the role of transnational curator to that of translocal translator and, in particular, underscored that which is lost in transnationalisation within the exhibition space.

The postcolonial rethinking and rewriting imperative of Documenta 11 is addressed in *Chapter 5*, by examining an orientation towards the gap, or lacuna, underlying various features of this Documenta. First of all, the gaps, omissions, disparities and framing devices in the archival functioning of the museum were reconsidered through the inclusion of diverse works dealing with the archive. For artists from the South denial of proximity and coevalness based on colonial conceptions of space and time meant exclusion from the



canon in the past and, where modernist notions persist, being labelled as deficient. In order to breach gaps, de-hegemonise cultural narratives and coding, and facilitate transcultural translation Documenta 11 located its project in its entirety in Bhabha's in-between space, in the gap, as it were. As such, homelessness, displacement and nomadic subjectivity impacted the archiving logic of Documenta to become anarchival; memory production to turn into counter-memory; the work of remembrance to be shaped as counter-memorials.

Criticised for a commitment to social engagement, rather than aesthetics, the exhibition of Documenta 11 was nonetheless informed by, what could be termed, a threshold aesthetic. *Chapter 6* explores this idea through an analysis of the notion of the artist as trickster, referred to by defenders and detractors of Documenta 11's curatorial approaches alike. Different kinds of oppositionality employed by artists are discussed, as are adversarial approaches reinvigorated by the curatorial selection of artworks (such as Situationist and Third Cinema strategies). The focus of this chapter is to discern to what extent an agonistic positioning may be significant as, firstly, a counter-localisation to multiculturalism in a transcultural exhibition and, secondly, to resist assimilation and co-optation. In this regard the embrace of the threshold, of thirdness, by Documenta 11 could be considered an exemplar of a global trickster positioning aiming for an expansion of critical visual strategies.

Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of some elements of transcultural curating extrapolated from notions put forward by the curatorial team of Documenta 11 and an evaluation of this Documenta as possible exemplar of such a practice. The gains and inefficiencies, even contra-productive results, of curatorial strategies are emphasised in a comparison to Documenta 12. The chapter closes with a short discussion of the contribution and limitations of this study and suggests some themes for further research. The contention of this study is that, having set out to grapple with the construction of multiple, overlapping public spheres and the exhibition as nomadic space this Documenta, at the very least, opened up discursive spaces that could expand



artistic discourses. At best, possible ways to resist hegemonies were revealed by artists chosen to participate by the curators in Documenta 11. By virtue of its serious engagement with the transnational space of the mega-exhibition as transcultural space in which new understanding of difference could be facilitated, Documenta 11 demands to be considered as a much-needed exemplar of a non-totalising, non-reductive exhibition practice. This research positions itself as an initial probing into the possible successes achieved in this regard.



CHAPTER 2

CONSTRUCTING A SPECTACULARLY DIFFERENT DOCUMENTA¹

...Documenta 11's spaces are to be seen as forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures that are part of its contradictory heritage of grand conclusions.
Okwui Enwezor (2002b:43).

Lauded as a Documenta of firsts – the first non-European director; the first to expand to destinations besides Kassel and outside the traditional time frame of the exhibition; the first to adopt a postcolonial project – Documenta 11's position as pioneering exhibition at the start of the twenty-first century needs to be reflected on. The approach in this chapter is to examine the salient features of this Documenta in terms of the *spectacular*, which will be employed in two different contexts: firstly, as a term describing what could be conceived of as possible exceptional approaches of the curatorial team, and, secondly, in reference to the spectacularisation of culture production deepened by homogenising forces of globalisation.² Special attention will be paid in this chapter, as in each of the following chapters, to the central question about this Documenta: to what extent did Documenta 11 function as mechanism of spectacularisation in a transnational art network or manage to transcend its hegemonies.

Starting from Documenta 11's venture to open out the aesthetic sphere, this chapter will focus on whether curatorial innovations, particularly postcoloniality, constitutes the institutional critique proposed by Enwezor, or if inclusivity of practitioners and publics previously ignored by Documenta amounts to delivering 'others for sale'. Counter-strategies – such as the

¹ The title of this chapter refers to Enwezor's (2002b:43) own characterisation of Documenta 11 in terms of the expectation that each Documenta should demonstrate its "spectacular difference".

² Guy Debord (1995:12) defines the notion of *spectacle* in thesis 4 as: "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." These mediated relations are further "both the outcome and goal of the dominant mode of production" (Debord 1995:13). Spectacularisation could therefore be construed as, to paraphrase Fredric Jameson (1991), as the cultural logic of global capitalism.



emphasis on the ethical dimension of the exhibition, on the agency of artists and creating ethical spectators by Documenta 11 – will be discussed in this regard. An analysis of the role of the documentary as form suited to both ethical engagement and the undermining of spectacularisation will conclude the chapter.

2.1 OPENING OUT THE AESTHETIC SPHERE

Half a century after the invention of the institution, Documenta 11 presents a decentred, expanded approach to the mega-exhibition by situating itself firmly in the arena of global cultural politics. Continuing a process that started with French curator Catherine David's Documenta X in 1997, Documenta 11 constituted a definitive shift in placing art production beyond conventional limits of the discipline of fine arts and inside a multidisciplinary social and political context. The first artistic director to come from the peripheries of the institution that used to function as a Euro-American bastion of artistic excellence, Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor (2003a:44), explicitly set out not to create an art exhibition, but to "make something else, in spite of the art exhibition". The aim with Documenta 11 was for it not to function as an institutionalised exhibition, but rather as a "constellation of public spheres" (Enwezor 2002b:54) in a global community. The catalogue for the exhibition sets the tone with the inclusion of 30 pages of still-images from news networks before the title page, orientating Documenta 11 towards global concerns: Aids in South Africa; the attacks on the World Trade Centre; living in the war zones of Yugoslavia, Congo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan and Palestine; the plight of immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and the homeless; the conditions in sweat-shops and dysfunctional cities; anti-globalisation protests and ethnic violence.

Some critics have lauded this positioning of the aesthetic sphere inside global politics as a much-needed effort to make large-scale exhibitions relevant in a time when the proliferation of biennials leaves audiences jaded and numb. In a globalised art world, Documenta has been described by artist John Miller



(1996:269) as an “anachronistic ritual” perpetuating the empty “cycle of raised expectations and quick disillusionment which has come to typify big international survey shows”. For art critic Jens Hoffmann (2002:106), “Platform 5 of Documenta 11 pulled in just at the right moment as a remarkable demonstration that ‘large’ can work”. What makes Documenta 11 different in Hoffmann’s (2002:106) view is that it “reflect[s] the urgent need of a more severe political approach to art, it also outlines a radical trans-disciplinary, trans-cultural, and trans-generational method for escaping the mediocrity of most what the art world has to offer these days”.

Asserting a critical difference has been an aim of each Documenta since the exhibition became a showcase of the vanguards in art history.³ Despite the demise of grand narratives, successive curators intended on maintaining the show’s premier position in the art world, and “the goal is still to reflect on and formulate Documenta anew each time” (Bauer 2002:103). In terms of Documenta’s considerable art-historic heritage and in the current throng of large-scale exhibitions, the success of a contemporary Documenta may depend on, what Enwezor (2002b:43) terms, a “spectacular difference”. Nothing less than a spectacular difference will do if spectacle has indeed become the mould of the mega-exhibition and, as curator Hou Hanru (2003:36) argues, art is now considered equivalent to the *art event* in a society given form by the spectacle. In this context Enwezor (2002b:43) refers to Documenta 11 having to declare its spectacular difference:

At the turn of an already less than promising century, Documenta is confronted by and placed in the challenging situation of declaring what its spectacular difference will be, without shielding its past triumphs and successes from the transhistorical processes that shake the ground of every ontological pronouncement about artistic uniqueness.

³ In the catalogue of Documenta 4 in 1968 initiator Arnold Bode (quoted in Westecker, Eberth, Lengemann & Müller 1972:163) located the meaning of Documenta in the fact that the exhibition is not an established institution but is reinvented each time: “Was ihre Bedeutung ausmacht, ist wohl die Tatsache, daß die documenta nicht als etablierte Institution existiert! Alle vier Jahre tritt sie auf den Plan, ist sie da! Die Idee der documenta muß jedesmal neu formuliert werden; ihr Programm und ihre Form.”



In order to establish any critical difference, whether spectacular or not, Documenta 11 had to contend not only with its own spectacular form, but above all with issues of spectacularisation by the culture industries,⁴ as well as instrumentalisation by the global market and the very political forces it set out to oppose. For Documenta 11 postcoloniality is the principal tactic employed to subvert spectacularisation and instrumentalisation and as such merits closer scrutiny.

2.1.1 Postcolonial tactical maneuver

In the context of Documenta 11, global representation is inexorably postcolonial.⁵ For Enwezor “the postcolonial, as the ethical response to the challenge of the global, should be seen as a kind of tactical maneuver”, offering a way to “think historically in the present” (Griffin, Meyer, Bonami, Rosler, Enwezor, Shonibare, David & Obrist 2003: 206). In the context of the catalogue of Documenta 11, postcoloniality comprises a twofold attack: decolonisation, or “liberation from within” (Enwezor 2002b:44), and “making empire’s former ‘other’ visible and present at all times” (Enwezor 2002b:45). For Frantz Fanon (2001:28) decolonisation “transforms spectators crushed by their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history’s floodlight upon them”. In terms of Documenta a postcolonial agenda, therefore, involved liberating artists, formerly marginalised as spectators to, or imitators of, “Western” art to participate in the history of modernity. It also entailed re-examining “[art] history’s floodlight” at one of its sources, rethinking

⁴ The dynamics of, what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer cynically termed, the “culture industry” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (first print-edition in 1947 was titled *Dialektik der Aufklärung*) impact not only popular culture manufacturing standardised goods, needs and production strategies. Critical art risks similar forces of standardisation and commodification, summarised by David (1997:1) as: “The stakes here are no less political than aesthetic – at least if one can avoid reinforcing the mounting spectacularization and instrumentalization of ‘contemporary art’ by the culture industry, where art is used for social regulation or indeed control, through the aestheticization of information or through forms of debate that paralyze any act of judgement in the immediacy of raw seduction or emotion (what might be called “the Benneton effect”).”

⁵ According to Enwezor (2002b:55) the four discursive platforms and the exhibition were “placed at the dialectical intersection of contemporary art and culture. Such an intersection equally marks the liminal limits out of which the postcolonial, post-Cold War, post-ideological, transnational, deterritorialized, diasporic, global world has been written”.



skewed “grand conclusions”, constructed around omissions as much as inclusions. Enwezor (2002b:45) stresses in this regard that this postcolonial re-assessment should not be confused with a postmodernistic reworking of grand narratives, but that “postcoloniality does the obverse, seeking instead to sublate and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation”. Basualdo (2002b:59) frames this curatorial task as not “reconstructing history”, but rather “reconstructing the present”. In the neocolonial⁶ present transnationalisation of labour, identities and cultural forms create new dimensions of postcolonial discourse.

At stake are a *rethinking*, and indeed a *rewriting*, of the history of modernity as a single trope. In his introduction at Platform 4, Enwezor (2002d:[sp]) claimed that by presenting platforms in non-European locales – New Delhi, St. Lucia and Lagos – Documenta is not merely displaced, but the very nature of discourses shaping debates around “centres and peripheries, the canon and non-canon, West and non-West, European and non-European” is questioned. This position is in line with the cultural task set by Stuart Hall (2001:19, emphasis in the original) that the history of modernities “should now be rewritten as a set of cultural translations rather than as a universal movement which can be located securely within a culture, within a history, within a space, within a chronology and within a set of political and cultural relations”. In this respect all Documenta 11’s platforms were conceived to “challenge suppositions of history being defined by Europe”, according to Enwezor (2002d:[sp]), and abrogate notions of cultural standards being set by the North. By setting itself the daunting task to reassess both historical and contemporary power relations, this Documenta raised the stakes for success and, conversely, failure of its ambitious curatorial project .

For Documenta 11 a great deal was riding on the potential of a postcolonial approach to reinsert specificity into transnational discourses that mystifies space as a flattened, unified trope and time as the recurring present. Debord claims (1995:165, emphasis in original) in thesis 165:

⁶ Neocolonial conditions of economic and cultural production in the South will be further discussed in Chapter 3 with reference to Platform 1: Democracy unrealized.



The capitalist production system has unified space, breaking down the boundaries between one society and the next. This unification is also a process, at once extensive and intensive, of *trivialization*.

The postcolonial approach of Documenta 11 set out to countermand this flattening feature of spectacularisation by showing disproportions between specific cultural production sites, thus thrusting marginalised spaces into focus. Furthermore, by reactivating historical discourses, postcoloniality could act as counterfoil to what Debord (1995:114, emphasis in original) sees in thesis 158 as the spectacle's paralysing effect on time:

THE SPECTACLE, BEING the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time, is in effect a *false consciousness of time*.

By injecting incongruity and discord into dominant discourses, postcoloniality can therefore, to use Walter Benjamin's (1969:257) phrase, "brush history against the grain" and, in the exhibition frame, construct non-totalising and anti-uniform strategies to differentiate the expanded aesthetic sphere. To what extent Documenta 11 accomplished this feat depended on the way its exhibition spaces were set up to engage with disproportions and incongruities in a differentiated transcultural space. A specific approach to hybridity was explored by the curators in this regard and will be critically assessed in the next section.

2.1.2 Creolising the exhibition

Documenta 11 aimed to present multiple narratives and thwart the drawing of essentialised cultural boundaries by approaching the space of the transnational exhibition as a creole location.⁷ Conceived as global stage for a

⁷ The notion of creole does not refer here to specific cultural and language mixing, but rather to the idea of *créolité*, or creoleness, defined by the curators of Documenta 11 (*Documenta 11_Platform 3...* 2003:13) as "the theory through which the socioeconomic, cultural, and creative potential of creole has been engaged in areas of identity, history, linguistics, and heritage". To clarify, Creole with a capital will in this section refer to language.

multitude of disciplines, viewpoints, approaches, artworks and production sites, Documenta 11 could be regarded as an attempt to not only open up, but especially, creolise the exhibition space. The inclusion of not only artists from around the world but also, what co-curator Ute-Meta Bauer (2002:105) refers to as, “intellectual ‘guestworkers’” outside the field of art, were designed to “open up the space of in-between, of transition and of passage, a space of diaspora, a ‘third space’” in order to create “new forms of understanding”, or at least “productive misunderstandings”. A case could be made that by focussing on hybridity and transitions Documenta 11, at least on a theoretical level, resisted the function of the spectacle to petrify differences and “to *bury history in culture*” (Debord 1995:137, emphasis in original).



Figure 1: Yinka Shonibare, *Gallantry and criminal conversation*, 2002.
Installation/sculpture.
Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:172).



In the gallery spaces of Documenta 11 artists engaging with hybridity sometimes managed to open up a critical space. The work of Yinka Shonibare for Documenta 11, *Gallantry and criminal conversation* (2002) (Figure 1), deals with both the creolised formation of culture and spectacularisation-dynamics of the mega-exhibition. On one level the tableaux of sexually coupled dressmaker's dummies in eighteenth century period dress from exotic 'African' fabric – made in the "Dutch wax" technique, but originating in Indonesia – references postcolonial identities as hybrid constructs influenced by criss-crossing trading routes. In the context of Documenta 11, the work also comments on the mega-exhibition as purveyor of exotic goods discovered by globally connected curators and the art public as modern-day aristocrats on a summer pilgrimage of a must-see destination. The inclusion of Shonibare's work, on some level, critiques the spectacular form of the exhibition it is part of, nevertheless one wonders if this slick and showy work did not serve the function of providing a self-critical alibi to the curators.

Platform 3, *Créolité and Creolization*,⁸ specifically explored the notion of creolisation as paradigm of transculturation, rather than the overdetermined notions of hybridity and *métissage*. Taking a local post-négritude discourse in the Caribbean to a global level by inviting participants from South America and the Indian Ocean, Documenta 11 investigated if the condition of creoleness and processes of creolisation could serve as paradigm for polycentric, "[t]ransnational, transurban, transdiasporic, transcultural" (*Documenta 11_Platform 3...* 2003:16) practices globally.⁹ Creolisation as transcultural paradigm functions, according to Hall (2003a:30-31), as a special case of translation:

This process of 'transculturation' occurs in such a way as to produce, as it were, a 'third space' – a 'native' or indigenous vernacular space, marked by fusion of cultural elements drawn from originating cultures, but resulting in a configuration in which these elements, though never

⁸ Platform 3 was a workshop held in St. Lucia, January 13-15, 2002.

⁹ The broad ideas of Caribbean writer and postcolonial theorist Édouard Glissant, could be considered a starting point in this debate, that "[t]he whole world is becoming creolized" (quoted in *Documenta 11_Platform 3...* 2003:13) and that the forces of globalisation mimic "the chaos of the plantation" (*Documenta 11_Platform 3...* 2003:15).



equal, can no longer be disaggregated or restored to their ordinary forms, since they [...] have been permanently ‘translated’.

This position does not constitute a romanticising of bricolage and hybridity; it underscores the inequalities, dominations and resistances bound up in cultural interactions and transactions. Whereas hybridity signifies any mixing, transitions and interconnectedness, creolisation “*a/ways* entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalterneity, [...] control and resistance” (Hall 2003a:31, emphasis in original). As such, the notion of *créolité* can, in the global sphere, show up asymmetries and constitute creole as a localised site of resistance. For marginal producers the notion of creolisation calls for, what Creolophone educator in Réunion Ginette Ramassamy (2003:24) refers to as, an “ethics of vigilance” to be put in place. The primary goal of such a pursuit is that the “internal vision” (Ramassamy 2003:25) of negative social representations limiting Creoles,¹⁰ or by extension locals resisting homogenising forces of globalisation, should be deconstructed. As localisation that show up disparities, open up a space for affirmative resistance and, in particular, create an ethical space in which art from disparate production sites can be viewed together, creole offered distinct possibilities to the curatorial project of Documenta 11.

How such an approach could be substantiated in the exhibition space, was shown by filmmaker Isaac Julien (2003:149), who aligned himself fully with this creolising project by setting the objective as “creolizing vision”, the title of his contribution to Platform 3. Julien (2003:150) describes this practice as “an attempt at the visual archaeological expedition in transatlantic space and culture of diaspora, in effect a travelling cinema which moves against the tides of globalization”. His three-screen projection for Documenta 11, *Paradise Omeros* (2002) (Figure 2),¹¹ thus excavates images of St. Lucia and the UK, inter-cut with individual and public narratives, both fictional and archival. A

¹⁰ Constructions of alterity can be predicated upon lingering colonial designations of Creole with primitivity, poor education, poverty, backwardness and inferiority (racial or cultural), expressed in Fanon’s (1967:20) description of Creole as “a halfway house between pidgin-nigger and French” for speakers in the Antilles.

¹¹ This title refers to Derek Walcott’s epic poem *Omeros*, interweaving narratives about locals and a landowner family of St. Lucia through shifting settings and historical time frames.

central image in the work is the visual linking of the adolescent protagonist, Achilles, submerged in the ocean with a flood of historical narratives of immigration and riots in the UK. The translations between personal and public memories, metropole and mythical island paradise, oscillating love and hate, xenophilia and xenophobia, guide the boy and the audience through the multi-layered loop of creolised space visually projected in the gallery.



Figure 2: Isaac Julien, *Paradise Omeros*, 2002.

Three-screen projection, 16 mm film transferred to DVD – black and white, colour, sound (20-25 min.)

Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:164).

By engaging with creoleness in both the periphery and metropole, and the creolising of subjectivity in the migration between the two, Julien (2003:154) establishes a mutually constituting space that could indeed be described as “against the tides of globalization” (Julien 2003:150) in the form of a homogenising, centripetal surge.¹² Any notion of a superior metropolitan culture is also undermined by the depiction of the conflicted nature of transposition, expressed in the voice-over by Walcott “as if we were in England to pay for our sins”. The tensions encapsulated in the experience of creoleness is further compounded by an evocation of the creolisation of gender; the doubling of displacements experienced by a black homosexual immigrant. Informed by the juxtaposition spelled out in the words *LOVE* and

¹² The notion of ‘global culture’ is according to cultural theorist Anthony King (1997:ix) dependent on a perception of “centripetal and centrifugal” movements corresponding to the confluence of cultural influences in cosmopolitan global cities and the dispersal of influences from these centres to the peripheries in cultural production and reproduction processes. However, decentred globalisation, operating in many directions at the same time and being unequally distributed, rather creates global cultures in the plural (King 1997:ix-x), or multiple creolising sites.



HATE as rings, the film ends with the young Achilles and a white boy teetering between combat and an erotic encounter.

The exploration of creoleness as orientation to transcultural space in the mega-exhibition could be regarded as a useful innovation, because it emphasised the syncopated rhythms of cultural translation while engaging with asymmetrical power relations even within its own structures. Approaching the transnational exhibition network from the localisation of creolised, postcolonial spaces afforded an artist like Julien and the curators of Documenta 11, one might add, the opening to effectively address the “politics of representation,’ not just the representation of politics” (Julien 2003:154).¹³ The specific curatorial strategies to deal with transcultural politics of representation and to rewrite the present history of Documenta 11 will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE: MORE OF THE SAME?

The spectacular difference of Documenta 11, defined in terms of a commitment to ethical and intellectual reflection and the rethinking of the historical procedures of the institution (see Enwezor’s quote at the top of this chapter), was questioned by some critics as being neither spectacular, nor that different from previous attempts.¹⁴ Art writer Anthony Downey (2003:89) notes that previous curators also critiqued the institutional function and format of Documenta and that it may not be possible to set a “radical agenda within an art network that, in conjunction with the re-territorialising imperatives of globalisation, is always already being repackaged within the neo-liberal, and invariably empty, wrapping of multicultural inclusiveness”. Framed as being

¹³ For Julien (2003:150) such a position of resistance is imperative: “If one doesn’t read against the rules of representation as they are defined by the global networks, then those rules of representation will, as it were, rewrite you.”

¹⁴ If the assertion of a spectacular difference constituting an institutional critique is regarded as historical *modus operandi* of Documenta, then Enwezor’s aim could on some level be construed as perpetuating tradition by its very project to subvert it. In this regard critic Stewart Martin (2003:10) argues that Documenta 11 remains entangled in the problems of the historical *avant-gardes*.



multicultural and postcolonial, Documenta 11 gave art historian Thomas McEvelley (2002:81) a “sense of déjà vu; or rather, it seemed not exactly to usher in a new era but to set a seal on an era first announced long ago”.

Yet, the actual exhibition of the work of more than 116 artists and artist groups induced Peter Schjeldahl (2002:95) to describe himself as “a New York art critic who left Kassel feeling uncomfortably marginalized”. As an European critic, Evert van Straaten (2003:5) (director of the Kröller-Müller museum in Otterlo) admitted that the show, which included more artists from Latin America and Africa than in the previous ten Documentas, changed his perception of photography, film, video and new media as the media of the dominant Western cultural elite. In order to evaluate whether Documenta 11 presented more of the same or a spectacular difference, this section will compare the curatorial approaches to that of previous directors, specifically David’s Documenta 10, and examine the role of other strategies besides postcoloniality, namely de- and extraterritorialisation as well as a rhizomised exhibition structure, in reworking the parameters and functioning of Documenta.

2.2.1 Curators and ‘elsewheres’

According to Downey (2003:85), Enwezor’s attempt at rethinking Documenta is simply another episode in the “long and venerable history” of critiquing the function of Documenta by curators like Harald Szeemann of Documenta 5 in 1972 and David’s Documenta 10 in 1997. If these two Documentas are taken as exemplars of significant shifts, their institutional reforms warrant a closer look and the question requires consideration: to what extent did Documenta 11 critique these predecessors and the cumulative foundations on which it was constructed.

Szeemann’s appointment as artistic director of Documenta 5 introduced the concept of appointing exhibition and museum directors of international



standing as curators of a single Documenta.¹⁵ In this capacity Szeemann's institutional critique comprised mainly the creation of a new visionary role for the curator as discoverer of talent and initiator of art-historical trends, an innovation first introduced into art history by the seminal exhibition *When attitudes become form*, curated in 1969 by Szeemann. According to art historian Walter Grasskamp (1996:76, emphasis in original), Szeemann showed that "not only artists but also art mediators can become stars of the art world if they present the right artists at the right time in the right *context*".¹⁶

Enwezor is certainly heir to this star-curator role, having been described as "a curator so demographically perfect, and so polished, that he would have to be invented if he didn't exist already" (Shatz 2002:40). Documenta 11 broke with the Szeeman-tradition though, by introducing a team of six diverse co-curators: Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya.¹⁷ This is in step towards a tactical form of, what curator Gerardo Mosquera (1994:137) describes as, "curatorial correctness". It is also an attempt to avoid the "transcultural colonialism" (Mosquera 1994:137) of making one-sided transcultural judgements by a curator positioned as explorer, discoverer, and cross-cultural meaning producer. In this regard Documenta 11 accomplished a productive rethinking of the institutional critique of Szeemann's Documenta for an art world sensitised to the complexities of transcultural curating. However striking

¹⁵ The cohesion of the first three Documentas created by the meta-narrative of art historian Werner Haftmann's notion of abstraction as world language had broken down by Documenta 4 in 1968 and a new direction was called for. Haftmann, who is considered the conceptual force behind Documentas 1 to 3 (Grasskamp 1996:73), published his influential book *Painting in the Twentieth Century* (1954) the year before the first Documenta.

¹⁶ Titling the exhibition "Questioning reality – pictorial worlds today" Szeemann synchronically eschewed any generalised aesthetic with Documenta 5 (Poinsot 1996:52-56) in favour of a thematic framework mediating discourses, by showing artworks together with imagery from religion, advertising and science fiction to work of the insane.

¹⁷ Basualdo is Chief-curator at the Wexner Centre for Arts in Columbus, Ohio, and Co-founder with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist of the *Union of the Imaginary*, an online forum about curatorial practice; Bauer is an independent curator and Professor of Theory, Practice and Mediation of Contemporary Art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna; Ghez is Director of The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago; Maharaj is Professor of History and Theory of Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and first Rudolf Arnheim Professor at Humboldt University, Berlin (2001-02); Nash teaches Film History and Theory at the University of East London and at Harvard University; Zaya is Contributing or Co-editor of among others *Balcon Magazine*, *Atlántica* and *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*. (Information as supplied by press office at the time of Documenta 11 in 2002).



Szeeman's analysis of attitudes and trends in the 1970s might be, he did not, according to David (1997:8), "succeed in reversing the [historical] directions that Documenta had taken".¹⁸

David's Documenta X is considered by most as paradigmatic because of its post-retinal¹⁹ focus on critical art and the social conditions of contemporary culture. Curating the last Documenta of the twentieth century, David (1997:9) employed a "retroperspective" approach to look back at the post-war history shaping the exhibition, but also to examine "everything from this now vanished age that remains in ferment in contemporary art and culture", more specifically the "'de-Europenization' of the world... [and the] postnational identification at work in the 'fractal societies' (Sergei Gruzinski) born from the collapse of communism and the brutal imposition of the laws of the market". This approach does indeed seem to encapsulate Enwezor's (2002b:43) project of "rethinking the historical procedures that are part of its [Documenta's] contradictory heritage of grand conclusions". With the publication of *Politics-Poetics documenta X – the book*, a thick volume of cultural theory by influential writers from the last half of the twentieth century, and a lecture program *100 Days – 100 Guests*, David also extended the cultural field around the exhibition, another aim of Documenta 11. Aesthetically Documenta 11 also seemed to follow the lead of Documenta 10 by bidding "farewell to retinal reason" (Maharaj 2002b:81). However, in practice shifts in curatorial focus and definitive departures in the choice of artists and artworks created two very different Documentas.

Documenta X's re-examination of the historical-cultural conditions of modernity around four politically emblematic dates²⁰ – 1945, 1967, 1978 and

¹⁸ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the socio-political and avant-garde aims of Documenta.

¹⁹ Critic Ken Johnson (1997:81) comments on David's *post-retinal* view of art as a form of social criticism, rather than as a visual experience; art as cognitive engagement thus moves beyond the visual pleasure of surface.

²⁰ The summary by the editors of *Politics-Poetics* (1997:24-25) explains why these dates are considered emblematic – 1945: formation of post-war European democracies and the beginning of the Cold-War era; 1967: utopian post-war ideals were discredited and solidarity develop between dissenting groups in developed and Third World; 1978: emergence of dissatisfaction with restructuring of Fordist capitalism and dissidence in communist societies;



1989 – were largely defined from post-war European perspectives and the polarisation of an American versus Soviet world view. David's critique of the institution of Documenta can in this context be viewed as the end of an era, rather than ushering in a new one. Documenta X examined how political and cultural decolonisation contributed to the realisation of the untenability of modernist notions, but left postcolonial re-evaluations open for the future, as David (Royoux 1997:86) indicated in an interview:

We are the heirs to a modernist culture which has been articulated in accordance with different axes which must now be called into discussion. Colonial and post-colonial history represent a particularly complex phase of this culture: any re-writing of this history will necessitate all manner of renegotiations regarding the cultural divisions made.

Few non-Western artists were included in Documenta X.²¹ David (1997:11) seemed to have found it difficult to find artistic excellence in “non-Western cultural zones where the object of ‘contemporary art’ is often no more than a very recent phenomenon, even an epiphenomenon”, linked to “processes of acculturation and cultural syncretism” at best, and at worst, to the demand for new market products in the West. David's negotiations with “non-Western cultural zones” consisted largely of inviting speakers, like Enwezor, to the lecture program, and to refer symbolically to possible ‘elsewheres’²² and alterities through the inclusion of the work of artists (such as Marcel Broodthaers, Öyvind Fahlström, Gordon Matta-Clark and Hélio Oiticica) who, according to David (1997:9), questioned the “anthropological foundations of Western culture” by subverting “traditional hierarchies and divisions of knowledge”.²³

1989: German unification and the end of communism accompanied by a commoditised postmodern aesthetic.

²¹ It has, nevertheless, to be noted that Documenta 10 fared considerably better than Jan Hoet's Documenta 9, criticised for relegating “others” to “anthropological curios” (Kontova 1992:129).

²² David (1997:10) employed the notion of *parcours*, “a historical and urban itinerary”, by juxtaposing artworks with Documenta-sites in Kassel that ranged from Baroque structures to unused underground passageways. She (David 1997:10) maintains: “This *parcours* is also a real and symbolic itinerary to its possible ‘elsewheres’, the cultural and the urban realities of a ‘Whole-World’ (Edouard Glissant) that documenta cannot claim to convoke or even ‘represent’ in Kassel”.

²³ New-Delhi critic and curator Geeta Kapur (1997:[sp]), a contributor to the *100 Days – 100 Guests* program, takes issue with David's focus on ‘critical art’ situated in a history of the



Enwezor's approach to 'elsewheres' was so decidedly different that it elicited the reaction that Documenta 11 was the first to "smash the mould of previous Documentas and blow the model of the notoriously Eurocentric art event right out of the water" (Williamson, 2002:[sp]). According to artist Sue Williamson's (2002:[sp]) score-card analysis of the birthplaces of the list of 116 participating artists and artist groups (considered as a single unit), only 15 artists were American and 12 German.²⁴ No less than 48 other countries were represented by artists associated with (if not presently living in) these countries, including African countries like South Africa, Benin, Morocco, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda and Senegal. By including cultural practitioners from around the globe and work fashioned in a multiplicity of production sites, Enwezor *showed* 'elsewheres' from India to the Arctic. Rather than a self-conscious re-positioning of Western thinking imploding in postmodern fashion on its own premises, Documenta itself approached the 'elsewhere' by leaving the home ground of Kassel and shifting three of its platforms to other continents.

If the experience of Documenta X was "akin to editing a book", writes art critic Yuko Hasegawa (2002:105), then Documenta 11 was "akin to reading a profound book", praising Enwezor for his "attempt to create a new, practical curatorial model". What could be considered spectacularly different about Enwezor's approach was that thinking about postcoloniality translated into practical strategies to curate difference on a global scale. Commentator Stewart Martin (2003:7) maintains that Documenta 11 "presents a watershed in the history of Documenta", since it "exhibited contemporary art from across

Western avant-garde and defining art objects as it has been circumscribed by Western art history, concluding: "How radically she makes her choices, or whatever cutting edge she tries to give the exhibition, she is still in an exclusionary mode rather than in an inclusive one."

²⁴ McEvelley (2002:82, emphasis added) arrives at a very different tally, stating that "25 artists *can be described as* from the United States (far more than from any other country), 34 from western Europe and 6 more from the former USSR, 14 from Africa, 16 from Asia and 9 from Latin America". Rather than support for his position of disputing the inclusivity of Documenta 11, it reflects a narrow identification of location with the issuing of passports, as some of the artists on his list could be considered diasporic. The *Art Newspaper* (Sorbello 2002:28) reported that less than 5% of the Documenta 11 artists were born in the US and pointed out the majority of participating artists born in Africa, Asia or Latin America live in Western centres. Working with quotas based on nationality or region might serve little purpose in a globalised art network and cannot be considered as 'proof' of anything.



the globe in accordance with a profound critique of orientalism and neocolonialism that this task faces”. Documenta 11 fulfilled in this respect the need identified by David (Royoux 1997:86) that “any re-writing of [postcolonial] history will necessitate all manner of renegotiations regarding the cultural divisions made”. Whatever its limitations and shortcomings might be, Enwezor’s Documenta showed in practice what a renegotiated cultural field and exhibition space could look like, and as such performed an institutional critique that might have been envisioned before, but not curatorially actualised until 2002.

2.2.2 De- and extraterritorialisation

The decision to move Documenta out of Kassel with Platforms 1 to 4 impacted not only the shifting and crossing of physical and cultural boundaries, but especially also on the limits of the exhibition structure. Documenta 11 aimed to subvert the logic of the mega-exhibition by embracing displacement as a critical element of its discursive project in “transdisciplinary and antidisciplinary interlacing fields” (Bauer 2002:106). This curatorial strategy was explained by the curators of Documenta 11 in terms of two key concepts: deterritorialisation and extraterritorialisation.

Bauer stressed (2002:105) deterritorialising Platforms 1 to 4 was not “a symbolic act”, but a journey to ‘elsewheres’ that had to be made while renegotiating and rethinking Documenta’s practice:

The decision to begin addressing the questions raised in the five platforms at the relevant sites was a sign of genuine interest in dialogue, in exchange, and in discourse, and was thus much more than a symbolic act. It meant recognizing the specificity of each location and the conditions of each lived social space; it meant, above all, a respect for those who established these discourses – discourses determined by personal perceptions, experiences, and living circumstances.

Deterritorialising the Documenta-experience thus could result in the reterritorialising of voices and discourses that have previously been



marginalised and displaced in the history and practice of the exhibition. It also repositioned the audience from a largely Western/Northern art world to include a broader public in developing countries. Officially close on 10 000 visitors attended the newly instituted Platforms 1 to 4, which could be regarded a “new” audience apart from the exhibition audience traditionally visiting Documenta in Kassel. While some of the contributors could be regarded as Northern intellectuals (this applied more to Platform 1 than the others)²⁵ each platform also included local voices and audiences, thereby constituting a North-South forum.

Enwezor (2002b:42) approached deterritoriality or displacement as an aspect of the broader notion of extraterritoriality, stating: “As an exhibition project, Documenta 11 begins from the sheer side of extraterritoriality”. The notion of extraterritoriality, therefore, is conceived to undermine the institutional encoding of the exhibition form, which limits any continuous critical engagement. With Documenta 11 Enwezor (2002b:43) set out to challenge “the idea that the means and approach taken by an exhibition is necessarily fully encrypted into the result of what it displays and the forms it recuperates for artistic posterity”. The logic of the exhibition’s centrality and any notion of neatly-packaged, exemplary narratives was inverted by a) expanding the historical context in Kassel to include other locations in Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa; b) changing the time-frame of the one-off festival to an extended engagement; c) moving outside the traditional boundaries of the gallery domain to include a wider discursive field; and d) engaging transdisciplinary models of culture production.

The success of the curatorial strategy of extraterritoriality in exploring the possibilities and limitations of Documenta is predicated upon the singular territory of the institutionalised mega-exhibition. In this regard Documenta could be considered as functioning like Michel Foucault’s heterotopias in the sense of being both museum and temporal festival at the same time. Heterotopias are described as “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted

²⁵ See Chapter one, note 16 for a list of contributors.



utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986:24). As a lived space with its own discourses linked to a slice in time, the quinquennial Documenta would belong to the class of heterotopias that Foucault (1986:26) terms “heterochronies”. As the *museum of a 100 days*, the term used by the exhibition’s initiator, Arnold Bode, Documenta is an archive of the cumulative history of contemporary art for almost half a century, replete with narratives and counter-narratives about the trajectory of art production. Yet, as a temporal exhibition it purports to show cutting-edge work linked to current developments, which, in time, will be institutionalised in a cyclical interplay of tradition and innovation.

This doubled-up heterotopic spatiality brings complex oppositions into play, particularly if the curatorial goal is to rethink the form and function of Documenta. One way to supersede the heterotopic space is by creating, what Bauer (2002:106) refers to as, a “communicative space, a zone of activity, in which curatorial and artistic, social and political theories and practices intersect”. As a “zone of activity” or “discursive field” Documenta 11 could aspire to become a productive “open, unlimited, unending process” (Bauer 2002:107). Although Documenta 11 could ultimately not divorce itself from its historical roots in Kassel and the considerable funding from its German sponsors²⁶ without closing shop, so to speak, approaching the event as a discursive zone of activity, or, in Enwezor’s (2002b:54) formulation, as a “constellation of public spheres”, did fashion an extraterritorial space of sorts that could transcend the limits of the temporal exhibition. How much was effectively gained in terms of critical engagement would, however, be very difficult to gauge. A more successful strategy at extension was created in the actual viewing spaces of Platform 5 in Kassel by following a rhizomatic approach.

²⁶ Of the Documenta 11 budget of 12,8 million € entrance fees and publication sales accounted for 6,9 million €. The rest was supplied by state and corporate sponsors, such as Die Bahn, Deutsche Telekom, Sparkassen-Finanzgruppe and Volkswagen, according to derStandard.at, available at <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?ressort=Dokumenta>. The cultural currency of Documenta is of such importance in Germany that a 10 € commemorative coin and a special postage stamp was issued for Documenta 11 in April 2002.



2.2.3 Exhibition structure rhizomised

Embarking upon the exhibition as a nomadic, open-ended network with a rhizomatic structure, was a further elemental strategy deployed by Documenta 11 to transcend the limitations and spectacularisation built into the temporal mega-exhibition. The *rhizome* has implications for the space outside, as well as inside the exhibition structure, rendering traditional boundaries of the event porous. In terms of the *outside*, the art exhibition becomes a discursive field – an unending process – activating art production as knowledge production. *Inside* the gallery spaces the logic of the exhibition, the relation of the artworks to each other and the experience of the audience, are put on altered trajectories.

The curatorial team's approach to the different sites of the Documenta event as *rhizomes*, refers to the concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari of a-centered, open-ended, non-hierarchical networks, fostering manifold connections in diversity or *multiplicité*.²⁷ For Basualdo (2002b:57) “[t]he notion of the magician’s encyclopaedia, the labyrinthine and incomplete, a fragile highly temporal encyclopaedia as a way of thinking of knowledge that is transient but at the same time endless, is very like the rhizomatic roots of our conception of Documenta”. Bauer (2002:106) poses “the individual positions presented and the various contributions, whether installation, film, sound, text, lecture discussion, or whatever – are connected like a rhizome that branches into a whole that is not immediately perceptible”, but that nevertheless form “a stratification of forms of exchange that emphasizes the principle of manifold connections in the *rhizome*,²⁸ of diversity, of

²⁷ The notions of *rhizomes* and *multiplicity*, as discussed in the rest of this section, were developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:5-25.

²⁸ Compared to the image of the root-tree that is constituted by binary logic, the *rhizome* is, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987:21), a system expressed as $n - 1$ dimensions or directions. This means the system is neither reducible to the One, nor the multiple, but is always an overflowing middle or plateau without beginning or end (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:21). There are no points on a rhizomatic system, only lines. In fact, the rhizome is defined by the outside, the line of flight or deterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:9). The rhizome follows the “logic of the AND”, being constituted around “coming and going” through multiple entryways and exits, rather than “starting and finishing” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:25).



multiplicité".²⁹ Valuing nomad thought, that privileges exteriority over interiority, difference over identity, conductivity over restrictive analogy and performance over reflection, Deleuze and Guattari (1987:11) poses the multiple as imperative:

Always follow the rhizome by rupture: lengthen, prolong, and relay the line of flight; make it vary, until you have produced the most abstract and torturous of lines of n dimensions and broken directions. Conjugate deterritorialized flows.

The object is to create *nomad space* that is smooth, or open-ended, like the structure of felt fabric, which is "in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:475-6). This smooth space is filled by events rather than things, affects rather than properties, forces rather than matter, tactile or haptic rather than optical perception (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:479).

It could be argued that by aiming to extend a line of flight rather than constructing a rarefied space in which art objects vie for attention, Documenta 11 effectively undermined, what Bourriaud (1992:131, emphasis in original) at the time of Documenta 9 (directed in 1992 by Jan Hoet) described as, "the Documenta-effect":

[...]Documenta, as a whole, is no longer anything more than television. What is particular to television is that, unlike cinema, nothing is *shown*. Sequences are merely *programmed*. And all the artists seeming to fit in with each other like passing elements on an indifferent screen. The critic is more prone to remember the persistence of the works than the works themselves after one viewing of the show.

The logic of the exhibition is the displacement of the artwork, from the context of its creation to the specific space and time of the exhibit. In the crushing throng of artworks and spectators "Documenta relegates the visible to its margins so all that remains is the *infra-* and *ultravisible* with whatever lies

²⁹ A multiplicity is described as having "neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:8).



between remaining unseen or barely seen” (Bourriaud 1992:132). Hence, in a mega-exhibition like Documenta the meta-language of the exhibition – the grouping of artists, the associations between artworks created by their inclusion in a single exhibition space, as well as the narrative-superstructure imposed by the curating – has to be carefully negotiated to avoid Bourriaud’s (1992:131) “videogenic” effect.

Documenta 11’s exhibition spaces were set up to counteract this inherent spectacularisation dynamic by creating a nomad space and facilitating displacement or lines of deterritorialisation. Basualdo (2002b:57) describes the Binding-Brauerei, the newly adapted former brewery utilised together with the Museum Fridericianum, Documenta-Halle and Kulturbahnhof as main venues to stage Platform 5, as the exhibition’s strongest statement in this regard:

Binding gave us the possibility to make a stronger statement. It is both puzzling and labyrinthine; we hope it has created a double feeling of homelessness and homeliness. At an architectural level we have been able to create what has been very much at the root of the exhibition, namely that we were also displaced but trying to find a sort of comfort in our displacement.

The viewer had to interact with this maze-like exhibition venue (Figure 3) by literally finding a way through. Stopped by walls, or dead-end corridors, yet reading from the venue map that the desired artwork was just on the other side of the wall, one was forced to double-up and re-orientate past already observed works, confounded by a non-linear spatial logic. This physical and mental disorientation and regrouping reinforced the impact of artworks that endeavoured to shift perceptions. The “encyclopedia of Documenta 11”, writes Basualdo (2002a:57), on the one hand “proposes to disillusion us in our unshakable certainty in the world we believe we live”, and on the other “proposes to suggest a wealth of nuances to us: evidence itself of the work of difference, as it might be incessantly reflected in works and words”. A case could be made that walking the ‘encyclopedia’ became as much of a multi-sensory event as experiencing the different entries, thereby dislodging reception of the artworks from the spectacular retinal regime.



Figure 3: Schema of artists displayed in the Binding-Brauerei. 2002.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition Venues*. 2002:119).



Within the inclusive project of Documenta 11 a rhizomatic approach further played a role in democratising the spectatorial playing field. The floor plans of venues were certainly designed in order to prevent the audience from rushing from one “big name” to the next. All visitors to the Binding-Brauerei had to pass the work at least twice of the unknown Canadian Inuit Igloolik Isuma Productions, placed in the corridor linking the entrance to the rest of the space. The extended exhibition space was more like a rhizomatic plateau in which a multiplicity of views were linked conjunctively, rather than a hierarchical space favouring the infra- and ultravisible. As such, Documenta 11 engaged with not only the limitations of its own form, but also presented a possible configuration for an egalitarian exhibition forum that dehierarchised representation. The issue of representation could thus be redressed on both levels of *how many* and also *how* previously excluded artists were represented. In a sense Documenta 11’s tactics to open and level out the exhibition landscape not only changed Kassel’s proximity to ‘elsewheres’, but, on some level, changed the topography of the institution itself.

2.3 CREATING ETHICAL AGENCY

While Documenta 11’s positioning of art production as inextricably part of the larger cultural praxis was not new,³⁰ the emphasis on ethical commitment in a globalising world could be considered different to previous Documentas. This committed curatorial vision lead to criticism of being “social and economic evangelism” (Kimmelman 2002:1), a “protestant view of art” (Shatz 2002:40) or Documenta 11 being “the least ‘arty’ Documenta yet” (McEvilley, 2002:85), on the one hand, but also received praise as a “return to humanity” (Nochlin 2002:161) and an ethical “committed, informative, and even radical stand”

³⁰ This reconnection of contemporary art with its social context is an expression of an ethical turn in the 1990s, labelled by Bourriaud (2002:112) *relational aesthetics*, an aesthetic theory “consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt”. Representing a social interstice the artwork in this view has, what Bourriaud (2002:61) calls, a “community effect”, thereby radically shifting modernist notions: “The aura of art no longer lies in the hinter-world represented by the work, nor in the form itself, but in front of it, within the temporary collective form that it produces by being put on show”.



(Gioni 2002:106). For Documenta 11 ethical reflection dealt with the central issue of *agency* – the ability of artists, or other cultural practitioners, and the viewing public to initiate action and resist power dynamics of globalisation and spectacularisation.

If one accepts that social production has become “biopolitical” (Hardt & Negri 2002:295) as globalisation intensifies, and that the control mechanisms of the global Empire³¹ manage differences as it incorporates them, the possibilities for critical art production are increasingly compromised. In, what is described by cultural theorist Masao Miyoshi (1998:259) as, “TNC culture” (culture formation in the wake of transnational corporations) all culture products, even history and geography, are treated as “part of tourism, often packaged in museums, restaurants, and theme parks”. Miyoshi (1998:259) claims this “corporate buyout” of culture leads not only to the “quantitative measurement” of cultural products, but more significantly, to the rapid co-optation of any form of resistance. For contemporary art, especially, this poses a serious challenge as “the corporate buyout of high culture is rapidly changing the nature and role of art as criticism” (Miyoshi 1998:260). Convening strategies to counter these hegemonising mechanisms are, simultaneously, contemporary art’s greatest challenge and weakness, according to Enwezor. He (Enwezor 2002b:45) maintains that “[i]f this Empire is materializing, hegemonizing, and attempting to regulate all forms of social relations and cultural exchanges, strong, critical responses to this materialization are contemporary art’s weakest point”. Any critical gains made by the curators and artists of Documenta 11, therefore, has to be weighed against the almost impossible odds facing such endeavours.

³¹ Hardt and Negri (2002:198-201) define the control mechanisms of what they term “Empire” - a transnational hegemonic network which supersedes the ‘spectacle society’ and demands new forms of resistance – in terms of a triple imperative, of being inclusive, differential and managerial. The *inclusive imperative* is built around universal acceptance and the setting aside of differences; *differential control* celebrates differences as gist for the capitalist mill and “peaceful regional identification” (Hardt & Negri 2002:199); *managerial imperial control* creates a hierarchy of differences in “a general economy of command” (Hardt & Negri 2002:199).



Ultimately an exhibition aiming to construct “forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection” (Enwezor 2002b:43) has to contend with the spectacular logic of postmodern aesthetic consumption, described by Bauman (1998:31, emphasis in original) as:

To become an object of desire, a source of sensation – in other words, to be of value to the denizens of the postmodern society of consumers – the phenomenon of art is re-centered around the *event of the exhibition*. The ‘artistic experience’ is generated primarily by the temporal event, only secondarily, if at all, by the extemporal value of the work of art itself.

Therefore, an interrogation of counter-strategies to counteract fetishisation,³² and the construction of some kind of critical distance in order to thwart spectacular consumption were crucial to the project of Documenta 11. Focussing on the curatorial attempts to create agency, this section will deal with two key areas of inquiry: firstly, creating spectatorship and a viewing experience beyond hegemony, and, secondly, possible tracks for artworks produced from an ethical positioning to disrupt dominant orders.

2.3.1 Beyond hegemony: a different kind of spectatorship

Advocating for agency on every level of the exhibition experience, Documenta 11 set out to facilitate a despectacularised viewing experience for an audience shaped by a multiplicity of global and local influences, rather than being constructed by a homogenised society of the spectacle. Although the majority of the visitors to the exhibition in Kassel were German,³³ it could be argued that in a globalising world “spectatorial identification is culturally, discursively, and politically discontinuous [...]; the same person might be crossed by contradictory discourses and codes”, according to film theorists Ella Shohat

³² Art historian Johanne Lamoureux (2005:69-71) distinguishes several orders of the fetish that come to play in contemporary exhibitions: anthropological and religious fetish transposed to art objects, commodity fetishism at work in the art market, and fetishisation of exhibition displays aiming for spectacular entertainment.

³³ Of the 650 000 paying visitors to Documenta 11’s Platform 5 about 28% were from abroad and 7,1% came from Kassel, according to the official website at <http://www.documenta12.de/archiv/d11/data/english/index.html>



and Robert Stam (quoted in Nash 2002:132). Additionally, postcolonial discourse and post-imperial critique have moved spectators beyond the hegemonic society of the spectacle, argues Enwezor (2002c:56). He (Enwezor 2002c:56) postulates that this has resulted in the emergence of a new kind of spectator, “whose gaze upon the mottled screen of modernity is counter-hegemonic/counter-normative, and not simply counter-cultural”.

Theoretically this position opens up a critical space by fragmenting the hegemony of the spectacle. Enwezor claims (2002c:56):

It is in this sense that postcolonial subjective claims (multiculturalism, liberation theology, resistance art, feminist and queer theory, questions of third cinema, anti-apartheid, environmental and ecological movements, rights of indigenous peoples, minority demands, etc.) deviate from the hegemonic concept of spectatorial totality and renders it fragmentary.

Rather than Debord’s viewer “whose senses has already been co-opted and homogenized into the institutional logic of display and transformation”, Enwezor (2002c:56) poses that the Documenta-audience represented “an unknown demographic in the fragmented network of global cultural exchange”. Instead of feeding of “diffusion and reproduction of excess”, this spectatorial experience would be articulated through “diffusion and differentiation”, maintains Enwezor (2002c:56). In order to augment whatever advantage could be extracted from such a focus on difference, Documenta 11 located itself on the side of, what Enwezor (2002c:59, emphasis added) terms, “*strategic globality* [...] that introduces to the contemporary artistic and cultural circuits new relations of spectatorship whose program of social differentiation, political expression and cultural specificity *reworks the notion of the spectacle* and constructs it as the site of new relations of power and cultural translation”. An argument could be made that, while Documenta as mega-exhibition *par excellence* certainly could not escape its spectacular form and function, this repositioning towards non-homogenised publics and specificity at least opened up the potential of critical engagement with the artworks on display. On a certain level, Documenta 11 could be regarded as an attempt to annex the domain of the spectacle by restructuring its power



relations transculturally. How this approach relayed into actual transformations was made dependant on strategies to promote agency.

The curators of Documenta 11 exacted agency from its globalised, fragmentarised, fractured spectators as a form of democratic duty. In this regard Enwezor (2002b:54) posits: “Spectatorship, which takes the carnivalesque as its mode of enunciation, can only function productively in a democratic, open system”. The link between the carnivalesque and a “democratic, open system” is, however, a slippery one. According to Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984:6), medieval carnivals and comic rituals produced a “second life outside officialdom”, a “culture of the marketplace” (Bakhtin 1984:7) in which all hierarchies were suspended for the duration of the festival. Essential to this notion of the carnivalesque is the dynamic structure of each expression as “the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal” (Bakhtin 1984:10), but also its utopian character, being a “utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (Bakhtin 1984:9). The long-term possibilities of subversion and change are, therefore, undermined by the very formation that created its promise in the first place. In a sense the carnival is made possible and is contained by the repressive societal structures it ultimately upholds. This could, in fact, be considered as the crux of the dilemma facing Documenta 11: *how could the structures it was set to uphold foster actual transformations without being mired in utopia?*

The democratic space for the reception and production of art is further framed by the curators in terms of ethical agency. Viewers shared the same ethical space as the artist, a space that requires a commitment to society. Basualdo (2002c:103, own translation) claim in this regard: “[F]or us, aesthetics are always already ethical; the fact that art exists, that it is present, already implies an ethical position.” However, for Enwezor it is not enough, as one reading of Basualdo would suggest, that as part of the human race the artist per definition produces ethical objects. It requires commitment and agency



from the artist to position her/his work in regard to the power structures in society and powerful possibilities of the artistic space.³⁴

For the audience of Documenta 11 this curatorial position to artistic production and spectatorship meant being challenged in various ways. Enwezor (2003a:44) summarises this position as:

The challenges I'm demanding from the audience are the challenges of the artworks, the challenges of the discursive contributions, the challenges of the public's contribution. All of these presuppose an enormous respect for the public, as opposed to the know-it-alls who always want to reduce the public to simpletons who have no agency.

Expecting the audience to exert their agency, the aim for Documenta 11 was not to supply "eye candy" (Enwezor 2003a:44) but to engender ethical and intellectual reflection. Contrary to the professed "respect for the public", this stance smacks of curatorial paternalism. While one could have sympathy for the position of the curator aiming for the deconstruction of hegemonies to show, what could be described as, difficult art, such a concerted effort to force spectatorship beyond hegemony could be counter-productive.

2.3.2 Ethical epistemic engines

By framing agency of the artwork primarily in terms of knowledge production, a similarly tight curatorial hold was exerted in the selection of artworks. This selection reflected the emphatic departure that Enwezor (2002b:43, emphasis added) claims for this Documenta:

³⁴ In Enwezor's (2002b:54) view "the democratic system, which is to be distinguished from popular politics, but rather one that promotes agency over pure belief, the demands of citizenship place strong ethical constraints on the artist based on his or her commitment to all 'forms-of-life'". Here Enwezor references philosopher Giorgio Agamben's use of "forms-of-life" in *Means without end, Notes on politics* (translation published in 2000). Agamben (quoted in Enwezor 2002b:54) maintains the notion forms-of life "defines life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power".



[O]ne claim that can be made for Documenta 11's spectacular difference is that its critical spaces are not places for the normalization or uniformization of all artistic visions on their way to *institutional beatification*. Rather, through the continuity and circularity of the nodes of discursivity and debate, location and translation, cultural situations and their localities that are transmitted and perceived through the five Platforms, Documenta 11's spaces are to be seen as forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures that are part of its contradictory heritage of grand conclusions.

In an exhibition conceived to be “less a receptacle of commodity-objects³⁵ than a container of a plurality of voices, a material reflection on a series of disparate and interconnected actions and processes” (Enwezor 2002b:55), the emphasis was not only on the diversity of cultural production, but especially on the artwork's potential for voicing difference and dissidence, as it were.

The theoretic framework for art to produce knowledge that pushes through and beyond “retinal repetition – in order to come up with something different, unknown, other” (Maharaj 2002b:71) was supplied by co-curator Maharaj. On the one hand he (Maharaj 2002b:71-72) sites the actual production strategies of artists that produced a multiplicity of artworks that approximated epistemic activities: “spasmic, interdisciplinary probes, transitive, haphazard cognitive investigations; dissipating interactions, imaginary archiving; epidemiological statistics, questionnaires and proceedings; ructions and commotions that are not pre-scripted”. An epistemic or para-epistemic orientation is in this view, however, not only a prerogative but could constitute the defining moment for artists coming to terms with the globalising dynamic of “double production: a drive towards standardization, erasure, flattening out – a logic of sameness [... and the] drive of difference production – the scene of extra-rapid cultural translation” (Maharaj 2002b:72). In our engagement with difference, Maharaj

³⁵ Some success is registered in this regard, if only on a facile level, by the complaint of certain gallerists and collectors that Documenta 11 was “Not much of a shopping trip” (Schjeldahl 2002:95).

(2002b:72) suggests, we need new epistemic approaches to enable “other’ ways of knowing and ways of knowing ‘otherness’”.³⁶



Figure 4: Jens Haaning, *Kassel – Hanoi (Light Bulb Exchange)*, 2002.

Light installation in public place.

Treppenstraße (Kassel) and Hoàng Quốc Việt (Hanoi).

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:213).

³⁶ Maharaj (2002b:73) asserts when the Cartesian grid of sameness and difference is made to fit cultural complexities, ambiguities get filtered through the weave to create a transmogrified epistemic frame: “On the one hand, a logic of sameness takes charge – a xenophobic drive in which the grid erases and eradicates elements of difference and otherness that it cannot handle or assimilate. On the other, a xenophilic drive: the grid effaces difference by recasting and reconstituting it in its own image and by putting it on show as a sign of itself.”



As an example of artworks that function as such epistemic engines when they do not “convert incommensurables into swappables” (Maharaj 2002b:74), Maharaj sites the works of Jens Haaning. His *Turkish Jokes* (1994-2002), were broadcasted in the public space of the main station in Kassel, the point of arrival and departure for Documenta-visitors. Non-Turkish pedestrians could not “get it”; what was being said, to whom it was addressed and at whose expense passed them by. In an expanding EU, coming to terms with immigration policies and strategies for managing cultural diversity informed by the levelling out of multiculturalist thinking, Haaning’s work could be regarded as confronting complacent tolerance. His work *Kassel – Hanoi (Light Bulb Exchange)* (2002) (Figure 4), in which light bulbs were installed on the Treppenstraße in Kassel and the street Hoáng Quốc Việt in Hanoi, Vietnam, indexed the global levelling out, or conversely, intensification of difference. While the first work indeed engaged with incommensurability on various levels and the actual experience of incommensurability by the majority of Documenta 11 audience, the latter work got stuck in its play with “unswappables”. While the viewer was left to wonder if it was in fact possible to insert the same light bulb into two streets continents apart, this facile connection of East and West on the level of product compatibility did not reference larger issues of cultural commensurability.

The critical question needs to be answered whether this kind of “visual art knowledge” (Maharaj 2002b:72) does not succumb to the problems associated with a stance that purely privileges a message, described by art theorist Jean Fisher (2002:66) in the catalogue as “the art object becomes an information carrier, much like mass media itself, or it risks reduction to a secondary effect of the social” (Fisher 2002:66). If artistic ‘knowledge production’ does not differ critically from the proliferation of globalised information production – from what Jean Baudrillard (1998:150-151) terms the “pornography of information and communication” – it simply adds to the noise rather than voice differences. In this regard Maharaj (2002b:72, emphasis added) formulates a role for artworks “that trigger transformative thought, action and behaviour” to function as “*art-ethical processing plants* churning

out options and potentials for chipping in, action and involvement in the world”.



Figure 5: Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument*, 2002.
Installation.

Friedrich-Wöhler-Straße, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition Venues*. 2002: 210).

Aiming for the production of knowledge seems difficult enough; assessing the impact of an “art-ethical processing plant” could be downright problematic. Some of the complexities and contradictions entailed in, what could conceivably be termed, ‘ethical art production’ were exemplified by the wide-ranging reaction to Thomas Hirschhorn’s commissioned work, *Bataille Monument* 2002 (Figure 5). The artist provided a library, TV studio, Turkish snack bar, a Bataille exhibition and Bataille sculpture, as well as a free shuttle service in artist-decorated taxis, in a working-class Turkish neighbourhood. The work was lauded by Basualdo (2002c:104-105, own translation) for its critical engagement with Georges Bataille’s ideas about excess, as originating from somewhere and continuing in a different form than one imagined, and for telling “us everything about the way in which we interact with difference”.



Curator and art critic Massimiliano Gioni (2002:107) interpreted the work as an “almost humanitarian operation” and appreciated the way the viewer was forced to be “a voyeur, an intruder, or simply a stranger, who is forced to renegotiate his own position towards art and life”. For him (Gioni 2002:107) the strength of Hirschhorn’s work was its ambiguity: “Like Bataille’s writings, Hirschhorn’s gesture is not about taking a moral position, but it’s rather about exposing contradictions and complexities.” For other critics the work had “nebulous” (Fox 2002:92-93) results, since it “pushes dangerously towards a window-shopping approach to knowledge, where browsing replaces applied investigation, and where smart juxtapositions in rough ‘n’ ready sculptural surroundings are stand-ins for informed dialectics”.

It is indeed questionable what results the artist intended to achieve. The informed gallery goer could conceive of the work as a “brilliantly irreverent anti-monument” (Lundström 2003:59), but what were the locals to make of the ramshackle art-shack in their backyard and the artsy crowd taxied in to look at it and them? In a sense Hirschhorn’s work reversed the position taken by Haaning, by taking what can be considered “art language” to a Turkish neighbourhood. Issues of translation, intelligibility, exclusion and privilege come into play, indicating a less than charitable approach to what had to be considered Hirschhorn’s primary audience. Or, was his primary focus the gallery audience? In that case, the local residents were set up.

If artworks are to function as art-ethical processing plants, artists have to aim for more than ambiguity. Showing does not equal participating, nor does some sense of commitment necessarily ensure ethical engagement by the artist or the audience.³⁷ Action from within the safe space of contemporary art – well-intentioned or not – risks being ineffectual in any real sense and its excesses can certainly have unimaginable results. If the aim is to engender some notion of empathy, the project runs into an impasse: empathy depends on distance created between ‘ourselves’ and ‘others’ and ultimately turns into

³⁷ Gioni (2002:107) argues in this regard that Documenta 11 does not offer any clear ethical role for the spectator when faced with images of massacres and conflict: “Does our reaction belong to the domain of ethics or to that of aesthetics? Are we spectators or are we meant to turn to political action?”



“ethical/epistemological abuse” (Kester 1999/2000:6).³⁸ However worthy an ethical approach to art production might be, its commitment needs to measure up to its efficacy, or at least question the possibilities and scope of ethical engagement. What could more realistically be said of Documenta 11’s “forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection” (Enwezor 2002b:43) is that not only were the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures reflected upon, but the very possibilities of ethical reflection and committed action were being questioned.

2.4 REDEFINING THE DOCUMENTARY

The prevalence of artworks in a documentary mode struck visitors to Platform 5 of Documenta 11 as a spectacular difference; spectacular not only in its frequency but especially in the way different genres – photography, film, video (projection), installations and archives – reinvented documenting in various forms. As a tool to interrogate artistic interaction with the real world the documentary form suited the curatorial project of ethical engagement. In terms of other curatorial aims, the documentary further played a role in despectacularising the exhibition by slowing down the viewing experience and expanding participation.

2.4.1 Slowing down and opening up

It has been estimated that visitors to Documenta 11 had to spend 600 hours (Heartney 2002:87) to watch all the films and videos. This proliferation of time-based artworks and the amount of incorporated text on display were some of the main criticisms against the exhibition.³⁹ This is partly a function of, what

³⁸ Art theorist Grant Kester (1999/2000:6) argues that “the very act of empathetic identification is used to negate the specific identity of the other subject”, thereby creating a false sense of *sameness* which masks differences and the privileged position of the empathiser.

³⁹ The record high attendance of the exhibition – at least 665 000 when paying visitors and accredited journalists are added up – compounded curatorial reserves critics had in this regard. For critic Keith Patrick (2002:94) the “predominance of so much time-based material



Enwezor (Griffin et al 2003:156) terms, the “problem of sprawl” in large-scale exhibitions – the sheer overwhelming mass of artworks to be viewed in limited time – but it also results from the way artists work with time-based media like film and around seriality or narrative cycles. Whereas the inclusion of text were up to artists who worked with non-retinal aspects that transgressed disciplinary genres, Enwezor (2003a:45) explains, the longer films⁴⁰ were a curatorial choice, intended to change “the viewer’s relationship to the time of the exhibition, which is another device we used to elaborate critically”.

Slowing down the viewing process is, therefore, a counter-strategy to the spectacularising visual overkill associated with a rapid scanning of the daunting amount of artworks in an exhibition of this size. According to Enwezor (2003a:45), the curatorial aim was to “work more with cinematic language than with the logic of the loop”. If the experience of time is used as critical tactic, it does not matter that the audience could not experience all the work equally. The intention was to create an exhibition space that facilitated the non-totalising curatorial approach to Documenta 11, that there are “no overarching conclusions to be reached, no forms of closure” (Enwezor 2002:42-43). In a sense an overview was withheld, by making it impossible to interact with all the artworks on display. A rhizomatic structure has “multiple entryways” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:12) and Documenta 11 had likewise “many centers and many edges” (Bauer 2002:106), leaving it up to viewers to choose among the revolving doors.

As a strategy to facilitate agency in the reception of artwork, slowing-down proved to be, for the most part, rather counter-productive. For the artists participating in Documenta 11 this tactic might have meant more jostling for viewing position, yet also more thorough viewing. On the other hand, any critical openings created within the ‘nomadic’ exhibition spaces might have

in such an extensive situation [...] where much time was lost simply waiting to gain entry to individual spaces” was a failure by the curators.

⁴⁰ In this regard *Day and Night and Day and...* (2002), the almost 36 hour long black-and-white film in which Belgian artist Jef Geys compiles all the photographs from his forty-year career, is a record. A distant second is the nearly five hour long (288 min.) retrospective work by filmmaker Jonas Mekas of his personal archive from 1970-1999, *As I was moving ahead I saw brief glimpses of beauty* (2000),



been completely missed by viewers without the commitment to spend a few days interacting with the art.⁴¹ The decision to show longer films in the exhibition spaces, not as part of a film program, effectively wasted time.⁴² Withholding an overview could have created resistance, rather than openness, in other than dedicated viewers.

The choice of time-based media had another intended critical dimension in line with Documenta 11's democratising project: opening up art production to practitioners with limited resources that would otherwise not be able to show work in Kassel. Video, especially, levels the playing field to artists from different parts of the world, given the widespread availability of video equipment and portability of completed work. Cameroon-born artist Jean-Marie Teno argues in this regard, according to Nash (*Documenta 11..., short guide* 2002:222), that low production costs, easy operation and informal screening networks could establish video as a medium to "reinvigorate media production in Africa". For some the use of video, film and photography was evidence of modernity, of the margin moving to the centre (Van Straaten 2003:5) and for others – mostly American and Japanese critics who expected more digital art – it was a sign of Documenta 11 not moving with the times.⁴³ It has to be mentioned that one of the most intricate digital pieces on display was a work from, what could be regarded as an artist from the peripheries, Beijing native Feng Mengbo, who constructed a shareware multiplayer version of the action game *Quake III Arena* as an Internet-performance, *Q4U* (2001/02).

It could be argued that from a curatorial point of view the selection of media impacted on the reception of artworks from diverse production sites, as the

⁴¹ Critic Dan Fox (2002:92) points out that nuances inevitably gets lost in the viewing experience of an exhibition the size of Documenta: "Valuable contributions to the discourse in which Enwezor and his team immersed themselves are inevitably flattened and stripped of nuance, subjected instead to the drifting attentions of *flâneur*-like art viewing".

⁴² One had, for instance, to wait one's turn outside the closed-door mini-theatre where Steve McQueens *Western Deep* (2002)(25 minutes) was shown.

⁴³ The proliferation of documentary films and video was even considered a cop-out by New York critic Peter Schjeldahl (2002:95) who pontificated: "Why should an emerging country's young artists submit to rigorous initiation in traditional mediums when technology offers so many more efficient options?"



“acceptance and dissemination of [the various] media technologies are mediated by economic, cultural and political realities” (Fernández 2003:51). The showing of works utilising low-tech electronic media alongside lustrous productions not only referenced these uneven conditions, but also presented the avant-gardist art establishment with an expanded aesthetic field. Artist Kendell Geers (2002b) believes the subversion of sleekness might be a reason for the selection of his work *Shooting Gallery* (2000), a slide projection of a slow-motion shooting sequence from a Godfather-movie. The work has little aesthetic information – the clicking rhythm of the projector setting up the freeze-frame shots for the consumption of violence in the gallery – compared to films of longer than 20 minutes, such as Julien’s *Paradise Omeros* (2002), that was singled out by critics for its “sheer formal mastery of the cinematic art” (Patrick 2002:95). Geer’s interpretation is supported by Enwezor’s (2003a:46) questioning of a preoccupation with aesthetic values and claims, asserting in the light of the expansion of visual strategies one has to “eschew completely the idea of any kind of over-wrought aesthetic judgment as far as what’s proper to all works of art”.

Opening up the aesthetic field, as curatorial aim, here applies not only to a postcolonial rethinking of Westernised aesthetics, but also the fact that representation and reception strategies in a decentred, global art network call for the display of localisations of art praxis. The inclusion of documentary-style works, dealing with wretchedness in all its globally manifested forms, specifically questioned entrenched notions of the value of beauty and transcendency in art and how the documentary form, in particular, could expand an engagement with the world outside the gallery.

2.4.2 Refiguring the real

Documenta 11’s focus on abject reality was construed as humourless sobriety by even those who praised its curatorial vision, such as Gioni (2002:106): “With its shantytowns and ruins, and its diaries shot in conflict zones and on the borders of misery, Documenta is a veritable catalogue of dysfunction and



disaster”. While perceiving Documenta 11 as “an exhibition remarkably well suited to the stark new realities of the post-Sept. 11 environment” (Heartney 2002:88), critic Eleanor Heartney commented about the short supply of sex and wit (Heartney 2002:94). To these criticisms Enwezor (2003a:44) answers:

I have a notion that when people say that there was no humor, no sex, no mess, no fun, and above all that it is Protestant or evangelical, what they mean is that the realism of the documentary is a realism of abjection [...] Yes, it was intentional, it was tactical in the sense that we wanted to question the function of the exhibition and what making an art exhibition means at this present point in time when we live with an excess of images, but with few relations to connect those images.

Thinking about the documentary mode in the context of Documenta 11 thus plays out on various levels: the representation of the real, of what Enwezor (2003:44) referencing Agamben calls “‘naked life’, bare life”; the relation of documentary-style images in the gallery to popular images in the press, on TV and produced by Hollywood; and the possible function within an exhibition of artworks utilising documentary forms.

Some critics dismissed the documentary outright for being an aesthetically crude and ultimately naïve strategy harking back to unmediated representation. Michael Kimmelman (2002:1), art critic for The New York Times, declares his surprise at the “lack of irony (or is it naïveté?)”, claiming “the presumption throughout this Documenta seems to be that a camera, simply aimed at something, tells the truth, the more cameras the better, as if a profusion of views through the lenses weren’t also bound to be biased”. This position confuses the documentary style with the pursuit of journalistic realism⁴⁴ and ignores the various ways Documenta-artists strategically redefined the documentary genre through the use of metaphor, multiple viewpoints, and fictive or transdisciplinary interventions. What attracts artists to pointing the camera lens at reality is precisely what writer and curator Katerina Gregos (2005:19) terms the “transformative territory” created by that

⁴⁴ McEvelley (2002:85) states in this regard the documentary-style work in Documenta 11 “was by no means conventional or journalistic footage” and that the exhibition offers “[c]ountless different and ingenious modes of video presentation”.



very act: “Reality may be their point of departure, but it is a reality not simply represented but one that is managed, distilled, complicated and enhanced”.⁴⁵

The issue is not whether documentaries, as some special class of images, could be recovered to convey unmitigated “truths”, but if the very forms spectacularised by the mass-media could be refashioned to function as ethic-epistemic engines.

Insistence on a transcendental or ironic aesthetic approach becomes problematic when artists try to make sense of fractured reality and rigid distinctions get blurred.⁴⁶ The monumental events of 11 September 2001 induced the Moroccan-born photographer, Touhami Ennadre – who, according to commentator Lauri Firstenberg (*Shortguide...* 2002:70), has resisted to produce documentary-style images his entire career – to memorialise personal expressions of trauma in a city far from his home in Paris, with *New York City, September 11* (2001), 26 black-and-white photographs. Whereas Ennadre’s work is closer to journalistic reportage, Alfredo Jaar’s response to historical events resulted in the transformation of information into a haunting installation. “It is difficult”, is Jaar’s (2002:290) understated summary of the artist’s position upon confronting the question, “How do I make art when the world is in such a state?” His installation for Documenta 11 *Lament of the images* (2002) is as much a metaphor for blindness to mediated information as for the erasure there of. An ante-room with 3 white illuminated texts in black boxes – about the damage to Mandela’s eyes in the limestone quarries of Robben Island, Bill Gates’ ownership of 65 million photographs stored underground, and the purchase of all satellite images of Afghanistan by the Pentagon – lead via an architectural corridor to

⁴⁵ Steven Bode (2005:17), director of the UK based Film and Video Umbrella, ascribes the enduring popularity of the video medium to the immediacy of the image, theatricality linking it to performance and cinema, the sculptural dimension achieved by staging in a gallery and its accessibility to less expert audiences. He (Bode 2005:17) states: “Video’s ability to incorporate different visual textures and its facility for inter-textual resonance and allusion (as artists continue to quote, blithely or deconstructively, from popular culture, TV or movies) also marks it out as a hugely influential site of engagement and experimentation.”

⁴⁶ In this regard Basualdo (2002a:58) claims artworks were selected precisely because borders were transgressed: “Far from the autonomy of art or the equivocal pleasure of form for form’s sake, the images that guide the encyclopedia of Documenta 11 lead us to the accidents of the world with which they are confused. The borders between archive and work, between document and monument, waver in the mirrored glare of the encyclopedia.”

a second room, blindingly lit by a white screen. By formally linking the illuminated text with the white screen, the white/black-out not only commented on the subject of the texts involved, but also on the use of text for public consumption.

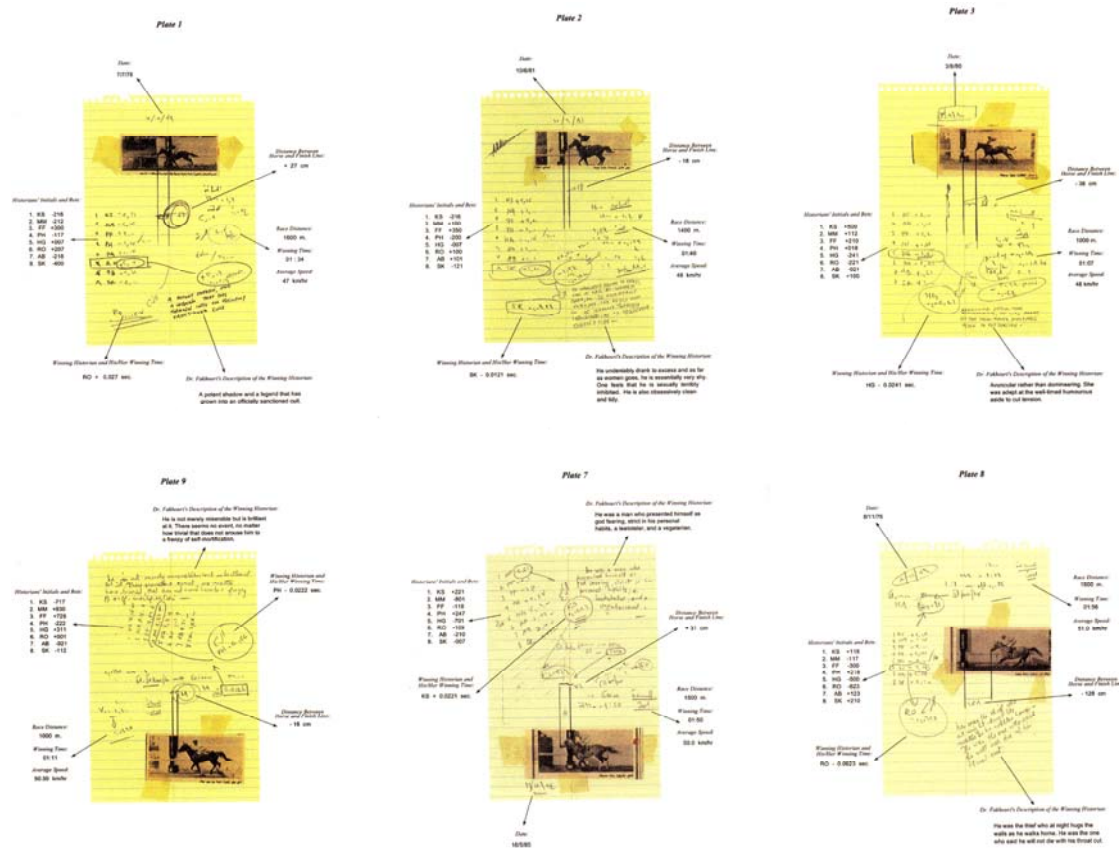


Figure 6: The Atlas Group, *Notebook Volume 72: Missing Lebanese Wars*, 1999.

Notebook, original pages, 14 x 20,5 cm.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Catalogue*. 2002:183).

Ideas about the accuracy and veracity of the documentary were effectively inverted by the Atlas Group's detailed fictive archives about the civil wars in Lebanon of 1975-91. The producer of the works already at the outset confounds expectations: the group 'founded by' the real artist Walid Raad, could include real or fictional members. The works painstakingly show up simplistic binary oppositions of the real and fictive, of truth and fabrication, of found and invented. A fictive authority in the form of the historian, dr. Fadl Fakhouri, archives the use of car bombs in *Already been in a lake of fire* (1999) or winning horses in *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1999) (Figure 6). Of the

notebook containing 145 images of cut-outs of specific cars with details of date, time and explosion size given in Arabic text, nine digital prints were displayed at Documenta 11. The fact that these cars have recently been photographed and the documenting compiled years after the events, questions the power of authority, notions of scientific truth and authenticity, the staging of meaning and the seduction of surface. In *Missing Lebanese Wars* the viewer's credulity is tested by the "evidence" that during the Lebanese civil wars opposing nationalist and socialist historians came together on Sundays to gamble at the racetrack. Pages of a notebook show yellowed newspaper clips of photo finishes accompanying the notes on each race, plus descriptions of the winning historians, who bet on how close the photographer came to capturing the horse crossing the finishing line. The absurdities of this research project highlight the absence, or escape, of a coming to terms with real issues and interrogates what different notions of reality could mean.

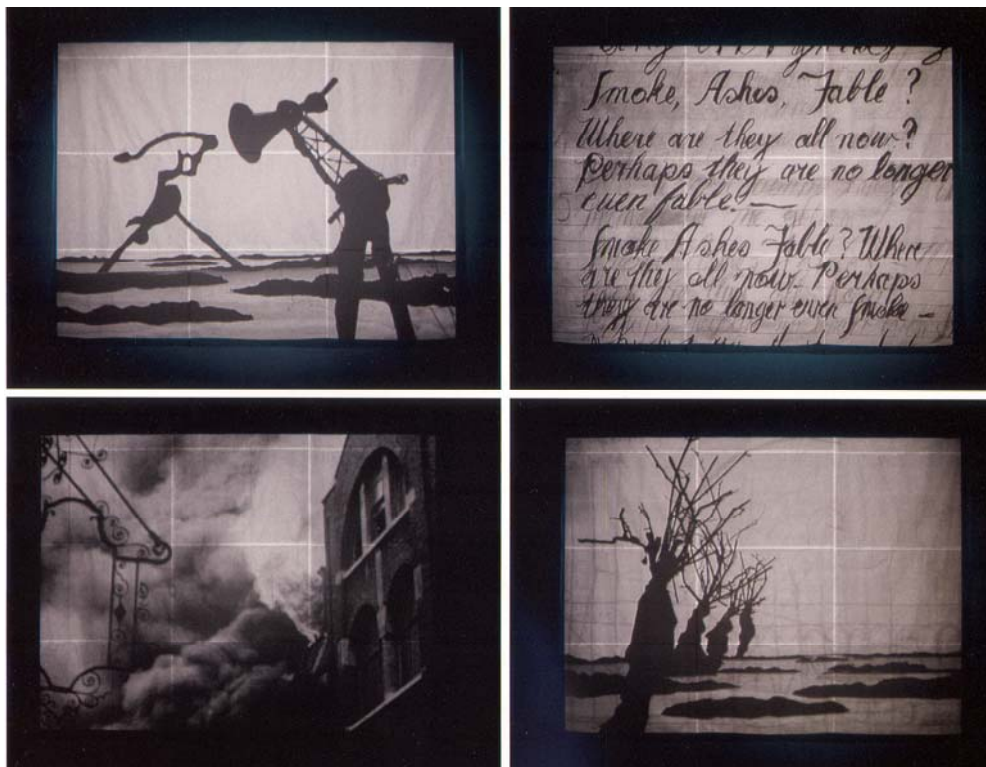


Figure 7: William Kentridge, *Zeno writing*, 2002.
Film installation, 16 mm film transferred to DVD (11 min.), stills.
Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:161).



The use of metaphor and post-cinematic techniques transforms the documentary mode of William Kentridge's *Zeno writing* (2002) (Figure 7). The work, conceived of as "a trace" (Kentridge 2002) of the theatre production *Confessions of Zeno* (2002), is a film-installation projected onto a screen of sheets of tracing paper. Kentridge's use of "cheap butcher paper and sticky tape" (Kentridge 2002) subverts the slickness of film, as does the laboured drawings of cinematic effects and film-techniques. Different levels of reality layered in the imaging – archive footage, drawings, torn paper figures and the shadows of real puppets manipulated by actual humans – act simultaneously to deconstruct filmmaking techniques and to refer to real and imagined, public and personal realities mutually constituting and transforming one another. "It's about the *unwilling* suspension of disbelief," states the artist (William Kentridge 1999:19). The camera as "instrument of control, scrutiny, recording and memory" (William Kentridge 1999:33) is manipulated to construct much more than a diary. Self-absorbed Zeno's little obsession with giving up smoking in wartime links smoke, ashes, lies and fables in a resonant interplay between private and public spheres.

Dutch artist Johan van der Keuken (1983-2001), experimenting with conventional boundaries between documenting and fiction, paints an impressionistic picture of life in the South-Indian state Kerala in his film *Het oog boven de put* (1988). In three parts the film, while registering images on the road, follows family life, a banker visiting small investors, and the training of traditional rituals. Van der Keuken's montage of people, situations, urban impressions and rural landscapes offers no commentary or conclusions, thereby emphasising that his view of this reality is indeed but one view. Thus, in contrast to mass-produced documentaries obscuring the framing context of the lens, Van der Keuken keeps the eye above the well in focus, as it were, thereby showing the 'real' as constructed.

A strong case can be made that the works of Jaar, the Atlas Group, Kentridge and Van der Keuken expanded notions of documenting. Seen together with more straightforward documentary modes, such as that used by Ennadre,



Documenta 11 re-examined the scope of documentary images to transform and memorialise the individual experience of realities. According to art historian María Fernández (2003:52, emphasis added), Documenta 11 “reintroduces the *testimonial potential* of images as a subject for reconsideration” and questions “our acceptance of a post-indexical, simulacral era from which there is neither respite nor escape”.⁴⁷ By setting out to include voices that have previously been inaudible, silent or deemed unworthy to be listened to, this Documenta also opened up the possibility of artists to bear witness. Notions like *hyperreality* and *posthumanity* makes no sense to somebody living through the genocide in Rwanda, nor does *death of the author* translate as anything but more tyranny to the marginalised artist, previously considered as pre- or proto-modern. Documenta 11 indeed presented the possibility of recovering the documentary, approached from the postcolonial space of exile, as a strategy to penetrate the simulacral fog. It could, on the other hand, be argued that, to a certain extent, postmodern notions were contextualised as a form of Western provincialism.⁴⁸

Ultimately the curatorial focus on the documentary could be deemed to be political:⁴⁹ within the extended field of representation aimed for in this Documenta, the specific localisation of individual producers was emphasised by their use of documentary forms. The frequency of these works in the Documenta-spaces visually mimicked the resisting force of the “multitude”⁵⁰ to hegemonic power. As such, the selection of documentaries played an important role in the construction of Documenta 11 as space for ethical reflection on an unflattened transcultural landscape.

⁴⁷ For Fernández (2003:52) the important question posed by the artworks was not if truth can be represented, but rather whether images “can stimulate ethical reflections and practices”.

⁴⁸ Novelist-theorist Susan Sontag (2003:110) maintains in this regard the positions that reality has become a spectacle (Debord) and that images constitute the only reality (Baudrillard) speak of “breathhtaking provincialism”, universalising First World experience and viewing habits, and it also suggests “perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world”.

⁴⁹ Enwezor (2003a:45) claims in this regard “the political dimension has to deal with the ethics of representation, and the production of an exhibition that tries to privilege the speaking position of the producer of ideas is to me a political action”.

⁵⁰ Hardt and Negri (2004:99, emphasis in original) pose that the notion of *multitude*, differing from that of ‘the people’, refers to “a set of *singularities* – and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different”.



2.5 CONCLUSION

In the frame of the investigation carried out in this chapter into the difference that Documenta 11 intended for itself, it could be concluded that the curatorial efforts met with success in crucial aspects, yet, these accomplishments were somewhat eclipsed by the high standards that this Documenta set for itself. The twin strategies of approaching the deterritorialised spaces of this project as creolised territories, and constructing the exhibition rhizomatically, in particular, engaged creatively with art production within a transcultural field in which connections could be made and disconnections shown up. The heavy investment in postcoloniality also paid off in terms of injecting specificity in cultural discourses, shifting dynamics in the reception of artwork, and, most importantly, counter-acting flattening of the spectatorial regime. Nonetheless, while the curators aimed to harness the cultural weight and art-world cachet of Documenta for redress and change, the reach of Documenta turned out to be a cursed blessing. Curatorial strategies did not undermine the co-optive power of the Northern institution sufficiently in order to subvert its functioning.

Documenta 11 could, all the same, be considered an exemplar of a non-exoticising curatorial approach to others, undermining ethnographic identifications based on imperialist power dynamics and, to a lesser extent, globalising imperatives to produce spectacularly marketable others. According to Niklas Maak (2002:29), opinion writer for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the outstanding quality of this Documenta was to eschew both shock tactics and exoticising art production in far-off locations for its neocolonial audience, by turning the ethnological gaze around in such a way that audiences could reconsider their worldview.⁵¹ As a dialectic space of dialogue, Documenta 11 ventured to destabilise the comfort zone of art-tourism in which “artefacts are paraded through the galleries, the very range

⁵¹ Maak (2002:29) states: “Die herausragende Qualität dieser Documenta liegt gerade darin, daß sie nicht auf erwartbare Schockeffekte setzt, nicht die Kunstproduktion fremder Länder mit einer im Kern neokolonialen Geste als bewundernswerte Exotica feiert, sondern den ethnologischen Blick umkehrt und spielerisch gegen den verdutzten Besucher richtet [...] Die Documenta 11 ist das Vorbeben einer anderen Weltsicht: einer Sicht, die nicht gegen Amerika und Europa gerichtet ist, sich aber entfernt von den Gewißheiten des hier geprägten Blickes auf die Bilder der Gegenwart”.



of origins providing the meaning – a stay at home cultural tourism” (Murphy 1998:187). Hence, the experience of difference could become other than, what Stuart Hall (1997a:31) describes as, “wondering at pluralism” in a globalised cultural economy, “which is constantly teasing itself with the pleasures of the transgressive Other”. By aiming for such an engagement with audiences on a level other than that of art-tourism, Documenta 11 made a significant attempt at despectacularising the mega-exhibition .

However, the gains made in terms of inclusivity – whether this constituted the inclusion of ‘enough’ non-diasporic artists, or not – have to be balanced against the inevitable museological logic of Documenta. According to Thomas Wagner (2002:29), art critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Documenta 11’s project, of showing many voices speaking of different cultures and symbolic orders, had never before been museologised as fast. What contributed to the co-opting of difference and normalisation of any subversive power of artworks, in Wagner’s (2002:29) view, is that the works on display were ultimately compatible to a Western art market.⁵² An argument could be made that the postcolonial project of critiquing the mechanisms of a Western art tradition from within the structure of a European institution might, on the other hand, be less about leaving the museum than rather importing into it. Documenta 11 could be regarded as achieving the success of at least differentiating the centre by including former margins.

The consensus, among advocates and detractors alike, seems to be that Documenta 11’s project of institutional critique had less to do with reinventing Documenta than defining the limits of this institution in a globalised art network. Even if Documenta 11’s rethinking of historical procedures and inclusion of marginalised artists were construed by some as a universalising topos, as “[t]he outside [as] the new inside” (Shatz 2002:41), or “pluralism [that] had been imposed as a new form of fundamentalism” (Gioni 2002:107),

⁵² This position could indicate a wish on his side for non-Western artists to show ‘authenticity’ and be uncorrupted by the Western art market. See Siemons (2002:33) for a discussion on exotic expectations of ‘postcolonial art’ to be somehow outside the sphere of global cultural influences. Chapter 6 engages in particular with the anti-market strategies employed in Documenta 11.



the attempt at a counter-hegemonic and counter-normative (re)construction of the historical event has to be lauded. The showing of those excluded from the museum's illustrious history as active agents in global transmodernities, not only exposed the narratives bound up in Documenta as the site for the production of art history, but also created a space for viewing diverse art forms from different and unequal production sites on shifting ground, as it were. In this sense Documenta 11 approached both an aesthetic of diversity and, inversely, a diversity of aesthetics – a commendable project in terms of transcultural engagement.

What is less convincing, though, is the problematic approach to ethical and political agency by the curators of Documenta 11. Compared to strong American reaction against, what was regarded as the political project of Documenta 11,⁵³ the German press was, conversely, on the whole positive about the “Renaissance of Utopia” (Maak 2002:29, own translation). The value of Documenta 11 was for Wagner (2002:29) that art was not politicised as such, but that politics were successfully reclaimed for the territory of art in a time of globalisation. Kurt Kladler,⁵⁴ writing for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, claimed Documenta 11 steered clear from any form of political correctness because it approached political action, similar to the social and historical institution of Documenta, as product and medium of politically motivated processes. It could certainly be argued that in the focus on the world outside the gallery – by favouring documentaries produced in diverse locations, among other tactics – Enwezor's Documenta (re)claimed a political position for art. That the curatorial momentum propelled the experience of Documenta away from consumptive viewing towards ethical-critical engagement (however limited that might have been) and the political stance extended to Documenta's own power dynamics, indeed strengthened the critical aim.

⁵³ Washington Post writer Blake Gopnik (2002:1), the most vehement critic of Documenta 11, described the exhibition as an “encyclopedia of politically correct positions” creating a “massive, exhausting, depressing [sense of] déjà vu”. He (Gopnik 2002:1) claims that “Documenta's brand of agitprop looks strikingly out of touch with what I see coming out of newer galleries and studios these days [...] They favor the quietly resonant object over any braying statement of political intent.”

⁵⁴ Kladler is quoted in the last press release issued for Documenta 11 on the official Documenta-website at: <http://www.documenta12.de/data/english/index.html>.



However, the achievements of the ethical-political curatorial project in terms of actual transformations of power relations remained as ambiguous as the agency exacted from the audience and artworks.

Documenta 11's enduring spectacular difference might be the curatorial insights gained in its interrogation of the dynamics of globalisation and the construction of the mega-exhibition as creolised, transcultural space. Whilst achieving some success regarding strategies to counter spectacularisation, the curatorial efforts to create resistance strategies to hegemonic global forces demonstrated the almost insurmountable difficulties of such a curatorial task.⁵⁵ Yet, the nomadic spaces in Kassel managed to showcase visual art that pushed and sneaked beyond boundaries, occasionally changing the cultural landscape on both sides of divides.

⁵⁵ Additional tactics to subvert the functioning of hegemonies will be critically evaluated in Chapters 3 to 6.



CHAPTER 3

ON EXPANDING PUBLIC SPHERES

It is more rewarding – and more difficult – to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about ‘us’.
Edward Said (1994:336).

In order to assess Documenta 11’s functioning “not as an exhibition but as a *constellation of public spheres*” (Enwezor 2002b:54, emphasis added) this chapter deals with the curatorial positioning of the public sphere and cultural production on intersecting postcolonial and global trajectories. The element of expansion contained in the notion of a constellation will especially be examined in terms of whether enlargement, or greater inclusivity, meant a broadening and deepening of civil societal values and, if so, how that could influence art production. How this enlargement-project played out against globalisation dynamics is of crucial concern, since the success of Documenta 11’s socio-political engagement was made dependent on the “dialectical interaction with heterogeneous, transnational audiences – a public sphere through which to think and analyse seriously the complex network of global knowledge circuits on which interpretations of all cultural processes and research today depend” (Enwezor 2002b:53). An important criticism against the curatorial project, raised in Chapter 1, will be further examined in a recontextualised form: did an expanded Documenta 11 and its extraterritorial platforms perform as forums of inclusion, or rather, instruments for neocolonial¹ expansion of ‘others inc.’ for a global cultural marketplace?

¹ Neocolonialism refers here to the global capitalist imperialism after World War II which subjected newly independent states to the economic and cultural domination of former colonial powers and the superpowers of the United States and then Soviet Union. Subsequent control through multi- and transnational companies, development agencies and, especially, monetary superstructures are considered more insidious, difficult to expose and to counteract than the blatant colonialism of European imperialism (with its zenith mid-18th to mid-20th centuries) and therefore as a serious threat to the development of independence of postcolonial states. According to Ashcroft et al (2000:162), the term was coined by Pan Africanist thinker and first president of an independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, in *Neo-colonialism: the last stage of imperialism* (1965) and developed from Lenin’s notion that imperialism is the final stage of capitalism.



Departing from an investigation of the notion of the public sphere and what a postcolonial fleshing out of this concept could entail, the first part of this chapter deals with notions of inclusivity and pluralism in the transcultural space of international exhibitions. Given Documenta 11's focus on art production in localities previously excluded from Documenta, the discussion will include the implications for the functioning of art in societies in which the public sphere is in crisis or has collapsed. In this context the themes of democracy, justice, truth and reconciliation addressed in Platforms 2 and 3 are particularly pertinent. How these themes relate to intensifying globalisation dynamics will be considered in the second part, with specific reference to the contributions of individual artworks to the debates.

3.1 POSTCOLONIAL PUBLIC SPHERES

The constellation of public spheres created by Documenta 11 could in the first place be regarded as an attempt at a *postcolonial expansion* of the notion of the public sphere. Enwezor (2002d:[sp]) describes the postcolonial moment as an “incredible moment of transformation” and as such postcoloniality offers an opening to fundamentally change the discourse around Documenta and the art world. In his introduction to Platform 4 in Lagos, Enwezor (2002d:[sp]) stated the platforms “challenge suppositions of history being defined by Europe” and one of the reasons Documenta travelled to distant locations was to “capture the grain of the voices, the texture of discourses that cannot simply be seen as supplementary to the grand narrative of history that is European”. Communicating “grain” and “texture” are certainly important steps to translation and making connections in a discursive public space. By allowing marginalised and excluded voices to speak for themselves, Documenta 11 aimed at producing a public sphere which facilitated a multiplicity of discourses and showed a possible formulation of a public sphere for an egalitarian global exhibition.

The vehicle through which the public sphere was constructed in Documenta 11's constellation was the *platform*, defined, more precisely, as “an open



encyclopedia for the analysis of late modernity; a network of relationships; and open form for organizing knowledge; a non-hierarchical model of representation; a compendium of voices, cultural, artistic, and knowledge circuits” (Enwezor 2002b:49). The first four platforms were put together as collaborations with among others the Prince Claus Foundation for Culture and Development, the India Habitat Centre, the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, CODESRIA (Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa) and, besides Platform 3, were open to the public. The thinking behind the collaboration between a multiplicity of disciplines on different continents was to produce a “*constellation of multifaceted Platforms* in which artists, intellectuals, communities, audiences, practices, voices, situations, actions come together to examine and analyze the predicaments and transformations that form part of the deeply inflected historical procedures and processes of our time” (*Documenta 11_Platform 1, Democracy unrealized...* 2002:11, emphasis added).

The focus on interdisciplinarity created some problems inherent to the production of common ground. Although the collaborators on Platform 1 stress in the introduction to the published volume that their’s is a “critical interdisciplinary methodology that is to be distinguished from interdisciplinarity as a form of exhibitionism” (*Documenta 11_Platform 1, Democracy unrealized...* 2002:10), this critical stance does not question interdisciplinarity as such. The translation between disciplines is taken as unproblematic, a fact questioned by urbanist AbouMaliq Simone (2002a:[sp]), who commented on the “uneasy mix” of contributions to Platform 4, the difficulty of deciding what language to use and which connections to manage. The complexity built into Documenta 11’s public sphere in fact undermined its project of inclusivity. In this respect Documenta’s public sphere was emblematic of the restrictions to equal participation built into the idealised bourgeois public sphere.

Habermas’s original conception of the public sphere² is criticised in the contexts of gendered and postcolonial subjectivity as being an exclusive form

² Habermas first developed the idea of the *public sphere* in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, published in 1962 and usually translated as *The Structural transformation of the public sphere. An enquiry into a category of bourgeois society*.



of association for European, bourgeois men. For political philosopher Nancy Fraser (1992:113) the idealised liberal public sphere is actually constituted by its exclusions, in the sense that Habermas conceived of a single public arena with open access only to members of a homogenous community. Counter-publics and counter-discourses would in this framework be construed as fragmentation and degeneration of the ideal of rational consensus. Rather than an instrument of liberation, the public sphere could therefore function as a “hegemonic mode of domination” (Fraser 1992:117). In this regard Said (1994:278) criticises Habermas as typical of Marxist thinkers who are “stunningly silent on racist theory, anti-imperialist resistance, and oppositional practice in the empire”.³ Habermas (1992:425, emphasis in original) concurs that “a different picture emerges if *from the very beginning* one admits the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere”.

If notions of rational-critical discourse, equal participation and consensus-building in the public arena are seen as worthwhile ideals for contemporary society (and art), the question needs to be addressed how public spheres could function in multicultural and transnational societies. Literary critic Peter Uwe Hohendahl (1992:107) argues for the reintroduction of history and context, as well as a weaker claim of rationality “without the presupposition of demonstrative universal norms”. It could be argued that postcolonial insights – such as the redefining of modernity, rationality and democracy combined with an understanding of the cultural effects of location and dislocation – open up possibilities for, firstly, a plurality of models of public spheres and, secondly, the simultaneous functioning of different models. Fraser (1992:121) contends in order to achieve real parity of participation in any public sphere, systemic inequalities need to be eliminated, particularly assumptions that status, gender and the private sphere can be checked at the door as if the public

³ According to Said (1994:278) this silence is deliberate: “And lest that silence be interpreted as an oversight, we have today’s leading Frankfurt theorist, Jürgen Habermas, explaining in an interview (originally published in *The New Left Review*) that the silence is deliberate abstention: no, he says, we have nothing to say to ‘anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles in the Third World,’ even if, he adds, ‘I am aware of the fact that this is a eurocentrically limited view’”.



sphere is a space of “zero degree culture” (Fraser 1992:120). In this regard postcolonial emphasis on subjectivity, marginality, alterity and subaltern publics could create spaces for, what Fraser (1992:120) terms, the “unbracketing of inequalities” and, in particular, the differentiation of publics.

Heterogeneous participation in several overlapping public spheres, a constellation as it were, could afford greater promise of an open society and minimise the hegemonising formation of a deceptive sense of “we” or the substitution of concession for consensus. In order to move away from any abstract universal that could legitimise hegemonies, cultural theorist Walter D. Mignolo (2000:743) argues for diversity as a universal project in the form of a “critical and dialogic cosmopolitanism”.⁴ For him notions of democracy arising from an Enlightenment heritage should not simply be recast, but replaced by “border thinking or border epistemology grounded on the critique of all possible fundamentalism (Western and non-Western, national and religious, neoliberal and neosocialist)” (Mignolo 2000:743). Aiming for diversity in a liminal, transcultural space thus holds the promise of widespread participation, rather than “being participated” (Mignolo 2000:744). A commitment to such *border thinking* and sensitivity to incommensurability and gaps in the interface between cultures might be critical to the success of public spheres on the transnational level.⁵

Therefore, the attempt by the curators of Documenta 11 to expand their project to include multiple, overlapping spheres could be considered as a vital transcultural undertaking. Furthermore, a postcolonial approach undeniably offers the transcultural curator particular advantages in constructing a democratic space to engage with diverse art production. Whether the specific approach of Documenta 11 transcended the formidable levelling and co-optive dynamics of neocolonial hegemonies, however, is another matter altogether. The rest of this section assesses two specific ways in which the curatorial focus endeavoured to subvert homogenising dynamics, by showing art produced in collapsing public spheres and reworking the idea of consensus.

⁴ Mignolo (2000:721) defines cosmopolitanism in terms of historical counter-globalisation strategies, as “a set of projects toward planetary conviviality”.

⁵ The functioning of Documenta 11 as border localisation will be further discussed in Chapter 5.



3.1.1 Coming to terms with crisis

While notions of the public sphere are multiplied in transnational space, in the context of postcolonial states the core-concept is fragmented and hollowed out. Considering the inequalities built into the power dynamics of many postcolonial states,⁶ political scientist Achille Mbembe (2001:39) reminds us that “[t]he notion of civil society cannot, therefore, be applied with any relevance to postcolonial African situations without a reinterpretation of the historical and philosophical connotations it suggests”. What is at stake is the very possibility of a separate sphere outside the influence of the state that could facilitate the articulation of a plurality of ideas. In such a space, where artists have to construct the reception of their works without a gallery system to speak of and access to media,⁷ art production cannot function along Northern lines. In this regard Documenta 11 rearticulated notions of the public sphere for Northern audiences by showing how artists in the South come to terms with what could be described as a public sphere in crisis.⁸

In the context of the exhibition in Kassel the work of Le Groupe Amos (Figure 8), founded in 1989 by a collective of writers, intellectuals, activists and artists⁹ in Kinshasa, presented a striking example of art endeavouring to create a functioning public sphere. In the postcolonial aftermath of Mobutu Sese Seko’s dictatorship, the rule of Laurent Kabila and civil war in the DRC, the group takes the ethical position of the biblical prophet Amos as their starting point. In their view art production cannot be divorced from grassroots

⁶ Mbembe (2001:29-32, emphasis in original) argues four properties of colonial rule are perpetuated in postcolonial power structures: “*régime d’exception*”, rule departing from a single, common law for all; “*regime of privileges and immunities*” in which justice is arbitrary; “*lack of distinction between ruling and civilizing*” resulting in an equation of citizens with subjects; and “*circularity*” built on submission rather than the public good.

⁷ Postcolonial film and literary critic Manthia Diawara (2002:32) postulates that the deterioration of a public sphere in Africa can in no small measure be attributed to the lack of newspapers, magazines, TV-networks and book publishers within and across national boundaries in which non-Western and non-diasporic views can be expressed.

⁸ The discourse of crisis underlies the approach to Platform 4: Under siege: four African cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos in particular, and frames, according to Enwezor (2005:32), artistic production which is influenced by social and political predicaments, as well as “processes of subjectivisation, by which I mean not only the ability to constitute a speech not marked by the failure of intelligibility and communicability but the very act of the creative transformation of African reality”.

⁹ The members of the collective are Flory Kayembe Shamba, José Mpundu, Thierry N’Landu and Jos Das (*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:229).

activism and social aesthetics. The installation of their work for Documenta 11 showed audio and video programs, wall texts and pamphlets employed in their quasi-educational projects to inform and incite community audiences with themes ranging from civil disobedience to the empowerment of women and the advancement of literacy.¹⁰ Le Groupe Amos approaches artworks as interventions in the life of ordinary Congolese, producing theatre productions, art instruction programmes, clinics and workshops with local actors, housewives, workers and students in both the official French and vernacular, Lingala. The success of their non-violent civil projects can be measured by the fact that the group was, according to Enwezor (2005:38), invited to participate in the peace conference between warring factions hosted by the South African government in 2002.



Figure 8: Le Groupe Amos. Installation view, 2002.
Documenta-Halle, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:29).

¹⁰ Audio programs include Flory Kayembe Shamba's *Pour voir clair: les acteurs gouvernementaux et non gouvernementaux de paix* (To see clear: governmental and non-governmental activists of the country), broadcasted on 17 November 1999 (60 min) and Thierry N'Landu's, *Dialogue intercongolais* (Intercongolesian dialogue), broadcasted on 18 March 2002 (60 min). Examples of video programs are *Femme Congolese: femme aux mille bras*. (A Congolese woman: woman with a thousand arms (10 min, 37 sec) and *Education for life campaign: when African woman talk about sexuality*, Lingala with French and English subtitles (41 min, 45 sec).



In a milieu that curtails the functioning of a public sphere, Le Groupe Amos claims a powerful space of agency for the cultural practitioner by discounting any notion of the separation of art and politics, of ethics and aesthetics. Against criticism of Le Groupe Amos that there is “not an artist among them” (Shatz 2002:40) and that their work is typical of Documenta-artists from the South who “don’t even make *art*” (Shatz 2002:40, emphasis in original), the inclusion of this collective showed a creative response to the realities of art production in non-Western spaces and as such expanded the constellation of Documenta 11’s public spheres from its Northern inception to global proportions. The projects of Le Groupe Amos differ from the political and social-orientated art of Situationist, Surrealist and Fluxus artists in two fundamental respects: any disclaiming of a privileged status for the artist is not from within an aesthetic framework as a form of anti-art or anti-commercial sensibility, nor is the group focussed on collapsing the space between artist and audience. Compared to the ‘social sculpture’-works of Joseph Beuys for previous Documentas,¹¹ Le Groupe Amos did not set out to induce a creative response to social systems in an audience well-versed in their civil rights. Creating a public sphere is a very different exercise than engaging in a public space which fosters disagreements. By exhibiting the Congolese experience, Documenta 11, rather than co-opting dissent, facilitated the questioning of freedoms and oppositions in the North and if, and to what extent, the public spheres in the North impacted the larger constellation.

3.1.2 Pluralism and transculturality

In the transcultural space of a globalised exhibition such as Documenta, approaches to the public sphere could be crucial to engagement with difference. In order to admit a plurality of voices in cross-cultural exchanges, the global public sphere has to be constructed as ultimately unrealisable,

¹¹ For Documenta 5 (1972) Beuys created an information office for the *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*, where he discussed issues of ‘direct democracy’ with visitors, and which ended with a boxing match for direct democracy on the last day. Documenta and 7 (1982) inaugurated the work *7 000 Eichen*, the planting of 7 000 oak trees with columns of basalt throughout Kassel.



since consensus might neither be possible nor desirable. The very notion of *consensus* needs to be re-examined when applied in a transnational context.

The unattainability of consensus is imperative to keep dialogue open and find alternatives to hegemonies, posits political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2002:88-89) in Platform 1.¹² Mouffe (2002:90) argues for “agonistic pluralism”, a notion of consensus that is not an elimination of antagonism, which leads to apathy, but is built through dissent in a pluralist democracy:

According to such a view, the aim of democratic institutions is not to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere but to defuse the potential hostility that exists in human societies by providing the possibility for antagonism to be transformed to ‘agonism’.

In the current neoliberal/neoconservative regime of globalisation antagonisms are far from suspended, but rather turned into judicial and, above all, moral oppositions, maintains Mouffe (2002:89). Hostilities and boundaries between groups of people are thus being reinscribed, “but since the ‘them’ can no longer be defined in political terms – given that the adversarial model has supposedly been overcome – these frontiers are drawn in moral categories, between ‘us the good’ and ‘them the evil ones’” (Mouffe 2002:93).

Taking Mouffe’s views as starting point, it could be argued that if we are to engage with difference in transcultural public spheres and avoid new regimes of exclusions, it is imperative to construct public spaces as incomplete, changeable and on some level untameable, with consensus always being out of reach. For those wishing to participate in such an expanded, inclusive public sphere a similar open approach to the construction of identity would be required. Us-them positing could be reduced in the transcultural sphere if, according to Mouffe (1994:111), “peoples’ allegiances are multiplied and their loyalties pluralized”; when agonism is approached as the agonism of difference, rather than of identity. Documenta 11’s platforms were articulated to engage specifically with these aspects of transcultural public spheres: the

¹² Mouffe (2002:92) maintains that the consequence of consensus-based discourses, such as for instance deliberate democracy and reflexive modernity that locate the public sphere in a postpolitical space, is “an inability to articulate any alternative to the current hegemonic order”.



functioning of democracy as unrealised and unrealisable from the top down, and the hybridity of identity and cultural formations from the bottom up. The concerted focus on difference, pluralism, and the value of opposition, in particular, aimed at fostering a space for the emergence of that which is disagreeable and unpalatable. In this respect Documenta 11 could hypothetically engage with difference in a way that would resist co-optation.

The objective was to engage with a “much more nuanced understanding and elaboration of difference than the commodified, institutionalized versions of difference”, claims Enwezor (2003a:43).¹³ In order to achieve this, Enwezor (2003a:43, emphasis in original) asserts “we constructed *Documenta 11* dialectically, not oppositionally, nor reductively, so as to affect a meaningful discursive approach to problems of representation, as well as their limits”. This ‘nuanced’ approach notwithstanding, art writer Kobena Mercer (2002:89) remarked “the discourse surrounding Documenta 11 unwittingly revealed that there is still no satisfactory or widely agreed vocabulary for dealing with ‘difference’ in contemporary culture”. Enwezor (2003a:44) agrees there is no “one sufficient language”, but maintains Documenta 11 did not set out to supply a dictionary for reading difference, as it were, but to “develop a set of discourses that allows for the possibility of multiple perspectives, multiple-positioned and sited practices”. It could be argued that the situating of difference in a field of transcultural contexts, at least eschewed any polemically paralysed positioning around political correctness and multiculturalism. A case can also be made that the curatorial project of Documenta 11, by expanding notions of both the public sphere and consensus, in principle expanded the representational field. At best, this approach opened up the promise for transcultural exchanges, thereby transcending any mere inventory of diverse cultural objects in our globalising moment.

¹³ In reaction to criticism that Documenta 11’s emphasis on difference in broad global strokes resulted in the underrepresentation of female and gay artists, Enwezor (2003a:43) maintained the curatorial focus was on “certain types of socio-political and cultural disenfranchisement”, rather than on groups associated with identity politics.



3.2 GLOBALISING THE DISCOURSE

It is the contention of this study that the specific curatorial engagement with the conditions of globalisation set Documenta 11 apart from other contemporary mega-exhibitions. Whilst the institution of Documenta certainly cannot escape its own globalising function, through the interrogation of global power dynamics shaping culture production Enwezor's Documenta created a space in which the lack of fit in overlapping frames of the real world and the gallery, North and South, outside and inside could be shown. As such, this localisation offered the ethical curatorial project the best opportunity to unmask and undermine the functioning of uneven power relations. In order to evaluate the measure of Documenta 11's own subversion of, or complicity to, globalising dynamics, this section focuses on the discursive expansion intended by its curators.

Besides creating an extraterritorial discursive field to foster a multiplicity of postcolonial public spheres, the platforms of Documenta 11 were conceived to examine globality. Rather than functioning as mere instruments of cultural globalisation, the platforms were framed by Enwezor (Griffin et al 2003:159, emphasis added) in terms of the "rigorous review of what the 'global' actually is in relation to *different spaces of production*". This "discursive elaboration of the global public sphere" (*Documenta 11_Platform 4...* 2002:20) is conceived to "move beyond spaces of legitimation [... and] open up spaces of articulation" (Enwezor 2002d:1). Through physically moving these "spaces of articulation" to different localities and collaborating with local institutions, Documenta 11 at the same time endeavoured to broaden *and* focus its scope. Initially art critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* Thomas Wagner (2002a:41) described the platforms as the "International Enwezor Tours" for elite discourse-communities with the public treated as mere readers.¹⁴ However, after the opening of the exhibition in Kassel, he (Wagner 2002c:43) praised the platform-strategy for incorporating theory into the Documenta-project without weighing the exhibition down and for Enwezor delivering what

¹⁴ Wagner (2002a:41, own translation) feared the overly academic pre-program for the fifth exhibition-platform meant: "First comes the seminar, then the art."



was required of him: a Documenta opened to the changes brought by global transformations.

With the aim of assessing how Documenta 11 positioned itself towards such “transformations”, the broad contributions of Platforms 1 and 2 will specifically be discussed in terms of 1) how the global movement of capital influence the democratic structures central to art production in the envisioned constellation of public spheres and 2) how justice could be achieved on a transnational level given Documenta 11’s commitment to ethical praxis in a broader cultural context.

3.2.1 Global capital and democracy

Although the first four platforms should not be understood as staging a theoretic framework for the exhibition in Kassel, Enwezor (2002b:53) linked the investigation of democracy in Platform 1, *Democracy unrealized*¹⁵, with art production as:

Nearly fifteen years of unrelenting neo-conservative attacks have weakened the political and cultural base within which artists have expressed [...] the multicultural and postcolonial nature of modern and contemporary culture.

If democracy is deemed to be an enabling framework for the reception and production of art¹⁶, and neo-conservatism is considered an impediment to artistic expression, a discussion of the discourses around transnational capitalism and democracy is vital to the project of Documenta 11. Taking the measure of the global skies, the curators of Documenta 11 launched their constellation with Platform 1 (*Documenta 11_Platform 1...* (2002:13) by situating the discourse within “the current wave of reassessments of the hegemony of democracy” in the light of: 1) the “scale of penetration of global capitalism”, 2) the upsurge of nationalisms and fundamentalisms in response

¹⁵ Platform 1, a series of conferences and lectures, were convened 15-20 April 2001 in Vienna and 9-30 October in Berlin 2001.

¹⁶ See section *Democratic dimension of the exhibition* in Chapter 2.



to the “neoliberal globalist onslaught”, 3) large-scale displacements and immigration expanding notions of citizenship, and 4) the struggle of postcolonial states. How these themes were addressed in Platform 1, will be explored against a discussion of current capitalist flows.

3.2.1.1 Transnational capitalist playing field

In order to come to terms with the complexity of transnational capitalism, the general features of our phase of globalisation¹⁷ will be examined in some detail. If the ‘discovery’ of Amerindia (Dussel 1998:10) in 1492 is seen as the beginning of the first planetary system, the initial phase could be called *imperial globalisation*, constituting the world in metropolises and colonies with Europe at its centre. Whether the end of this phase is taken as World War II and decolonisation, or as the beginning of the nineteenth century (Friedman 2005:34) and the economic shift to companies globalising for markets and labour, the centre shifted in the twentieth century to *Euro-American globalisation*, dividing the planet into Three Worlds.¹⁸ The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the dissolution of the socialist Second World could be taken as the incisive (if not starting) point of current *transnational info-globalisation*. A “new geography of centrality and marginality” (Sassen 1998:XXV) with a North-South axis of the global few and local multitude (Hetata 1998:274-275) has emerged, facilitating global flows between interurban strategic sites, disconnected from nation-states. There is a sense that globalisation in this latest phase is gaining speed as the world is shrinking or flattening.¹⁹

¹⁷ Globalisation theorist Roland Robertson (Buell 1994:303) identifies five phases of globalisation: germinal phase (early fifteenth century – mid nineteenth century), incipient phase (mid eighteenth century – 1870s), take-off phase (1870’s – mid 1920s), struggle for hegemony phase (mid 1920s – late 1960s), and uncertainty phase (current). For the purposes of this discussion three simplified phases will be identified.

¹⁸ The First World was considered as developed and capitalist, the Second World as developing and communist, and the Third World as underdeveloped and non-aligned. The Bandung conference held in 1955 in Indonesia was an attempt by twenty-nine newly independent African and Asian countries to form a third block in the Cold War hierarchy as defined by the West.

¹⁹ New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman (2005:35) maintains the economic world has been “flattened” by the convergence of ten factors around the year 2000: the fall of the



Key to what Spivak (1999:356) calls “decentered postfordist postmodern capitalism” is the transnationalisation of production. Innovations in telecommunications, transport and information technologies have not only influenced the “spatial extension” of production, but especially its “speed” (Dirlik 1989:70), signifying a space-time compression.²⁰ The virtual movement of currency, unfettered by location and time-zones, results in a “casino-economy” (De Benoist 1996:118) in which capital is deterritorialised and markets manipulated to the advantage of few global players. This abstraction in the financial markets not only exposes markets to destabilising changes, but also influences “new forms of labor and their future productivity” (Hardt & Negri 2004:281). The transnationalisation of labour in the wake of transnational production, combined with the “dematerialisation of production” (Hetata 1998:275), entail fundamental shifts in the nature of labour. Hardt and Negri (2004:66) maintain the conditions of new forms of “immaterial” labour undermine the labourer by blurring work and non-work time and making flexibility and mobility a condition of employment. Literary and cultural theorist Masao Miyoshi (1998:254-257) shows how transnational corporatism in search of ever greater dividends can generate “areas of poverty in any place” through downsizing and implementing creative ways to lower the average hourly wage of lower skilled workers.

The transnationalisation of production created, according to political economist Saskia Sassen (1998:XXVI), a “new geography of centrality” on the macro-level of a global grid of cities, which link powerful financial and business centres “disconnected from their region and even nation”. Inside global cities, where investment revolves around specialised services and the financial sector, another form of geographic centrality is established. Thus,

Berlin Wall made it possible to think of the world as a single space with a global future; the dot-com boom in the middle 1990s and overinvestment in fibre-optic communication networks provided connectivity with distant places; seamless software applications allowed people anywhere to work together; different kinds of work could be digitised and outsourced; whole production units could be shifted offshore to the cheapest work force; free online-collaboration made open-sourcing possible; outside companies could be in-sourced to run logistics; a global supply chain ensured instantaneous production a world apart from its markets; information technologies facilitated collaboration and mining of unlimited data; wireless access and voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) turbocharged new forms of collaboration.

²⁰ The notion of ‘space-time compression’ is developed by geographer David Harvey in *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (1990).



low-income city-areas and the expansive territory outside the global grid constitute the “new geography of marginality” (Sassen 1998:XXVI). People traversing geographical borders are as constitutive of globalisation as the movement of goods and capital, maintains Sassen (1998:XXXII):

[...] it is not only the transmigration of capital that takes place in this global grid, but also that of people, both rich (i.e., the new transnational professional workforce) and poor (i.e., most immigrant workers) and it is a space for the transmigration of cultural forms, for the reterritorialization of ‘local’ subcultures.

The movement of immigrant and migrant workers, especially, results in a Third Worldisation of First World cities, or the creation of satellites of the South in the North, and transforms global cities into “spaces of postcolonialism” (Sassen 1998:XXX). Global cities, then, have transplanted the metropole-periphery dynamic as postcolonial spaces. The global city is the multicultural space of contestation where identities are de- and reterritorialised, as well as transnationalised in hybridised cultural formations.

For the South globalisation gives rise to intensified marginalisation, even if contemporaneous globalisation differs from previous forms by including non-Western players, indicating that, on some level, *global* does not mean *Western* and that globalisation has moved beyond the Westernising project (Buell 1994:304). Even if modernism’s civilising process has been overtaken by a complex, polycentric form of globalisation crisscrossing national borders and different modernities,²¹ this does not, however, entail the democratisation of the economic playing field. A convincing case can be made for the “active management of *underdevelopment*” (Buell 1994:110) in the South, since the uneven conditions created by colonialism are further entrenched and expanded by global capitalism.²² Mbembe (2001:52-53) points out that in

²¹ Historian Arif Dirlik (1989:71) shows, for instance, how the East Asian Confucian revival is linked to non-European claims to the history of capitalism.

²² Structural adjustment programs imposed by World Bank in the 1980s has, according to Slater (2003:54), not only involved the “massive redistribution of financial resources from the South to the North”, but has resulted in a “structural resubordination of the South to the North”, effectively giving the North political power over the “dismantling of the role of the state” in countries of the South.



Africa even countries with economic potential cannot gain any significant access to know-how, new technologies and distribution networks, which leads to “the downgrading of the continent” and the widespread deepening of poverty. Cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg (1996:185) shows how global capitalism’s mechanisms for creating the means of rendering debt infinite may be the most exploitative form of capitalism and colonialism yet:

It is possible, then, that the emergence of an international economy of debt financing, built upon the spatial displacement of production and the increasing centrality of services (including culture), is not some aberration or failure of capitalism but, to put it metaphorically, the beginning of a cycle of rejuvenation.

It is against these complex dynamics that Documenta 11 situated its project, in the discursive platforms as well as the Kassel-exhibition. Among the various artworks specifically dealing with the functioning of global capital were two German artists, Andreas Siekmann and Maria Eichhorn, whose inclusion critically expanded the public sphere around capitalism and democracy envisioned for Documenta 11. Siekmann in *From: limited liability company* (1996-2002) (Figure 9) explores how the imbalances of economic power impacts on the divisions in public space and marginalisation of minorities. For Siekmann (2002:584) “[t]he ideology of neoliberalism has been introduced into every aspect of society as something completely inevitable, the social equivalent of the factors governing where multinational corporations set up or relocate”, and he sets out to demythologise the public rationalisations of this ideology. The work consists of around 220 mixed-media drawings (each 21 x 29,7 cm) with a recurring protagonist in the form of a pair of blue jeans, signifying both commodity and unemployed worker with empty pockets. Displayed as a visual chain or puzzle on a linear grid of white tables and the walls in the *Kulturbahnhof*, the drawings dealing with themes such as corporate management, unemployment, surveillance and urban policies invited the viewer to pull up in a wheeled office chair to scrutinise the artist’s “if-then” (Siekmann 2002:584) sequential logic. Utilising the visual strategies of commercial design, Siekmann effectively created a storyboard of the workings of capitalism around themes, displayed in three-dimensional letters, such as “*Logik der Apparate*/logic of the apparatuses” dealing with the

monitoring of excluded jean-figures. The narratives activate various transformations of the jean as symbol of working-class reality and subversion, global commodification and popular cultural icon. Thus the jean-figure, denoting for Siekmann (2002:584) “a field of projections, anxieties, and repression, but also [...] a way of conveying political commitment”, becomes the messenger of a kind of anti-advertisement campaign for capitalism: for the abuse of democratic freedoms, the overreaching of global markets and riotous consumerism. Stylistically, the cartoon-readable drawings produced as a series of similar images, if not multiples, could also be regarded as comment on notions of production and consumption: particularly individuality in art production²³ and consumption of art products.



Figure 9: Andreas Siekmann, *From: limited liability company*, 1996-2002.
Drawing (watercolour, acrylic paint, felt-pen and touch-up stick)
Kulturbahnhof, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue* 2002:498).

Eichhorn's *Maria Eichhorn limited public company* (2002) exposes the invisible workings of capital and value, by subverting it through the formation

²³ According to Jürgen Bock (2005:[sp]), who curated Siekmann's work for the XI Triennale-India in New Delhi in 2005, the stylistic allusions in these drawings to the socialist painters of the Cologne Progressive Movement of the 1920s reference modernist notions of the originality of artworks.



of a public company founded with the express purpose not to produce any capital gain. Her installation of photographs in lightboxes included articles and the deed of incorporation, minutes and reports, the announcement of and entry into the commercial register. The minimum venture capital required to set up a company (50 000 Euro) was displayed with the company documents. This work raises many questions not only about the logic of capitalism,²⁴ but also about the value of art. Does capital meet its nemesis in the gallery or does the artist's intervention add value to the money transformed as artistic commodity? It also renders the capitalist entrenchment of individualistic achievement problematic; since the work, conceived of by an individual artist, was constituted in collaboration (the board of directors of the company includes Okwuchukwu Emmanuel Enwezor as chairman of the supervisory board).

Rather than trendy expressions of a globalisation-theme for a gallery public, the works of both Siekmann and Eichhorn could be regarded as critical engagements with capitalism²⁵ and the production of art products. It could be argued that the reflective moment of both artworks – of the critical assessment of their own functioning as cultural capital – while not destabilising their place in the gallery, at least undermined effortless visual consumption. As such, the selection of these works aided the construction in Kassel of a critical space in which to think about global capital and democracy, among other themes.

A similar critical positioning was engendered on a discursive level by the inclusion in Platform 1 of heavyweight-theorists such as Bhabha, Hall, and Hardt and Negri. The next section will engage with the specific ways in which

²⁴ Eichhorn (2002:558-559) identifies a list of issues connected to the formation of a limited public company including the mobility of capital, responsibility of the combine, speculation, accumulation and reduction of value, self-determination and ownership of knowledge.

²⁵ The critical resonance with a wider public was expressed in the review of *The Economist* (*Blue days* 2002:1) that praised artists such as these as “the bards of society” and states: “Ms. Eichhorn and her co-exhibitors are not crypto-communists. Rather they express a profound anxiety about a global capitalism that, they believe, all too easily homogenises human expression.”



their contributions could be regarded as an expansion of Documenta's public spheres with reference to disparate economic and democratic frames.

3.2.1.2 Democracy under threat

The growth of transnational economic empires conversely results in, what Hall (2002:30) refers to as a "growing 'democratic deficit'". Transnational capitalism raises various issues about sovereignty and democracy as the powers of nation-states are curtailed and transcended by planetary economic players that are not held accountable by national regulations. Governments are increasingly cast in the supporting role to global capitalist forces, partly by design and - in the developing world - by necessity, in order to remain or be part of the fluent geopolitical landscape and global economy.²⁶

Central to what can be perceived as a weakening of democracy by some, and the broadening of democratic values by others in the pro-globalisation camp, are conflicting notions about the hegemony of capitalism as a global abstraction and of the inevitability of a particular brand of democracy, namely that of neoliberal democracy. The underlying assumption alluded to in the title of Platform 1 is that the threat to democracy lies in the notion that democracy has somehow been "realised", as already proclaimed by political economist Francis Fukuyama.²⁷ For Hall (2002:22-23, emphasis added) the main problem with hegemonising liberal democracy as the triumphant system of a "*democratic capitalist*" world is that it diminishes the transhistorical ideal of democracy. This interdependent linking of capitalism and democracy leads to the "hollowing out of democracy at the very moment of its so-called apotheosis" (Hall 2002:25). In the marketplace of global politics, maintains Hall (2002:26, emphasis in original), populism "*replicates and supplants*" true

²⁶ Hall (2002:28) summarises the role of governments creating "conditions for private capital to prosper", as deregulation in order to be competitive, actively courting transnational capital, preparing citizens to adapt to volatile market-forces, and especially in the Northern hemisphere, to wean dependency on the welfare-state.

²⁷ In *The end of history and the last man* (1992) Fukuyama claims the end of the Cold War marks the end of history, as liberal democracy has shown itself to be the ultimate social-political system.



democratic alternatives as the freedom required by markets “condenses metonymically every kind of freedom”, thereby turning every social participant into a consumer. This situation is aggravated by the intensified “mediatization” (Hall 2002:27) of politics – the role played by polling, lobbying and spinning in manipulating public opinion. Ultimately the notion of Third Way politics – a drifting towards the centre and commitment to move past divisions of left and right – undermines the functioning of democracy.

Even if one were to acknowledge that global capitalist forces can advance democracy, offering what Hardt and Negri (2004:234, emphasis in original) term “freedom *from* the rule of nation-states” in oppressive forms, no democratic regulation exists at global level. Notions of ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ do not ensure democratic representation, claim Hardt and Negri (2002:327), if “the people”, both on a national and global level, are absent in the equation. In terms of democracy defined as popular representation, there is “no global version of democracy [...] even on the agenda” (Hardt & Negri 2002:327).

Democratic demands by people loosing faith in the declining power of nation states, by those redefining identities along sub-national lines and by mobile transnational migrants, give rise to new sub- and supra-national notions of citizenship. On the transnational level the consequence of globalisation is emergent post-territoriality, or expressed in an end-narrative, as the ‘end of geography’. In terms of concepts like sovereignty, statehood, the people, representation and jurisdiction, new legal interpretations are offered, such as “effective nationality” (Bhabha 2002:351) for transnationals and “non-coordinating jurisdictions” (Bhabha 2002:351) in the case of cyberspace agents. Political advisor to the president of the International Romani Union, Sean Nazerali (2002:133-149), presented an interesting option of the Roma as a possible example of a “nation without a state” at Platform 1. As a nomadic people, the 15 million Romani have no wish for territory, but in their quest for formal self-determination and international representation, they could show how a territory-less state might operate in terms of transnational structures for education, tax, criminal law and electoral processes. Another



field of post-territorial democratic claims are cyber-states, websites claiming statehood and sovereignty, with “virtual ‘space’ [...] becoming populated by a new form of quasi-state” (Smith 1995:280).

The shortfall in the functioning of democracy within and across borders leads Bhabha (2002:350) to suggest that the title for Platform 1 should rather read, *Democracy de-realized*, claiming: “At the heart of democracy, we witness this de-realizing dialectic between the epistemological and the ethical, between cultural description and political judgement, between principle and power”. The sometimes equivocal approach to democratic ideals in the South could be attributed to the very different experience by people in the North and South with the instruments of liberal democracy. The struggle of slaves to be included in the democratic sweep of the French Revolution and Enlightenment ideals, seminally described by C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins*,²⁸ is a striking example of how selective notions of democracy are applied when implemented in and for different localities.

The belief in the superiority of liberal democracy is, in a sense, a teleological fulfilment of faith in the democratic promise of modernity. As such, it does not escape the violence inherent in the “phallogocentric” (Spivak 1990a:19) and “foundational ethnocentric” (Gilroy 1993:55) conception of rationality constituting Eurocentric modernity. The notion of the inevitability of liberal democracy becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when backed by neocolonial and global capitalist forces. Whether structural and political changes are imposed by the World Bank and IMF, or Afghans and Iraqis ‘liberated’ at gunpoint, these enforced democracies are democracy “betrayed” (Baxi 2002:113), or at the very least, deferred. For the South the narratives of freedom and of development often mean, what Spivak (1999:371) calls, “enabling violation – a rape that produces a healthy child”. Development and

²⁸ James’ book (first published in 1938) about the slave-revolt in San Domingo resulting in the independence of Haiti from France in 1804, supplies details on how supposedly universal notions of *liberty* and *rights* were subject to power-play in both Paris and the colonies as it threatened the very structure of the conceived world-order.

free trade have less to do with freedom than exploitation, creating greater divides between the overdeveloped North and structurally irrelevant rest.

For Documenta 11 aiming at the inclusion of the broad spectrum of postcolonial voices in its public spheres, the full complexity of North-South dynamics come to bear as transnational trajectories impact the various localities *in* and *about* which artists produce their work. In a globalised cultural economy artists engage with both global and local issues, often choosing to relate to various localities that are not their own.



Figure 10: Andreja Kulunčić, *Distributive justice*, since 2001.
Multidisciplinary project.
Documenta-Halle, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues 2002:28*).

The work of Croatian artist Andreja Kulunčić, *Distributive justice* (since 2001)(Figure 10), is such a multidisciplinary project that spans localities,



democratic conceptions and economic realities. As the exhibition – co-designed by participants from disciplines like philosophy, sociology, photography, design and programming – moves around the globe, research and theoretical inputs imprint from each location on the work in progress: an open global forum in the form of a web-portal in which people from any locality can interact about the fair and impartial distribution of goods.²⁹ On the website potential and actual participants can take part in a game to design a just society and discover their distributive profile, all of which get recomputed into the work's archive. The artwork is thus conceived as interactive working space and the artist as facilitator in the production of a public sphere, aligning it with Documenta 11's project of expanding and diversifying views and participation. Similarly to the work of Le Groupe Amos, Kulunčić reframes artistic labour as contributive to the creation of the public sphere; instead of a single localised focus, her project could be considered as a translocal attempt at the expansion of a sub- and supra-national functioning of citizenship.

In the discussion of artworks in this chapter, a pattern seems to emerge in the curatorial selection: by favouring non-institutionalised activities or works that are informed by some form of criticality, Documenta 11 aimed to construct a critical space to engage with the world outside the gallery. A case could be made that the works of Le Groupe Amos, Kulunčić, Siekmann and Eichhorn indeed expanded the gallery sphere in line with the social-ethical project and that their particular thematic foci were conducive to a certain critical positioning of this Documenta in general. The showing of these works in conjunction with the discursive engagement with geo-economic and geopolitical conditions further reinforced the construction of Documenta 11 as critical location in the global cultural economy. Thus the cumulative effect of curatorial strategies appear to multiply as platforms build consecutively and alongside one another in rhizomatic fashion. Another such attempt at the expansion of Documenta 11's constellation, made within the ambit of Platform 2, will be evaluated in the next section.

²⁹ According to the website (www.distributive-justice.com) Kassel was one of the exhibition's initial stops and it has since travelled to Australia, Austria, America, Croatia, Turkey, Slovenia and South Korea.



3.2.2 Considering truth and justice

If Platform 1 contextualised problems with the democratic public sphere due to globalisation, Platform 2³⁰ centred on what could be done to address demands for social justice where public spheres had been violated. What was being explored was an expanding global ethic, and more specifically, an engagement with, what the curators (*Documenta 11_Platform 2...* 2002:13) described as, an emerging category in the humanities “that is dedicated to the study of memory and its ethical and aesthetic implications within representation”. Approaching the global sphere not as an inflated super-public sphere but as *transnational space of accountability*, Documenta 11 raised questions about the social responsibility of artists in their own localities and about artworks as instruments of representation, narration and commemoration in the public sphere. The wide scope of Platform 2 will in this section be limited to a discussion of the connection between notions of justice, truth, memory and memorial with specific reference to South African contributions in this regard.³¹

3.2.2.1 Multiplying definitions

For each notion of justice, ranging from the juridical to personal, corresponding concepts of truth and levels of proof govern the experience of fair dealing by the multiplicity of voices who make up the public sphere. In South Africa, besides juridical, ontological, narrative and experiential truth, two new approaches to truth emerged during the ground-breaking Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): performative and dialogical truth. Curator Rory Bester (2002:168) referred to the testimony of Jeffrey Benzien – a

³⁰ Documenta 11_Platform 2, *Experiments with truth: transitional justice and the processes of truth and reconciliation*, was held at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, May 8-12 2001. A film and video program was presented concurrently with the conference in the Visual arts gallery of the India Habitat Centre, May 7-21 2001. The title of this platform refers to that of Mohandas K. Gandhi's autobiography, *The story of my experiments with truth*, first published in serialised form in the Gujarati weekly *Navajivan*, 1925-28.

³¹ Contributions to Platform 2 about the value and limitations of truth commissions, conditions for reconciliation and the functioning of transitional justice fall outside the scope of this analysis.



former investigator with the SA security police demonstrating the ‘wet bag’ method of interrogation and torture of prisoners – as an example of performative truth that visualises history and marks the body of the performer. The idea of dialogical truth was coined by justice of the South African Constitutional Court, Albie Sachs (2002:53), who posed this form of truth-in-process “assumes and thrives on the notion of a community of many voices and multiple perspectives”.³²

Truth thus appears on shifting ground, as multiplying in its re-enactments and with no definitive narration. The domain of truth is bound to be ambiguous because of what psychoanalyst Geneviève Morel (2002:82) posits as the gap, even opposition, between truth and the real: “Truth has to do with speech and language, in other words with the register of the symbolic; the real is excluded from this”. If, as Morel (2002:83) claims, “the imaginary reveals itself with affinity to the real that the symbolic does not have”, artworks are posed to reveal elements of truth and function as witnesses in the social sphere. Even if truth is uncovered as fragile, incomplete and tenuous, it does not diminish the function of *telling of truth*, which on an ethical level, according to Tunisian law professor Yadh Ben Achour (2002:127), opens up a space in which “a reestablishment of the moral order takes place” through the reversal of the roles of offender and offended, suppressed and suppressor, dominator and dominated.

The political order, served by interests very different from the moral order, value truth in the form of the *memory of truth* highly, because of its legitimising potential in historical narratives. In this regard Documenta 11 aligned itself with the “search for an ethical space of historical narration” (*Documenta 11_Platform 2...* 2002:17), with, what social philosopher Lotte Nauta (2002:337) terms, the democratising of collective memory:

³² Sachs (2002:52-53) distinguishes between four categories of truth – *microscopic* (narrow, detailed and focused truth that can be verified); *logical* (impersonal, generalised truth of deductive propositions); *experiential* (open-ended, personal attempts to objectively weigh subjective experience); and *dialogical* (based on continuous interchange).



The process of democratizing memory, with all its detours and wrong turns, is part of the confusing situation of a pluralistic society that must come to terms with conflicting internal interests.

Approaching historical narratives in a global democratic sphere would accordingly assist the writing of competing histories and would, above all, question hegemonic constructions of the truth. For Documenta 11 this meant examining Western ethical claims: “If Western humanism and rationality always rest upon some agency of exclusion, what are the limits of their application to contemporary crimes against humanity?” (*Documenta 11_Platform 2...* 2002: 17).

In the political, as in the artistic sphere, Documenta 11 aimed to reassess what the ethics and instrumentalisation of memory could mean. Artists dealing with memory and the witnessing of crimes against humanity in their work could be strategising to access the global marketplace. In this regard Enwezor (2004:33) poses that “bearing witness to the memory of the dim years of apartheid became de rigueur for work seeking admittance into exhibition possibilities” for South African artists in the 1990s.³³ The artworks selected for discussion in the next section seem to pass muster with the curators of Documenta 11, since each work could be considered to multiply definitions and to reveal aporias in specific historical discourses – unresolved ethical issues in particular public spheres – around the globe.

3.2.2.2 Collective memory and amnesia

Filmmaker Eyal Sivan, whose childhood in Israel sensitised his approach to memory and politics, explores the instrumentalisation of particularly victims’ testimony and the manipulation of archives. In his presentation for Platform 2 about Adolf Eichmann’s trial, Sivan (2002:287) delineated how filming during

³³ In this case Enwezor, as much-touted curator of the 2nd JHB Biennale, might be flippant in his characterisation of art in this incisive period of South African history. Film theorist Jyoti Mistry (2001:8) points out the country was coming to terms with building a new identity around a “common heritage of suffering”. If contemporary artists did not deal with issues raised by the TRC, their work would have been considered out of touch and irrelevant inside the country.

hearings of crimes against humanity is skewed towards “representation of the victims and the creation of a linear collective memory”, while the testimony of perpetrators are dehumanised and obscured in the realm of myth. Collective remembrance can consequently function as a one-dimensional narrative of ‘victims’ and ‘monsters’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’. The initial camera frame is further manipulated when a selective compilation of images become code-like “illustrations for commemorative discourses” (Sivan 2002:287) without the power to stimulate reflection on both the horrors of the past and present. *Itsembatsemba – Rwanda: one genocide later* (1996) (Figure 11), his work for Documenta 11 in collaboration with photographer Alexis Cordesse, could be regarded as an attempt to counter one-dimensional framing of the genocide in Rwanda and reenergise contemplation about its meaning in the present.



Figure 11: Eyal Sivan, *Itsembatsemba – Rwanda: one genocide later* (still), 1996.

Film: 35mm transferred to DVD, 13 min.

Museum Fridericianum, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform5: Exhibition, short guide* 2002:215).

This work does not present the banalised international media-images of, what Diawara (2002:33) terms the “pornography of violence”, used to portray the



systematic massacre of more than 700 000 Tsutsi in 100 days. Instead, Sivan and Cordesse contrast images taken in April 1996, two years after the start of the massacre, with an incendiary soundtrack of radio broadcasts by Radio Télévision Mille Collines (RTLM) from April to June 1994 during the height of the atrocities. The documentary focus is not only switched from victim to perpetrator, but the time shifts also create a viewing space between the sense of impending doom and the aftermath of slaughter that connects the work to the present. The work thus achieves what Sivan aims for with his own manipulation of the archive: to “give these materials a ‘status of truth’ that will allow us to renew the tradition of what can be called political art” (Sivan 2002:288).

Colombian artist Doris Salcedo (Figure 12) shares Sivan’s commitment to art production in an ethical space, but she approaches collective memory in a dysfunctional public sphere where dialogical truth, or any other kind of truth for that matter, is denied. Her work displayed at Documenta 11 bears mute testimony to the siege fiasco in 1985 in the Bogota Palace of Justice. On 6 November guerrillas from movement M-19 stormed the Supreme Court, demanding that then president Belisario Betancur stands trial. During the 27-hour siege the police and army destroyed the building and more than 100 people were killed, including 11 judges. Because criminal files were destroyed in a fire during the siege, the events were officially blamed on the influence of druglords trying to escape impending trials. Many questions remain unanswered about the chain of events and the trail of missing and charred bodies.³⁴ For her works *Noviembre 6* (November 6) (2001) and *THOU-LESS, 2001-2002*, Salcedo sculpted chairs of steel, wood, resin and lead with parts missing or melted together. Scattered like loose ends over the gallery floor, these mutilated chairs act as metonymical substitutes for absent, amputated and disappeared bodies. In a second enclosed space, constructed with a portal and inner sanctum, the elongated limbs of chairs form diagonally crossed spars that obstruct access. This work, *Tenebrae Noviembre 7, 1985*

³⁴ A truth commission has since been instituted by the Supreme Court in November 2005, according to the main Colombian daily *El Tiempo* (Comisión de la Verdad... 2005:[sp]), and preliminary reports will be released from November 2006.

(Darkness, November 7, 1985) (1999-2000), is a metaphor for the barricaded official sphere that remains out of bounds. Seen together, these works of Salcedo speak unmistakably to the disavowal of justice.

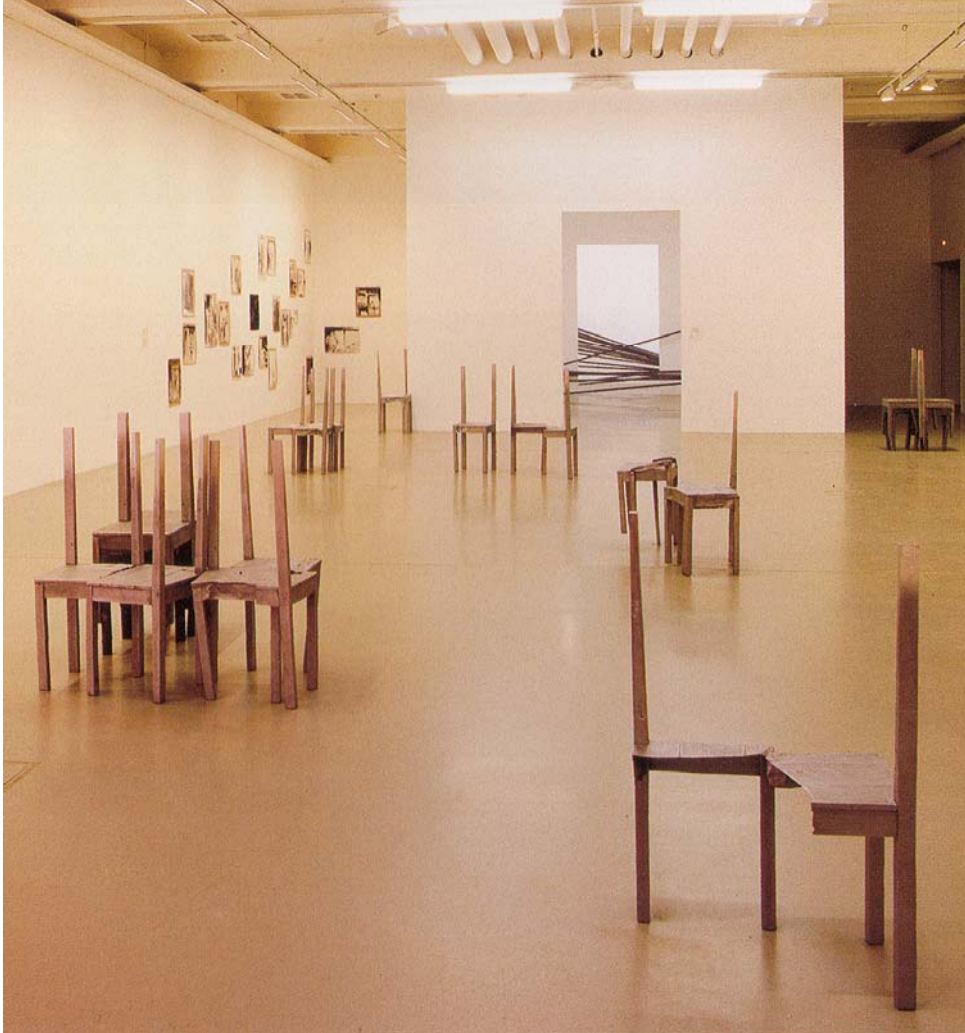


Figure 12: Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6*, 2001; *THOU-LESS*, 2001-2002; *Tenebrae Noviembre 7*, 1985, 1999-2000.
Installation: Stainless steel, lead, wood, resin and steel.
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues* 2002:36).

Croatian artist Sanja Iveković juxtaposes personal experiential truth with collective memory and collective amnesia in both her video *Personal Cuts* (1982) (Figure 13) and video-projection *Searching for my mother's number* (2002). As a major proponent of Yugoslavian feminism since the 1970s, Iveković explores the role of media representations in the formation of identity,

particularly where gender identifications and national stereotypes overlap. In *Personal Cuts* the artist intersperses images of herself cutting holes into black tights used as a mask, with archival footage on the history of Yugoslavia taken from state-sponsored TV programs, thereby contrasting notions of personal camouflage and façade with official masquerade. *Searching for my mother's number* works through slides and archival material with the life story of Iveković's mother, Nera Safaric, who was deported to Auschwitz for anti-fascist activities and freed in 1945. Contrary to the stereotype of anti-fascist heroine feted during the communist years, Safaric is as unremembered as all the other heroines by a society intent on distancing itself from its convoluted past. By working with the slippages between personal and public records Iveković exposes the spectral nature of collective discourses.



Figure 13: Sanja Iveković, *Personal Cuts* (still), 1982.
Video: colour, sound 3 min. 40 sec.
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue 2002:356*).

Also shown in Kassel were works dealing with collective memory referring to disputed ethical territory in Spain after the Franco-regime, addressed by the Catalan filmmaker Pere Portabella in *Informe general sobre algunas*



cuestiones de interés para una proyección pública (General report about some interesting issues for a public projection) (1975), Chilean people's struggles in Gaston A. Ancelovici's *Memorias de unaguerra cotidiana* (Memoirs of an everyday war) (1986) and the experience of torture by political prisoners in Uruguay in Louis Camnitzer's *From the Uruguayan torture series* (1983/84).

By including artworks dealing with contemporary narratives in diverse troubled public spheres, as well as works made in the 1970s and 1980s, Documenta 11 expanded its engagement with global ethical issues *territorially* and *temporally*. Thus its constellation of public spheres stretched from both North to South and from the present to the past, consistent with the postcolonial project of rewriting narratives impacting present space and future imaginaries.³⁵ It needs to be considered whether this approach principally expanded the postcolonial project of Documenta 11, or if it could also be considered as an expression of voracious globalism. Providing a framework in which a multiplicity of artworks can seamlessly be read together might show the way to packaging palatable difference, rather than aiding a thorough reassessment of Western narratives. Instead of deepening a global ethic, postcoloniality might be instrumentalised to justify the consumption of sanitised suffering.

3.3 AIDING THE ENEMY

After participating in Platform 2, cultural critic and dramaturge Rustom Bharucha (2001:227, emphasis in original) questioned whether the Documenta-platforms were “staged illusions of critiquing the Eurocentrist parameters of *Documenta*, or whether they are in fact reinforcing its paradigms with new Third World infusions of controversy, dissent, and

³⁵ bell hooks (1995:151) reminds us that “[s]ubversive historiography connects oppositional practices from the past with forms of resistance in the present, thus creating spaces of possibility where the future can be imagined differently – imagined in such a way that we can witness ourselves dreaming, moving forward and beyond the limits and confines of fixed locations”.



disagreement". In other words, while the intention with Documenta 11's expanded constellation is not in dispute, especially by commentators in the South, the possible outcomes of its project is deemed uncertain.

The criticism of playing in the hand of the enemy is levelled at postcolonialism *per se*; that on some level postcoloniality is complicit to neocolonial capitalism rather than subverting the hegemony of global power structures.³⁶ For Hall (1996: 257-258) the failure to adequately theorise the relationship between postcolonialism and global capitalism is the most disabling shortcoming in postcolonial discourse. Indian art critic Geeta Kapur (quoted in Bharucha 2001:227) commented at Platform 2 that Documenta 11 neglected to take a strong ethical stance against neocolonial expansionism:

The triumphant winners of the cold war, the anti-democrats of NATO, the MNC sovereigns in the capitalist world seemed not to have been sufficiently imbricated / implicated / nailed for their responsibility in producing so many of the devastating conditions of global transition.

Allowing for the fact that these issues were raised in Platform 1 and investigated in more depth in Platform 4,³⁷ it could be argued that Documenta 11, on the discursive level, indeed engaged with neocolonial expansionism only in broad terms. Whatever ethical positions were adopted in this endeavour did not map out the road to transformations and conflict. The exhibition of artworks in Kassel further opted for subtle messages rather than declarations in this regard. Subtlety and complexity might not hold up against integration into, what Bharucha (2001:227) terms, "neo-Eurocentrist variants of [...] cool postmodern subalternity".

³⁶ The critique of postcolonialism being subservient to neocolonialism seems to fall in two categories: firstly, against the position of Third World postcolonial intellectuals working in First World countries and creating an 'aura' mystifying global power relations (Dirlik 1989:52-83) or turning informants in service of neocolonialism (Spivak 1999:360-361), and secondly, that multiculturalism and cross-border studies serve the needs of transnational corporations for expanded markets and the control of their diverse labour forces (Miyoshi 1998:264).

³⁷ Platform 4 will be discussed in the next chapter.



Rather than the space-clearing³⁸ venture it sets out to be, postcoloniality could be instrumentalised to package difference for the global marketplace in which “cultural differences have to be both acknowledged and depoliticized in order to be contained” (Giroux 1994:193). As showcase of globally produced contemporary art, Documenta 11 could not escape its role as a possible supplier of marketable and indeed profitable ‘others’. As curator Mari Carmen Ramírez (1996:23) reminds us, the transnational art market is dependant on specialists in global centres that can broker cultural goods and identities from peripheral markets. Documenta 11’s agenda of inclusiveness could therefore be construed by some as merely manageable multiculturalism³⁹ for and by the global art market cashing in on a blue-chip mega-exhibition. Several critics have commented on Documenta 11’s silence regarding its own relationship to its corporate sponsors, acknowledged with full-page placement of logos in the back of the exhibition catalogue.⁴⁰ This silence could be considered as undermining Documenta 11’s professed critique of the marketplace. For critic Angela Dimitrakaki (2003:169, emphasis in original) the catalogue is an “ideological document”, for the order of the news images on the opening pages and the sponsors’ logos “reverses the *real* order of things”. Given the curatorial focus on institutional critique, the functioning of global capitalism, and the ethical engagement with the production and reception of art, it could be argued that as mega-exhibition Documenta 11 indeed failed to theorise its own complicity to neocolonialism and sanction by market forces.

As discursive powerhouse, this Documenta particularly ran the risk of being instrumentalised to showcase tolerance by a dominant Northern power-elite. In this regard Gramsci (1971:12) defines the role of intellectuals as “the dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government”. Inclusion of subordinate or marginal groups has to entail a transformation of the dominant group, otherwise, the

³⁸ In Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (1991:348, emphasis in original) definition the “*post-* in postcolonial, like the *post-* in postmodern, is the *post-* of the space-clearing gesture”.

³⁹ See Downey’s (2003:89) criticism of Documenta 11’s spectacular difference in previous chapter.

⁴⁰ On the other hand, a writer like Blake Gopnik (Gopnik 2002b:G01), who is critical of the political project of Documenta 11, accuses the show of not only “bit[ing] the hand that feeds it; it wants to chew and swallow, arm and all”.



agent of their incorporation effectively eliminates any subversive power that those “outside” might have had. It could be argued that the curators of Documenta 11 tried to countermand the dynamic of co-optation by art-market forces through its wide-ranging discursive platforms that imbricated various boundaries, including that of its own exhibition spaces. The selection of artworks that in some form or another resisted market demands for products could be regarded as an effective strategy in this regard. It has to be pointed out, however, that this subversive tactic does not apply to all works selected for Kassel and that many of the Documenta 11-artists could be considered the usual suspects one would encounter on the mega-exhibition circuit. Nonetheless, from the perspective of a peripheral critic, Ranjit Hoskote (2002:[sp]) commends Enwezor for not succumbing to “playing native informant and prospector on behalf of the First World”, but acting “under the sign of a sophisticated disciplinary re-conceptualisation, not that of an uncomplicated Third-Worldist vision”. Be that as it may, the potential of hegemonic power structures to absorb, and feed off, dissent can not be underestimated. Ultimately, it remains questionable to what degree Documenta 11 brought about a transformation of the geocultural landscape.

3.4 CONCLUSION

However limited the curatorial project of Documenta 11 might be, the expansion of heterogeneous participation and fostering of cross-cultural exchanges in a global constellation resisted the construction of undifferentiated dominant discourses. This Documenta, if not escaping instrumentalisation by ‘the enemy’, emphasised the importance of aiming for agonistic pluralism in a transcultural field. In a sense Documenta could not escape the fate of, what culture theorist/activist Cornel West (1990:20) terms, the “co-opted progressive” – those well-meaning culture critics working from within institutions to institute redress and democratise the field of representations.⁴¹

⁴¹ West (1990:19-20) maintains that proponents of the “new cultural politics of difference” cannot affect real transformations without some form of crisis being acted upon by society at



Yet, co-optation by market forces was to some extent undermined by the contra-spectacularisation tactics employed by the curators – as analysed in the previous chapter – and the inclusion of socio-cultural practices that defy being limited to the production of objects. The strongest disavowal of market objectives, however, were achieved not by curatorial statements, but by particular artworks that resisted fitting into, what urban designer Susan Torre (2002:355) refers to as, the postmodern “transnational discourse of memory,’ referring to all suffering in general and no suffering in particular”. Insofar as some Documenta 11-artworks – such as the discussed works of Le Groupe Amos, Siekmann, Eichhorn, Sivan, Salcedo and Iveković – avoided clichéd representations and aimed to engage contemplative viewers in an ethical space, they challenged the leveling force of proliferating globalism. In this regard Camnitzer (2002:[sp]) claims the aesthetic quality of works exhibited in Kassel refutes criticism of political correctness and the expectation that “after the quota is filled, the next step could have been to return to the same old hegemonic curatorial practice”. The selection of artworks from diverse production sites that aimed to disavow the flattening of differences in collective discourses, may be the curatorial team’s strongest statement against co-optation.

Even if Documenta 11’s curatorial project is considered to be sanitised by the global market it is inevitably part of, attempts to facilitate diverse discourses in intersecting and competing public spheres created an open-ended conceptual and visual environment in which art in the twenty-first century could be engaged with. Postcolonial space became transcultural space where a multiplicity of interactions, connections and breaches could potentially be formed. Whatever its limitations, it is the contention of this study that Enwezor’s Documenta broke new ground in the way that difference in the transcultural field was (re)negotiated. By differentiating publics, histories and production sites, Documenta 11 avoided packaging inclusivity and exoticised others in any homogenised shape or form.

large, yet that pressure from within institutions is preferable to none at all. He (West 1990:31) proposes a demystifactory or prophetic criticism that “begins with social structural analyses [... yet] makes explicit its moral and political aims”.



CHAPTER 4

CURATING GLOBALITY/ PRODUCING LOCALITY

The postcolonial today is a world of proximities. It is a world of nearness, not an elsewhere.
Okwui Enwezor (2002b:44).

By the latest count historical mega-exhibitions like Documenta and the Venice Biennale now share the global stage with more than 200 (Heartney 2005:73) international biennials. This proliferation of global shows offering exotic locations and artists from around the globe has, according to art critic Eleanor Heartney (2005:73), created a kind of “anxiety” to attract critical attention in the art-world. The curatorial approach to an international exhibition has never been more vital to critical success. Kassel has the tactical advantage of being conceived of as a serious venue, given the historical weight of Documenta, the longer planning-frame and lower frequency of the event (only twice a decade as apposed to every other year) and the large budget for the exhibition.¹ Yet, even for Documenta the curatorial vision remains critical to the long-term effect of an exhibition that aims for global impact.

As international mega-exhibition the extraterritorialised Documenta 11 not only *reflected* globalism and *managed* global flows in the art-world, by legitimising theory and the careers of artists of the global panoptic; it also *staged* globalism as a theme in its discursive platforms and artworks dealing with globality. The curatorial approach of Documenta 11 was nevertheless a critical globalism, questioning the ‘global’ with a view to the ‘local’. It is the contention of this chapter that the expansive globalising project of Documenta 11 at the same time localised the focus of the mega-exhibition, thereby rearticulating notions of art production in the interstices between the global and local imaginaries.

¹ David (Griffin et al 2003:156) jokingly refers to the fact that people go to provincial Kassel simply for a specific exhibition and not to buy Italian shoes or visit the Academia like in Venice and asserts that Documenta is “unique [...] as a space where [...] you can develop a statement (and a real production structure) and find ways of implementing it”.



An analysis of the curatorial positioning towards globalisation discourses and exhibition practices will track Documenta 11's own positioning within a decentred art network that create new mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The impact of Documenta 11's postcolonial positioning in approaching globality and the implications for the production of locality in especially peripheral cultural production sites will form the core of this chapter. The critical focus will be whether this localisation constituted a counter-flow to co-optation and assimilation in globalising dynamics and, if so, to what measure this Documenta facilitated a critical moment in the mega-circuit.

4.1 GLOBAL ASPIRATIONS

The exponential growth of international mega-exhibitions is, according to Enwezor (2002c:51, emphasis added), motivated by a "*will to globality*" that is often informed by "traumatic historical ruptures" (Enwezor 2002c:47).² Some large-scale exhibitions should, however, be understood in terms of the discourse of modernity and modernisation, claims Enwezor (2002c:50), with art being approached by postcolonial states as "the contemporary manual for exiting peripheralization". The example of the São Paulo Bienal, founded in 1952, is cited by Enwezor (2002c:51) as presenting "the view of Brazil's continuity and contiguity with European culture" by showing Western avant-garde art together with home-grown artistic innovations. On both these scores aspirations to be global and modern, while nonetheless articulating some national identity of the country hosting the mega-exhibition, could be regarded as an expression of the cultural dynamics in contemporaneous globalisation.

The coexistence of national, transnational and post-national identifications in a plurality of cultural trajectories which contract and expand across various

² Enwezor 2002c:48) asserts for instance that the Kwangju and Johannesburg Biennials have been created at "critical moments in the political and social transitions of South Korea and South Africa", similarly to Documenta's formation in response to World War II. Enwezor (2002c:48) locates the impetus for South Africa's 'will to globalise' in the "end of apartheid [... signifying] to the rest of the world that the ground for the work of the imagination, as a fundamental part of a society in transition towards democracy [...], is an important part of the transition".



borders, mirror globalisation processes as the site of conflicting simultaneities. Distinctions between home and abroad, arrival and departure, native and foreign, indigenous and imported, roots and routes are breaking down and the very notion of *origin* is severely compromised as cultures are becoming increasingly heterogeneous on local and global levels. According to cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg (1996:169), “[t]he new global economy of culture entails a deterritorialisation of culture and its subsequent reterritorialisation, and challenges culture’s equation with location or place”. At stake are ideas about culture being located in unitary formations. Globalisation theorist Roland Robertson (1997:85) claims that thinking about culture has been limited by the “myth of cultural integration”, asserting that viable societies are “normatively integrated, with culture performing the major function in that regard”. This myth is shown up by globalisation, which requires flexible ways of locating culture and “interrogates the understanding of culture as a site of belonging with the idea of culture as a process of transition and becoming” (Chambers 1996:53). An assessment of globalisation therefore requires examining culture production in terms of location, dislocation and relocation, as well as place, displacement and replacement.

While the unitary location of culture in nation-states is under pressure and contemporary nations have to contend with what Bhabha terms “dissemiNation”,³ debates on national narratives, however, do not spell the end of the nation in any real sense of post-nation.⁴ Nation-states not only created the conditions for globalisation, but are also an indispensable aspect

³ Bhabha develops this notion in “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation”, printed in both *Nation and narration* (1990) and *The location of culture* (1994). Dissemination is not only influenced by the transnational conditions of culture formation in the wake of the transnationalisation of people, but the inherent flexibility of culture and, especially what (Bhabha 1990:3) postulates as the “impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force”. Maharaj (2001:1), in his introduction of Bhabha at Platform 1 in Berlin, interpreted the notion of ‘dissemination’ as “the nation liquidised”, as “liquefying, dissolving, melting, [and] mixing a new scene of maceration in which new identities are produced outside outdated archaic and obsolete notions of nation and identity with which we are lumbered by birth”.

⁴ Curator-critic Geeta Kapur (1994:40) expounds the fact that citizens in the First and Third Worlds approach ‘the national’ differently – while internationalists in the First World perceive the national as “not only a lost cause but also a negative hypothesis”, for the Third World “the international is a firmly hyphenated term: the national is their express concern and determined reality”.

of globalisation.⁵ The idea of the nation is both imposed from above by the state and also constituted by its citizens as, what social anthropologist Benedict Anderson (1991:6) terms, “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”. In order for Anderson’s imagined communities to perform on the transnational level, a global imaginary is required. It is in terms of this imaginary that nation-states and national cultures position themselves with strategies of isolation or adaptation, cognitive of what Robertson (quoted in Buell 1994:299) phrases as “*global callings* (their unique geocultural or geomoral contributions to world history)”. For the art world its own global aspirations, and indeed callings or missions, are situated within these globalisation parameters. Institutions, curators and artists orientate themselves both transnationally and nationally whilst coming to terms with the realities and pressures of globalisation processes that simultaneously free up and limit positionalities.

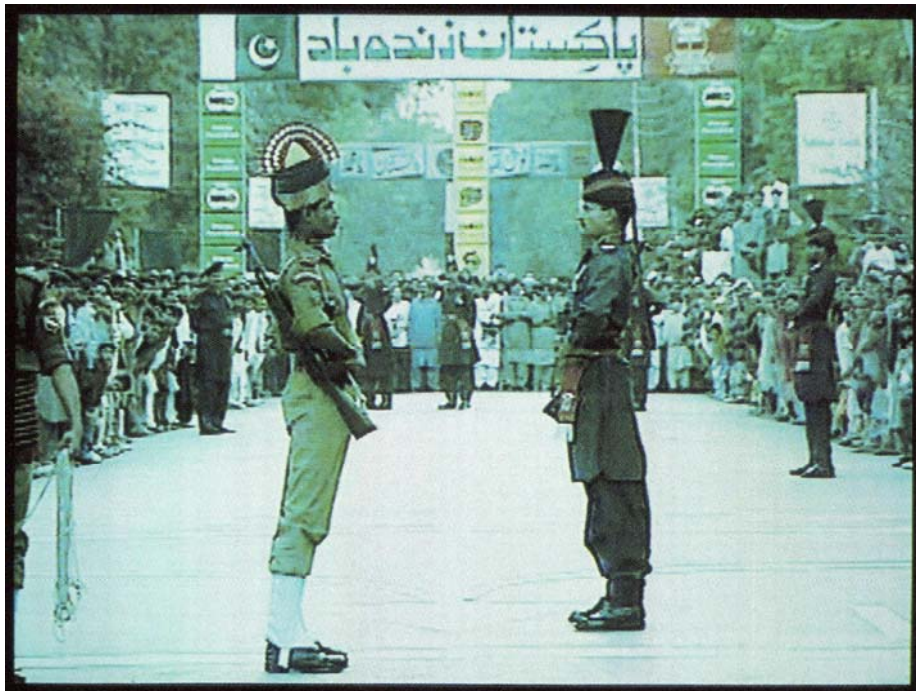


Figure 14: Amar Kanwar, *A season outside*, 1997.
Still from video (30 min.)
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:58).

⁵ World-system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein (1997:96) maintains with the creation of nation-states an “inter-state system” formed in which no “no-man’s lands” were left, thus codifying every aspect of the individual citizen’s existence, and that this division of the world into similarly managed units makes interlinking in a global system possible.

Documenta 11 engaged with these complex issues in Kassel with the inclusion of two works addressing postcolonial nationhood and identity formation in India and Palestine respectively. Indian filmmaker Amar Kanwar's *A season outside* (1997)(Figure 14) deals with how issues of nationality, essentialised identities and conflicts have been performed since partition in 1947. Taking the border post at Wagah on the India-Pakistan border as a focal point, the work contrasts the elaborate ritual opening and closing of the border with the movement of ordinary people, individuals who have the choice to question or to get caught up in collective narratives and enactments.



Figure 15: Fared Armaly with Rashid Masharawi, *From/To*, 2002.
Installation-view.

Documenta-halle, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:13).

Compared to the lyrical approach of Kanwar, the commissioned installation of Fared Armaly and Rashid Masharawi *From/To* (2002)(Figure 15) follow a very different transdisciplinary methodology to engage with the multi-layered



Palestinian experience since 1948.⁶ Starting out from the topography of a single stone – according to Armaly (2002:549) the stone represents the smallest unit of landscape and is the icon of resistance to occupation – it's digitised, triangulated lines were translated as a map on the floor inside and outside the spaces allocated to this work in the Documenta-Halle. Armaly (2002:549), a first-generation American of Palestinian and Lebanese origin, claims the experience of the topos of *Palestine* as non-fixed space emerges in diasporic “correspondences” of roots and routes. Varied correspondences were created in the exhibition space by the inclusion of postcards, maps and three videos by filmmaker Masharawi, who was raised in the Shati refugee camp and remained living in the Occupied Territories.⁷ His *Checkpoint*, a single camera take at eyelevel of traffic at the Ramallah-Al Quds Israeli checkpoint, captured the familiar narrative of tanks, soldiers and ordinary people preparing for enforced closure. The emotional impact of the videos exploring living conditions of occupation contrasted with the dry logic of mapping to heighten the disjunctures between space and displacement, permanence and transience, monolithic representations and fractured identities. The work also reveals, in now small measure, its own routes in the flows between national and transnational spaces; between Northern institutional art practise and disenfranchised temporality.

Documenta 11's own mapping of the gaps, shifts and contradictions of a globalised world will be discussed in the next section with reference to specific orientations towards globality in the art world. An expanded, decentred art network could, on the one hand, offer greater inclusivity and open out the field of representations. However, notions of transnational representation could, on

⁶ *From/To* was first conceived as a collaborative dialogue in 1999 for the Witte de With Center for Contemporary art in Rotterdam, linking refugee-camp fieldwork, research centres and films from Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Europe and America, according to Armaly (2002:549).

⁷ Elements included with Masharawi's videos – *Checkpoint* (2002) (colour, sound, 50 min), *Homemovie* (2002) (colour, sound, loop 3 min. 20 sec), *Waiting* (2002)(colour, sound, 10 min) – were *Dealing with the past, creating a presence, picture postcards of Palestine* (1999); *On thematic cartography* (2002); a separate screening of Auguste and Louis Lumière's *Journey through Palestine* (1987) and Tewik Salah's *The Dupes* (1972); an on-demand digitised film program; on-site computer installation with websites and texts.



the other hand, rather than freeing up art production, act as new mechanisms of exclusion.

4.1.1 Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion

The growth of an international art circuit showing art from diverse production sites was made possible by the postmodern opening for previously marginalised artistic communities outside European and American centres developing after the ground-breaking exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* in 1989 at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.⁸ Yet the growing decentred circuit of mega-exhibitions around the globe has resulted in the art world's own version of a "new geography of centrality and marginality" (Sassen 1998:XXV) at work in the globalised economy. A North-South axis still determines that "connections only happen inside a radial and hegemonic pattern around the centres of power" (Mosquera 1994:133) with access to the expanded marketplace of the art-world superstructure mimicking the hierarchies of global capital. Mosquera (1994:133) describes this condition as "axial" globalisation and the spaces traversed between global destinations as "zones of silence" with little or no access to global centres or to one another. Depending then on one's position on the global grid, globalisation in the art-world might be viewed as less transterritorial participation than transnational institutional diversification, more a case of expanded market than inclusivity.

Transnational distribution circuits, bolstered by the concomitant formation of theoretical notions of a "new internationalism"⁹ and "international advanced art" (Enwezor 2002c:51),¹⁰ act as globalised mechanisms of inclusion and

⁸ See discussion of the critique of this exhibition in Chapter 1.

⁹ Notions of a "new internationalism" as post-multiculturalism are explored in Fisher, J (ed). 1994. *Global visions. Towards a new internationalism in the visual arts*. Internationalism, as applied to paradigmatic artists, is further explored by curator Gavin Jantjes in *A fruitful incoherence. Dialogues with artists on internationalism* (1998).

¹⁰ Enwezor (2002c:51, emphasis added) maintains the will to be global risks spectacularisation when international exhibitions "seek to embed the peripheral spaces of cultural production and institutional articulation in the trajectory of international discourse" without seeking to "bring about a more complex understanding of artistic movements to local publics through the symbolic use and exchange of forms and ideas of *international advanced art*".



exclusion. Making the success of a transnational exhibition dependent on a kind of international meta-language of art has the implication that 'locals' everywhere need to learn to speak it in order to be heard. Jantjes (1998:16) defines "internationalism" in terms of hybridity and syncretic culture formations as the confusing moment after Babel: "If visual art is a form of language, with its own syntax grammar and concept of time, our contemporary art today resembles the moment immediately after Babel." Whilst this position shifts the discourse away from a centre-periphery binary, it could result in a drive to speak art "Esperanto", according to artist Marlene Dumas (Jantjes 1988:55), or, what Mosquera (2001:27) refers to as, "Art English". Mosquera (2001:28) claims "by the nineties, a sort of 'postmodern international language' had been instituted, prevailing over the so-called international scene even while its coinage as a dominant code denies *de facto* the pluralist perspective of postmodernity". In Documenta 11 the inclusion of artworks that question the parameters of such a homogenised art language to some extent subverted its functioning. However, by insisting on the notion of international advanced art in its selection criteria, Documenta 11 could be regarded as in full compliance with art-network dictates.

On the one hand more artists from – what used to be called – the peripheries are shown in international exhibitions than ever before. Access to a biennial could in fact favour artists from marginal localities above those at global centres. Geers (2005:6) maintains in this regard that as a result of the influx of curators and critics with the two Johannesburg biennials South African artists met "more curators of greater importance than any artist in London or New York" between 1994 and 1997, leading to international careers for some with "previously unimaginable privilege", "unheard of production budgets" and the chance of showing their work "in every corner of the globe, and exchanging ideas with the world's best critics, curators, artists and collectors". The 'global show' also positively impacts the local art scene through transcultural contact and dialogue around art production. Artist-curators David Koloane and Sipho Mdanda (2004:39) sum up the benefits of the biennials to the South African art community as that "more works from the African continent were shown" and artists "saw and experienced various arts approaches from a vast



resource that the biennales brought”. As contact zones between global and local circuits of art production, Enwezor (2002c:46) frames biennials as “important scenes of cultural translation and transnational encounters between artists, art markets, institutions, and various professionals”.

On the other hand, globalised exchanges are doomed to be unequal, limited by global gate-keepers, partial distributions and sheer serendipity. Kathryn Smith (2001:73) expresses the artist’s view of globalisation from the bottom up:

Events predicated on ‘cultural dialogue and exchange’ often end up as desperately one-sided, frustrating and limited in terms of productivity. As such, young local artists without the means to travel abroad often feel as if they are producing in a vacuum.

For Koloane (quoted in Martin 2004:30) globally unconnected artists who do not conform to the “new internationalism” and “international language” of large-scale exhibitions are marginalised by “the new exclusion”. Curator Francesco Bonami (Griffin et al 2003:162, emphasis in original) remarks how artists nowadays “land in good galleries only *after* a solid career in the biennial system”. The international art circuit marginalises as it empowers, by continuously widening the gap between mobile artists who are better informed and have more opportunities to refine their work and those stuck with a limited horizon – limited by the lack of infrastructure, the availability of publications, opportunities for dialogue and local galleries with access to an international market. This results in divisions impacting the production of locality as artists fall in two distinct groups: “those who have functioning international careers and those who do not” (Geers 2005:6). These artists with international careers tend to form a transnational class of nomadic producers, whose work perpetuate an international style. Documenta plays no small part in this: What Documenta giveth, Documenta also taketh away. Artists included in Documenta 11 now have international careers, while others remain marginalised. It could also be argued that the curators of Documenta 11 from the outset selected artists that, for the most part, belong to this group of nomadic producers and therefore had limited impact as inclusionary project.



Against expectations from artists in the South that Documenta 11 would be “our Documenta” (Geers 2005:130) and commentators in the North questioning the inclusivity of a Documenta that represented diasporic artists,¹¹ a case could be made that Enwezor at least steered clear from any notion of “authentic” representations while accentuating the value of transnational aesthetic principles. While the inclusion of artists who speak the ‘international art language’ indubitably excluded locals who don’t, it also created openings for cultural translation in a transcultural field and, in particular, a refiguration of modernity as Western trope. Practitioners representing marginal production sites, if not necessarily working in them, emerged in this Documenta as participants in transmodernities. Thus Documenta 11 avoided both the pitfalls of essentialising differences and relativism in transcultural curating, thereby engaging effectively with one of the most pressing demands in a deterritorialised space of cultural production: coming to terms with essentialisms.

4.1.2 Representation in a decentred art network

As a sign of the deterritorialisation of the contemporary art world, “citizenship [...] is measured by the number of frequent-flier miles one chalks up” (Lee 2003:167) – for artists, curators, critics, art dealers and viewers on the art-tourism track alike. This transnational focus could be attributed to at least three distinct factors: the cultivation of difference in the postmodern multicultural agenda; the constitutive effects of globalisation forces; and the embracing of globalism by the art community.

Multiculturalism’s politics of difference has impacted the global sphere in perverse ways. Whereas it certainly opened up the field of representation, it also led to the commodification of the Other by the art market, forcing notions

¹¹ Thomas McEvilley (2002:82), for instance, questioned how artists who have lived and continue to live outside their country of birth should be dealt with in a head-count of participation ratios.



of fixed identities along ethnic and national lines. For Mosquera (2001:30, emphasis in original) “greater plurality” and “greater circulation and legitimation of art from the peripheries” in the wake of multiculturalism “responded less to a new consciousness than to a tolerance based on paternalism, quotas, and *political correctness*”. This resulted in neoexoticism from the centre and self-othering by the peripheries:

[T]oo frequently, value has been placed on art that explicitly manifests difference or that better satisfies the expectations of otherness held by postmodern neoexoticism. This attitude has stimulated the *self-otherising* of the peripheries in which some artists – consciously or unconsciously – have tended toward a paradoxical self-exoticism (Mosquera 2001:30-31, emphasis in original).

Inclusion in a global market ruled by multiculturalist logic comes at a price as artists are expected to perform packaged identities.¹² South African artist Thembinkosi Goniwe (2003:35) protests being defined by the “burden of racial representation” and having to speak for a “collective black experience”. Besides being limited by a totalising approach of some notion of ‘black art’ (Goniwe 2003:35), the artist is further put in an absurd position of collaborating with “mechanisms of institutionalized racism” (Goniwe 2003:37).¹³

Responding to multiculturalism’s essentialising-imperatives, artists are increasingly reluctant to show their birth certificates, if not the stamps in their passports, in their work. In curatorial practices, also, the shift away from origins create, according to artist Yinka Shonibare (Griffin et al 2003:154), a further opening to “prioritize the aesthetic and political concerns of artists rather than their origins.” Thus the approach to art production is corresponding to the “polyglot and migrant” (Canclini 1998:378) shape of fluid identities dislocated from unitary formulations of space and temporality. As

¹² British/Jamaican art historian Petrine Archer-Straw (2003:100) maintains the curatorial tendency to ‘package’ art from peripheries like ‘the Caribbean’ makes it “difficult to determine the extent to which the image we are projecting is one that has been selected internally as opposed to externally”.

¹³ In this regard Goniwe (2003:37) asserts: “[T]he life of a black South African artist is an absurd novelty – always in invention and reinvention by those in positions of authority. The black artist participates in a constant struggle: having to fight his/her way out of the periphery by carving a route to the center regulated by the white gatekeeper”.



such art production locally and globally reflect the globalising forces of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of culture across national boundaries and identities. This transnationalisation of the aesthetic sphere shifts the discourse to the “in-between” (Bhabha 1994:224)¹⁴ and “in transit” (Canclini 1998:377). Canclini (1998:377) poses that a “poetic of the transitory” circumscribes artworks that “overflow [...] territories, because the works’ journeys make its external resonance a component of the message”. It is in this moment of ‘going with the flow’, of global projection, that art moves from mirroring global flows to become an active globalising force.

The art world’s embrace of its global mission can manifest in, what art historian Pamela Lee (2003:166) formulates as, *globalism*: “an ethos, an aesthetic, or a kind of period style”. In her view this extends from “imagery of globalization [...], the aesthetics of passports and Coca-Cola” (Lee 2003:166) to a “colonial logic underwrit[ing] the expansion of the art world’s traditional borders as if the art world itself were gleefully following globalization’s imperial mandate” (Lee 2003:165). In this respect the large-scale international exhibition functions as an instrument of neocolonialism, according to artist Martha Rosler (Griffin et al 2003:161), maintaining it is “a grand collector and translator of subjectivities under the latest phase of globalization”. This expansion manifests in what (Mosquera 1994:135) describes as “curating the world”¹⁵ as well as the colonising of other cultural domains and the ‘lifeworld’ outside the gallery. Penetration of the market seems to be the aim, rather than critical responses to the culture industries.

When the institutional structures of the art world begin to resemble that of transnational corporations the gap for a critical encounter with globalisation

¹⁴ Bhabha (1994:216) formulates the global as a multifarious site for the production of singularities, translation and multiple identities in terms of double-frames: “Cultural globality is figured in the *in-between* spaces of double-frames: its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentred ‘subject’ signified in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionality of the ‘present’.”

¹⁵ Mosquera (1994:135) references anthropologist James Clifford when maintaining “the restless desire and power of the postmodern West to curate the world has now begun”, indicating that the anthropological desire to ‘curate the other’ has turned into curating the world.



becomes very narrow indeed. In order to open up the possibilities of formulating the “strong, critical responses” Enwezor (2002b:45) advocates to global hegemonies, Lee (2003:167) claims that a self-critical re-examination of art’s global positioning is imperative:

[O]ur most urgent challenge is to account more critically for the way the art world has internalized the conditions of the global as its daily habitus: its institutional, political, and economic imperatives as well as its artistic and critical ones. And we need to productively rethink the ‘art world’ as itself a mode of immanent global production, not just a passive mirror reflecting the sweeping geopolitical changes thought to remain outside it.

It is doubtful, however, whether such a critical self-examination could produce enough distance – a critical territory ‘outside’ – to the global order. The curatorial project of Documenta 11 could, nonetheless, be considered as precisely such an attempt to rethink the influence of globalising forces and the exhibition’s own role in particular as globaliser in transnational art networks.

4.1.3 Localising a globalised Documenta

In a sense Documenta 11 produced localities in its exhibition structure by opening up spaces where the particular resisted being reduced to the universal. Critic Tim Griffin (Griffin et al 2003:153) states:

Enwezor’s globalism [...] was in Kassel linked to the acute value of regionality and difference, where the emergence of the local and particular precluded the possibility of any unifying system or thematic but nevertheless comprised a field of what could be called ‘minor knowledges’.

Even if Documenta 11’s transnational circuitry predisposed it to be global in intent, it is local in content, leading Jan-Erik Lundström (2003:59, emphasis in original) to conclude that “in our time of uncertainty, instability, hybrid and fluid identities, *Documenta 11* was indeed an exhibition of place, of culture’s anchorage in space”.



Such localising of the global is not only an expression of the fluidity of contemporary societies, but a necessary condition for the production of difference. It creates spaces for the “production of new localities in order to make them significant in the modern world, or to generate different modernities” (Hanru 2003:36). The transcultural viewfinder of Documenta 11’s constellation of postcolonial public spheres was specifically set to bring local contexts and histories into focus. As such, the curatorial aim of providing mooring against anchorless “transnationalisation, translocalization, and denationalization of the international contemporary art economy” (Enwezor 2002c:45) could indeed be regarded as successful. While approaching transnational and transcultural space as space of displacement, Documenta 11 nevertheless underscored the locatedness of speakers, production sites and artworks. It is the contention of this study that the particular engagement with locality could be considered the strongest curatorial statement against rampant globalism in the mega-exhibition circuit. The following two sections engage in detail with curatorial localising strategies that distinguish this Documenta among contemporary exhibitions and evaluate the positive contribution of a postcolonial approach.

4.2 PROVINCIALISING THE GLOBAL

Globalising Documenta meant *provincialising* Documenta, in the sense which cultural historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2001:190) formulates the postcolonial task as provincialising “Europe”.¹⁶ In this context Documenta 11 dealt with place as palimpsest, as the complex successive historical inscriptions that, especially in non-Western cultural sites, archives disruptions of modernity in space as well as time. Thus locality can be read as “a constant trope of difference [...], a continual reminder of colonial ambivalence, of the separation yet continual mixing of the colonizer and colonized” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin

¹⁶ For Chakrabarty (2001:191) the provincialising project comprises an understanding, firstly, of Europe’s annexing of the notion “modern” as an integral part of its own imperialist history and, secondly, that Third World nationalistic thinking has been partners in universalising this conception of modernity as European. He (Chakrabarty 2001:192) advocates “writ[ing] into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it”.



2000:179). By conceiving Documenta 11's platforms as a "rigorous review of what the 'global' actually is in relation to *different spaces of production*" (Enwezor, Griffin et al 2003:159, emphasis added) consequently entailed approaching the global, first and foremost, as postcolonial space.

Such a positioning calls for a clear definition of ethical engagement on the global level. The transnational and transcultural imaginary is experienced as cosmopolitanism by those regarding themselves as global subjects and is informed by the trope of the traveller or stranger. Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005:222) maintains an ethical discourse of cosmopolitanism should steer away from "the diversitarianism of the game warden, who ticks off the species in the park, counting each further one a contribution to his assets".¹⁷ Responsible cosmopolitanism, in this view, involves not only knowing about other subjectivities in the global world, but as fellow-travellers to consciously engage 'strangers'. What distinguishes the experience of strangers, according to cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiades (quoted in Chambers 1996:53), is that "[t]he stranger's vision is enlightened, not because he has transcended his origins but because travelling has revealed the chiasmus within the certitudes of belonging". Living in globalised communities, where the distance between strangers has shrunk, we all have a sense of becoming, what psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva calls, "strangers to ourselves".¹⁸ We are confronted with "new modalities of otherness" (Kristeva 1991:20) and in this moment of experiencing otherness we can, according to Bhabha (1996:202), "assum[e] a more worldly, or what is now termed 'global' responsibility". Bhabha articulates the space of the global imaginary, conceived of as both "imagined and unimagined community" (Bhabha

¹⁷ Appiah (2005:222) makes the distinction between "moral" and "cultural" cosmopolitanism, or an approach of "universalism" and "impartialism", stating "[t]he discourse of cosmopolitanism will add to our understanding only when it is informed by both of these ideals: if we care *about* others who are not part of our political order – others who may have commitments and beliefs that are unlike our own – we must have a way to talk *to* them".

¹⁸ In *Strangers to ourselves* (1991:191) Kristeva extends Freud's notion in *Das Unheimliche* (1919) of "that agony of frightened joyfulness, that has been called *unheimlich*, that in English is *uncanny*, and the Greeks quite simply call *xenos*" to the "foreign" and the contemporary experience of foreigners. Kristeva (1991:192) claims: "The ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics: it would involve cosmopolitanism of a new sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of the unconscious – desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible".

1996:201), as a space of ambivalence in which a “translational” cosmopolitanism (Bhabha 1996:204) can be constructed. From this position commonality is not given, but achieved at a cost to those constructing cosmopolitan identities.

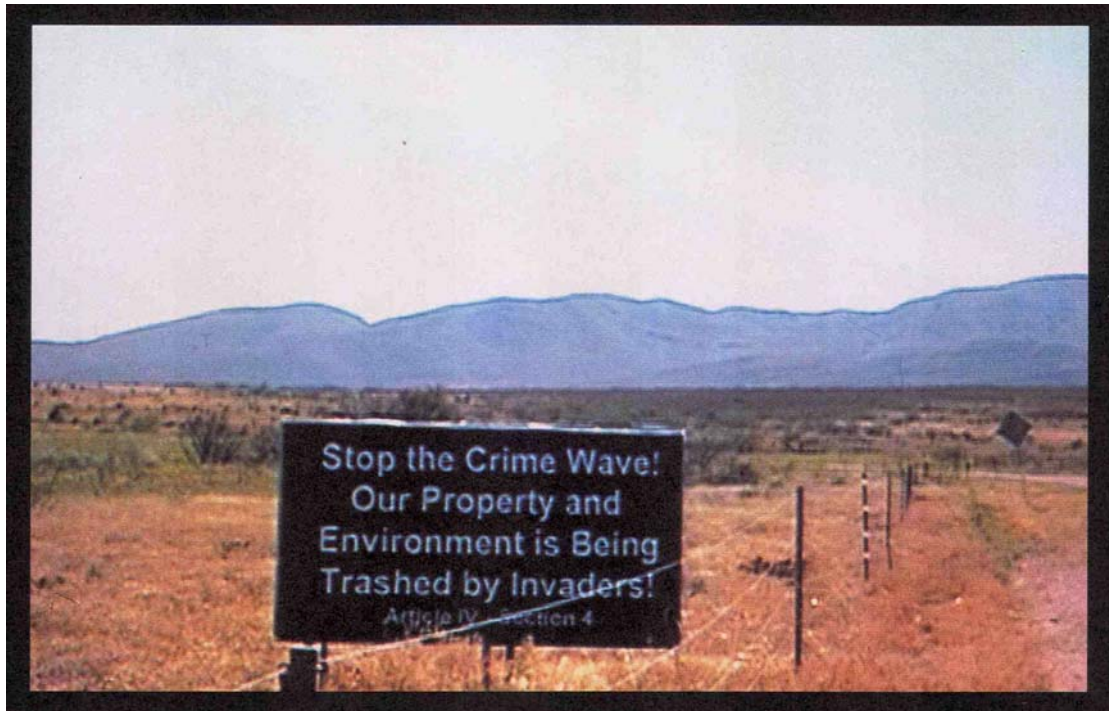


Figure 16: Chantal Akerman, *From the other side*, 2002.
Super 16 and video transferred to DVD: film installation for 18 monitors
and 2 screens, real time video broadcast.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue 2002:163*).

For Documenta 11 an ethical interrogation into fragmented global living conditions in a postcolonial commons entailed, in the first place, to diminish the distance between localities. Such a sense of proximity in the exhibition space could, and did indeed in the spaces of Documenta 11, facilitate understanding of and tolerance for cultural differences. *From the other side* (2002) (Figure 16) – Chantal Akerman’s multi-screen installation of film and video about illegal immigration of Mexicans across the US border into the harsh Arizona desert – linked the artistic space of Documenta with the ‘other side’ of the real border through a live broadcast. For the opening days of Documenta a continuous loop of a film-image was projected onto a screen near the border, which was in turn filmed and broadcast live in Kassel. This



seamless use of technology to traverse borders in the Northern aesthetic space poignantly underscored the provisional reality of the interviewed Mexicans, locked into an unequal dynamic which some pay for with their lives. As such, Belgium-born Akerman engaged with displacement and proximity in a way that could open up a critical space for viewers to reconsider a border conflict on the other side of the world in a more immediate sense.

4.2.1 Proximity as global condition

The pivotal notion of proximity in the context of Documenta 11 is theorised in terms of “the terrible nearness of distant places” (Enwezor 2002b:44). By making nearness the prevailing mode of globalisation, Enwezor highlighted the inequalities of globalisation processes and, at the same time, that an ethical response was needed:

From the moment the postcolonial enters into the space/time of global calculations and the effects they impose on modern subjectivity, we are confronted not only with the asymmetry and limitations of globalism’s materialist assumptions but also with the terrible nearness of distant places that global logic sought to abolish and bring into one domain of deterritorialized rule. Rather than vast distances and unfamiliar places, strange peoples and cultures, postcoloniality embodies the spectacular mediation and representation of nearness as the dominant mode of understanding the present condition of globalization.

The fact that Documenta 11 questioned the *ethics* of power relations expressed in global disparities is considered a major gain by art historian Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbachie (2005:86). Approaching globality in terms of “nearness, not an elsewhere” (Enwezor 2002b:44) has the further advantage of constructing an ethical space in which new cultural forms and counter-histories can be negotiated.¹⁹ As such, postcolonial space “is the site where experimental cultures emerge to articulate modalities that define the new

¹⁹ Enwezor (2002b:44) argues in this regard that global postcolonial space is not “a vulgar state of endless contestations and anomie, chaos and unsustainability, but rather the very space where the tensions that govern all ethical relationships between citizen and subject converge”.



meaning- and memory-making systems of late modernity”, claims Enwezor (2002b:44). By emphasising proximities, rather than elsewhere in postcolonial space, the focus can therefore be shifted from broad global strokes to localising contexts and temporalities. Ultimately it renders any notion of a cultural core and peripheries nonsensical in a global modernity where “local details *everywhere* remind us of their global positionality” (Chambers 1996:57, emphasis in original).²⁰ A closer investigation of Platform 4 in the next section will examine how this focus on nearness, on abjection and an ethical response to troublesome proximities, impacted the global project of Documenta 11.

4.2.2 Cities on the edge of globalisation²¹

In a sense African cities are the extreme paradigmatic contexts of localities where the ‘global’ meets the ‘postcolonial’ and as such exhibit the conjunctures and disjunctures of globalisation. Platform 4, *Under siege: Four African Cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*²² raised the question whether these conditions entailed the creation of new modernities, rather than the conventional approach to Africa as pre-modern and in need of modernising through the munificence of globalising forces. The curators (*Documenta 11_Platform 4... 2002:20*) state:

We must ask ourselves whether there are modernities outside the reactive ‘alternatives’ to the West: modernities that emerge out of postcolonial histories and global phenomena, but which also engage different kinds of understanding of wealth, subjectivity and the social

²⁰ Cultural theorist Iain Chambers (1996:57) argues that the notion of a pure, essential core can not be extracted from the actual travels of cultural phenomena in “global transit, translation and transvaluation”, rendering the “rhetoric of alterity” hollow. He (Chambers 1996:57-58) claims: “In absolute difference the rhetoric of alterity locates a pure otherness waiting to be filled by the presence of our desires [...] like the ‘empty’ wilderness [...] waiting to be settled and domesticated and brought into the redemptive time of our history”.

²¹ Documenta 11’s engagement with South American cities in the form of a research project published outside the framework of the five platforms – Silva, A. (ed). 2003. *Urban Imaginaries from Latin America. Documenta 11*. Translated by V Martin. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz. – is not discussed in this section, since this publication focuses primarily on the imaginary constitution of these cities.

²² Platform 4, a conference and workshop, was held in Lagos in March 16-20 2002.



sphere so often taken for granted when approaching modernity and globalization.

Questions about alternative modernities impact on the way art produced in Africa should be viewed and presented within a globalised art network, especially since globalisation is conceived in the North as a shift towards a spatial orientation in which time has been compressed to present space.²³ Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1998:45) concludes that even if the “[s]hrinking of space abolishes the flow of time”, the experience of a “perpetual present” differs greatly for those empowered and those made structurally redundant by globalisation, namely the “globalized’ rich” and the “globalized’ poor”. He (Bauman 1998:45, emphasis in original) maintains the global aristocracy, who are not constrained by space in its physical or virtual forms, “live in *time*”, while the masses with nothing but time on their hands, “live in *space*”. Consequently the concept of home, according to Bauman (1998:46), means dematerialised space to the rich and decomposed time to the poor. Any notion of the post-historical paradox, of living in continuous contemporaneity, therefore might be meaningless to people cut off from the benefits generated by globalisation. Especially for Africans experiencing globalisation as intensified unequalisation, “time and space have not collapsed”, maintains Sheila Bunwaree (2002:1), sociologist of development for CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa).

The curators of Documenta (*Documenta 11_Platform 4...* 2002:14) defines the “crisis” of African cities in terms of “spatial entropy, a decline in infrastructure, the unravelling of traditional institutional and social networks, the erosion of state capacity to provide adequate social amenities, [and] inequality of access to economic and political capacities”. The predicaments seem to outweigh the promises presented as a series of paradoxes, of what Bunwaree (2002:1) describes as “multiple D’s and R’s” – on the one hand

²³ The notion of globalisation as ‘space-time compression’ – first developed by geographer David Harvey in *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (1990) – is expressed by anthropologist of science and curator Bruno Latour (2004:[sp]) in terms of a spatial turn. Latour (2004:[sp]) claims we live in a “time of cohabitation”, in which there is no progress and nothing disappears, and that the politics of time has ended since we have moved into a “politics of space”.



decay, destruction, decadence and dilapidation, and on the other reconciliation, renewal, reconstruction, resilience and resourcefulness.

Referencing co-cultural theorist Anthony King's work on urbanism, Frederick Buell (1994:137, emphasis in original) postulates that the colonial city might, in a reversal of time, be the global city's future as the conditions of inequality and fragmentation of the periphery are replicated in global centres:

[C]olonial circumstances represent, in fact, not the past of which the core is the modern future, but a new global future that the core is only beginning to recognize. The peripheries are thus not behind but *further along* the developmental timeline.

African cities coming to terms with colonial pasts and global futures are subsequently situated not at the edge of globalisation processes as the level of their participation in the global economy would suggest, but rather at the very centre of producing coping mechanisms in a globalised world. In an "increasingly urban continent" (*Documenta 11_Platform 4...* 2002:17) with forty percent of the African population living in cities, African cities lay bare the human cost of deterritorialising and reterritorialising in cities of both the North and South. They reveal the "increasing urbanization of poverty" (*Documenta 11_Platform 4...* 2002:18), show contemporary cities as contested "collision points between tradition and modernity" (*Documenta 11_Platform 4...* 2002:17), and display urban spaces as sites of "desire, nostalgia, or paranoia" (Bremner 2002:165).

In Kassel the effects of globalisation were most striking in works referencing cities of the South. Olumuyiwa Osifuye's *Selected Feature Photographs of Lagos* (2002) show how individuals make do in a city in crisis, in the space between structural collapse and renewal. Similarly Jean-Marie Teno exposes the empty promise of global prosperity for the developing world in *Vacances au pays* (A trip to the country) (2000). Showing the degradation surrounding the two 'modern' concrete towers in Cameroon's capital Yaoundé, Teno's first-person cinematic work questions the roles of postcolonial functionaries and the impact of a global economy in the stagnation experienced by his countrymen.



Figure 17: David Goldblatt, *Silencers for sale and fitting, Esselen and Banket Streets, Hillbrow, 2002*.
C-print, 40 x 29,5 cm
Kulturbahnhof, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue 2002:307*).

The photographic images of both David Goldblatt, *Jo'burg Intersections* (1999-2002) (Figure 17), and Kendell Geers, *Suburbia* (1999), depict Southern financial capital, Johannesburg, as a city divided along Western and African imaginaries. Goldblatt frames 'exclusive' developments, such as the Dainfern-estate, Shingara Sands Bush Lodges and the 'Tuscan' gambling paradise Montecasino – amplified with quotes from developers' publicity – with images of an informal settlement, rubbish dump, silencers fitted and corn roasting on the side of the road. Geers presented 36 images of facades to suburban homes, each 'protected' by versions of barbed wire, electrified fences and armed response warnings. At Platform 4 architect Lindsay Bremner (2002:165) referred to Johannesburg as a city "being remade as a collection of juxtaposed fragments", with a "new spatiality of fixed identities and logics of discrimination" (Bremner 2002:160). She (Bremner 2002:160) offered an explanation of why 'Italy' became an urban model for wealthy



South Africans: it confers a sense of stability and timelessness while distancing inhabitants from real history, it carries the promise of *la dolce vita*, and Italy represents the urbane value of being civilized. In between “sanitized fragments and idealized reflections of global capital”, Bremner (2002:171) maintains, ordinary people are reconnecting the divided apartheid city in an emerging “improvised spatiality”.

In the township, inner-city, suburb, *quartier* and *cités* people devise diverse adaptive survival strategies of improvisation of “Do-It-Yourself”, described by curator Hou Hanru (2003:37) as the “main source of sustainability, the main force in the revival and continued development of today’s post-planning cities”. This view of globalisation is ‘from the bottom up’, as it were, situated in “unstable space” (De Boeck 2002:246) and driven by a “frontier logic of mutation” (De Boeck:245). Through localisation processes new urban landscapes emerge, of “*villagization*” (De Boeck 2002:258) and novel ethnicities, but also of imaginary constructs of the city in the order of “ghosts” (Simone 2002a:[sp]) or the “shadow, spectre, reflection” (De Boeck 2002:281). Urbanist AbouMaliq Simone (2002a:[sp]), keynote speaker of Platform 4, formulates the conditions of identity creation in a city like Douala, Cameroon, in which conventional urban and social structures have collapsed, as ghost-like. He (Simone 2002a:[sp]) maintains against the backdrop of the “ghost-like character of the international financial economy”, for the majority of Africans depending on the informal economy and services “the only way to take charge of the city is as ghosts”. Living as ghosts mean “[t]he boundary between what is actual and what is possible is effaced, is taken apart as that which never happened but could, is remembered as it is about to happen now” (Simone 2002a:[sp]). Anthropologist Filip de Boeck (2002:281) posits Kinshasa’s invisible “second city”, governed by the occult and mystery, mirrors “the way in which the second or ‘shadow’ economy has taken over the first or formal economy”. The main crisis of societies marginalised by globalisation is defined by De Boeck (2002:284) as the “slippage” between the real and its double and the eventual “*liquidation* of the double, the unwholesome coalescence of the reflecting sides into one, or the gradual take-over of one by the other” (De Boeck 2002:285, emphasis in original).



The global pressure of trans migrations manifest in African cities, as elsewhere, in conflicts between locals and non-locals who reterritorialised vacated spaces, like the *flatlands* in the inner-city of Johannesburg. Maxine Reitzes (2002:216), policy researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa, investigated xenophobia in the context of conflicts in perception of Johannesburg as a “world-class city” versus an “African city”. Reitzes (2002:215-216) claims “[t]he project of forging a post-apartheid South African national identity tend to be informed by ‘othering’ non-South Africans”, who are perceived as “threats to hard-won inclusive citizenship rights and entitlements”. Migrants from other African countries, however, regard “certain rights as portable” (Reitzes 2002:217), lay claim to a common black identity, appeal to former political alliances and consider the Southern African region to be a single economic entity. French researcher Antoine Bouillon (2002:86, emphasis in original), who worked in Durban and Johannesburg, expounded the fact that “South African black people have historically been denied access to *both* the *city* and *citizenship* at the same time”. Bouillon (2002:89) maintains while South African “would-be ‘city-zens’” are territorialising previously forbidden terrain, in staging their citizenship “a border has to be constantly re-performed to give substance and effectiveness to national identity” (Bouillon 2002:93). Bouillon (2002:93, emphasis in original) argues “*an alternative enunciation of citizenship*” based on “basic human rights” may be called for in order to treat all non-nationals – migrants, immigrants and refugees – equitably and to do justice to the “*constituent human rights dimension*” of the notion of citizenship that “renders the actual definitions and implementations of citizenship in local nation-state contexts forever questionable”.

Rather than supplying a litany of the wretched of the earth, Documenta 11’s public sphere dealing with African cities elaborated on the unadulterated conditions of globalisation and what the terrible nearness of distant places could mean in the context of a European exhibition aiming for global relevance. Platform 4 could also be regarded as a demonstration of resistance strategies to the stranglehold of globalisation forces through the



focus on particular production of localities.²⁴ Inclusion of artworks produced under these conditions further contributed to provincialising the cultural discourse around Documenta 11.

4.3 PRODUCTION OF LOCALITY

The localising project of Documenta 11's constellation of public spheres could be construed as a central strategy in resisting global hegemonies. Contrary to criticism of the exhibition being "given over to ethnographic material" (Robinson 2002:[sp]), the curatorial approach was not inclusiveness based on geographical distances covered and outer-reaches embraced, but rather on the *production of locality*. This section will deal specifically with the possibilities and limits of the local as site of resistance for cultural production and will also evaluate attempts by Documenta-artists to construct a transnational digital space of refuge and opposition.

4.3.1 Site(s) of resistance

In the rhetoric of globalisation the *local* is constructed as the site for the production of difference or singularity in opposition to the universalism of the *global*. When this opposition rests on assumptions that "the global entails homogenization and undifferentiated identity whereas the local preserves heterogeneity and difference", assert Hart and Negri (2000:44), it presupposes a "false dichotomy between the global and the local".²⁵ This

²⁴ Enwezor (2002b:52) claims in this regard that the four African cities under discussion "express paradigmatic contexts of intense production of locality (neighborhoods, associations, imaginaries of religion, and circuits of mediatic representations)".

²⁵ Any rigid distinction between the 'global' and 'local' is untenable, as contemporaneous globalisation is constituted by a chain of mutually-constructive, conflicting simultaneities. Jameson (1998a:xii) defines globalisation as "an untotizable totality which intensifies binary relations between its parts". The sense of simultaneous movement in opposite directions while doubling back, of reassigning dynamics from above and below, of *both... and...*, leads Bhabha (2002:355) to describe globalisation discourse in terms of a "contiguous, double horizon [...] shuttling back and forth between continuity and contiguity". This shifting double horizon of "conflictual *contiguities*" (Bhabha 2002:354) is alternatively expressed as a Janus-face by Hall (1997a:27), for whom "[g]lobal and local are the two faces of the same movement



dichotomy is based on “a kind of primordialism that fixes and romanticizes social relations and identities” (Hardt & Negri 2000:45).²⁶ Globalisation plays out as the interpenetration of the global and local with locality produced on both local and global levels, with no ‘outside’ to the process. Hardt and Negri (2000:45) suggest “[g]lobalization, like localization, should be understood instead as a *regime* of the production of identity and difference, or really of homogenization and heterogenization”. Defined from this position, the global and local refer to “different networks of flows and obstacles in which the local moment or perspective gives priority to the *reterritorializing barriers* or boundaries and the global moment privileges the mobility of *deterritorializing flows*” (Hardt & Negri 2000:45, emphasis added).

To escape the circular logic of the global-local dichotomy, the local is more productively discussed in terms of the production of locality.²⁷ Referencing Appadurai, Hardt and Negri (2000:45) describe the production of locality as “the social machines that create and recreate the identities and differences that are understood as the local”. Appadurai’s (1996:178-179) notion of the production of locality is linked to sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies’s use of *Gemeinschaft*,²⁸ ‘neighbourhood’, to refer to “the actually existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realized”. For Appadurai (1996:179) neighbourhoods are “situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual, and their potential for social reproduction”

from one epoch of globalisation”. Political theorist James Rosenau (2003:4) expresses globalisation in terms of an “endless series of distant proximities in which the forces pressing for greater globalization and those inducing greater localization interactively play themselves out”. The notion of interactivity, rather than mere simultaneity, is also stressed by globalisation theorist Roland Robertson (1997:73), who defines globalisation as “a massive twofold process involving *the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*”. In this view the transnational and national, the global and the local, the impersonal and the communal, homogeneity and difference, “pace and space” (Rosenau 2003:5) are mutually constituted.

²⁶ Grossberg (1996:176) maintains the identification of the local as the “site of specificity” and the “site of agency (difference, resistance)” presupposes “prior identification of subjectivity, subject positions (identity) and agency, leading to “fetishisation of the local”.

²⁷ “Glocalization”, a Japanese marketing term from 1980s (King 1997:x), is used by some authors to describe the two-way process of globalisation. This term adds no insight into the direction or conditions of flows, but instead obscures the uneven realities of globalisation.

²⁸ Tönnies conceived of the distinction between community and society in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, first published in 1887. The notion of *Gemeinschaft* is exemplified by the house as the focus of the family or neighbourhood, a homogeneous entity bound by close bonds and beliefs. *Gesellschaft*, the larger civil society or nation, is represented by the city, in which ethnicity, class and race are contested.

and, differing from Tönnies, he (Appadurai 1996:178) approaches locality as “primarily relational and contextual, rather than as scalar or spatial”. The notion of contextuality encapsulates the problems with the production of locality on a global scale, since neighbourhoods function as “contexts and at the same time require and produce contexts” (Appadurai 1996:184).²⁹ Locality can thus only be produced and reproduced with reference to the non-local or global. Any possibility of change or “new contexts” relies on these “dynamics of conjunctural change” (Appadurai 1996:185). ‘Locality’, in this view, is not a space but a “relational achievement” (Appadurai 1996:186). Therefore, even if the local seems to be dwarfed by the global in the processes of globalisation, locals retain some form of agency in the production of their locality.

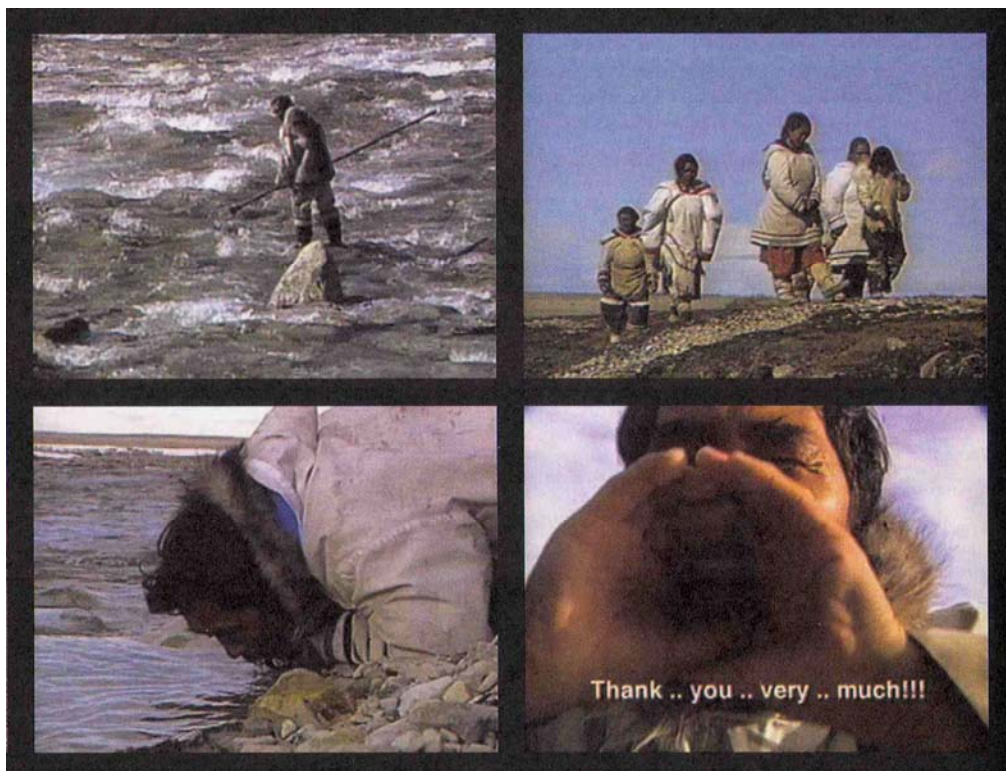


Figure 18: Igloodik Isuma Productions, *Nunavut* (Our land), 1994/95.
Stills from episode 8: Avamuktalik (Fish swimming back and forth).
Video, colour (28 min. 50 sek.)
Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue* 2002:354).

²⁹ Appadurai (1996:184) maintains as “meaningful lifeworlds” neighbourhoods function as “multiplex interpretive site[s]”, but “[i]nsofar as neighborhoods are imagined, produced, and maintained against some sort of ground (social, material, environmental,) they also require and produce contexts against which their own intelligibility takes shape”.



Improvising resistance to homogenising forces of globalisation was at the heart of Documenta 11-artworks dealing with the reterritorialising of identities. Creating independent community-based media for the new arctic territory Nunavut³⁰ is the project of Igloolik Isuma Productions, a Canadian Inuit film production company. Aimed at a primary Inuit audience, *Nunavut* (Our land, 1994/95) (Figure 18) – 13 half-hour episodes of a dramatic TV series – dealt with life in the Igloolik community in a soap opera format. By mixing fiction with instruction the series does not only entertain, but endeavours to preserve oral traditions and traditional ways of living through a form of storytelling adapted to a globalised age. According to the company's website <http://www.isuma.ca/> an additional aim is the creation of jobs in this isolated community.

A similar focus on expression of group-identities and active empowerment is at the heart of the projects of the Senegalese collective Huit Facettes.³¹ The artists' involvement with workshops, such as painting on glass, pyrography, ceramics, batik dyeing, carving, weaving, embroidery and mural painting in rural communities was presented at Documenta 11 in the form of documentation in *Hamdallaye!* (1996-2002). In the socio-cultural centre established by the group in the village of Hamdallaye, Samba M'Baye, a local self-taught painter of frescoes, was assisted to decorate various huts and the main building. His signs and shapes were developed as basis for a graphic register to establish a personalised visual alphabet for the village.

Apart from innovative tactics to produce locality, these works share common ground in their rejection of modernist notions of commodified art production. They show an art practice that effectively distances itself from the forces and demands of global cultural industries through engagement with local social issues. For artist Kan-Si (*Huit Facettes...* 2002: 570) art production in sites of

³⁰ The aboriginal lands Nunavut – an area of 2 million square kilometres, nearly one fifth of Canada – was granted self-rule on 1 April 1999, according to the official website <http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/>.

³¹ Huit Facettes was formed by 8 artists in Dakar, Senegal, in 1996 and the current members are Abdoulaye N'Doye, El Hadji Sy, Fode Camara, Cheikh Niass, Jean Marie Bruce, Mor Lisa Ba, and Amadou Kane Sy (Kan-Si) (*Documenta 11... short guide* 2002:114).



intense production of locality has to be positioned socially and be judged accordingly:

Artistic work that aspires to engage with social issues certainly contributes in one way or another to the development of the 'real world' [...] Such contribution will have to be perceived differently and in a wider sense, just as the notion of a work of art can be understood more in terms of process than as finished cultural object, to be instantly consumed (seen, appreciated or indeed judged).

The skill transfer and developmental aspects of this form of art practice relocates it against globalising dynamics to connect with globalised art's forgotten public, the "poor in Africa [who] have become the disappeared of globalisation" (Enwezor 2005:41). Such a utilitarian view of art also realistically engages with the weak position of contemporary African artists working on the margins of a globalised art economy. A showing of these works in Northern Kassel, therefore, indeed serves as counter-position to "modernism's historical contradiction between art's claim to aesthetic autonomy and its social relevance", as it is framed by critic Nadja Rottner (*Documenta 11... short guide* 2002:114).

4.3.2 Limitations of the local

In terms of a global frame, the limitations put on the production of locality – in cultural peripheral zones or in spaces outside the grid of globally powerful centres – render the local as the "site both of promise and predicament" (Dirlik 1989:85). Devising strategies of resistance within and across these parameters is the greatest challenge for cultural practitioners intent on producing locality with their own work.

The promise of locality is linked to what historian Arif Dirlik (1989:90) describes as "localized consciousness," constituting "the local as the site for working out 'alternative public spheres' and alternative social formations". For Dirlik (1989:87) postmodern debunking of meta-narratives, such as that of



modernity and modernisation, resulted in both a “reassertion” of the local and the “restoration” of the histories formerly thought irrelevant:

Rather than an inexorable march of global conquest from its origins in Europe, the history of modernization appears now as a temporal succession of spatially dispersed local encounters, to which the local objects of progress made their own contributions through resistance or complicity, contributing in significant ways to the formation of modernity, as well as to its contradictions.

This reinstatement-project runs into a predicament, maintains Dirlik (1989:90), because persistent structures of domination maintain conditions for manipulation on political and cultural levels. Thus, even if the breakdown of the theoretic framework of modernism empowered local narratives, from the vantage point of global capitalism the local is not “the site of liberation but manipulation” (Dirlik 1989:96).³² This characterisation rings true for the former ‘Third World’ or South, but does not keep track of the predicaments of deterritorialised, diasporic and transnational “translocalities” (Appadurai 1996:192) created by globalisation. For Appadurai (1996:199) “[t]he many displaced, deterritorialized, and transient populations[...] are engaged in the construction of locality, as a structure of feeling, often in the face of erosion, dispersal, and implosion of neighborhoods as coherent social formations”. Constructing and reconstructing local narratives under these conditions, complicated by divided loyalties and lack of commitment (especially in transient communities), are truly fluid and precarious, in both global centres and peripheries.

The production of locality is inscribed by an awareness of the bigger picture, of some sense of the ‘global’. Awareness of the local is, in turn, heightened by globalisation. Strategising locality, however, has to entail more than the simplistic marketing slogan of ‘Think globally, act locally’. The ‘global’ is not a homogenous field,³³ neither is the ‘local’ uncontested.³⁴ For African cultural

³² Through “domestication” in different localities transnational corporations “mystify the location of power”, thereby making resistance more difficult, claims Dirlik (1989:95).

³³ Stuart Hall (1997b:67) maintains “‘the global’ is always composed of varieties of articulated particularities”, defining the ‘global’ as “the self-presentation of the dominant particular”.



producers especially, framed by modernism to be poor echoes of Western excellence or, at most, ventriloquist dummies,³⁵ this presents a challenge. Cultural theorist Ioan Davies (1998:137) identifies the “tactic of simulacrum”, of inventing and packaging the fake for those searching for the authentic, as a localising strategy for “Africans [who] are faking themselves both for themselves and others”. It is, however, a precarious victory to pull one’s own strings in the hope of not being manipulated, a parodying strategy heading into the ghostly realm where the “double” gets liquidated (De Boeck 2002:284). Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o advocates ‘indigenisation’, taking the best from the global and appropriating it to empower the local.³⁶ This position oversimplifies the translation of cross-cultural symbolic systems, and Buell (1994:243, emphasis in original) contends by primordialising the ‘global’ Ngũgĩ’s “strategy of globalist indigenization” could also be described as “re-tribalization or re-traditionalization” and as such is ambiguously forward and backward looking at the same time”. Buell (1994:243) refers to Spivak’s use of the term “‘strategic’ essentialisms”, and of the “use of the notion of primordial continuity to create and mobilize a community” as another formulation of this strategy. The ‘primordial locality’ can, however, never be ‘pure’ and localising notions of identity, tradition, and indigenisation are globally produced, marking localising strategies as intrinsically ambiguous. Dirlik (1989:98) proposes a “critical localism”, excluding “romantic nostalgia for communities past, hegemonic nationalist yearnings of a new kind [...], or historicism that would imprison the present in the past”.

However daunting the globalising grip might be, Hall (1997b:68) proposes that hegemony “is never completed”.³⁷ The uncertainty contained in the

³⁴ Jameson et al (1998:375) argue “totalizing narratives of the local” need to be deconstructed in the face of the “polysemy of cultural hybridization”.

³⁵ Culture critic Olu Oguibe (1999:19) expounds how the “master narrative” allows the African artist little space for “his and not his master’s voice”, projecting him as “an echo, as the displaced sound of percussive fracture” (Oguibe 1999:18) and reiterating “ventriloquy as a structure of reference for Western attitudes towards African artists” (Oguibe 1999:20).

³⁶ In *Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African literature* (1981) Ngũgĩ argues for the translation of Western texts into African languages like his own Gĩkũyũ and against Africans writing in English for a Western audience.

³⁷ Hall (1997b:68) maintains the moment of fulfilment escapes ‘the hegemonic project, the historical project, in which is lodged a variety of differences but which are all committed either



multifactorial, polycentric global system further opens up possibilities for local action to cause global upset “despite the enormous disparity in size between the two frames” (Buell 1994:321). Buell (1994:298) suggests that in order for localised activism (agency not constructed as necessarily unified or deliberate) to be effective, “[w]e should think both more locally and more globally”, constructing resistance “below and above the nation”. Given the mutually-constructive double horizon of globalisation-dynamics and the inevitably relational construction of locality, resistance cannot be situated in the ‘local’ exclusively. Indeed, the practice of what Buell (1994:298) terms “global-localisms” – such as ethnic, religious, gender, environmental, occupational, and virtual affiliations – show “increasingly decentred [and deterritorialised] strategic boundaries”. Cultural resistance to global hegemonising forces might be better located, to paraphrase Hardt and Negri (2000:45), as *both* reterritorialising barriers *and* reterritorialising flows.

4.3.3 Digital public sphere

The Documenta-website and artists working in, or referring to, the digital domain explored the idea of creating global-localist resistance strategies in the form of a transnational public sphere for the production of locality in cyberspace. Art historian Reesa Greenberg (2005:94) praises the discursive expansion of Documenta 11 through online discussions, even though the website was constructed as “site for communication rather than parallel or alternative display”. Although Greenberg (2005:94) would like to see the Web used as a fully constituted platform, she concedes that this might represent a “fetishization-of-technology trap” in the framework of Documenta 11, given the unequal access to, and lack of control of, technology by the non-West.

The members of the Delhi based Raqs Media Collective (Raqs Media Collective 2002a:581) – Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta and Jeebesh Bagchi – position their work explicitly in the digital commons: “The

in a dominant, or a subaltern position, to a single historical project” when it declares “its boundaries to be coterminous with the truth, with the reality of history”.

act of locating [our work] in the public domain of the digital commons is both to contribute to non-proprietary and non-territorial ways of looking at space and at art/work, and also to contribute to an existing body of interventions in ‘free culture’”.³⁸ Raqs’ works present as open source and can be modified by the public as a “‘rescension’ [a version ready to be considered by itself] – a networked narrative which can give rise to another networked narrative (which is neither a clone nor a copy of the ‘original’) without being a replacement of the first” (Raqs Media Collective 2002a:581).



Figure 19: Raqs Media Collective, *www.opuscommons.net*, 2002.
Documenta Halle, Kassel.
(<http://www.opuscommons.net/templates/doc/index.html>).

For Documenta 11 they set up *www.opuscommons.net*, where viewers could contribute to an aesthetic lexicon of and for the exhibition (Figure 19). The

³⁸ Raqs Media Collective (2002a:581) subscribes to the Free Code/Software movement as members of the media initiative Sarai – according to <http://www.sarai.net/> the notion of *sarai* as space where travellers shelter and meet translates as a digital space for research, networks, partnerships and hybrid cultural practices.



facilitation of an open-ended collaborative creative space connects to the group's investigation of urban spaces in which the "syntax of time-space coordinates connects the city as a location to the abstractions of other spaces and times" (2002c:1). Another work shown at Documenta 11, *28°28N' / 77°15E::2001/2002, An installation on the coordinates of everyday life – Delhi, 2001/2002*, expressed through an assemblage of video, text, sound, print and signage the way inhabitants experience space and the restrictions placed on their movements – the fragility of a living commons. Stickers in four languages – Hindi, English, Turkish and German – were put up on the streets of Kassel with messages such as: "You are entering a zero-tolerance zone. Make no trouble here", or "Access denied. Have you registered with the relevant authorities?" Common urban experiences link the localities of Delhi and Kassel thanks to globalised media.

Notions of a digital production of locality, however, fall outside the grasp of the globalised poor, "the 'structurally redundant' [for whom] real space is fast closing up" (Bauman 1998:45). In the Documenta-Halle a constructed passage and entrance connected the work of the Raqs collective literally and conceptually with Cameroon-born installation artist Pascale Marthine Tayou. In *Game station* (2002) Tayou played scenes from Yaoundé on ten monitors accompanied by a network of headphones leaking a global muddle of sound from radio frequencies around the world. The headphone-highway strung up overhead like a crow's nest of rudimentary telephone and power lines in a 'Third World' locality, as well as the network of TV's (actual and drawn) and projection screens, delineated gaping inequities in 'the game' for the Northern audience of Documenta and people living in the South.

An interesting work by the two Singaporean artists Woon Tien Wei and Charles Lim Yi Young of Tsunami.net pushed the limits of the artwork while literally "walking" the Internet. Their *alpha 3.4* (2002) consisted of digitally recording the walk from Kassel to Kiel, the physical location of the Documenta server. The movements of the walker were tracked by GPS (Global Positioning System) and changes in IP numbers (identification numbers assigned to each computer linked to the Internet), the browser, mapping



software and pinging tracer program were shown on four LCD screens in the Binding-Bauerei. According to a Tsunami.net-interview (2002:1) a webcam was installed to “see” the documenta.de webserver as a “real object in real space” working against the perception created of the Internet as intangible and borderless. By drawing attention to physical objects and distances, the artists effectively engaged with dictates of geopolitics and the centralising of technology.

These works revealed the promise and predicament of an inclusive, digital Documenta. Cyberspace certainly offers strategic advantages of decentring and deterritorialising discourses, yet the abstraction built into this transnational commons could deny specificity when it is approached as a-historical or supra-contextual space.³⁹ The digital domain could also be constituted as a space of exclusion if the inequalities in techno-globalisation are ignored by the North. Awareness of the possibilities and limitations for art practice to engage with transnational and localised production of locality, of reterritorialising and redirecting barriers and flows, is particularly significant in the context of global exhibitions. For the most part, curatorial focus on the production of locality, rather than the production of globality, could be the key to privileging resistance strategies in the globalised exhibition. It could also be deemed imperative if transcultural curating is to be more than an expression of globalism, multicultural management and cultural correctness. The next section will evaluate how different localities were put in relation to each other; how the act of translation within the spaces of Documenta 11 was approached.

4.4 TRANSLOCAL CURATING

Curatorially Documenta 11’s approach to transnational space as the translocal space in which the production of singular localities can impact

³⁹ Artistic director of transmediale (the international media art festival held annually in Berlin), Andreas Broeckmann (1997:1), poses that any approach to cyberspace as a translocal *independent* locality is problematic, since this form of idealised nomadism could lead to being “translocal and lost”, rather than gaining from visiting one another’s homes.



discourses and art practice, established Enwezor and his team of co-curators as innovators in contemporary curatorial practices. Meeting the demands of a globalised art world for expansion, yet undermining dynamics of the culture industries for facile translations between cultures, Documenta 11 set out to create complexity and density. This section will deal with how the curatorial project engaged with notions of cultural translation and what relevance this had for the selection and reception of artworks in the exhibition.

4.4.1 The curator as translator

A decentred, but expanded, global art network especially impacts the function and scope of curating as organising and translational principal. Globalisation has, according to critic and curator Alex Farquharson (2003:8), created “a demand for a new breed of curator – forever on the move, internationally networked, interdisciplinary in outlook, in command of several languages” and with the ability to “discern patterns and directions in an increasingly accelerated, expanded cultural field”. The diasporic curator, like Enwezor, has the added advantage of being credited with special insight into transcultural translation, as transnational curating and viewing, for that matter, are both translational. The “meta-curating” (Farquharson 2003:9) of artists working in a multiplicity of localities is shifting and redefining the discourse of contemporary art to be increasingly, what curator Hou Hanru (2003:36) defines as, “(1) multi-transdisciplinary, (2) multi-transcultural, and (3) a merging of art and real life to generate new distinctions between private and public spheres”.

The complexity and scope of the expanded artistic field seem to spill over notions of “exhibition” or “show”, limited by what David (Griffin et al 2003:158) describes as the inherent “three unities of classical theater: unity of time, unity of space, unity of narrative”. Alternative notions such as “constellation of public spheres” (Enwezor 2002b:54) adapted from the political arena, or the “‘construction site’, ‘laboratory’, ‘think-tank’ and ‘distribution channel’, metaphors borrowed from the lexicons of industry, the media, corporate



culture and science” (Farquharson 2003:8), are being put forward by curators from diverse cultural fields.⁴⁰ Curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist (2001:127) proposes the notion of “an energy plant, a *Kraftwerk*”,⁴¹ referencing the idea of “the museum on the move” of Alexander Dorner, director of the Hanover Museum in 1920s. Obrist (2001:128) claims the instability of systems and environments in non-equilibrium physics is a metaphor for contemporary society, and he therefore favours pre-formalist notions of the exhibition as laboratory in order to show “the limits, boundaries and the porosity of places where knowledge and culture are produced” (Obrist 2003:151). Whatever form curators⁴² choose to *interact with*, rather than *show* art, the emphasis seems to be on multiplicity, connectivity, flexibility and unpredictability.

It is in the curatorial approaches to complexity that possible transgressive strategies to hegemonies emerge. Obrist (2003:150) suggests that by opening-up the “connective possibilities” of exhibition structures the logic of the culture industries can be subverted:

At a moment when collaboration between museums and different exhibitions is more and more driven by economic reasons and the rentability of globally shipped, packaged shows, I see an urgency and necessity to think about non-profit driven, brand-orientated, but art-oriented interconnectedness.

For Hanru (2003:36-37) the creation of alternative art spaces as “alternative contexts” offer the possibility of flexible “new paradigms of art language” that could break with the globalised art network and its hegemony of the “high-modernist tradition of the white cube and post-minimalist, post-conceptual forms”. Enwezor’s localising strategies achieved precisely these goals in instances where multiple connections between singular sites of cultural

⁴⁰ Mosquera (2001b:123) refers to the phenomenon of curators from outside the traditional field of art as a “discourse of inflation”, maintaining the “curatorial boom has attracted people from other fields who frequently use art just as a base to build their ideas about something else”.

⁴¹ Obrist (2001:129) maintains “the traditional exhibition is essentially still modelled on Renaissance curiosity cabinets (*Wunderkammer*)”.

⁴² Given the complexity of contemporary exhibitions, curators increasingly tend to work in teams, leading Hanru (2001:77) to assert: “The time when one curator could dominate a project is past; it is now a time of collaboration, exchange, and sharing.”



production were formed; when alternative art practices, forged in alternative contexts, were represented. The focus on alternative production of localities ultimately undermines hegemonising by “the dominant particular” (Hall 1997b:67). It also establishes a transcultural framework in which the gaps in translation – the very limits of translatability – are underscored, thereby subverting “diversitarianism” (Appiah 2005:222) in the exhibition space.

4.4.2 Interrogation versus fragmentation

Documenta 11’s curatorial contributions to the discourse of globalisation, multiplicity, diversity and transnational curating become more evident if compared to Francesco Bonami’s fiftieth Venice Biennial in 2003, titled *Dreams and conflicts: the dictatorship of the viewer*. For Bonami (2003:XXII) globality manifests overwhelmingly as a threat to “individuality and uniqueness”, with the result that “a new Romantic dimension of inner awareness is rising from the breaking wave of globalization”. Bonami (2003:XXI-XII) coined the ungainly term “glomanticism” for the approach to a “new reality somewhere between Globality and Romanticism, where economics and information finally intersect within the complexity of an individual’s identity and emotions”. Privileging inward, individual experience, Bonami (2003:XXII) proposed a “dictatorship of the viewer” and favoured an exhibition structure showing a “polyphony of voices and ideas”. He (Bonami 2003:XXI) claims: “The ‘Grand Show’ of the 21st century must allow multiplicity, diversity and contradiction to exist inside the structure of an exhibition”.

Besides the obvious solipsistic and romantic nostalgia, ‘glomanticism’ also suffered from the “curator’s somewhat disingenuous characterization of this approach as a viable form of political resistance” (Rothkopf 2003:177). Art critic Scott Rothkopf (2003:177) maintains Bonami’s position was “indicative of an art world haunted by its impotent relationship to recent geopolitics yet understandably anxious to frame art as a socially redemptive practice”. By assuming an oppositional stance to globalisation, yet at the same time



refusing to examine his 'Grand Show's' relations to globalising forces, Bonami became complicit to the very forces he professed to oppose. Griffin (2003:246) summarises this quandary as:

[A] strange tension within this Biennale was generated by the attempt to contemplate some position 'outside' culture, suggesting a possibility for revolution that the very notions of globalism underpinning the exhibition would deny.

By contrast, Documenta's platforms positioned art production in the broader cultural praxis and by acting as instruments of "rigorous review" (Griffin et al 2003:159) of globality, possible ways of resisting complex globalising forces were thoroughly examined. This not only grounded the discourse, instead of withdrawing into a romantic subjective realm, but also created a framework to engage with cultural difference for the exhibition in Kassel. For Bonami 'localising' took the shape of a fractured structure of eleven separate exhibitions by eleven curators, who presented "a series of intentionally dissonant presentations, several of which were organized in classic World's Fair style by continent or region" (Rothkopf 2003:176). Diversity here comes close to compartmentalisation and harks back to visual colonialism. Intentionally aiming for heterogeneity could also result in a kind of artificial production of locality in the exhibition context compared to Documenta 11's engagement with the very real production of often abject localities. This led Griffin (2003:246) to conclude "the Biennale event itself was deconstructed in a way that was more surface or motif than living fact, and the play with the exhibition's form here generally did not succeed".

Both Documenta 11 and the fiftieth Venice Biennale aimed for open-ended, anti-totalising approaches to global representation, but whereas the first resonated as strong curatorial direction, Bonami's vision was criticised as pushing multiplicity to the point of incoherence. Enwezor and Bonami's views of global curatorship were virtually diametrically opposed: whereas Enwezor "insist[ed] on the responsibility of the curator to make legible statements by means of the exhibition" (Griffin et al 2003:156), Bonami (2003:XXII) aimed not to "contain the complexity of the world and weave visions into a curatorial



interface”. By leaving the production of the exhibition’s meanings to the ‘dictatorship of the viewer’, Venice became victim to sprawling fragmentation of work by 400 artists. In comparison Documenta 11’s rhizomised exhibition spaces could be regarded as “an instructive counterexample, insofar as that exhibition suggested a cogent, if somewhat overstated, curatorial viewpoint, which rather than stifling the artworks generated meaningful connections among them” (Rothkopf 2003:177). Bonami’s refusal to supply a translational framework could be blamed on what Rothkopf (2003:177) describes as “the mistaken assumption that a focused curatorial argument is [...] necessarily ‘hegemonic’”.

Rather than performing the fragmentary dynamics indicative of cultural globalisation, the curators of Documenta 11 approached the global exhibition by interrogating globality with a view to *what is lost* in translation; between a multitude of cultures being deterritorialised and reterritorialised across local and global frames, as well as in artworks dealing with the conflicting predicaments and promises of these processes.

4.4.3 Lost in transnationalisation

The artworks included in Documenta 11_Platform 5 were not of the globalisation-as-period-style variety, of what Lee (2003:166) terms “the aesthetics of passports and Coca-Cola”. In a sense Documenta 11 was about that which is fought for and got lost in transnationalisation.

If the works deal with passages and journeys, they present the human view of globalisation processes. Allan Sekula’s *Fish Story* (1990-1995) is an epic, transoceanic undertaking of photographing harbours, port cities and the shipping trade integrated with the history of representation of maritime themes. By personalising the mapping of global flows on the high seas, abstract processes can be told and viewed as personal stories. These visual narratives, meta-commenting on traditional depictions of panorama and detail, are no mere photojournalism, but emphasise the all too human view through



the disjuncture of still photography and the technological sophistication of a global transport network. In contrast, the installation of *Multiplicity, Solid sea* (2002), expressed the ambivalent sense of a globalised sea as petrified rather than fluid, solidifying inequalities and identities. The multidisciplinary research project by a Milanese agency of architects, geographers, artists, urban planners, photographers, filmmakers and sociologists drew an atlas of the Mediterranean as not a fluid space of cultural exchange, but as solid territory of commodified trajectories and identities. The group claims on its website (2002:[sp]) that interactions between regulated bands of water at different depths happen as “short circuits” with reference to the sinking of a clandestine fishing boat with 283 illegal immigrants on board in December 1996 near Sicily – an event vehemently denied by authorities for years. Ghostly smuggling routes intersected with the fishing trade only when remains and affects of the dead appeared in fishing nets. The work emphasised that no attempt had yet been made to retrieve the remains of those not ‘on the map’. The theme of skewed mapping of globalised territories was further elaborated on in the film of Pavel Braila, *Shoes for Europe* (2002), documenting the three hour-long process of changing train wheels from Russian to standard gauge at the Moldavian-Romanian border and in Ulrike Ottinger’s film *South east passage: a journey to new blank spots on the map of Europe* (2002).

The collaborative project of Alejandra Riera with Doina Petrescu, *Fîlmele kû nikare bê avakirin. Un film non réalisable*, 2002, was an innovative effort to engage with globalised art making across borders. Petrescu (born in Romania) and Riera (born in Buenos Aires) worked with the problems encountered by Kurds in Turkey and the situation of Leyla Zana – the first Kurdish woman to be elected to the Turkish Parliament but then incarcerated for using Kurdish and wearing Kurdish colours.⁴³ Their installation of “a non-realizable film” included photographs, film and text to investigate the decontextualisation and recontextualisation of information. Complex issues of translatability as well as the limitations and ethical obligations of transcultural representation were thus addressed.

⁴³ Zana was released after a decade in prison on 9 June 2004 (Kurdish political prisoner... 2004:[sp]).



Localised effects of global ecological issues conspicuously revealed the disparities of globalisation. American Michael Ashkin showed 133 gelatin silver prints in *Untitled (New Jersey Meadowlands Project)* (2001/02) of deserted industrial wasteland – the wasted spaces of overgrown parking lots, fenced-off yards of derelict factories, obsolete construction sites, abandoned railroad tracks. The miniaturised grid of images, each 10 x 25,5 cm, conversely monumentalise the scale of degradation, the scope of economic and social entropy. Whereas Ashkin's work could be considered a dystopian narrative, the collaborative project of landscape architect Julie Bargmann and artist Stacy Levy, *Testing the waters* (launched in 1995), involved the environmental remediation of an area contaminated by a coal mine in Vitondale, Pennsylvania, into a park. The systems employed to treat acid drainage were approached in the gallery space as six boxes – containing coal and contaminated earth and water – fronted with glass panels on which maps and information were sandblasted. This documentary tracing was continued at the actual site, called Litmus Gardens, where the clean-up is treated not as erasure but as revealing the history and processes of regeneration. The post-industrial site was thus converted into a living monument.

For Ravi Agarwal, living in New Delhi, environmental justice for the South is the most pressing issue. His photojournalistic images index living conditions in sites marginalised by global capital, especially the low-wage workers in the state of Gujarat – agricultural, quarry and sex workers; migratory people on a lorry, on the bus, taking the train; community life of slum dwellers in front of a skyscraper, a girl wearing tribal make-up, a union focussing on dalit or 'untouchable' workers. Agarwal is also the founder of Toxics Link, a community-based exchange on chemical safety and waste management. Art and activism thus combines to expose the incongruous rules for waste management in a globalised economy that geographically separate sites for production, consumption and disposal of goods. While the overdeveloped North becomes cleaner the South gets dirtier, as not only unregulated production site, but the recipient of waste trade.



Figure 20: Cildo Meireles, *Disappearing / Disappeared element*, 2002.
Ice trolleys and water popsicles.
Friedrichsplatz, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues* 2002:192).

Whilst the discussed works seriously engaged with the effects of globalisation and meaningful connections between localities were made by their inclusion in the framework of Documenta 11, it has to be pointed out that the curators also succumbed to trendiness in their selection process. The work of Brazilian Cildo Meireles, for example, added more to the visual impact of the scene outside the exhibition venues than to the engagement with global discourses inside. His *Disappearing element / Disappeared element* (2002) (Figure 20) consisted of packaged popsicles of pure water, sold for 1 Euro each by vendors pushing ten carts around Documenta-venues. Ostensibly this work referenced scarcity and abuse of limited resources by bringing the debate to the Documenta audience, who by purchasing a popsicle/artwork



became complicit to the supply-and-demand chain of the market for both clean water and art. The self-referential cleverness of this over-exposed work left the visitor high and dry, as it were, without transcending the actual exploitation of a resource. Conceptually, the difference ‘disappeared’ between volunteers clad in Documenta’s T-shirts selling art-popsicles and vendors peddling bottled water.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The discussed artworks included in Documenta 11 seem to share a certain critical positioning, not only to globality but especially to the art world’s globalised practices. As such, they meet Enwezor’s (Griffin et al 2003:154) requirement of constructing a globalised exhibition around “serious interaction with artists and practices that are not similarly inscribed [by the global paradigm]” and have the potential to transcend superficial expressions of fashionable globality. In general, a case can be made that the selection of works dealing with displacement and transigrations, cities of the South, reterritorialising of identities, construction of a digital commons, passages and journeys, globalised art making and ecological issues indeed constituted a critical engagement by Documenta 11 with globalisation processes. If an exhibition is to add to the discourse of globality rather than to the increasing noise level of global art festivals, such a committed questioning of the conditions of globalisation and its own place in globalising processes is not an indulgence but an imperative.

Documenta 11’s localising-project not only interrogated specific conditions of globality and resistance strategies to cultural homogenisation, but in particular created a framework to engage with difference transculturally. The anti-totalising strategies of Documenta 11’s curatorial project notably circumvented the trap of, what art historian Johanne Lamoureux (2005:72) terms, the exhibition’s inherent “fetishist rhetoric of display and its effects”. Lamoureux (2005:72) attributes this to, firstly, the “anthropology of proximity” that subverted exaggerated notions of distance and the possibility of exotising otherness; secondly, by valuing “the wandering of hybrid producers” that



undermined over-evaluation of individual creativity and accentuated the cultural complexities of globalised, postcolonial trajectories. While this latter gain has to be measured against the exclusionary effect of the selection of 'wandering producers', it cannot be denied that Enwezor's Documenta destabilised any essentialist reception of artwork produced in non-Western localities.

The inclusivity achieved by Documenta 11, the weight assigned to different sites of production and sensitivity created to the conditions for the production of a multiplicity of localities, presented an innovatively different take on the globalised large-scale exhibition. Documenta 11 also succeeded in meaningful ways to re-focus the event away from an expanded market to a critical engagement with globalisation. The contention of this study is that the major achievement of provincialising strategies was to circumvent the dynamic of mega-exhibitions that supply a showcase of difference – what could be considered “quantitative internationalisation” (Mosquera 2001:27) or a “calculus of difference” (Maharaj 2003:80) which would limit transculturality to a global form of multiculturalist management of diversification.

By constructing an ethical space to encounter difference within a Northern institution Documenta 11's curators provided marginalised voices, first and foremost, with a sensitised audience. Enwezor (2001:243) contends the postcolonial question of “Who should speak?” is beside the point, as the subaltern is and has been speaking. It is rather now a question of “Can the subaltern be heard?” and “To whom does s/he speak? Spivak (Spivak & Gunew, 1990:59) suggests this question would be more productively framed as “Who will listen”. Being listened to seriously, without being categorised and limited to a specific speaking position, is crucial, she claims. The extended postcolonial discourse around this Documenta in the popular press and on radio and TV in Northern Europe, in particular, contributed to sensitise Documenta-visitors to the timbre of different voices. It could be argued that through the strategy of creating proximity – of reterritorialising barriers and flows – Documenta 11 created a context for the reception of art from the non-West and West alike.



CHAPTER 5

MIN(D)ING THE GAP

...the story of Friday... is properly not a story but a puzzle or hole in the narrative (I picture it as a buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button).
From Foe, J.M. Coetzee (1986:121).

Documenta 11's postcolonial project was conceptualised around 'gaps' in two significant ways: a deliberate situating of transnational cultural practice in a dislocated space,¹ as well as coming to grips with the lacuna around which Eurocentric cultural narratives have been constructed concerning the non-West. The use of the word *gap* here refers to disparity, inequality, omission, deficiency, absence and lack, but also to break, breach, opening and bridge. In the process of activating the gap as a constructive space, Documenta 11 could be considered as mining the potential of a liminal transcultural space, while being mindful of the boundaries set by cultural framing devices.

This chapter firstly engages with the ways in which the curatorial project and exhibited artworks could be perceived as a mining exercise by embracing the gap as an ambiguous space in terms of what Homi Bhabha (1994:36-39) formulated as a *Third Space*.² If the meaning of culture and the articulation of difference are being made dependant on such an "'inter' [... or] *in-between* space" (Bhabha 1994:38, emphasis in original), the gap similarly becomes the site of transitions and dislocations of meaning. Bhabha (1994:37) states:

It is in that Third Space [...] which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.

¹ For a discussion of cultural dislocation perceived of as creolised, hybrid localisation see the section *Creolising the exhibition* in Chapter 2.

² Bhabha (1994:36) argues that if the formation or location of culture is considered as transnational and translational, the production of meaning necessitates the precondition of a Third Space of enunciation, "which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious".



By locating Documenta 11 in such an in-between space, the project of “reflection on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures that are part of its contradictory heritage of grand conclusions” (Enwezor 2002b:43) held possibilities of not only reassessing, but also reworking narratives. In a transcultural exhibition in-between space could produce mutable histories, geographies, identities and, above all, sites for resistance. To what extent the curatorial project were successful in these aims, will be the particular focus of this chapter.

Advancing from homelessness as destination and nomadic subjectivity as transgressive strategy – what could be considered Documenta 11’s commitment to ‘mind the gap’ – is secondly discussed in terms of the exhibition’s extensive engagement with the archive. From a curatorial point of view this involved a reconsideration of Documenta’s own modernist heritage and approaches to art from the South. In this regard Documenta 11’s unframing of, what could be regarded, a *Northern gaze* and showing up framing devices are evaluated. Specific attention is paid to if, and how, frames were shifted and gaps negotiated in the daunting task of transcultural translation within the expanded visual-sonic discursive framework of Documenta 11. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the advantages and limitations of littoral curating, or curating in the gap, as it were.

5.1 IN-BETWEEN: HOMELESSNESS AS DESTINATION

The notion of in-between relies on a double negative – of neither the one, nor the other – which in terms of cultural production denotes hybridity or creolisation. In globalised cultural practice the space of in-between opens out to multiple criss-crossing trajectories constituting transnational inter- and transculturation. The Third Space thus contains overlapping localisations of what Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994:19) describes as “an elsewhere-within-here/-there”. Locating culture formation in such a space means not only to recognise the impurity of cultures, but to give up any ideas about the fixity of



identity.³ This position impacts also all possible fetishisations of past and future identities, as Bhabha (1994:219, emphasis in original) points out:

Such assignments of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* – find their agency in a form of the ‘future’ where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory”. It is [...] an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present.

Coming to terms with this interstitial space involves embracing the *unheimliche*⁴ condition of living in the gap, with the “estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (Bhabha 1994:9).

The space of in-between is, in a sense, a sprawling zone of indeterminate locations: the space of ambivalence, of passage, of refuge⁵ and camouflage, of border conflicts and of insurgency. It is as outsider-space under the sign of rebellion, transgression, insubordination and insurrection that the in-between creates the space for indeterminate agency. In facilitating breaches and breaks the in-between functions as space of emergence. For the postcolonial project of Documenta 11 this aspect of dislocated cultural practice offered the crucial promise of intervention and change. Artworks situated in such a homeless state can act as gateways to what Bhabha (1994:7) describes as “revisionary time”, stating:

Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.

³ Bhabha (1994:219, emphasis in original) argues: “What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, ‘opening out’, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race”.

⁴ The meaning of the German word here refers to what Bhabha (1994:9) translates with the neologism “unhomely”, rather than Freud’s interpretation of *unheimlich* as “uncanny” in *Das Unheimliche* (1919). The sense of unfamiliar, strange, uneasy, forbidding, unknown is activated in contrast to the meaning of *heimlich* as belonging to the house: familiar, friendly, comfortable, intimate and habitual.

⁵ See Bauer’s (2002:105) designation of Documenta 11 as space of refuge for experimental approaches and cultural ‘guestworkers’ outside the field of art in Chapter 2.



Put another way, in the gallery the postcolonial present depends on artworks and curatorial practices targeting the gap. In this regard Documenta 11 raised the question as to what extent its exhibition spaces functioned as Third Space.

5.1.1 Mapping passages forking endlessly⁶

If the exhibition is approached as an interstitial space of cultural production, it could be considered as mapping the gap, or as an attempt to chart Third Space. As such, the exhibition could smooth the path of some trajectories and interrupt the progress of others in order to produce a mutable geography in which destinations remain open and roads endless. The object would be to breach borders, conceived of as fixedly delineating partitions, and to explore the unknown and unknowable terrain inhabited by difference.

Enwezor (2002b:42) located Documenta 11 in precisely such an indeterminate space-time continuum, stating

[...] this exhibition could be read as an accumulation of passages, a collection of moments, temporal lapses that emerge into spaces that reanimate for a viewing public the endless concatenation of worlds, perspectives, models, counter-models, and thinking that constitute the artistic subject.

The indetermination reaches as wide as it is deep, leading Basualdo (2002a:57) to formulate Documenta 11's position as the "conjunction of an encyclopedia⁷ and a mirror", as the space of "refract[ion] in the multiple systems through which the artists of a generous geography have organized the world and their own worlds". Both these metaphors – the encyclopaedia and mirror – indicated the fragmentation, complexity and uncertainty embraced by this Documenta. As a "collection of encyclopedias, a world of worlds" (Basualdo 2002a:57) or, conversely, as a "book of mirrors" (Basualdo

⁶ This heading refers to Basualdo's (2002a:62) conceptualisation of Documenta 11 as "an exhibition in which the paths fork endlessly".

⁷ Basualdo's (2002a:56) use of "encyclopaedia" refers to that of Jose Louis Borges' text "Thlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", in which the elements of a discovered encyclopaedia – language, geometry, history, metaphysics, etc. – is transposed onto the world into which it is introduced.



2002a:58) Documenta 11 did not shy away from the sheer magnitude and profundity of a borderless conceptual landscape. The commitment to the logic of the labyrinth in its rhizomatic exhibition spaces – as curatorial strategy to create conditions for unexpected crossings – produced a level of success that prompted the reviewer in *The Economist* (Blue days 2002:1) to liken Documenta 11 to Borges’s tale about “a café in Buenos Aires with a door that opens on to a street in Prague, which, if followed to the end, led you to the Piazza Navona”.

An exhibition intent on shifting boundaries favours artworks that are at home with transmigrations, polyvalence and interconnectivity – that which Mirzoeff (2000:7) terms diasporic visual production. Mirzoeff (2000:7) identifies two elements of such images: *intertextuality* (the spectator is expected to interrelate with the work by applying “extratextual information”) and *intervisuality* (different modes of visuality interact and is interdependent on one another). This categorisation overlaps with Canclini’s (1995:225) labelling of dehierarchising artistic strategies as *intergenre* (mixing image, sound and text) and *transtemporal* (drawing together elements from different epochs and contexts). It could be argued that works utilising and combining some of these elements are *de rigueur* on the international biennial circuit, since an interstitial positioning could be considered more accessible to transnational audiences. That this fashionable trend could lead to artwork manufactured to size does, nonetheless, not devalue the potential of powerful works to activate the transformative potential of the gap.

The installation of French artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster for Documenta 11, *Park – a plan for escape* (2002) in the gardens outside the Orangerie, crossed genres to present a work that was part public sculpture garden, part open-air intervention into an urban environment. Gonzalez-Foerster linked diverse geographical and historical references – such as a piece of lava rock from Mexico, a phone booth from Rio de Janeiro, a rose bush from Le Corbusier’s garden in Chandigarh, India, with screenings in a butterfly-shaped projection pavillion – into a transitory space. According to the artist (quoted in Birnbaum:[sp]) the film screened in the butterfly pavilion was inspired by the

novel *Invención de Morel*⁸ and it relocated imagery of parks from films like *La notte* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961), *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961) and *Aiqing Wansui* or “*Vive l'amour*” (Tsai Ming-Liang, 1994). At different times of the day, depending on weather conditions, this work shifted the disparate intervals between location and narrative, recreation and recollection, objects and imagined encounters, while subtly maintaining a tension between the foreign and familiar, escape and containment. The work spoke of more than the transnational cultural space in which it was produced; its connections were not mere whimsical compilations, but set up as a garden of spatial translation.



Figure 21: Stan Douglas, *Suspiria*, 2002.
Video installation, detail.
Fridericianum, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues 2002:39*).

⁸ The novel by Argentinian writer Adolfo Bioy Casares was first published in translation, *The Invention of Morel*, in 1964.



Another artist commissioned by Documenta 11, Canadian Stan Douglas, also attained polyvalence through the interstitial production of his work. In *Suspiria* (2002) (Figure 21) he addressed the phantasmagorical character of late capitalism by relating diverse visual, textual and auditory spectral elements into an uncanny experience of a logic operating between nightmare and fantasy. The work takes as its point of departure two historical features of Kassel – the home of the brothers Grimm and the site of the monumental Herkules Octagon. The labyrinthine-like passages of the monument replace the setting of the forest for the enactment of narrative elements from the Grimm’s collection of fairytales, combined with literary allusions in volume 1 of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx.⁹ The title of the work derives from Dario Argento’s horror movie, *Suspiria* (1977), which technically influenced the visual style of Douglas’ imagery, as well as the soundtrack performed by the Italian prog-rock¹⁰ group, Goblin. Visually Douglas achieved a transmogrified, ghostly reality, by exploiting technical features of the North American NTSC television system¹¹ and superimposing imagery manipulated by computer so as not to repeat any images over the hundred days of the exhibition. Bleeding lines and vibrating colours, sound distortions, as well as fore- and background shifts, all merge together to dissolve the visual-textual-sonic plane into a spectral dimension. The fairy tale of what the artist perceives as the hollow triumph of capitalist democracy could thus be experienced on a mind-bending cognitive-visceral level.

Approaching artistic production like Gonzalez-Foerster and Douglas in an interconnected geo-cultural landscape could, on some level, be regarded as the prerogative of artists in Northern localities with the means to traverse physical and technical borders. Being committed to present an “endless

⁹ Douglas (2002:557) explains this choice by asserting that Marx is a “theoretician of ghosts, of ‘spectrology’”, quoting the phrase from the *Communist Manifesto* – “A specter is haunting Europe...” – and contextualising this phantom of communism not “as a ghost from the past, but rather a vision of the future that anticipated nineteenth-century capitalism collapsing under the weight of its contradictions”.

¹⁰ “Prog” or progressive rock refers to the largely European movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s which attempted to create a sophisticated form of rock that incorporated influences from classical music and jazz fusion, according to the website progarchives.com.

¹¹ According to Douglas (2002:557), NTSC is a “system of ghosts” in which colour is superimposed on a black-and-white system, thereby making it possible that “luminance and chrominance components can be interchanged by simply switching a few cables”.

concatenation of worlds, perspectives, models, *counter-models*” (Enwezor 2002b:42, emphasis added), Documenta 11 also included works that question these seamless, borderless production strategies: one person’s boundlessness is, after all, another’s appropriation.



Figure 22: Georges Adéagbo, “*L’explorateur et les explorateurs devant l’histoire de l’exploration*”...! *Le théâtre du monde*, 2002.
Installation view, Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues 2002:185*).

The installation of the Beninese artist Georges Adéagbo, “*L’explorateur et les explorateurs devant l’histoire de l’exploration*”...! *Le théâtre du monde* (“Explorer and explorers confronting the history of exploration”...! The theater



of the world) (2002) (Figure 22), functioned as reminder that the act of crossing and drawing of borders was bound up with colonialist narratives. As an artist 'discovered' by Western collectors on the hunt for contemporary African works of art, inclusion into the canonical halls of Documenta meant for Adéagbo a coming to terms with crossings in a very different way. For him the notion of passage was tied up with that of expedition and access; the idea of a destination was linked to being classified and even accumulated. As such, Adéagbo resists being labelled an artist defined by Western art structures. The central configuration of a boat and anchor in his installation functioned at the same time as cipher for movement, voyage, discovery *and* for being stranded, trapped, buried. There are no smooth passages in Adéagbo's view of culture: the non-linear, critical connections he draws between his own texts, found texts, objects, posters, paintings and sculptures reveal the convoluted twisting and (re)turning of dirt paths and boulevards superimposed onto one another.¹²

Against the glossy display of globalised art production, Adéagbo's work engages with the power-plays of cartography and the inequalities built into conceptions of a single world stage. Seen from Southern localities, the space of passage has less to do with the crossing than the dismantling of boundaries and structures of differentiation. With the inclusion of works such as Adéagbo's, expressing downside-up views of the world, the open-ended curatorial field of Documenta 11 exposed concealed and obscured boundaries that need to be addressed if cultural production is to function as a space of translation.

5.1.2 Nomadic subjects on the war path

Aiming for culture production in a Third Space involves a repositioning of the formation of identity that has been described as exilic, diasporic, migratory

¹² Adéagbo (2002:546) remarks on how the name of streets and statues reflects the relations between former metropole and periphery: "See in the French cultural center in Cotonou-Benin the Kondo statue monument called Gbêhanzin of the kingdom of Dahomè, which became the kingdom of Benin, and in Paris-France, the Rue de la République du Dahomey, which has become the Rue de la République du Benin...!"



and nomadic. In contrast with the topos of the exile favoured by Said,¹³ feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti (1994:21-24) opts for that of the nomad, claiming the exile stays focussed on loss and reminiscence, while the migrant is suspended in the present by being stuck in an orientation around origins. Also, the idea of diaspora could result in essentialist notions of ethnicity or, what Hall (2003b:189) terms, an insertion of the mythical into historical time.¹⁴ The nomadic, on the contrary, “does not stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity” (Braidotti 1994:22). The nomadic choice is not rootlessness, but a “situated form of heterogeneity” (Braidotti 1994:17) in which connections¹⁵ and transitions are superseding separations and traditions. As “vectors of deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:382) nomads embody the line of flight in nomad thought that value exteriority over interiority, difference over identity.¹⁶ Accordingly, the nomad functions in a state of becoming, rather than that of being.

Thus, by extending the notions of Braidotti and Deleuze and Guattari, nomadic identity can be considered as the site for resistance, if it is actively adopted and embraced. The deterritorialised, transitory nomad is a “transgressive identity” (Braidotti 1994:35) who can destabilise all kinds of conceptual hallowed grounds. It is as inhabitants of smooth space¹⁷ that nomads are potential men of war and pose a threat to any order that they are exterior to. For the nomad *unheimlich* translates as undomesticated, untamed,

¹³ For Said (1994:317) the displacement of exile expresses the conditions of postcolonial, transnational life: “Exile, far from being the fate of nearly forgotten unfortunates who are dispossessed and expatriated, becomes something closer to a norm, an experience of crossing boundaries and charting new territories in defiance of the classic canonic enclosures”.

¹⁴ Hall (2003b:189) argues against the diasporic model of Jewish exile constructed around problematic ideas of *return* and *chosen people* to be used as “legitimizing myth”. He maintains the concept of diaspora should be interpreted from a broad base of different historical realities in order to provide a model for “transnational forms of belongingness, of multiple identifications, and of plural identities” (Hall 2003b:190).

¹⁵ In reference to the work of Deleuze, Braidotti (1994:5) states that “nomadic becoming is neither reproduction nor just imitation, but rather emphatic proximity, intensive interconnectedness”.

¹⁶ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of nomadic thought and nomadic space in connection with rhizomes.

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari (1987:384) propose that open-ended smooth or nomad space acts like a “wedge” between areas of codified striated space. In the “Treatise on nomadology – the war machine” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:351-423) the threat of nomads to power apparatuses is unpacked to the extent that the war machine is predicated upon the existence of nomads.



or wild and creates an environment in which camouflage, disguise, concealment and tricks are the weapons of sabotage and subterfuge. Unhomeliness is thus the preferred location of power for the nomad.

In terms of art production, nomadic subjectivity indicates working or mining the gap as a *double positive*: as bridge or channel, providing a multiplicity of passages, and as an obstruction or wedge, forcing openings and thwarting the smooth running of well-oiled machines. Activating the gap as constructive space is, in fact, critical in order to avoid the disempowering pitfalls that curator-critic Rasheed Araeen (2002:337-341) identifies in theorisations of the postcolonial subject in terms of displacement and loss. Firstly, the universalised notion of exile can be instrumentalised by the dominant culture to define 'postcolonial Others'; secondly, the mere enunciation of difference and hybridity equates to "the power of the mule" (Araeen 2002:338), and thirdly, in-between space can be compartmentalised to separate and keep artists outside the dominant culture.¹⁸ If the in-between loses its transgressive edge, it could indeed become a trap.

Documenta 11 approached nomadic consciousness and its transgressive potential within its de- and reterritorialising agenda (See Chapter 1) as a "critical envelope in which we wanted to place the *entire* paradigmatic operation of Documenta 11" (Enwezor 2002b:52, emphasis added). For Enwezor (quoted in Creischer & Krümmel 2000:75), art functioning in an extended cultural field should be understood as a space of translation (Übersetzung), breach (Bruch) and dissonance. According to Basualdo (2002b:58) Documenta 11 was conceived as a space to problematise notions of fixed identity such as 'national identity' and to show culture production as "labyrinthine, always already displaced, always already transgressive in that it transgresses our most basic ideas of identity". Informed by this critical stance, the role of the artist is articulated in terms of the trickster,¹⁹ a position that

¹⁸ Araeen (2002:341) maintains because of the separate space opened up by Bhabha's theorising non-white artists are required to show their "cultural identity cards" and that the "culturally exotic Other" has been transformed into a "politically exotic Other".

¹⁹ Formulations of the notion of the trickster and art production from a position of transgressive liminality are considered in detail in Chapter 6.



noticeably influenced the selection of artists participating in Documenta 11. In this regard Documenta 11 set out to harness the subversive promise of the dislocated positioning of actual diasporic and conceptually nomadic artists. One could argue, what was conceivably lost in terms of inclusivity by privileging diasporic artists above artists living in the ‘peripheries’, was gained critically by showing artists with intimate knowledge of nomadic identity formation.

5.1.3 Displacement, archiving and counter-memory

Nomadic subjectivity impacts on how artists approach the archive; in fact, a nomadic positioning in art practice might engender a special relationship to archiving, both thematically and methodologically. Especially for diasporic artists, the unhomeliness of a displaced positioning is expressed in, what Enwezor (2001:240) terms, a “constant hunger for incarnation”²⁰ that is fed by continuous engagement with personal and collective archives. On an individual level the construction of unsettled identities relate to the archive in the form of retrieving, reclaiming, salvaging and reinscribing. These endeavours impact on the collective imagination when the labour of remembrance turns into counter-memory.

Braidotti (1994:25) constructs nomadic consciousness as “a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of presenting the self”, which functions as a site for counter-memory. In Foucault’s (1977:160-162) view, counter-memory is constituted by oppositional historic modalities exposing the mask of historical narratives purporting to monumentalise singularities in

²⁰ Enwezor (2001:240) maintains the “diasporic representational repertoire still remains lodged in the Freudian slip, sublated between the sandwich of speech and its attendant untranslatability” and that in order to satisfy the diaspora’s “constant hunger for incarnation [...] it fashions graven images for its lost and active memories, and signs them with the acute reality of the present”.



terms of origins.²¹ Foucault (1977:162) proposes an apposing genealogical approach:

The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.

It is in their insistence on identity as indeterminate, unfixed and mutable that nomadic subjects resist notions of teleological continuities and “enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges” (Braidotti 1994:25). This position links to Bhabha’s (1994:193) designation of subaltern agency as “relocation and reinscription”, but moves through and beyond different localisations to destabilise any notion of final or fixed locatedness.

The archive could be interpreted as personal counter-memorial for Chohreh Feyzdjou (an Iranian Jewish exile who died in Paris in 1996), whose work was exhibited as a mixed-media installation *Boutique products of Chohreh Feyzdjou* (1973-1993) (Figure 23) in Documenta 11. Bearing the label – “Product of Chohreh Feyzdjou” – ashen objects in bottles, boxes, crates and stacked rolls of blackened canvas were put on show to create a space reminiscent of the bazaar in Feyzdjou’s native country, upmarket boutiques in her adopted country and a Situationist art shop. Yet, contrary to the logic of display intent on showing commodities to their best advantage, Feyzdjou’s boutique approaches display as disguise. Her products are blackened, rolled up or buried in crates, thereby veiling and negating the very process of production being advertised. A very different creative force is at work here: destruction is the means of preservation. The transformative moment in Feyzdjou’s production happens when the artist annihilates the preciousness of one-off products like paintings: blackening or obliterating all her products has the effect of saturating her whole archive with meaning.²² The darkened

²¹ Two such modalities that Foucault (1977:161) puts forward is the parodying of constructions of “monumental history” and the “systematic dissociation of identity” in order to show the reality of multiple identities and pockets of emergence.

²² Critic Léili Echghi (1998:132) points out that Feyzdjou’s objects only make sense in the context of the whole archive of her work, which in the interconnections formed transcended space and time into a “temporality where it’s not clear whether the memories evoke

archive thus reveals itself as counter-memorial – to that which can not be recovered, to that which shall remain nameless, to that which stays hidden from plain sight.²³



Figure 23: Chohreh Feyzdjou, *Boutique products of Chohreh Feyzdjou, 1973-1993.*

Installation view, Fridericianum, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues.* 2002:40).

If counter-monuments are conceived in response to the “traditional redemptive and consolatory purposes of the memorial” (Torre 2002:349), counter-memory could be viewed as a reaction against the immobilisation and mummification of memory in the archive. Remembrance and justice are approached as an inherently unfinished process. For artists working with memory and the archive, this aspect is vital in order to avoid that their work

something in the future, whether these objects that had the appearance of remnants, or ruins, were referring to things past or were remnants of things still to be destroyed”.

²³ If the artist’s Jewish heritage is taken into account her archive could specifically be regarded as a counter-memorial to exile and the Holocaust. See Maharaj’s (1994:31) reading of Feyzdjou’s work in terms of the shop as “stereotyped Jewish space”, the stashes of rolled-up canvasses referring to the “sacred space of the Talmudic scroll” and the distressed, sooty surfaces relating to “Auschwitz dust”.



become “symbolic graves” (Torre 2002:348) like public memorials.²⁴ Keeping the past alive in the present was equally important for Documenta 11’s ethical postcolonial project and any prospect of “revisionary time” (Bhabha 1994:7). Nomadic subjectivity creates the conditions for such an interminable involvement with the archive: “The nomadic tense is the imperfect: it is active, continuous; the nomadic trajectory is controlled speed” (Braidotti 1994:25). Given the subversive potential of a nomadic positioning, the work of counter-memory could be formulated as the nomadic practice of prising open gaps in historical narratives.

The photographic archives of both South African photographers David Goldblatt and Santu Mofokeng exhibited in the Fridericianum performed as compelling instances of counter-memory. Goldblatt’s time-slice of the white suburb of Boksburg, *In Boksburg* (1979-80), portray in black and white photographs the black-white divisions inherent in that segregated society. In a suburb “shaped by white dreams and white properties” (Goldblatt quoted in Downey 2003b:203) black subjects are shown as migrant labourers allowed on the edges of the social order. The shared streets particularly attest to the different realities along the ‘colour line’. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, Goldblatt’s imagery “serve as another form of remembering, a counter-memory which bears witness to what is unrecoverable”, claims Enwezor (2004:29) and also confronts the present-day viewer with the question of reviewing how much power relations have changed.

Mofokeng’s photographs of the landscape and structures of Robben Island in 2002 engage directly with narratives and counter-narratives of memorials and archiving. In Kassel photographs of a cattle kraal, courtyard, lime quarry, cricket lawn, shipwreck, prison administration block and houses, built under the Reconstruction and Development program, were exhibited in the same series with the image *Self-portrait at KZ 1. Auschwitz, Poland* (1997). By linking two infamous prison camps with the inclusion of the last image, the

²⁴ In her presentation for Platform 2, architect Susana Torre (2002:347) contends memorials can not meet the demands of victims for truth and justice but serve the function of graves as places “for grieving, publicly recognizing suffering, and acting as a permanent reminder of a crime so that it may not be repeated”.



artist sets up the conceptual framework for his imagery. Mofokeng (2002) explained that it is important, in the light of the perversion of 'horror tourism', to ask: "What is remembered?" and "Who remembers?" Mofokeng does not show the iconic cell of Mandela, but rather a cattle kraal built by prisoners with an Eastern-inspired decoration as a post. He also reminds the viewer that the island has another history in which a bird soars above a beached ship-wreck. While visually expanding the narrative of Robben Island, Mofokeng conceptually adds nuance to the landscape as cipher for memory. The artist's Robben Island, which differs markedly from the version popularised by tourism brochures, introduces as counter-memory issues concerning the living monument and the dynamic between closure and erasure onto the visual plane.

The possibilities of creating meaningful connections between imagery, memory and counter-memory expressed in the archival work of Goldblatt and Mofokeng, could indicate why so many artists who worked in the documentary mode – specifically with media such as photography, film and video – were selected by the curators for Documenta 11. Photography memorialises as it freezes the frame and the medium lends itself to seriality, which enables artists to construct narratives. In the gallery the subversive potential of mass-media is further amplified by being accessible to less specialist viewers. As such, the artist's construction of counter-memory and other interventions in the archive can be communicated to a wider audience. Curatorially, the selection of artists experimenting with archiving and the construction of counter-memory, therefore, aided the construction of Documenta 11 as nomadic space.

5.2 RECONSIDERING THE ARCHIVE

The curatorial aim to "reflect [...] on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures" (Enwezor 2002b:43) of Documenta dovetails with a tendency by contemporary artists to investigate the archive, described by art historian Hal Foster (2004:3-22) as an "archival impulse". Foster (2004:5) postulates that



rather than an engagement with origins, artists are “often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects – in art and in history alike – that might offer points of departure again” and therefore the impulse could be described as “anarchival”. Borrowing from Foster, the endeavours by Documenta 11-artists to readdress gaps in narratives from the archives of the past shaping the present could thus be termed an “anarchival impulse”. How such anarchival approaches could function to show up and dislodge framing practices will be investigated in the following sections.

5.2.1 An anarchival impulse

Upon entering the Museum Fridericianum, the central Documenta space, the viewer was confronted in the semi-circular, prime position with the installation on all three floors of the epic work of Hanne Darboven. The core of her work included in Documenta 11 is *Kontrabaßsolo (Solo for Double Bass), opus 45* (1998-2000) (Figure 24) – an installation of 3 898 “mathematical music” drawings surrounding a pedestal on which a crystal skull was displayed in a glass box.²⁵ This monumental work set the tone in the exhibition for the importance of artists working with the archive, the interface of personal memorials and public record, and the role of the museum as repository for sanctioned archives. At the outset the stage is set for a Documenta focussed on its own historicity and that of the artworks included, displaying that “[t]he encyclopedia of Documenta 11 is, first and foremost, a collection of archives, rich in documents that personalize history, that make the person historical” (Basualdo 2002a:62).

On a concrete level Darboven’s work articulates Jacques Derrida’s (1996:12) notion of *mal d’archive*, archive fever, as the “transaction between th[e] death

²⁵ Documenta 11 offered a kind of retrospective of Darboven, who also presented work in Documentas 5,6 and 7. Her personal archive included *Wunschkonzert (Request program)* (1984), performances of the *Sextet for strings, opus 44* (1998-2000), 3 films – *Film 1-6* (1968), *100 x 42* (1970/71), *The moon has risen* (1983) – and a video, *At castle hill* (1998).

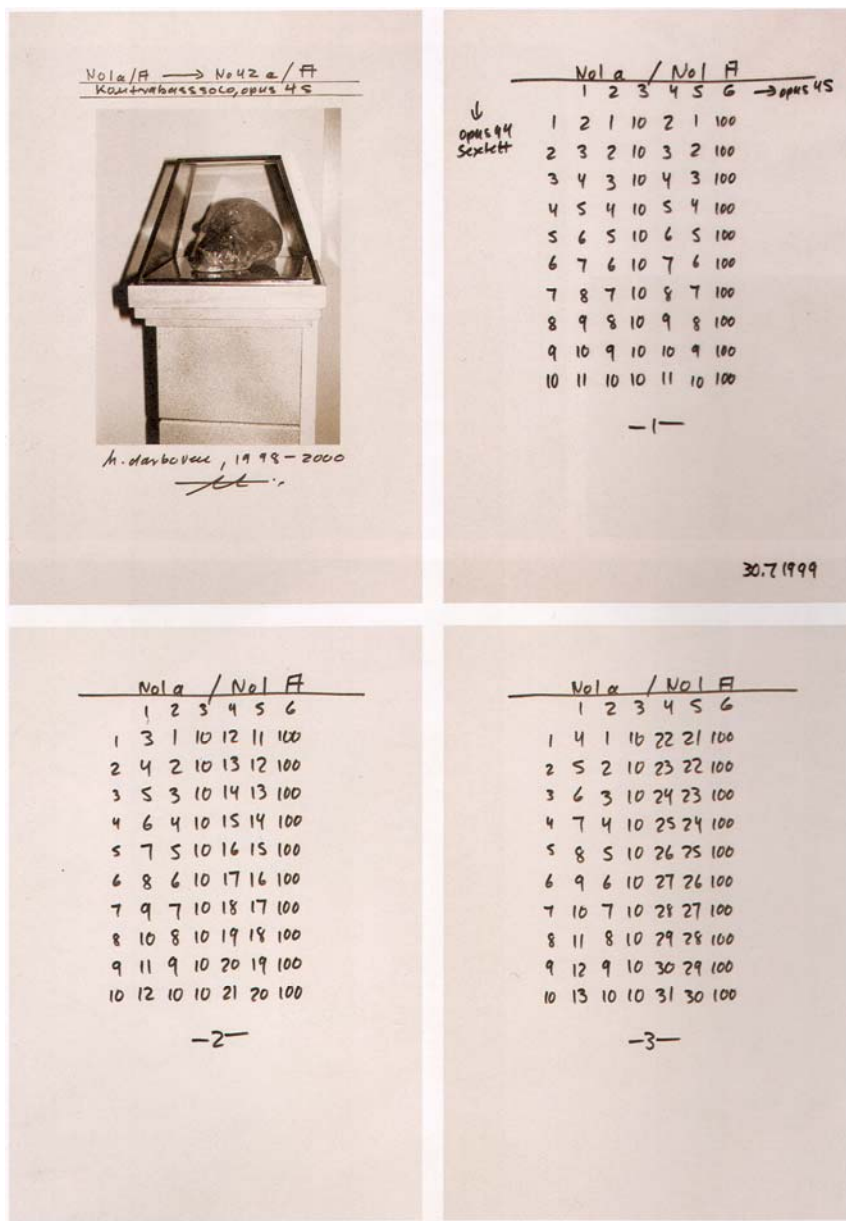


Figure 24: Hanne Darboven, *Kontrabaßsolo* (*Solo for Double Bass*), *opus 45*, 1998-2000, detail.
 First file of series: drawings and photograph.
 Fridericianum, Kassel.
 (*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue 2002:236*).

drive and the pleasure principle”.²⁶ The implication of the work seems to be that the very shadow of destruction is the driving force of the archiving process and that the limits of the human experience similarly limit the archive,

²⁶ Derrida (1996:91) describes the ‘*mal*’ or fever as: “It is to burn with passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there is too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself.”



irrespective of how creative, thorough or extensive it is. This reading is reinforced curatorially by the visual and conceptual linking of On Kawara's *One Million Years (Past and Future)* (1970 – present) on the first floor directly opposite Darboven. Kawara's relentless recording of the passing of time is presented as an installation/performance/broadcast with seated figures in a glass booth reading dates from twenty leather-bound volumes. The fragility of the human endeavour is once more emphasised by a glass box. Darboven's plinth display of a simulated skeleton in gemstone becomes a metaphor for the link between oeuvre and archive – as memorial for deceased artists like Chohreh Feyzjdjou, Dieter Roth and Juan Muñoz displayed at Documenta 11 – but also as monument for people and places archived in artworks.

For Derrida (1996:90) the *mal d'archive* is closely linked to the *trouble de l'archive*, that which mystifies what we see, but also the “troubled and troubling affairs [...], the trouble of secrets, of plots, of clandestineness, of half-private, half-public conjurations, always at the unstable limit between public and private, [...] between oneself and oneself”. It is at the nexus of the troubles to induce *both* archival or anarchival fever in individual artists *and* the postcolonial fervour to re-examine troublesome imperial archives that Documenta 11 was situated.

Enwezor's definition of Documenta 11's spectacular difference in terms of an ethical engagement with its own history necessitates a re-evaluation of the heterotopical functioning of Documenta as museum (See Chapter 2). As a counter-site “in which [...] all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986:24), the museum of Documenta bears witness to the historical archiving imperatives of its Northern localisation. The fact that the home of Documenta, the Fridericianum, was constructed in 1780 as the first public museum in Europe, and that the exhibition was conceived of during the latter half of the twentieth century to be a bastion of Western avant-garde thinking, position



Documenta as prime exemplar²⁷ of exhibition practices in the colonial metropole. Coming to terms with the canonical trajectory of Documenta, therefore means for Enwezor (2002d:1) to “unhinge and to make unstable the grounds around which we have conceptualized Documenta over the years”. It also means, according to Bauer (2002:103), that Documenta 11 was conceived as a “corrective” project in order to “reformulate a history of art that is linear and focused on the West”. This dual agenda, of both unhinging and reformulation, is set to anarchise the archive on various levels: as canon ascribing value to certain art and artists while excluding others, as repository for the construction of historical narratives, and as conceptual framing mechanism altering realities.

5.2.2 Not Northern time and space

Conceptualisations of modernity and Modernism are grounded in colonial notions of time and spatiality. The paradigm of progress, the possibility of ‘advancement’ being predicated upon the existence of ‘advanced’ culture as opposed to ‘archaic’ or ‘primitive’ culture, is founded on a split conception of time. Within a colonial framework the progressive paradigm is interpreted not only temporally, but is especially applied spatially to different cultures existing in the same era yet somehow governed by the logic of different time frames. A diachronic notion of time – linear, progressive development through historical time – is reserved for European culture; allochronic time – a time frame ‘outside’, often conceived of as cyclical and static – is used for non-European cultures.²⁸ Positing progression further as the culmination, goal or rationale of history,²⁹ ensures European time, European culture and European history the

²⁷ The word *documenta* is used here in its original Latin meaning of *example*, as both *instruction* and *warning*, according to the Latin dictionary (Harpers’ 1907:605). See Chapter 1 for a detailed explanation of the term.

²⁸ The distinction between diachronic and allochronic time is borrowed from art historian Lize van Robbroeck (2003:174). She develops these notions in the context of Black cultural production in South Africa, showing how evolutionary narratives relate to progressive categories of ‘traditional’, ‘transitional’ and ‘township’ art.

²⁹ This kind of Eurocentrism is based on Enlightenment discourses around Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s philosophy that history is a rational process, expressing the unfolding or



superior ideological position within what Jean-François Lyotard (1984:38) called the great legitimising narratives of speculation and emancipation.

The theatre of history is thus construed as the exclusive domain of the West with the Rest consigned to prehistory, irrelevant to, or forever trying to catch up with, what is considered the real or universal history. In Hegel's view, Sub-Saharan Africa could be dismissed from this universal history and could not even claim a particular African history.³⁰ Whereas histories of the non-West were constructed around either lack and absence, or, at the most, incompleteness and inadequacy, the history of 'Western civilisation' was sanitised notably in relation to its origins.³¹ The notion of a mythical past combined with that of pure, national identities resulted particularly in Germany in cultural and civic exclusions that have only been amended in German law in the year 2000.³² Ultimately, constructions of Western cultural superiority can only be maintained by positing an inferior non-West as the outside to this binary frame, as Edward Said has revealed in his analysis of Orientalism.³³ This perception of cultural distance is consequently employed as a discursive template to reproduce existent narratives and reaffirm perceived differences.

Documenta's modernist heritage displays the denial of proximity and coevalness to art from the South as a double gap: by the lack of exhibited

realising of the consciousness of freedom. This argument was first developed in *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), translated as *The Phenomenology of Spirit/Mind*.

³⁰ Hegel claims in *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte* (quoted in Buck-Morss 2001:69): "In this largest part of Africa no real history can take place. There are only accidents, or surprises that follow one another. There is no goal, no state there, that one could observe, no subjectivity, but only a series of subjects, who destroy each other". According to Hegel (1991:80), the spirit/mind is further determined by geography: "The true theatre of History is therefore the temperate zone; or, rather its northern half, because the earth there presents itself in a continental form, and has a broad breast, as the Greeks say".

³¹ Political historian Martin Bernal's controversial three volume *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic roots of classical civilization* – Vol. 1 (1989), Vol. 2 (1990), Vol. 3 (2006) - is an exploration of pre-Greek, Egypto-Semitic influences on Western culture. Even if his conclusions are disputed, the purified vision of classical Greece and justification of Aryan ideals of nineteenth-century Romantic thinkers remain glaringly obvious.

³² According to historian Fatima El-Tayeb (2001:72), German citizenship was based on *ius sanguinis*, the "law of blood", until 2000 when elements of *ius soli*, rights of birth and prolonged residence, were incorporated. She shows how identity within this framework was historically "genetically 'transmitted'" (El-Tayeb 2001:74) and citizenship maintained in a "community of blood" (El-Tayeb 2001:77).

³³ Said (1978:7, emphasis in original) claims the construct of the Orient as Other to Europe depends for its orientalising strategy of Western hegemony on a form of "positional superiority" which renders the non-Westerner effectively powerless.



work in its archive (and therefore playing a significant role in constructing the sanitised canon of modern as Western art), as well as by treating contemporary work from non-Western localities as deficient. Obstinate persistence of the modernist preconception that art from the non-West could at most be derivative or immature, is evident in David's (1997:11) view of "non-Western cultural zones where the object of 'contemporary art' is often no more than a very recent phenomenon, even an epiphenomenon".³⁴ In order to show artists from around the globe on equal footing, a postcolonial Documenta 11 had to deal not only with uneven production sites, but also with the sediment of disparate frames applied by the North to theorising art from the South.³⁵

It is the contention of this study that by juxtaposing the work from diverse localities in its exhibition spaces, Documenta 11 generated the conditions for not only a counter-discourse on the meta-level of the art-historical archive, but also for relativising classification systems – of West and non-West, modern and archaic, advanced and primitive – thereby disturbing notions of a single trajectory of modernity. The utopian explorations of urban structures by the Dutch Constant and Congolese Bodys Isek Kingelez were thus both presented for consideration in the Kulturbahnhof. Constant's *New Babylon* (1956-1974) is a futuristic archive of Situationist city models conceived around expectations of mechanisation and human creativity freed up by mobility. Kingelez built his visionary architecture by reassigning real or imagined forms of the metropolis around organic village life in *New Manhattan City 3021* (2001-2002) and *Kimbembele Ihunga – Kimbeville* (1994) (Figure 25). Although Constant and Kingelez applied different rationalities, they arrived at a comparable result. These post-industrial European and postcolonial African

³⁴ David's position is puzzling given her insistence that there is no exteriority to modernity, claiming: "I am getting tired of arguing that modernity is a complex phenomenon, full of folds we should unfold while taking into consideration temporalities which are not superimposable; and tired of quoting Walter Mignolo, 'There are no people in the present living in the past'" (Global tendencies... 2003:155).

³⁵ Visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff (2000:3) argues in art-historical narratives asymmetries persist in arguments about style masking national and personal essentialisms, with underlying racial prejudices barely concealed.

viewpoints of an originator in art history³⁶ and a self-taught artist, respectively, were thus staged as belonging to the same mottled modernity, or conversely, as different moments of corresponding modernities.



Figure 25: Bodys Isek Kingelez, *Kimbembele Ihunga – Kimbeville*, 1994.
Installation: balsa, cardboard, paper, plastic, ink.
Kulturbahnhof, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues* 2002:98).

The aim of Documenta 11 was not to construct a revisionist canon, but to question the actual notion of a canon and linear ordering, claims co-curator Basualdo (2002a:61). Rethinking historical frames in this context does not “produce a cacophonous version of history, but [...] attempt to map it into a more nuanced topological model that would allow us to establish connections that, for the moment, seem to be forbidden” (Basualdo 2002a:61). The construction of such a model is, first of all, an appeal for complexity and is not

³⁶ Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys was a founder of *Experimentele Groep Holland* in 1948 and is considered an ideological force of CoBrA and the Situationist International.



“narrating the history of an undefined series of inversions, nor even less of suspecting a list of inducements or demands” (Basualdo 2002a:57). The main concern for Documenta 11 was, therefore, not the politics of canonisation, but to differentiate the mechanisms of the archive and problematise its applications. A convincing case can be made that in its reconsideration of the archive the postcolonial curatorial project indeed accomplished at least a dislocation of Documenta as Northern space and abrogated notions of a undifferentiated standard of modernity. At best the exhibition spaces of Documenta 11 achieved an unframing and reframing of how the audience viewed not only work produced in the South, but the power relations inherent in the representation of subjects.

5.2.3 Unframing the gaze

By claiming the right to a universal history, the colonial North preserved the privilege of historiography for itself, a position most emphatically criticised by postcolonialism. At issue is “cultural narration” (Enwezor & Oguibe 1999:12), the power of the non-West to write their own histories of symbolic production. As Jacques Derrida (1996:4, N1) reminds us:

There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.

The power to shape the organising principles of the archive is at stake: admittance to an archive that embeds the rhetoric of othering in the ways it stores, organises, excludes, possesses and constructs public narratives would be adding insult to injury. The aim is to transform the one-sided dynamic of what Mosquera termed curator versus curated cultures³⁷ dictating the archive.

³⁷ Mosquera (1994:135) claims the centre-periphery scheme remains unchanged in postmodern “inverted curating” of host countries in the North curating art from other cultures, thereby dictating selection, legitimation and value.



The imperial gaze³⁸ relies on constant surveillance to maintain power over its panoptic structures, as Foucault pointed out. If the panopticon is taken as a generalised model for the mobilising of power relations, as Foucault's (1995:213) suggests, then the panopticon as metaphor for "surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency" (Foucault 1995:257) is closely linked to the archive. In this context the archive – being what Derrida calls an archontic principle³⁹ – institutionalises patriarchal logic by imposing domiciliation and demanding filiation. Any project to unhinge the imperial archival structures of subjugation, taming, interpellation and consumption, therefore, has to contend with the violence at the heart of the archive: "It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place" (Derrida 1996:2, emphasis in original). The archive is ultimately a framing regime that "produces as much as it records" (Derrida 1996:17) and thereby govern the existence and the future of what is recorded. On some level, that which is excluded from the archive never existed, and distortions within the frame warp reality to be what it never was. This is why the archive impact the present for Ugandan born artist Zarina Bhimji, whose family was expelled with other Indians by Idi Amin in 1972. Writing about *Out of blue* (2002), her filmic exploration of a personal coming to terms with this past for Documenta 11, Bhimji (2002:552) claims "history serves the present" since "[w]hat is not recorded does not exist".

Canadian artist Jeff Wall similarly addresses the conceptual links between existence and being seen in his *After Ralph Ellison, Invisible man, The preface* (1999-2002), a monumental Cibachrome transparency in a light box (Figure 26). Wall restaged the basement apartment of the black narrator in

³⁸ Ideas about the imperial gaze are developed from the role of the *grande-autre* in Jacques Lacan's theories about the formation of subjectivity in *The language of the self: the function of language in psychoanalysis* (published in English in 1968). The dominant Symbolic Other corresponds to the Imperial Other, whose gaze locates or frames the colonised other's identity - by limiting the other's own view of her/his identity and setting up an ideological framework delineating the other's world.

³⁹ Derrida (1996:95, emphasis in original) posits the paternal or patriarchic organising principle of the archive links to the "nomological *arkhē* of the law, of institution, of domiciliation, of filiation". He further states in a Freudian analysis that patriarchic dictates of the archive can only be re-posed as parricide or a "takeover of the archive by the brothers" Derrida (1996:95). In postcolonial context the reassessment of the archive would therefore presuppose the creation of conditions of equality, or conceptual brotherhood as it were.

Ellison's novel as a space dimly illuminated by a mass of 1 369 light bulbs. The dimensions of Wall's work, as an expression for the immense desire to be visible, is at odds with the windowless, single-room abode depicted. The subject's act of defiance and ingenuity – in the novel the lights are run on stolen electricity – provides cold comfort in the quest to assert his presence. However, in the context of the curatorial framework of the Fridericianum, this work emphatically affirmed the visibility of the hidden structures that frame subaltern subjects in hegemonic narratives.



Figure 26: Jeff Wall, *After Ralph Ellison, Invisible man, The preface*, 1999-2002.

Cibachrome in light box, 190 x 265,5 x 26 cm.

Fridericianum, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues* 2002:66).

Wall's work can be regarded as an example of what curator Salah Hassan (2003:[sp]) terms the tactic of "recovery" in postcolonial discourse. Hassan (2003:[sp]) identifies two major strategies in self-representation deployed by postcolonial visual artists: *insertion* – mainly the use of the body in work as a



kind of counter-penetration – and *recovery* – the negation of absence or affirmation of presence. Such attempts at the reinscription of imperial culture could be compared to writers employing a metonymic gap by inserting their own language into colonial language.

In the context of Documenta 11 the power of the archive could be harnessed by showing up the frame, by framing the frame as it were. This was achieved, to some degree, through curatorial strategies, such as the instituting of platforms to de- and reterritorialise narratives and a rhizomatic approach to the exhibition in order to open up the experience of space and time (See Chapter 2). The display of a large amount of artworks excavating the archive and documenting the process of archiving⁴⁰ was, however, for viewers the main portal of entry into an engagement with the archive as “system of discursivity” (Foucault 1972:129).⁴¹ It is on this basic level, of what can be said, that the archive functions as a set of complex relations which define discourse – “its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance” (Foucault 1972:130). It is therefore on this very level that the uncovering of disparities and omissions in discursive practices hold the greatest promise of transforming the functioning of the archive. It could be argued that, if the spaces of Documenta deepened understanding of the archive, shifts could be attributed to the insights of individual artists, rather than professed curatorial views. Nevertheless, the connections established between the collected artworks within the postcolonial curatorial framework amplified perceptions.

The work of Indonesian-born Fiona Tan, *Countenance* 2002 – a four-screen installation of 16mm black and white film-portraits of people living in formerly

⁴⁰ For the purpose of the discussion concerning the archive and Third Space, many artworks dealing with other aspects of archiving fall outside the scope of this chapter, such as Candida Höfer’s photographs of the bronze casts of Auguste Rodin’s *The Burghers of Calais* (2000-2001) in its different locations, Bernd and Hilla Becher’s systematic classification of half-timbered houses in *Fachwerkhäuser des Siegener Industriegebietes* (1959-1978), or David Small’s work about electronic storage and retrieving of information in *The Illuminated Manuscript* (2002).

⁴¹ Foucault (1972:129) asserts the archive functions as “system of discursivity” by setting parameters of possibility and impossibility of the enunciability and functioning of statement-events and -things.



divided Berlin – accessed the archive on multiple levels. Influenced by August Sander's (1876-1964) vast photographic project, "*Menschen des 20 Jahrhunderts*" (*Man of the 20th Century*), in which he grouped Germans into quasi-ethnographic categories,⁴² Tan attempted a re-framing of how sociological stereotypes are perceived. Her 200 life-size portraits of people from different social backgrounds and occupations read in the gallery less like a categorising of types than an investigation of the gaze, of observation and being observed, of even reversing the gaze of the reflected "I". By choosing to film rather than photograph her subjects, Tan creates a window for agency. Tan (2005:1) asserts film bears testimony to the contract between the artist, subject and camera by portraying the artificiality of, and resistance to, the encounter. A gap, or Third Space, is thereby opened up: "When looking at a video portrait, I am looking at something which is constantly escaping me." (Tan 2005:1) Ambiguity becomes part of the frame, undermining the power dynamics of the archive.

Seen together with other works engaging with archiving in the Fridericianum, in particular, the discussed works of Tan, Wall, Bhimji, Feyzdjou, Goldblatt, Mofokeng and Darboven indeed contributed to a reconsideration of the enunciative possibilities of the archive. Whether these artists aligned themselves with the postcolonial project of Documenta 11 or not, in the context of the exhibition their work supported the curatorial aim of dislodging frames by showing up framing devices and making gaps visible. If the affecting of epistemic discontinuities is regarded as a first step to de-hegemonise discourses and change the way cultures are coded and decoded in both the North and South, then Documenta 11 could be considered as a step in the right direction. In a transcultural exhibition any rethinking of the archive requires the dismantling of monocultural trappings⁴³ by superimposing

⁴² According to Tan (2002:587), Sander's taxonomy of archetypes included the farmer, the skilled tradesman, the woman, classes and professions, the artists, the city and the "last people" (idiots, the sick and insane), whereas Tan labelled her portraits according to social groups (single, couple, mother with child, father with child, flatmates, old-person's home resident, etcetera) and employed people (farmer, craftsman, technician, civil servant, employee, self-employed).

⁴³ Deconstructing Eurocentrism can invert Orientalism if 'the idea of Europe' is not treated with the same suspicions as 'the idea of Africa', dismantled by V.Y. Mudimbe (1988). Mosquera (2002:269) argues in this regard: "The de-Eurocentralization in art is not about



multifocal shifting frames. The success of such an approach, however, depends on the mapping of relations; on the translation between and across frames. To what extent Documenta 11 facilitated transcultural translation will be the focus of the next section.

5.3 TRANSCULTURAL TRANSLATION

At the centre of the postcolonial archive aimed at construction and deconstruction around the gap is the issue of cultural translation: how signification systems can be translated if the universality of a single, dominant code is eschewed. Coming to terms with difference means embracing the uncertain territory of the gap, since difference “is that which denies a common index of measure in which the one entity triumphs and the other entity fails” (Rogoff 2001:88).⁴⁴ Difference inhabits the liminal⁴⁵ spaces between frames and is most palpable as what Maharaj (Hall & Maharaj 2001:46) calls “elusive liquidity” or “that which resists translation”.

Meaning, is like the archive, constituted by its outside, of what is left over or left out, the untranslatable remainder.⁴⁶ Hall (Hall & Maharaj 2001:40) claims meaning and subjectivity are constructed across a lack: “To say or establish anything – any position, any presence, any meaning – one has to attend to what is outside the field of meaning and what cannot be expressed – its

returning to purity, but about adopting postcolonial ‘impurity’ through which we might free ourselves and express our own thought.”

⁴⁴ Visual cultural theorist Irit Rogoff (2001:87) posits the unframing work of difference as central to the development of different strategies to read culture: “Destabilizing arguments, by displacing their organizing perspective or ‘unframing’ them, in deconstructive parlance, from their comfortable abode, is one of the main workings of difference.”

⁴⁵ Bhabha (1994:179) claims: “The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces for the historical representation of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism.”

⁴⁶ Maharaj (2002b:72) describes translation as a “smudgy double-move”, in which meaning has firstly to be constructed in the source language and then reconstructed a second time, ending up with a residue, a “lack of fit, a gaping non-accordance”. Untranslatability becomes even more evident where the deconstruction of meaning is intentional – Maharaj (Hall & Maharaj 2001:39) sites “counter-signification” and “anti-meaning” in the work of James Joyce and Marcel Duchamp in this regard.



constitutive outside.”⁴⁷ The gap acts in this respect as an enabling space, opening up alternative modes of understanding beyond the linguistic model of translation to extend the notion of translation to activate, what Maharaj (Hall & Maharaj 2001:39) calls, “both the visual and the sonic”. This is where the work of artists can provide valuable insights and the gallery can act as Third Space to facilitate understanding. Obversely, the measure of work dealing with difference also rests in the way it engenders incomprehension. In this regard Bauer (2002:105) considers Documenta 11 as a “strategic affirmation of discrepancy”, stating:

Documenta 11 tries to open up [...] a ‘third space’ in which the inevitable discrepancies and irritations that come with it are not only retained as a structure but moreover are inserted as catalysts for new forms of understanding.

If the ‘affirmation of discrepancy’ is indeed taken as measure of the value of artworks selected by the curators, two works dealing with signification systems particularly come to mind, that of Ecke Bonk and Frédéric Bruly Bouabré. Bonk’s *Book of words = random reading* (2002) examines the function and dysfunction of signification by re-archiving the most comprehensive dictionary of the German language. The project includes framed versions of all 428 instalments of the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm since 1852, including revised editions. Starting with “A”, the 299 268 lemmata of the dictionary passed during the hundred days of Documenta through a projection frame as an endless scroll. Three word-sections at a time were also randomly selected from a digitalised version of the dictionary and projected only once during the exhibition. The proliferation of installation strategies in Bonk’s work underscores the essential open-ended and incomplete nature of signification, defined by the limitations of signs as a representative model of reality. The majority of the German audience could follow the trail of obscure and obsolete words, of murky shifts in meaning into Maharaj’s (Hall & Maharaj 2001:40) “sonic pools – the penumbra of the

⁴⁷ In Hall’s (Hall & Maharaj 2001:40) view difference is essential to the construction of identity: “We understand ‘sameness’ only through difference, presence through what it ‘lacks’. [...] The ‘truth’ of the Lacanian insight is that the subject is constructed across a ‘lack’, the self by its ‘others’.”

untranslatable that shadow and smudge language". The untranslatable could thus be glimpsed within a single frame, within a single culture.



Figure 27: Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, *Musée du visage Africain (scarifications)*, 1990-1991.

Drawings, coloured pencil, ballpoint pen on cardboard, 9.5 x 15cm.
 Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue 2002:210*).

Compared to the crystal rationality of Bonk, Darboven and Kawara, Bouabré from Côte d'Ivoire interprets patterns in clouds, orange peel, cola nuts, scarifications (Figure 27) and gold weights as symbols of meaning alien to a Western audience. Bouabré's interpretative mix of diverse signification systems and invented signs aim at making sense of the postcolonial



experience. Being from a tribe that does not have a written archive of their own, Bouabré has developed his *Alphabet Bété* (1990-1991) – 448 narrative drawings in coloured pencil and ballpoint on cardboard – for Bété syllables. Bouabré (quoted in Müller 2003:[sp]) explains his motivation:

The alphabet is the indisputable pillar of human language. It is the hearth where the memory of man lives. It is a very effective recipe against forgetfulness, the feared factor of ignorance [...] Africa has been looked down on as being the 'continent without an alphabet'. The present-day instrument used by black Africa as its tool is European and in reality the 'spearhead' of the coloniser.

On a certain level this work could, therefore, be regarded as a critique of any transcultural weight being attached to Western signification systems. It could be argued that the inclusion in the exhibition of works dealing with gaps in signification within and across cultures, as well as the idiosyncratic construction of meaning, could be considered as a curatorial attempt to amplify the experience of the gap: of that which is out of range; of the noise around the harmonious notes. By developing a visual dictionary that includes riddles, ambiguous meanings, elements of divination, interpretations and instructions of man's place in nature and the cosmos, Bouabré's work confounds the reductionism of colonial archiving. In a Northern exhibition the work reads as puzzling and mysterious, tempting the uninitiated eye with the seemingly familiar on the edge of knowing. The experience of the limits of translation thus transforms into the mind-warping sounding and visualising of difference.

Approaching difference and translatability within an expanded visual-sonic discursive framework could open up possibilities of transforming the configuration of the archive. Shifting the focus to the gap between the lines could similarly result in dislocating margins and rendering boundaries porous. The grip of certainty, control, manipulation, restriction and domination might thereby be loosened to reveal room for doubt, ambiguity, incongruity and arbitrariness within the archive. The violent order of the archive would, however, not relinquish its powers readily. In order to overcome resistance in the power-dynamics of archival systems, the gap has to function less as



facilitating space and more as disruptive wedge. Without doubt, the curatorial aim of Documenta 11 to create a space for the disruptive promise of nomadic subjectivity identified the *potential* of a transnational exhibition located in the in-between and selected artists did indeed channel this promise. Whether the Documenta-project managed to disrupt power relations, however, is less certain. In its rethinking of historical procedures and its own archive this Documenta did not escape the problems inherent to littoral curatorial practice.

5.4 CURATING AS LITTORAL PRACTICE

The case could be made that its engagement with the gap established Documenta 11 as prime example of littoral curatorial practice. The notion of *littoral* art practices, as developed by art theorist Grant Kester (1999/2002:1), expands the literal meaning of littoral – as the area between high and low water marks on the shore or banks of a river, lake or estuary – to pertain to ever fluctuating in-between space. While offering particular advantages to the curator, such an indeterminate location is, nevertheless, not without limitations.

As a transcultural orientation the littoral certainly opens up a space for multifocal and open-ended dialogue, counter-discourses, transgressive practices and ethical engagement. Kester (1999/2000:3-4) delineates littoral art practice in terms of interdisciplinarity, multiple registers of meaning and dialogical indeterminance. The aim of this kind of practice is “the open-ended process of *dialogical engagement*, which produces new and unanticipated forms of collaborative knowledge” (Kester 1999/2000:4, emphasis added).⁴⁸ This orientation resonates with Enwezor’s description of Documenta 11’s spaces as “forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures that are part of its contradictory heritage of grand conclusions” (Enwezor 2002b:43) and the

⁴⁸ For artists, in particular, littoral practice is “rooted in a discursively-mediated encounter in which the subject positions of artist and viewer or artist and subject are openly thematized and can potentially be challenged and transformed” (Kester 1999/2000:3).



exhibition as “less a receptacle of commodity-objects than a container of a plurality of voices, a material reflection on a series of disparate and interconnected actions and processes” (Enwezor 2002b:55). If shifting, rethinking, interfacing, in short, the redrawing and crossing of boundaries are the curatorial goals, then a littoral location indeed presents distinct possibilities.

To what extent the transgressive potential of the in-between is actualised and power translations transformed is, on the other hand, another matter altogether. Kester (1999/2000:5) points out that a form of “discursive determinism” underlies littoral practice: “the reductive belief that ‘discourse’ or dialogue in and of itself has the power to radically transform social relations”. In this respect Documenta 11’s postcolonial expansion of participation in its public spheres might not be enough to counter-balance the effects of existing power relations on its own discourses, nor does it ensure more than a compensatory outcome. The central issue of littoral curating is to uncover ways in which its practice can transcend the merely symbolic. Enwezor (quoted in Becker 2002b:26) distinguishes in this regard between “curating within the canon” and “curating within culture”, where the first option affords the curator only the chance of “nibbling or making minor changes”, whereas the latter “begin to make room for new forms of knowledge, new possibilities of articulating different types of intelligence that are unruly”. Taken at his word, Documenta 11 could be considered as being conceived to “curate within culture” as a constellation of public spheres. That is truly a monumental task for a single exhibition and one that, from the outset, has limited chances of success.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In its interstitial positioning the location of Documenta 11 presented itself as a space of multimodal shifting frames, facilitating cultural translation in a field of globalised production. As such, it could be considered as an exemplar for transcultural curating that transcends models which fixedly categorise and



distort the representation of cultural Others; that, to borrow from Mosquera (2001:25), says “[g]ood-bye identity, welcome difference”. It could also be regarded as an attempt to breach the North-South divide by engaging with continuities and discontinuities across and on both sides, thereby narrowing gaps in reception of art from diverse production sites. As a postcolonial space of reconceptualisation and redress, Enwezor’s Documenta 11 was, first and foremost, intent on showing up asymmetrical power dynamics affecting the production and reception of artworks. Transcending the vertical North-South dynamic with its built-in structures of subalterneity is, nonetheless, severely limited if the axis is not shifted to include South-South interactions and collaboration with “relative peripheries” (Lind 1998:234),⁴⁹ an endeavour that in principle extends beyond the scope of any Documenta.

By min(d)ing the gap Documenta 11 engaged with the possibilities of shifting hegemonic discourses and coding-structures impacting transcultural exchanges. Too often transcultural engagements mask a form of imperialist symbolic consumption, which treats artworks as artefacts or trophies brought “home for categorization and discussion, helping to carbonate the discourse” (Murphy 1998:188).⁵⁰ A masquerade of inclusivity could, in fact, reinforce hegemonic structures and hierarchies, claims feminist art historian Nanette Salomon (1998:351): “When the rules of the game are neither challenged nor changed, the very structure of [...] binary oppositions insists that one side be master; the other side pupil; one major, the other minor”.⁵¹ By setting out to command whatever power the in-between offers, Documenta 11 aimed to dislodge certainties and possibly change unidirectional dynamics. To what extend this project circumvented the risk of facilitating, what Amelia Jones (1998:391) terms, “incorporative disempowerments” plaguing post-feminist

⁴⁹ Swedish curator, Maria Lind (1998:234), ascribes the position of geographic and cultural “relative peripheries” to Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Scotland, Mexico and Canada, claiming these locations “are not considered part of the centre, but they cannot claim the same discrimination and imbalance as there is in the relationship between North and South”.

⁵⁰ Curator Patrick Murphy (1998:188) cites the inclusion of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica in Documenta X as an example of presentation of “the familiar in the exotic” and thus as “an indictment of a continuing narrowness of curatorial vision as well as a mis-representation of two major artists”.

⁵¹ Salomon (1998:351) postulates in this regard that “an uncritical insertion” of female artists into existing hierarchical and validating structures utilise “the device of ‘compare and contrast’” to situate ‘new’ entries into the canon.



discourses – strategies of absorption by dominant discourses that universalise particular messages – remains to be seen.

The curatorial mission to facilitate transcultural engagement and refigure Westernised incarnations of the archive situated Documenta 11 inevitably in the tradition of envisioning the exhibition as historical actor.⁵² If this Documenta's curatorial project adhered to some modernist proclivities, it also undermined it by not espousing an avant-gardist reactionary stance towards historical narratives, but an anarchival one. Rather than a quest to relativise preceding narratives, the transformations Documenta 11 advocated could be construed as belonging to an ethical project, conducted with the awareness of the futility of any attempt at the construction of 'new' grand narratives. In this regard Enwezor (2002b:45, emphasis in original) formulates what he perceives as the only tenable notion of a contemporary avant-garde:

If the avant-gardes of the past (Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, let's say) anticipated a changing order, that of today is to make impermanence, and what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls *aterritoriality*, the principal order of today's uncertainties, instability and insecurity. With this order in place, all notions of autonomy which radical art had formerly claimed for itself are abrogated.

This view of the space of cultural production as impermanent and aterritorial fundamentally challenged not only localisations of previous Documenta's, but also acted as a declaration of Documenta 11's own historicity and limitations – of a positioning in the gap, knowing some spaces can never be filled.

⁵² According to art historian Martha Ward (1996:459), the notion of exhibitions as "historical actors" is a modernist development, in which "representations of the exhibition's transformative power and historical mission [...] were accelerated for the distribution of modern art by an entrepreneurial avant-gardism".



CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS A THRESHOLD AESTHETIC OF THE TRICKSTER

Es[h]u presides here, because we should not forget him. He is the Trickster, the Lord of the Crossroads, sometimes changing the signposts to lead us astray. Rotimi Fani-Kayode (quoted in Mercer 1999:292).

A disorientating space flooded by a grid of blinding lights at different heights; concurrent noise from different directions emerging to be that of a rifle rhythmically being assembled and taken apart, pacing to and fro on a platform overhead, the rolling sound of empty shell casings on the floor – all executed by black-clad performers concealed behind the light sources; in front of the lights confounded viewers and shifting shadows – such is the stuff of the performance-installation by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, commissioned by Documenta 11. The sensory trickery and conceptual double play of Bruguera's *Untitled (Kassel 2002)* (from the series *Engineer of the soul*) in the Binding-Brauerei could be considered as a revealing example of the artist functioning as a trickster. Through the simultaneous interplay of hidden and overwhelming sensory impulses, the work aesthetically induced a momentary synesthesia, a sensory cross-over that stopped viewers in their tracks and prompted them to make sense of the confusion. Bruguera (2002:555) approaches sound as the “measure of a place”, as key to memory and myth about a place. The sounds literally highlighted by this work played on Kassel's history as weapons manufacturing centre before and during World War II, which resulted in the Allied bombardment of the city and its reconstruction as, among its crowning achievements, the city of Documenta. Thus the work performed on one level as counter-memorial to Kassel, but to an audience living in the post 9/11 present of polarisations around the ‘global war on terrorism’ the work's engagement with instruments of violence resonated with much more than a specific place and its past.

While certainly provocative, Bruguera's work does not easily lend itself to humour, an aspect usually associated with the notion of the trickster. Criticism



of the lack of humour in Documenta 11 hinged on the gravity of works such as this and the implied aesthetics of the curatorial view. The emphasis on sober, even sombre, socio-politically engaged artwork was construed as a kind of anti-aesthetic stance,¹ as if wit, frivolity, messiness and sensuality are essential to a “commitment to aesthetic space” (Steiner 2002:108). Underlying this line of criticism were notions about the transcendence² of art objects and the viewer, or art critic’s, response to works as primarily based on pleasure-principles. In this regard art theorist Grant Kester (1999/2000:2) points out that littoral³ or engaged art practices are often condemned as “unaesthetic”, based on the immanent location of aesthetic meaning in the art object. Given the littoral positioning of the entire project of Documenta 11, a closer scrutiny of selected artworks are proposed in order to discover whether the curators could be regarded as limiting or expanding the aesthetic field.

Advancing from the premise that subversivity is a goal to aspire to, the contention of this chapter is that, firstly, the curatorial intention of this Documenta was precisely to show up narrowed-down definitions of what could be considered ‘aesthetic’ in contemporary art production.⁴ Secondly, a case will be made that restrictive notions of the trickster and the carnivalesque employed in theorising the role of the artist⁵ undermine the subversive potential claimed for visual arts. The specific focus will be if, and to what

¹ The exhibition is criticised for being “[a]esthetically starved” (Schjeldahl 2002:95), lacking in “unconditional commitment to aesthetic space” (Steiner 2002:108), “the political become nothing if not the antidote to aesthetically convincing, ‘sensual’ art” (Hollert 2002:165) or its curators made out as people “for whom the messiness and frivolity of art are almost moral failures” (Kimmelman 2002:1).

² Dismissing Bruguera’s installation as an example of tedious, politically correct work, critic Ranjit Hoskote (2002:[sp]) criticises many artworks in Documenta 11 for being “illustrative or referential: the didactic assembling of evidentiary material replaces the transformative possibilities of art”.

³ See the discussion on littoral curating in the previous chapter.

⁴ Enwezor (2003a:44) claims in reaction to the criticism that “there was no humor, no sex, no mess, no fun”, that this focus on abjection was strategic: “we wanted to question the function of the exhibition and what making an art exhibition means at this present point in time when we live with an excess of images, but with few relations to connect those images”.

⁵ The statement of critic Kobena Mercer (2002:89) – that “the carnivalesque spirit of irreverence evoked by writer Jean Fischer [in the Documenta 11 catalogue], who explores the trickster figure across different cultures, was in short supply” in the exhibition – will be considered as such a formulation. Mercer (2002:89) seems to overemphasise the role of performance art, which he views as especially “sidelined by Documenta 11’s sobriety”, as the preferred medium of the trickster.



effect, Documenta 11 showcased possible examples of subversive aesthetic strategies.

It could be argued that if the visual arts are to stake any claim to criticality, the notion of aesthetics needs to be reconsidered given what Hall (2001:12 emphasis in original) terms the globally pervasive “aesthetisation of daily life”:

There are aesthetic practices distributed by a massive cultural industry on a global scale and the aesthetic is, indeed, the bearer of some of the most powerful impulses in modern culture as a whole, including what we used to think of as its antithesis – the ‘new economy’ which is, par excellence, a *cultural* economy.

Strategies for resistance to the “economicization of culture” (Miyoshi 1998:259) and agency of artists (and audiences) confronted with the dual homogenising and fragmenting forces of globalisation, have to be taken into account when thinking about contemporary aesthetics. In this regard this study positions itself to engage with Documenta 11’s exploration of what can be called a *threshold aesthetic* as an effort to critically expand, rather than weaken, the functioning of the aesthetic.

In order to investigate this thesis, possible trickster roles of the artist and threshold positions will be dealt with in this chapter. Specifically how Documenta 11 performed as trickster among global mega-exhibitions will be discussed. This involves the evaluation of the significance of an adversarial post-colonial approach compared to other oppositional stances. The chapter concludes with a contextualising in the aesthetic sphere of the threshold notion of *thirdness* as derived from Third Space and Third Cinema.

6.1 TRICKSTER AS PROTOTYPE OF THE ARTIST

Bruguera’s play with concealment, disorientation and ‘noise’ to engage her audience is typical of the shape-shifting form of the trickster. The mischief wrought by such trickster-strategies goes beyond jest and frivolity to affect often far-reaching, even sacred, changes. Insisting on a show of jest, hilarity



and absurdity (whatever the cultural definition of a joke for the viewer/critic may be) in fact limits the role and scope of the trickster-artist, who may or may not employ laughter as a tool to thwart her/his target. Art theorist Jean Fisher (2002:64) cites the example of the Yoruba trickster, Eshu, who “mischievously creates noise to engender a new pattern of relations” between two sworn friends on adjoining farms. Donning a cap that was black on one side and white on the other,⁶ he rode backwards on his horse between the farmers in their fields. The ensuing fight about the colour of the hat and direction of the driver was only settled by Eshu, who pointed out they were both right and reminded the two that their vows of true friendship can be undone by him.

In his extensive investigation of the archetype of the trickster we are reminded by Hyde (1999:6) that travelling trickster figures like Eshu, Raven, Hare, Coyote, the Monkey King, Krishna and Hermes are all lords of in-between who traverse boundaries with ease. In fact the trickster is master of the threshold as he actively seeks out or creates boundaries, since borderlands are the site of ambivalence, ambiguities, contradiction, paradox, opposition and crossings. This interstitial positioning is shared by the artist who approaches art production as nomadic activity in a Third Space.⁷ Such an artist equally shares the transgressive, disruptive and untamed identity of the trickster as agent for change. Trickster-style artists have the distinct preoccupation of being what Hyde (1999:256) describes as “joint-workers”, particularly “joint-disturbers”.⁸ They unsettle what supposedly fits harmoniously together and interrupt the stability of laboriously crafted structures on the one hand, but also force together that which is seemingly disjointed, opening up the seam for disorder, accident and chance. The

⁶ In Fischer’s retelling of theorist Lewis Hyde’s (1999:238) version of this tale, she changes the colour of the hat to red and white. In terms of the lesson also being about absolutes, the black/white distinction is maintained here.

⁷ See the section “Nomadic subjects on the war path” in chapter 5.

⁸ Hyde (1999:252-280) develops the notion of artists as *artus*-workers from the supposition that tricksters attack gods and ideas at the joints, their weakest spots, and from an etymological analysis of the Latin noun *artus* (a joint or seam in the body) containing the Indo-European root *-ar*, meaning “to join”, “to fit” and “to make”.

trickster can ultimately disjoint the functioning of the hinge by keeping the joint flexible in different directions.⁹



Figure 28: Fabian Marcaccio, *Multiple-site paintant*, 2001-2002.
Pigmented inks on canvas, silicon, polyoptics, oil, 3 x 70m.
Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
Photograph by the author.

Of course, individual artists may or may not follow any number of subversive trickster-strategies, irrespective of medium. Even in the ‘safe’ medium of painting, Argentinean-born Fabian Marcaccio displays the cunning of a boundary-crosser. In his work for Documenta 11, *Multiple-site paintant* (2001-2002) (Figure 28), Marcaccio incorporated elements of conflict through techniques of dematerialisation and mutation into images that read as abstract from a distance. Paint, silicone gel, found objects and photo sequences eat into each other and spill over the edges of the painting-pathways that invaded Kassel outside the gallery space. The integrated flows of Marcaccio’s work, which the artist describes on his website (Paintants [sa])

⁹ Fisher (2002:67) refers to Marcel Duchamp’s *Door: 11, rue Larrey* (1927) in this regard. Being hinged to simultaneously serve two rooms in his studio, the door opens one room as it closes another, or alternately, it keeps both rooms partly open or half closed.

as “abstract based history telling”, is a de- and re-territorialised zone indicative of nomadic space, where boundaries are blurred and corrupted to thrash out a nebulous space of becoming.



Figure 29: Joan Jonas, *Lines in the sand*, 2002.
Video-installation (still).
Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
Photo: Werner Maschmann. Copyright: documenta GmbH.

The installation/performance *Lines in the sand* (2002) (Figure 29) by American artist Joan Jonas established criss-crossing thresholds on different levels through multiple narrative references and interdisciplinary practices. Two texts by poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1884-1961) – *Helen in Egypt* (1955) and *Tribute to Freud* (1944) – set up the framework for the work. The idea put forward by H.D. is that Helen never went to Troy, but to Egypt instead, and that the fantasy of the woman, who supposedly caused the Trojan war, is thus really about the formation of mythical constructions. As trickster-narrator Jonas intercut excerpts from the Helen-text with descriptions of H.D.’s therapy sessions with Freud, while mixing up ‘real’ presentations of a bygone-Egypt (photographs from 1910) and the ‘fake’ contemporary casino Luxor in Las Vegas. On a single visual plane video-projection was combined with live



drawing, ritualised movement, shape-shifting masks and costumes to obscure and conversely unveil connections that reinforced the blurring of lines in the sand between facts and fabrications, phantom and fiction, reality and myth, the personal and cultural. If the crafting of flexible joints and shifting of boundaries are regarded as essential to the labour of trickster-artists, then both Jonas and Marcaccio could be regarded as excellent examples of threshold-art.

6.1.1 Two kinds of opposition

Yet for some the trickery-techniques employed by Marcaccio and Jonas do not nearly go far enough to destabilise the systems within which the artworks continue to function. What is required of the subversive artist is to be no less than a terrorist, argues Documenta-artist Kendell Geers (2005b:133):

The work of art needs to move outside the logic of language into the dangerous world of terror. The codes of language and history are threatened only by terror and that which is unimaginable, unpredictable, unexpressible, untranslatable, unmentionable, unsayable, inappropriate and articulated through humour, contradiction, danger and extremism.

This view challenges the effectiveness of a reactionary dynamic of negation which uses the same codes it is supposed to counteract and can, therefore, easily be integrated. Yet, an obvious problem with an approach of the artist as anarchistic trickster is sustaining a slash-and-burn aesthetics in a state of perpetual revolution. The enduring modernist dynamic of art history has shown that 'revolutions' are not only assimilated into the mainstream, but are actively advanced in order to feed, what art historian Rosalind Krauss terms, the myth of the originality of the avant-garde.¹⁰ Given the postmodern sensibility that appropriation and transformation might be the only tactics

¹⁰ Krauss (1985:157) maintains the avant-garde notion of originality is conceived in terms of "a literal origin, a beginning from ground zero, a birth" and is located in the notion of the self as uncontaminated by tradition and capable of incessant rebirthing.



available to innovators, it is questionable if a clean break is possible or even necessary for renewal.

In this regard the distinction is useful that Hyde (1999:269) makes between two kinds of trickster-strategies modelled on Loki – whose actions precipitated Ragnarök, the cataclysmic destruction of the gods in Norse mythology¹¹ – and Hermes, who keep the cosmos lively by stealing from Apollo and beguiling him with lyre-music. The revolutionary Loki is an oppositional figure who instigates a chain of events that leads to the world being reborn, while the mischief wrought by convivial Hermes leaves the balance of order and disorder intact while exposing weaknesses in the system. It could be argued that the latter strategy equates with Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984:11) characterisation of the carnivalesque as

the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (*à l'envers*), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings.

This dynamic inside-out reworking of the world, renewal through reversal, is by nature of the carnival always bound to a time-frame. At the end of the festival things return to normal, thereby limiting the function of the mischief-making to "ritual dirt-work" (Hyde 1999:187) that is aimed at a release of tensions built up in the system. This constraint does, however, not preclude comprehensive or unanticipated changes resulting from the ambiguous work of the trickster working from within the system.

6.1.2 Duplicitous intermediary

The ambivalence of laughter when engendered by trickery reflects the duplicity built into the role of the trickster as intermediary or third party, as one who questions and challenges, a kind of outsider-figure. Eshu, riding on the

¹¹ According to some versions of this mythology Loki orchestrated the murder of the god Baldr, invincible but for a dart made of mistletoe, by tricking Baldr's blind brother, Höör, to aim it at him. This death set in motion the events that lead to Ragnarök.



border between friends, enable *and* confuse communication between them, because as “go-between he’s a kind of static on the line, a connector who may or may not connect” (Hyde 1999:116). The trickster’s potential for disruption lies on the threshold where crossings can be created as well as disturbed. *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (English Version) (2001) #17/ #31* by The Atlas Group could be regarded as prime example of a work straddling this duplicitous space. The video is supposedly about the captivity of Souheil Bachar, the only Arab to be detained for 3 months in 1985 with the Americans Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Benjamin Weir, Martin Jenco and David Jacobsen. The information supplied with the work (*Documenta 11... catalogue* 2002:181) maintains that of the 53 tapes about the captivity only tapes #17 and #31 are available for screening outside Lebanon. Taken at face value the protagonist’s musings about masculinity and homo-erotic fantasies may seem obtuse,¹² yet if one bears in mind that the character Bachar and the tapes are pure fiction, the work prompts the response: *Why* this elaborate deception? The insertion of an Arab figure into the narrative of what was regarded as the ‘Western hostage crisis’ in the late 1980s and early 1990s, plays up differences in historical and cultural coding. By utilising disinformation, withholding evidence, mixing facts and fiction – in short, producing static on the line that confounds one-way communication – this work is intended to shake up certainties. An ambiguous space is created where the viewer is unsure if the work’s trickery principally deals with Reagan-era narratives or the twenty-first century narrative of a clash of civilisations.

Another artwork that explores the ambiguous potential of the threshold is *Homebound* (2000)(Figure 30), the installation of Mona Hatoum, born to a Palestinian family exiled in Lebanon. She subverts cosy notions of home by electrifying utensils like funnels, colanders, eggbeaters, graters and furniture to emanate a menacing buzz, which is amplified by lamps flickering at irregular intervals like warning signals inside objects. The whole installation is fenced off behind a wire barrier that simultaneously functions as a fortification

¹² Failing to see past the scam-tactics of the work, critic Michael Kimmelman (2002:1) commented on the “video testimonials by a Lebanese man who recounts his fears and (of all things) sexual impulses while being held hostage in Beirut” as an example of what he deems the “lack of irony (or is it naïveté?)” of Documenta 11.

guarding against intrusion, and a blockade that restrains movement. By sabotaging the safety of a home, Hatoum's work reveals 'home' – both as habitat and place of birth – as a duplicitous space. The use of kitchen utensils creates a threshold between mother's work and motherland, which by destabilising notions of shelter, refuge and sanctuary, reassesses the implications of location and dislocation, of exile and return.



Figure 30: Mona Hatoum, *Homebound*, 2000.
Installation view.
Fridericianum, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:77).

For the visual artist the subversive power of trickster-strategies lies in its potential to baffle, mystify and perplex, because puzzlement holds the promise of shifting perceptions. Thus art can function as space of translation in which the “perfidious fidelity” (Maharaj 1994:28) of such an exercise is substantiated and a space for incongruities and difference is articulated. When trickster-artworks produced in such a liminal space are exhibited to international audiences thresholds are multiplied, thereby increasing the



possibilities for mischief and prospects for cultural exchange. For the postcolonial curatorial project of Documenta 11, in particular, threshold consciousness could be regarded as of vital importance in order to exploit ambiguities, dislodge certainties and resist hegemonies.¹³ As mega-exhibition on the global circuit, an embrace of the threshold further entails approaching transcultural translation on shifting borders, as it were. The next section specifically explores to what extent Documenta 11 could be considered successful in the implementation of this twin strategy of translation and resistance through the inclusion of trickster-art.

6.2 TRICKSTER IN THE GLOBAL SPHERE

The main challenge for the effectiveness of a threshold positioning in visual art is finding ways to destabilise hegemonising forces associated with globalisation that co-opt and buy-out any form of resistance in cultural production.¹⁴ Certainly, limitations on artistic agency in the globalised sphere have intensified and expanded since the Situationists set out to chip away at the society of the spectacle. However, the monstrous reach of globalising processes is undermined by the uncertainty at its multifactorial, polycentric core.¹⁵ Put another way, expansive hegemonising structures can be fractured at the seams by tricksters disturbing the joints. A supposedly seamless, globalised art scene can inadvertently expose the limits of the 'global' and thus show the way for resistance. Fisher (2002:64) reminds us, "[w]hile international biennials and conferences privilege the institutionally 'acceptable,' they also provide sites that the 'unacceptable,' can take advantage of". As exhibition critical of its own role in the globalisation dynamics of the art world specifically, and culture production generally, Documenta 11 dealt with the notion of the trickster in two significant ways: by

¹³ Enwezor (quoted in Creischer & Krümmel 2000:79) locates trickster-art as continually jumping between resistance and translation.

¹⁴ Referring to the hegemonising and materialising structuring of all relations in a globalised, deterritorialised world, Enwezor (2002b:45) claims "strong, critical responses to this materialization are contemporary art's weakest point".

¹⁵ See Chapter 4 for a discussion on the vulnerability built into the volatility of globalisation dynamics.



including trickster-style artworks that show up the complexities of localised and transcultural production, and by functioning as trickster on the global mega-exhibition circuit.

Artists serious about agency seem to follow what Enwezor (Griffin et al 2003:163, emphasis added) describes as “the *strategy of proximity* (a strategy that keeps them in the game, while effectively situated outside of it) [... by utilizing] the idea of the trickster – a mode of behavior akin to Situationist *détournement* – to confront the power of the market”. The Situationist International practices of *détournement*¹⁶ and *dérive*¹⁷ could be considered specific trickster approaches, aimed at the de- and rerouting of narratives as well as behavioural patterns. In this context art making is similar to the drawing of maps, but contrary to the simplifying coding of geographical maps, these charting exercises employ the logic of the labyrinth in order to confound. Apart from the objective to create a zone of complexity, in which even the habitual and commonplace are stripped of familiar meaning, Debord and Wolman (1956:1) theorised that these strategies could democratise (or communise) the cultural playing field. Extended participation by unfashionable and unknown artists, even the revival of ‘bad’ art, could further break down barriers to understanding difference. On both these scores – heightened awareness of complexity and multiplicity as well as enlarged participation of artists and other cultural practitioners - Documenta 11 could be considered as trickster-project. If one ascribes to Fischer’s (2002:66) view that “the key to trickster’s function is not the resolution of conflict but the revelation of complexity”, then Documenta 11 indeed functioned as trickster on the global scene.¹⁸

¹⁶ Translator Ken Knabb (Debord & Wolman 1956:note1) analyses the meaning of the term used by Guy Debord and Gil Wolman in *A user’s guide to détournement* (first published May 1956 in *Les Lèvres Nues #8*) as “deflection, diversion, rerouting, distortion, misuse, misappropriation, hijacking, or otherwise turning aside from the normal course or purpose”. *Détournements* could involve elements of everyday life or cultural products being placed in new contexts and in unexpected combinations.

¹⁷ According to Debord (1958:1) *dérive* or “drifting” is aimed at going against the flow of “psychogeographical contours” which limit the entry and exit to zones of influences in cities.

¹⁸ See chapter 3 & 4 for a discussion on Documenta 11’s commitment to examine complexities of globalisation and the production of locality through the implementation of a global commons.



Documenta 11 specifically set out to undermine the global market dynamic of assimilating difference and dissent by turning it into profit, through favouring artworks and production strategies that resisted commodification on some form or another. Particularly collective and collaborative practices were explored for their potential to advance global trickery in this Documenta. Enwezor (2005:19) distinguishes between “fixed” and “flexible” groupings: a group of artists producing work under collective authorship, such as the British Black Audio Film Collective and Canadian Inuit Igloodik Isuma Productions, or open alliances of individuals and organisations such as the Congolese Le Groupe Amos, Senegalese Huit Facettes, Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective and Multiplicity, founded in Milan.

Both approaches subvert modernist notions of originality by undermining the reification of unique art objects being produced by individual genius, a “simultaneous aporia of artwork and artist” (Enwezor 2005:20). Furthermore, being often politically orientated and critical of formalist aesthetic values, works by collectives resist easy digestion by the art market. Aiming at the empowerment of locals marginalised by decolonisation and globalisation processes, the socio-cultural projects of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes¹⁹ question the function of art production in locations where gallery structures do not function as in the North and disenfranchised people have no use for white cube art. Network-based open approaches especially “delays or defers” (Enwezor 2005:21) efforts to label activities as ‘products’. The network narratives initiated by Raqs Media Collective defy notions of property and location precisely in order to explore the possibilities of freeing up culture production for hybrid practices.²⁰ The participating public is encouraged by this group to modify and produce versions of their work, which essentially stays a work in progress. By crossing barriers between what could be regarded as art and non-art, artist and audience, product and process, these collective approaches display the threshold positioning that enable artists to stay above and below the radar of market forces.

¹⁹ The works of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes are discussed in detail in chapter 3 and 4 respectively.

²⁰ See section on digital commons in chapter 4.

The work of Meschac Gaba, born in Benin but living in Amsterdam, could be deemed particularly cunning commentary on the art market and on how the uneven conditions of production in the North and South impact the institutional sanction of artistic hierarchies. His commissioned work for Documenta 11, *Museum of contemporary African art: humanist space* (2002), is conceived as the last of twelve spaces in a nomadic museum-without-walls which can be displaced or recycled to different localities. Two other works in the series, *Museum of contemporary African art: the library* (2001) and *Museum of contemporary African art: the museum shop* (2001) were also exhibited at Documenta 11.²¹

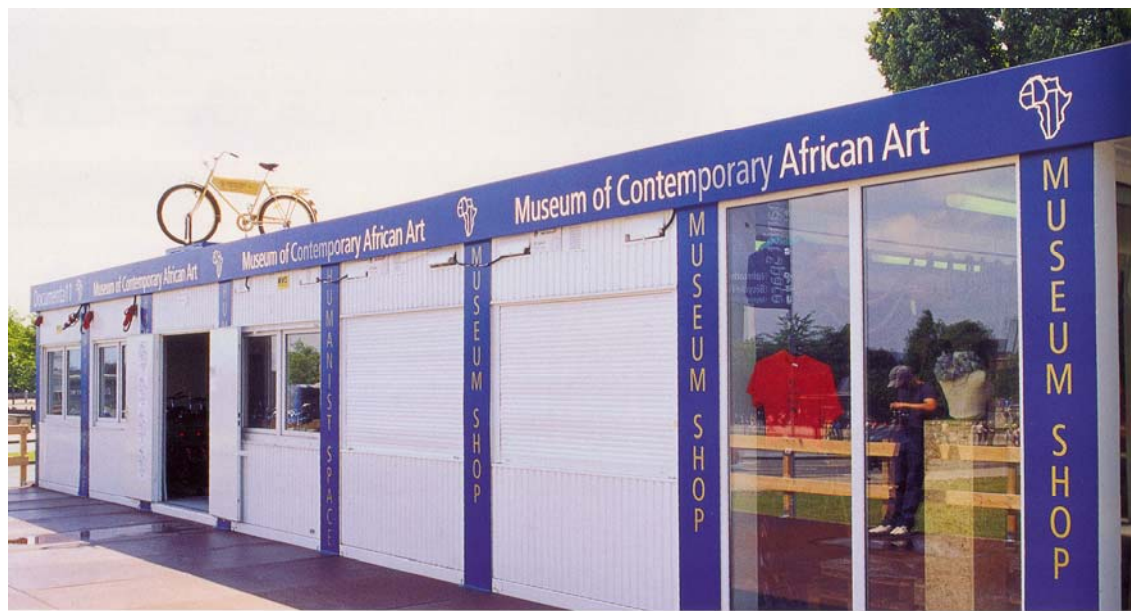


Figure 31: Meschac Gaba, *Museum of contemporary African art: humanist space*, 2002, and *Museum of contemporary African art: the museum shop*, 2001.

Installation, Kassel.

(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:194).

The 'humanist space', offering hundred golden bicycles for rent to visitors during the hundred days of the exhibition with the purpose of turning the profit over to humanitarian causes in Africa, was in Kassel situated adjacent to 'the

²¹ Other spaces in this museum include the draft room, summer collection, music room, marriage room, salon, architecture, art and religion, game room and museum restaurant according to the website of the work at <http://www.museumofcontemporaryafricanart.com/entree.html>.



museum shop' (Figure 31) in a temporary structure outside the main exhibition venues. For the passer-by this structure could read as a support for Documenta 11, as providing a service and souvenirs to cultural tourists. The ambiguity shown by the work's dependence on Documenta, yet simultaneous critiquing of institutional expansion and commodification, exploits threshold positioning to the full. Inside the store African and Western currencies were recycled in objects that comment on the economic conditions of Africans living with structural collapse and on the capitalist assessment of value as purely economic value. The function of a museum shop as money-spinner of cultural kitsch was thus destabilised by reclaiming it as exhibition space, closer in function to the library set up as space of learning. The composition of Gaba's museum questions not only the traditions of trading and displaying of cultural objects in Western museums and the absence of museum structures in Africa, but it could potentially initiate a dialogue about the distribution of cultural resources. Taken at face-value the title of the work deceptively suggests a single utopian view of a museum for contemporary African art. However, by positioning this work between homelessness and borderlessness, the artist creates a space of parody in which the workings of institutional power is transgressed.

As institution Documenta 11 subverted its own role as purveyor of the best and latest goods to a global art market not only by the inclusion of artworks critical of consumption, but especially by constructing a transgressive, despectacularising, nomadic exhibition space. The installations favoured in the curatorial selection played no small part in this; in particular, installations orientated towards excess in terms of scope, form and time. The display of entire oeuvres or series of works by single artists, and selection of time-based video and film installations could be considered tactically disruptive to the easy consumption of artworks as art products. An added bonus of the inclusion of various works by single artists, was that the meaning of artworks was contextualised by the artists themselves, thereby limiting curatorial framing.

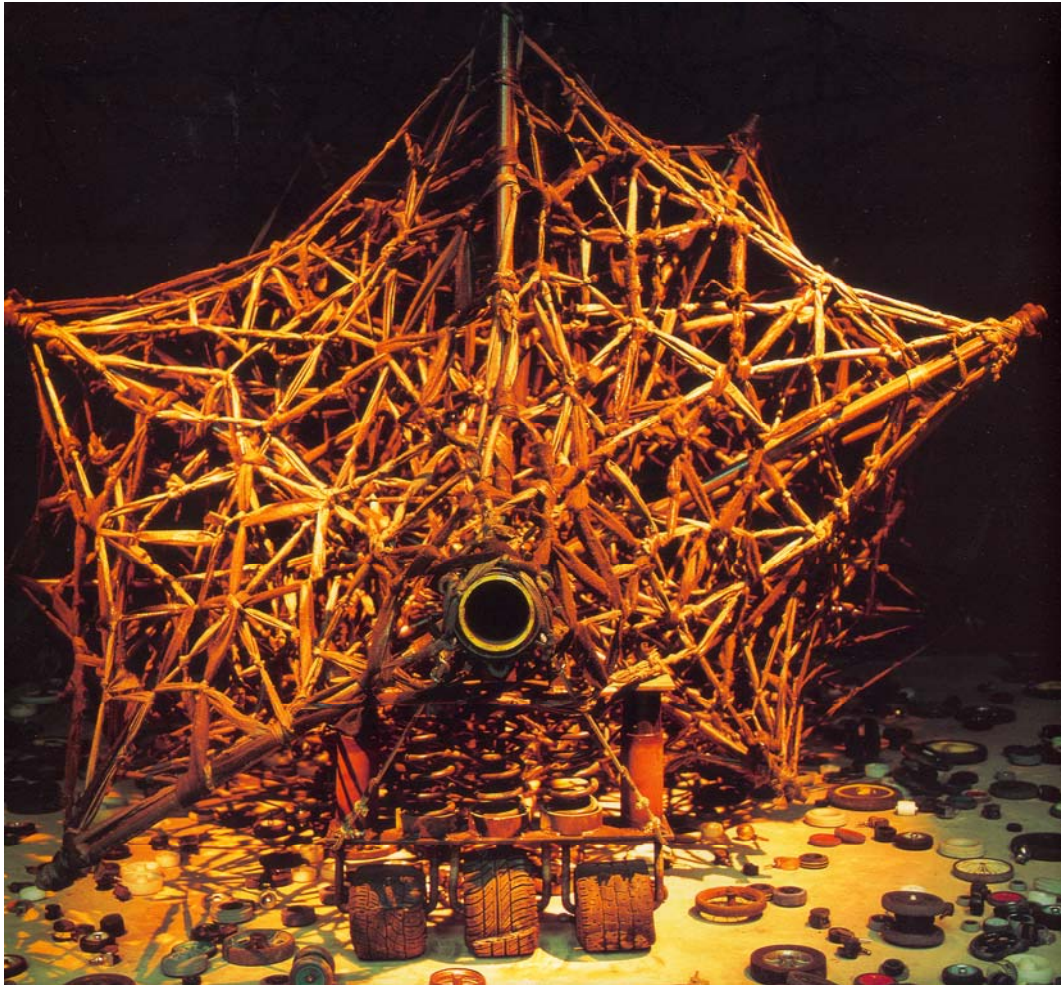


Figure 32: Nari Ward, *Landings*, 2002.
Installation.
Binding Brauerei, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:136).

For art historian Johanne Lamoureux (2005:73) Documenta 11 challenged “closure and fetishization” through the “tension between the pristine condition of the venues and presentation and the intermittent encounter with formless installations”. Exhibits of large parts of single oeuvres were obvious examples of such amorphous installations – *Boutique products of Choreh Feyzdjou* (1973-1993), Dieter Roth’s (died 1998) *Large table ruin* (1970-1998) and Croatian Ivan Kožarić’s *Atelier Kožarić* (1930-2002).²² Unstructuring was also deliberately developed by artists as a form of trickery to flout notions of high culture profiteered in galleries – as in the work of Portugese-Brasilian artist

²² Posthumous showing of work by artists such as Feyzdjou and Roth, as well as the inclusion of artwork making an impression in previous decades, form part of Documenta 11’s bag of tricks to defy expectations of delivering cutting-edge work to the market.



Arthur Barrio *ideaSituation: SubjectiveObjective interRelationship* (2002)²³ – and to express an anti-skill aesthetic that resisted delivering a polished product in the work of American Raymond Pettibon *Untitled* (2002), who juxtaposed banal everyday language, literary references, comic strips, drawings and newspaper fragments. The indeterminate space of disorder was exploited on a large scale in the sculptural installations of Jamaican-born Nari Ward and French artist Annette Messenger. Both Ward's *Landings* (2002) (Figure 32), a hydraulic-operated organic weapon-like structure patched together from discarded materials, and Messenger's *Articulated – disarticulated* (2001-2002), computerised automatons of fragmented and mutant physical shapes, achieve a disquieting emotional charge through the magnitude of jumbled pieces.

The proliferation of artists who use some notion of formlessness strategically in Documenta 11 had less to do with a “celebration of the theme that ‘things fall apart’” (McEvelley 2002:83) than with ambiguous construction of meaning and the curatorial intention of withholding an overview. The project of Documenta 11 was, according to Enwezor (2002b:42-43), to show that “there are no overarching conclusions to be reached, no forms of closure” because in its threshold positioning “Documenta 11 places its quest within the epistemological difficulty that marks all attempts to forge one common, universal conception and interpretation of artistic and cultural modernity” (Enwezor 2002b:43). This anti-totalising approach distinguished Documenta from other mega-exhibitions on the global circuit and offered what Lamoureux (2005:71) terms an “antidote to *Magiciens de la terre*”²⁴ and other decontextualised and reductionist approaches to non-Western culture production. With the goal of creating an ethical global “constellation of public

²³ According to Carlos Basualdo (*Documenta 11_Platform5: Exhibition, short guide*. 2002:30), this work is a combination of two series, *Situações* (Situations) and *Experiências* (Experiences), originating from the early 1970's and late 1980's respectively, that challenge notions of public and gallery art while aiming at reenergising emotional involvement of the viewer.

²⁴ Lamoureux (2005:68) maintains that the inclusion of non-Western artists in the exhibition held at the Centre George Pompidou in 1989 merely reinforced Western values – specifically the notions of the artist as innovator, the inherent value of artistic objects and object making, and the “spiritual channeling” potential of displayed objects – thereby constructing sameness between the artworks through fetishisation.



spheres” (Enwezor 2002b:54) Documenta 11 set out from the space of ambiguity and complexity on the side of the trickster intent on thwarting market forces. The next section will evaluate the kind of opposition posed by this curatorial positioning.

6.3 APPROACHING AN ADVERSARIAL AGENDA

A threshold aesthetic calls for an adversarial trickster positioning in which the untamed, unstable, unfixed, nomadic, disturbing – in short, both the unsettled and unsettling – are favoured. Rather than being a celebration of contrariness and conflict per se, this localisation is a recognition of the transformative promise of what in an auditory regime would be *dissonance*; that which is inharmonious, discordant and jarring. The object of producing such ‘noise’ would be to break the spell of the ‘music’ and reassess the full complexity of sounds and silence as in a John Cage composition. Valuing the jolting potential of the clash, adversative approaches to art production entail a form of tactical brinkmanship: some concessions can be forced and certain borders need to be shifted. Embarking from this position, the requirements for agonism and strategies for adversarial exchange will be discussed in this section.

6.3.1 Opting for agonism

The transcultural public sphere envisioned by Documenta 11 may depend on an adversarial agenda if the condition for a vibrant pluralist democracy is indeed posited as agonism, the position put forward by political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2002) in her presentation for Platform 1.²⁵ According to Mouffe’s (2002:90) formulation, “in democratic societies, while conflict cannot and should not be eradicated, neither should it take the form of a struggle between enemies (antagonism), but rather between adversaries (agonism)”. The kind of agonism Mouffe (2002:91) argues for resists being “tamed” or

²⁵ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Mouffe’s arguments.



adversaries turned into “competitors” by hegemonic forces, in order to maintain the vital capacity to articulate alternatives. For transcultural exhibitions dealing with cultural difference, an agonistic positioning may be of particular significance as a counter-localisation to multiculturalism. Peaceful coexistence of essentialised differences as key element of multiculturalist managerial strategies needs to be undermined in support of what Hall (Hall & Maharaj 2001:54) terms turbulence:

The turbulence I speak of concerns the sense of freefall and melt-down of ethical engagement with difference, which goes beyond its packaged, manicured version as the experience of curious, titillating difference sifted down to diversity.

In her analysis of post-apartheid art in South Africa, art historian Liese van der Watt (2004:49) makes a convincing case for an adversarial aesthetics that functions in a space designated as post-identity, post-race and post-ethnicity in which artworks “actively engage the failure of identity”.²⁶ This kind of post-positioning affirming the liquidity of identifications does not mark a moving beyond the engagement with difference, but rather an agonistic approach towards fixed notions of signification. The aim is to open up a space of uncertainty through artworks that disrupt and perplex visual regimes codifying social relations. Literary theorist Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000:158) posits race is such a scopic regime that can only be put out of joint by an “adversarial aesthetics” following a visual line of attack. Border infringements are at the heart of Seshadri-Crooks’s (2000:159, emphasis in original) trickster-stance:

I am proposing an adversarial aesthetics that will destabilize racial looking so that racial identity will always be uncertain and unstable. The point of such a practice would be to confront the symbolic constitution of race and of racial looking as the investment we make in difference for sameness.

²⁶ Van der Watt (2004:46) maintains the artists included in the seminal exhibition *Personal affects: power and poetics in contemporary South African art*, originally held at the Museum for African Art and The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York (September 2004 – January 2005) – Churchill Madikida, Samson Mudzunga, Steven Cohen, Minette Vári, Thando Mama, Diane Victor, Berni Searle, Mustafa Maluka, Wim Botha, Claudette Schreuders and Jane Alexander – “embrace loss, absence and becoming rather than being; they welcome the fragment, the provisional, the question, rather than the answer”.

Thus the work of dissonance can turn into “discoloration” (Seshadri-Crooks 2000:160) and displacement, which could facilitate the resituating of discourses.

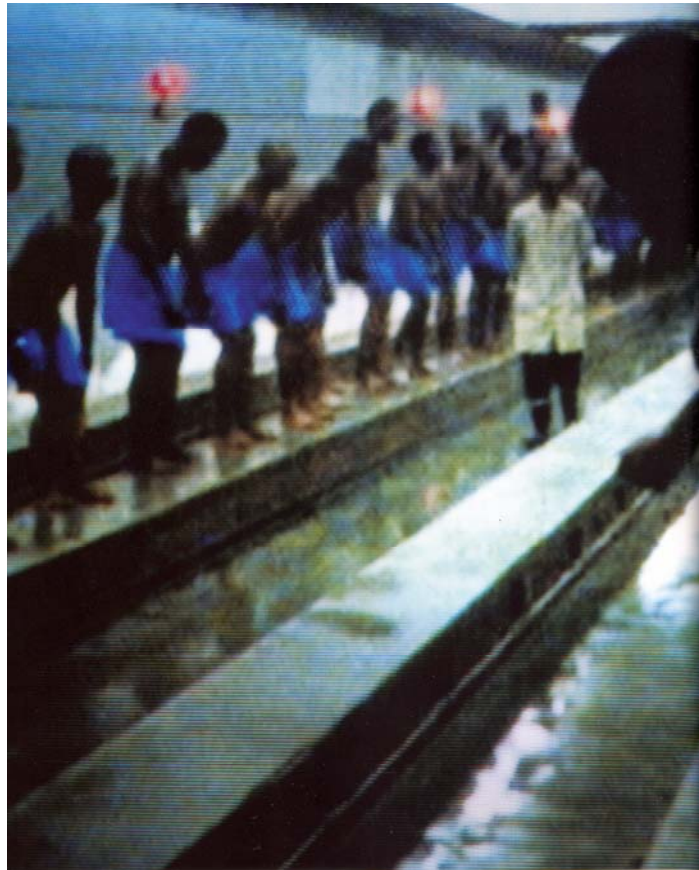


Figure 33: Steve McQueen, *Western Deep* (still), 2002.
25 minutes super-8 film transferred to DVD.
Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:176).

In the context of Documenta 11 Steve McQueen’s *Western Deep* (2002) (Figure 33) could be considered as a captivating example of adversative implementation of aesthetic means. Against critics such as Linda Nochlin’s (2002:161) demand for non-documentary “works full of sensuousness and colour”, McQueen’s film craftily interweave metaphorical and documentary elements of representation to create an ambiguous viewing experience of particularly the black body. The aesthetic qualities of *Western Deep* has been well received by critics, who even rank it as “the most outstanding” (Meyer 2002:169) work on display at Documenta 11. Appreciation of the formalistic



achievements, without considering the subject matter closely, involves turning a blind eye to what Enwezor (2003a:47) deems the work's disturbing encounter with the "beauty and disgust of the black body as a machine". Being commissioned for a postcolonial Documenta and dealing with bodies that in the South African milieu have been inscribed by the socio-economic engineering of apartheid,²⁷ McQueen's work calls for a reflection on the black subject and the viewer's gaze.

McQueen starts his film with blackness, blotting out vision in order to heighten the compressed, grating mechanical noise of what turns out to be a lift with miners descending down the deepest gold mine in the world. Throughout, a disorientating soundtrack, shifting intervals and unpredictable flashes of light create a hectic, visceral viewing experience that connects to the screened image of a feverish labourer with a thermometer between the lips. McQueen's aesthetic manoeuvring thus collapses the border between "viewer and viewed" (Demos 2005:87) by constructing a space in which "the audience oscillates between embodiment *before* the image and inclusion *within* it" (Demos 2005:86, emphasis in original). The empathetic link between the somatic experience of the viewer and the portrayed activities of the mineworkers is, however, disjointed by the very same aesthetic tools that draw the viewer into the work. Low lighting in the nebulous subterranean labyrinth portray disciplined, manipulated, confined and suffering bodies as indeed sensuous and luminous, bringing elements of seduction and voyeurism into play. In a scene with two rows of miners, performing a bizarre stepping exercise (probably a fitness-test) to the rhythm of a buzzer and blinking red light, the half-nude bodies in blue boxer shorts are cast in submission to the gaze of the viewer as much as to the figures in white coats monitoring them. Reminiscent of Eadweard Muybridge's systematic stop-motion photography of human locomotion, this scene, on one level, alludes to scientific engineering and the body treated as machine in capitalist production. Yet, on another level, the paraded black bodies agonistically

²⁷ Enwezor (2004:37) maintains under the panoptic control of the apartheid state the trace of the body as "archival and indexical referent [...] exists between norms of inscription and exposure, surveillance and disappearance".



confront the largely Northern gaze of gallery aesthetes at Documenta 11 in facing their own stereotypes of the black body, such as possible overdetermined interpretations of abjection and slavery.²⁸

By withholding a narrative or contextualisation through the medium of a voice-over traditionally employed in the documentary, *Western Deep* mines an indeterminate zone of interpretation that eschews any dominant reading. The ambiguous viewing position that the viewer is being cast in is thus compounded. It could be argued that the agonism engendered by McQueen's use of aesthetic tools is typical of the trickster-artist and that this work, seen together with that of Marcaccio, Jonas, The Atlas Group, Hatoum, Gaba and Ward in the spaces of Documenta 11, set an adversarial tone that thrived on dislodging certainties.

6.3.2 Proximity versus anthropophagy

The subtleties of Documenta 11's adversarial approaches become more apparent when compared with anthropophagy – arguably the ultimate aggressively antagonistic aesthetic strategy – explored by the preceding XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (1998). Both exhibitions set out to examine transculturality from the side of cultural hybridity, but whereas the São Paulo Biennale commenced from a specific non-Eurocentric oppositionality, Documenta 11 put varied global-postcolonial counter-positionalities forward for consideration. Instead of one strategy, Documenta 11 thereby employed a whole bag of tricks to unhinge narratives.

Taking the *Manifesto antropófago* published by Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade²⁹ in 1928 as theoretical baseline, the biennale approached

²⁸ Art historian John Pepper (2003:79) cautions against a narrow interpretation of images of black South African bodies, which historically has been influenced by 'struggle photographs' disseminated internationally "leading us mistakenly to believe that nothing else existed in (especially black) experience outside the image either of the heroic body in protest, or the brutalized body subjected to the power of the State".

²⁹ De Andrade and his wife, artist Tarsila do Amaral, was pivotal in promoting anthropophagy as emancipatory strategy of an independent Brazilian Modernism. For Herkenhoff



cannibalism as, what chief-curator Paulo Herkenhoff (1998a:157) terms, “a sort of symbolic exchange with the enemy”:

You ate the enemy because the enemy had eaten your other, so that you can regain your past. Or because you would need the forces of the enemy to increase your own force. So the idea was to build yourself from the other or with the other.

De Andrade (1998:[sp]) identifies this cannibalistic project as: “Absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into totem.” By employing a metaphorical version of what is regarded by European conquerors as the taboo practice of ingesting human flesh by barbarians, anthropophagy is in the first place: “The transfiguration of Taboo in totem” (De Andrade 1998:[sp]). Thus anthropophagy acts at the same time as “vaccine” (De Andrade 1998:[sp]), a line of attack against cultural domination, and as productive tactic, turning the neutralised enemy into an advantageous source of exchange. In this context the artwork is approached as, what artist Lygia Clark (quoted in Herkenhoff 1998b:[sp]) calls, “anthropophagic drool”, describing her work as “my own phantasmagoria which I give to the other, suggesting that they clean it and enrich it with their own phantasmagoria: thus it is an anthropophagic drool that I vomit, that is swallowed by them”.

The wide interpretations of these concepts by “dozens of curators” (Herkenhoff 1998b:[sp]) resulted from a mottled selection of artworks, that draw on some form of appropriation, to the inclusion of artists like Clark, whose work relies on interactivity. The vague application of the notion of anthropophagy is a function of the endeavour to recover a concept conceived to fortify nationalism in a transnational context. While anthropophagy is designed to be “Against all importers of canned consciousness” (De Andrade 1998:[sp]), the notion of oppositional exchange could conversely result in petrifying and essentialising differences, if compared to Documenta 11’s emphasis on nomadic producers functioning on shifting thresholds. In a globalised transcultural arena the varied counter-positionalities developed in

(1998b:[sp]) anthropophagy remains a “crucial strategy in the process of the constitution of an autonomous language in a country with a peripheral economy”.



postcolonial discourse present specific paths of resistance that could potentially push beyond assimilation and mutation. Cultural theorist Iain Chambers (1996:53, emphasis added) lists these as “*counter-histories* (of the black Atlantic, of the Jewish Arab, Indian and Chinese diasporas), *counter-memories* (of forced communalities of slavery, indentured labour and racisms), and *counter-communities* (cosmopolitan and local) that persist in the counter-discourse of a non-linear or syncopated understanding of modernity”. Rather than operating from a position of threatening alterity these adversarial localisations count on proximity in order to engage and possibly change opposing views.

As Mosquera (2003a:91) points out, anthropophagy “is not carried on in a neutral territory but rather one that is subdued, with a praxis that tacitly assumes the contradictions of dependence”. For the South this means continued unequal North-South power relations and circulation. In recovering anthropophagy as a curatorial concept the biennale did not come to grips with extensive postcolonial critique of the notion of cannibalism, such as that the discourse about cannibalism, in a sense, produced cannibalism.³⁰ Rather than attempting to dislodge hegemonies from a weak position that perpetuates colonial oppositions through the agonistic juxtaposition of North and South, non-Western and Western approaches, Documenta 11 opened up the possibility of reframing notions of aesthetic practice in the North and shifting discourses in visual culture globally. By situating culture production in Third Space and making “the terrible nearness of distant places” (Enwezor 2002b:44) its prevailing mode of globalism, this Documenta aimed for displacements across diverse trajectories. To what measure this translated in the actual expansion of visual strategies, is the focus of the next section.

³⁰ In his evaluation of the written ‘evidence’ for cannibalism in Fiji, the cannibal islands of the mid-nineteenth century, anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere (1998:63) argues that “European cannibal narratives” relied on fictive accounts taken as ethnographic fact and that native populations responded by using cannibalism as the “weapon of the weak” against the intruders.



6.4 INDIGESTIBLE THIRDNESS³¹

Valuing Third Space and art production as ethical engagement, Documenta 11 seriously engaged with strategies of resistance in visual production. This involved in no small measure a re-examination of the trickster-tactics of Third Cinema.³² Co-curator Mark Nash (2002:132) maintains:

It can be argued that Third Cinema has provided a discursive space for a range of different cinematic practices that contemporary art has not been able to emulate and that the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction of aesthetic discourse in the visual arts have taken a different course to those alternative, experimental, and political cinemas included under the general rubric of Third Cinema. Indeed, one of the aims of this Documenta is to draw our attention to this alternative tradition.

What distinguishes Third Cinema as trickster-art is that its various practices resist assimilation and cooptation; “it becomes something which the system finds indigestible”, according to Solanas and Getino (quoted in Nash 2002:135). By insisting on speaking with an accent and thrusting margins into the centre, artists in this tradition undermine any notion of a generic, ‘correct’ language, thereby rendering the dominant language as merely another accent. Although accented cinema³³ is born of necessity in peripheral production sites, having to come to terms with art production in a marginal or interstitial space might in fact mean the enabling difference for artists

³¹ This term “thirdness” is borrowed from curator Phillipe Vergne (2003:22), who coined the phrase for an aesthetic orientation examined in the exhibition *How latitudes become forms: art in a global age* initiated by the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis (9 February – 4 May 2003). The travelling exhibition includes work by artists from 7 latitudes: Brazil, China, Japan, South Africa, Turkey and the United States.

³² *Third Cinema* refers here loosely to non-hegemonic cinematic practices that can be regarded as alternatives to production and reception strategies of what Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema* (1969) termed *First Cinema* – the Hollywood model as dominant ideology of the production of large-scale spectacles – and *Second Cinema* – cinema d’auteur, independent and new wave films that, however innovative in terms of formal, narrative and distribution structures, remain subservient to the first.

³³ Film theorist Hamid Naficy (2001:10) develops the concept of “an accented cinema” as a postcolonial development in the Third Cinema tradition of exilic, diasporic and ethnic films of which the “tensions of marginality and difference [...] are not neatly resolved by familiar narrative and generic schemas”.

anywhere, who are intent on challenging hegemonies in an age of intensified globalisation.



Figure 34: Black Audio Film Collective, *Handsworth Songs* (still), 1986.
58 minutes 16mm-film transferred to DVD.
KulturBahnhof, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:111).

The work of Black Audio Film Collective, founded in 1983³⁴ in London, is one of the oppositional approaches that Documenta 11 reconsidered for contemporaneous art production. The group's members – John Akomfrah, Reece Auguiste, Eddie George, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, Trevor Mathison, and David Lawson – initially viewed collective practice as “a viable means of survival” (Black Audio... 2002:553), but in pioneering the formation of an independent critical black film culture they broke through media barriers with contributions to Channel 4 on British TV. Their critically acclaimed documentary *Handsworth Songs* (1986) (Figure 34, directed by Ghanaian-born Akomfrah, is situated in the political aftermath of the race-riots in Handsworth, Birmingham, and London in 1985 in which a black woman, Joy Gardner, and white policeman, Keith Blakelock, died. Against simplistic portrayals in the mainstream media of rioters as either demonic or victimised,

³⁴ The founding date is given as 1983 in the catalogue for Documenta 11 (2002:553), but according to the British Film Institute's website (Black Audio...[sa]) the group functioned as a collective from 1982-1998.



this work sets out to capture the multiplicity of “voices, tones and registers” (Black Audio... 2002:553) that differentiates black identities. By cutting post-war reportage of race into the film, events were contextualised in postcolonial Britain’s encounter with difference and the marginalisation of minorities. Rather than documenting facts, this work aimed at reconsidering history and the politics of representation. In *Handsworth Songs* the voices of contemporary Britain resonated as indeed infinitely accented.

Third Cinematic works included in Documenta 11 share an adversarial questioning of spectatorial regimes, whether it is *racial looking* as in the work of the Black Audio Film Collective, *ethnographic looking* in Indonesian-born Fiona Tan’s video portraits, *Countenance* (2002), *gendered looking* in Iranian-born Shirin Neshat’s *Tooba* (2002) or *anthropological/male looking* in Vietnamese-born Trinh T. Minh-ha’s *Naked spaces: living is round* (1985). As diasporic artists living in Northern metropolises these artists are deeply aware of the power of the frame to perpetuate power structures. Trinh (1999:134) identifies her particular focus on framing in terms of the relations formed by looking:

I’m sensitive to the borders, edges and margins of an image – not only in terms of its rectangular confines, which today’s digital technology easily modifies, but in the wider sense of framing as an intrinsic activity of image-making and of relation-forming.

Her engagement with rural environments in the West African countries Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin and Senegal in *Naked Spaces* carries no outright political content, yet her intimate framing of daily life “shot intuitively with the camera placed very close to ground level, where most daily activities are carried out in African villages” (Trinh TM 1999:134) is a powerful comment on the traditions of ethnographic filmmaking.³⁵ Rather than approaching filming as fieldwork to engage with cultural difference, *Naked Spaces* explores everyday life as transcultural space. By resituating subjects

³⁵ Documentary filmmaker David MacDougall (1998:267-274) points out anthropology and certain types of ethnographic films that employ an authorial stance advance from a master concept of “*understanding is seeing*” (MacDougall 1998:267, emphasis in original) with understanding as “a function of both viewing position and an inside/outside, or surface/depth construct” (MacDougall 1998:268). Hence the act of looking is constructed as neither participatory nor self-reflective.



outside the frames of 'backward', 'primitive', and 'authentic' this work destabilises colonial looking.

For the curatorial project of Documenta 11 the principal value of Third Cinema was the "plurality of voices" (Enwezor 2002b:55) that the works bring to the envisioned global public sphere and to an exhibition that "counterpoises the supposed purity and autonomy of the art object against a rethinking of modernity based on ideas of transculturality and extraterritoriality" (Enwezor 2002b:55). In their threshold positioning these works showed possible strategies for an aesthetic of resistance, of thirdness. Vergne (2003:22) lists constitutive elements of such an aesthetic as: proximity and locality, in-betweenness, performativity of audiences and artists, a leaning toward multidisciplinary, critique of museum authority, growing importance of the everyday, and the affirmation of the subversive promise of art. This view connects to Kester's formulation of dialogical or littoral aesthetics, critic Suzi Gablik's notion of "connective aesthetics"³⁶ and curator Nicholas Bourriaud's (2002:57, emphasis in original) articulation of the artwork as relational object that functions like "*interstices*, like space-time factors governed by an economy going beyond rules in force controlling the management of different kinds of public and audience". An artist operating in this relational or intermediate space is like Duchamp's "anartist" (quoted in Maharaj 2002b:79), whose trickery messes up systematic drawing of borders and 'works' resembles interventions rather than products. An aesthetic of thirdness would also value multiplicity and what Bourriaud (2002:26) describes as "transitivity":

This idea of transitivity introduces into the aesthetic arena that formal disorder which is inherent to dialogue. It denies the existence of any specific 'place of art', in favour of a forever unfinished discursiveness, and a never recaptured desire for dissemination.

Ultimately an aesthetic of thirdness implies an expansion of visual strategies across all kinds of thresholds, especially "any kind of over-wrought aesthetic

³⁶ Gablik (1992:4) maintains that an emerging "post-Cartesian, ecological world view" repositions art practice from a modernist orientation of a "disembodied eye" to a "listening self", which shifts the focus to "interconnectedness and intersubjectivity".



judgement as far as what is proper to all works of art” (Enwezor 2003a:46). ‘Thirdness’ as an aesthetic orientation thus corresponds to threshold consciousness as trickster positioning. Such an adversarial, interstitial aesthetic shows a firm commitment to the vigour of an aesthetic space not made impotent by hegemonising forces of the art market and cultural globalisation.

Whilst Documenta 11 did not put forward any novel curatorial approaches to expand aesthetic strategies, the engagement with various oppositional tactics within its rhizomatic spaces could be regarded as a cumulative effort to amplify the subversive promise of art. It is the contention of this study that this commitment to an adversarial aesthetic set Documenta 11 apart from contemporary mega-exhibitions and that, by valuing agonism, the curators showed a viable way in which art could be made indigestible to the system.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The degree to which Documenta 11 could be considered to attain, or fall short of, the adversarial potential of a threshold aesthetic of the trickster varies widely among critics sympathetic to the exhibition’s social commitment. Whereas art historian James Meyer (2002:168) praises Enwezor’s Documenta as “without doubt the most memorable version of the show I have seen”, Geers (2005b:132) derides the show for “usher[ing] into the mainstream the politically correct, multicultural (PCMC) artist from both the margins and the racially unequal centre” and leaving colonial power structures unchanged. While Documenta 11, by virtue of its status as normative exhibition, certainly facilitated co-optation of artworks onto the global circuit, it is considered by German critic Peter Bürger (2002:33) as a decisive break with Documenta tradition. This fracture is according to Bürger (2002:33) caused by the introduction of an aesthetic informing work by artists from the



Third World that transcends notions about the production and reception of individual art objects as well as European debates about ‘engaged’ art.³⁷

Rather than functioning as revolutionary trickster, Documenta 11 could be considered as a joint-disturber working within the system, while fully aware of its own limitations. If the notion of aesthetics, first coined in its modern usage by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten,³⁸ and that of art as well as art history are taken as “central to the very machinery of historicism and essentialism; the very *esperanto* of European hegemony” (Preziosi 1998a:513), then artists and curators from the non-West inevitably have to redefine art practice from within the system if they wish to be part of the discourse. One of Documenta 11’s curatorial aims was to subvert the Westernism in visual art regimes by expanding the discourse beyond institutional aesthetics. According to Enwezor (2002b:54),

Documenta 11’s paradigm is shaped by forces that seek to enact the multidisciplinary direction through which artistic practices and processes come most alive, in those circuits of knowledge produced outside the predetermined institutional domain of Westernism, or those situated solely in the sphere of artistic canons.

By setting out to open up the walls of aesthetic space to a constellation of public spheres, Documenta 11 managed to, at the very least, render some Western parameters of aesthetics problematic and shift ways in which art from the ‘peripheries’ is viewed in a transcultural field of representations.

The role of the viewer in a trickster-aesthetic was emphasised in Documenta 11, by linking the notion of the exhibition as “mirror/reflection” (Enwezor 2002b:53) to spectatorship and the carnivalesque. By defining spectatorship in terms of “the carnivalesque as its mode of enunciation” (Enwezor

³⁷ Bürger (2002:33) posits: “Aus den Ländern der Dritten Welt kommt uns hier eine Ästhetik entgegen, die nicht nur den Gegensatz von Kontemplation des Einzelwerkes und zerstreuter Rezeption hinter sich läßt, indem sie uns zu aufmerksamer Betrachtung nötigt, auch der Gegensatz von politischer und reiner Kunst, der die europäischen Debatten um die engagierte Kunst begleitet hat, verliert [...] viel von seiner Brisanz.”

³⁸ Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica*, published in 1750, identified sensual knowledge as distinctive from rational knowledge, yet as valuable form of cognition in its own right.



2002b:54), the curatorial approach to the viewer stayed true to Bakhtin's (1984:7) designation of the carnival as threshold activity:

It belongs to the borderline between art and life [...] In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.

The distance between producers and mere observers of aesthetic products were indeed breached in the curatorial aim of producing an engagement with art as "cognitive-ethical episodes" (Maharaj 2002b:80). Approaching art production and reception in such a discursive-ethical expanded aesthetic sphere consequently increased the subversive potential for visual arts.



CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Setting out to investigate whether the curatorial approaches of Documenta 11 could be considered as in any way exemplary, this study concluded in the preceding chapters that, whilst failing in some regard to redirect geocultural and geopolitical dynamics, Enwezor and his team succeeded in important respects to create an inclusive mega-exhibition in which imbalances and differences were underscored, if not transformed. It has also been argued that this Documenta, by virtue of the cumulative effect of curatorial strategies, showed a viable, if not unflawed, way to engage with cultural differences in a transcultural field.

In a sense this study extrapolates from notions put forward by the curatorial team of Documenta 11 in order to identify elements of a possible exemplar for transcultural curating:

- a differentiation of the centre,
- the renegotiation of North-South relations,
- valuing agonism and pluralism,
- an accented internationalism,
- targeting of transitions,
- embracement of the border,
- affirming the subversive promise of art, and
- locating art practice as social engagement.

In the discussion around each of these issues throughout the previous six chapters of this dissertation, the gains and inefficiencies, even contra-productive results, of curatorial strategies have been emphasised. While distinguishing itself from its predecessors and other contemporary transnational exhibitions in its non-exoticising approach to others and elsewhere, Documenta 11 demonstrated in no small measure how complicated the challenges are of transforming hegemonic global dynamics



and redressing inequalities and distortions within existing networks that are funded, and largely managed by the North. Whereas the tactical employment of postcolonial theory opened up possibilities for rethinking and rewriting art historical narratives and importing voices that have previously been silent, muted, or deemed insignificant, Documenta 11, by virtue of its canonising function as premier Northern exhibition, created its own parameters of exclusion and marginalisation. Nevertheless, the central argument of this study is that, regardless of its shortcomings, this Documenta broke new ground in the way that difference in the transcultural field was (re)negotiated.

In order to substantiate the main claims of this dissertation, the following summary of chapters two to six will outline the specific achievements, limits and inadequacies of Documenta 11's discussed curatorial strategies; firstly, with reference to the features of the transcultural paradigm identified above and, secondly, in comparison with some tactics employed in Documenta 12.¹

7.1 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 engaged with the curatorial approaches by which Documenta 11 set out to differentiate the centre and renegotiate North-South dynamics by creating a nomadic space in which transitions could be fostered. Aiming for inclusivity and an expansion of representation that transcended the mere incorporation of former margins, by effectively transforming hegemonic structures of the centre, Documenta 11 attempted to open out the aesthetic to the public sphere of global cultural politics. *Opening out* was discussed in terms of the various horizontal and vertical extensions proposed by the curators; of the present space of engagement in a mega-exhibition, and historical interactions with cultural production not on the Euro-American axis. In this regard two key-tactics were evaluated: a commitment to open-ended dialogic space and postcoloniality as line of attack deployed, firstly, to rethink

¹ The discussion of Documenta 12 will be restricted to information and impressions gleaned from the Documenta-website, podcasts of lunch-time lectures presented at Documenta 12, the catalogue and magazines published by Documenta 12, and reviews of the exhibition, since I had been unable to visit Kassel to view the exhibition.



the institutional premises of Documenta as historiographical site and, secondly, to tackle the uneven conditions of globalisation. The contention in this chapter is that Documenta 11 differed markedly from its predecessors in the way that difference in the transcultural field was approached. Strategic de- and extraterritorialisation of the exhibition in Kassel and the utilisation of a rhizomised exhibition structure shifted the Northern institution's proximity to 'elsewheres' significantly in this Documenta. However, the curatorial attempts at constructing a counter-hegemonic and counter-normative space to show art from, what could be considered, margins, centres and everything in-between, demonstrated how limited the possibilities of such an endeavour really are and, ultimately, fell short of the high standards that this Documenta set for itself in this regard.

The institution of the notion of creolisation – both as metaphor for transculturation and as a paradigm for transcultural curating – could, nonetheless, be regarded as a fruitful innovation by Documenta 11. Creolisation as transcultural location served the dual purpose of highlighting not only asymmetries, but also resistance strategies. Thus, at the very least, a space was discursively created in which power relations could be engaged with and possibly altered. By showing up framing devices and the complexity of cultural translation in an expanded transcultural field of representations, Documenta 11 certainly created density in its inclusion-strategies and nomadic practices, thereby avoiding paternalism, political correctness and tokenisation. Though to what degree these tactics resulted in a transformation of the geocultural landscape remains questionable. It is my contention that such a project had to achieve more than merely incorporating artists and trajectories, since hegemonic structures feed off pronounced differences being absorbed into collective will. As Stuart Hall (1997b:58) reminds us: "Hegemony is not the disappearance of difference. It is the construction of a collective will through difference."

On the whole, although ultimately grounded in Northern Europe, Enwezor's Documenta approached a transcultural field in which the South could be heard – both in the North and South – and as such at minimum advanced the



prospect of dislodging hegemonic structures, in my opinion. This is not the case with Documenta 12, which embarked on a similarly inclusive project by inviting participation from across the globe. Whereas Documenta 11 played up the locatedness of practitioners in an uneven cultural, political and economic landscape – through the large selection of documentary-style works, among other tactics – the exhibition of Documenta 12 was approached as a “plateau where art communicates itself and on its own terms” (Buergel & Noack 2007:12). Artistic director Roger Buergel and his wife, curator Ruth Noack, seemed intent on freeing artists from any fixation of their “geopolitical identity (à la ‘art from India’)” (Buergel & Noack 2007:11) by even refusing to indicate their countries of origin on wall labels. (Re)contextualisation of works in Kassel was thus largely in the hands, or the eyes, of the curators who relied on formal correspondences between diverse objects to develop transcultural connections. Transcultural translation in this approach primarily amounted to the “migration of forms”.² By constructing Documenta 12 as a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which the exhibition became the medium,³ cultural differences were inevitably flattened: spatial and temporal differences between visual artworks, decorative objects, cuisine and fashion⁴ were obscured and mystifying links made. Furthermore, the implied Romanticism of Buergel and Noack’s notion that diverse cultural products divorced from their original contexts somehow communicated on their own terms, is deeply problematic, not least because the reading of the works was influenced by formal juxtapositions imposed by the curators. In retrospect, the rhizomatic approach of Documenta 11, in which artists were afforded their own spaces in which to contextualise their projects, were considerably more democratic and

² Buergel approached the notion of “migration of form” as central curatorial method, expressed at a lecture in Dresden on 24 January 2007 (according to the news section of the Documenta 12-website, available at <http://www.documenta12.de/488.html?&L=1>) as: “An exhibition like the documenta needs something akin to a red thread. [...] The Migration of Form is intended as such a red thread. As a curatorial method, it addresses the vivid and sometimes dramatic interplay of the historic as well as the contemporary evolution of forms.”

³ See the section “On the poetics of documenta 12” on the website at <http://www.documenta12.de/ausstellung.html?&L=1> for the formulation of this idea.

⁴ Documenta 12 sought to integrate such miscellaneous cultural products as Persian calligraphy from the sixteenth century, an Indian miniature from the seventeenth century, watercolour presentations of ceramics from China, a garden carpet from Iran, a Central-Asian bridal face veil, the experimental cooking of Ferran Adrià and fashion of Oumou Sy with artworks ranging from Édouard Manet and Paul Klee to contemporary media-installations.



attested to curatorial transparency, the strong curatorial vision of Enwezor's team notwithstanding.⁵

It is in the ambit of the issues discussed in *Chapter 3* that the crucial dissimilarities between the last two Documentas are most obvious and where, in my view, the curatorial orientation of Documenta 11 distinguished itself in an important respect, namely by valuing contestation and agonism. The curatorial designation of Documenta 11 as “a constellation of public spheres” (Enwezor 2002b:54) was evaluated in this chapter, considering that such an expansion of the parameters of an exhibition, while pluralising discourses, could also aid a globalising cultural economy. It is my contention that in its postcolonial reworking of the notion of the public sphere – of heterogeneous participation in several overlapping spheres with sensitivity to incommensurability in the interface between cultures – Documenta 11 indeed made a valuable contribution to engagement with transculturality. By aiming to construct a critical space in which to consider that which defies translation, even if employed strategies were sometimes inadequate, the curators of Documenta 11 avoided the trap of multicultural managerialism. In my opinion, the significance of the focus on agonism, on keeping the dialogue open in shared transcultural space where consensus is ultimately unrealisable, is that Enwezor's project showed a way out of the multiculturalist impasse that plagues mega-exhibitions. In comparison Documenta 12, in which commonality was presumed on a linear visual and conceptual plane, came across as an anachronistic *Wunderkammer*.⁶

Although a strong case can be made that Documenta 11 offered new insights in the construction of an accented cultural space in which the tone of voices,

⁵ Curator-critic Helen Molesworth (2007:141) claims the abiding difference between Documentas 11 and 12 is in the implied social models: the former presented a democratic model by a diverse curatorial team that constructed a “wildly heterogeneous exhibition – filled with internal contradictions”, whereas the latter got stuck in the “insular logic of the couple” and their “experiment in pure experience, an experience the terms of which were reached through neither debate nor consensus”.

⁶ According to critic Marco Scotini (2007:67), the anachronistic exhibition practices of Documenta 12 displayed past events and contemporary work together in glass vitrines, against coloured walls and in curtained spaces in a “contextual mise-en-scene [...] that not even Alexander Dorner would have been able to imagine”.



discourses and narratives in different production sites can in principle be grappled with, the casting of its curatorial team as translators in the global sphere did not safeguard this Documenta against criticism of complicity to expansionist neocolonial market forces; of delivering “others” for sale. To a certain degree the platforms were set up to undermine instrumentalisation and co-optation by specifically engaging with globalisation discourses. Yet, any agonism generated in this regard, did not stretch to mapping out ways to confront, and indeed jeopardise, co-optation dynamics. It was up to artists who resisted delivering marketable products and managed to create an ethical space for the contemplation of particular collective narratives to effectively defy levelling globalism. The inclusion of such artworks could be considered the strongest statement against cooptation by Documenta 11, an underwhelming result given the weighty curatorial rhetoric concerning globalisation.

Nonetheless, how Documenta 11 positioned itself within a global art network – the focus of *Chapter 4* – is considered a curatorial strong suit in this study. Within a field of proliferating transnational exhibitions pursuing global aspirations, Documenta 11 critically engaged with the dynamics of a decentred art network. The contention of this chapter is that whereas globalised exhibition networks tend to advance artworks that adhere to a transnational style, in transcultural space the locatedness of cultural producers is pivotal to meaningful engagements. It was argued that although Documenta 11 as mega-exhibition par excellence instituted mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion particular to deterritorialised art practices, both a gleeful affirmation of globality and powerless submission to fragmentation were nevertheless eschewed. One of the most positive offshoots of the postcolonial orientation of Documenta 11, in my estimation, is that the global sphere was provincialised by adopting proximity – “the terrible nearness of distant places” (Enwezor 2002b:44) – as its focus. Thereby globalising flows were reterritorialised to show how artists cope with the promise and limitations of producing locality in diverse production sites, especially in spaces on the edge of globalisation, such as African cities and aboriginal Inuit land.



The sense of locatedness engendered by the selection of artworks distinguished Documenta 11 from the dislocation at the heart of Documenta 12's curatorial practices.⁷ Compared to the problematic formal, and inevitably superficial, migration-patterns enforced by Buerger and Noack, Enwezor's preoccupation with actual diasporic artists informed by nomadic localisations seems the lesser of two evils. Limiting participation to artists that produced, what Enwezor (2002c:51) consider as "international advanced art", often translated as artists living in urban centres and that represent marginalised production cites only by proxy. However, this very limitation allowed for the construction of a translational, transcultural framework for the display of diverse artworks while steering clear of the fetishisation of disparate objects. Of the two Documentas, the particular focus on placed identities – on location as well as dislocation – produced a far better model for the construction of an accented transcultural exhibition, in my view. Documenta 11, at its very best, avoided the levelling of shared space and thus showed a way in which the understanding of difference might be broadened. It is my further contention that for those artists from Southern margins lucky enough to be included in this Documenta, the introduction of distinct accents opened up a space (albeit a small one) for dialogue, transgression and negotiation within the hegemonic languages of the centre.

While a rethinking of the centre and the museum of Documenta was central to the last three Documentas, it seems that the process started by David and progressed by Enwezor was pushed back by Documenta 12. In terms of its representation of women artists – more than half the artists in Documenta 12 were female – the last Documenta was praised for readdressing a critical imbalance not dealt with by Documenta 11. Yet, the display of far-flung collected pre-modern objects in juxtaposition with contemporary works smacked of orientalism.⁸ Even if the intention was to show the implied logic in the categorising and collecting of cultural products from other cultures by the

⁷ Critic Nancy Princenthal (2007:175) asserts Buerger and Noack are well known for seeking out wide-ranging projects and "forc[ing] disparate artists into unwonted association".

⁸ Critic Jörg Heiser (2007:137) comments on the "obnoxious" juxtaposition of, for instance, the mandala painting of John McCracken, *Tantric* (1971), with Tajik bridal veils from the nineteenth century and David Goldblatt's photographs *The transported of KwaNdebele* (1983) in the Aue Pavillion, designated the "Crystal Palace" by Buerger.



West,⁹ by attempting to draw a Theseus-thread of formal correspondences throughout the exhibition, the result was reminiscent of Enlightenment aesthetics aiming for a common grid of representations. In effect the project of Documenta 12, therefore, did not seem far removed from Said's (1987:12, emphasis in original) formulation of orientalism as the "*distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts".

In contrast the extensive engagement with the archive by Documenta 11, discussed in *Chapter 5*, was constructed as an anarchival project to readdress various canonical trajectories, reformulate historical narratives, unhinge conceptual framing mechanisms and reshape the organising principles of the archive. It is the contention of this study that the aim of the curators of Documenta 11 of an indeterminate, visual-sonic discursive framework showed a viable approach to difference and translatability, even if the realisation of this aim was not an unqualified success. In my view, cultural translation is central to transcultural curating if a single, dominant code is replaced by multimodal signification systems. Therefore, it could be argued that Enwezor's specific engagement with the thorny issue of cultural translation singled this Documenta-project out as moving in an exemplary direction for transcultural curating.

The location of Documenta 11 as translatory, interstitial transcultural space was particularly investigated with a view to examine the transformative possibilities of such a borderised location. The curatorial project was interpreted as *mining* the potential of the gap, or in-between, while being mindful of gaps, omissions and disparities in cultural framing devices. By choosing homelessness as destination, Documenta 11 embraced nomadic identity and set out to create an indeterminate zone of passage in which paths

⁹ With regard to the exhibited connoisseur's representation of Chinese porcelains from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, Johannes Wieninger states in the catalogue (2007:20): "The presentation of the ceramics in isolation without a spatial context corresponds to the traditional depiction of objects, a response to the question of objectivity and reality." Whether this position reflects that of Buergel and Noack is unclear, because they did not supply any coherent conceptualisation of their project (a total of four paragraphs in the catalogue), relying instead on the installation/exhibition to speak for itself.



fork endlessly, home to artworks accomplishing transmigrations, polyvalence and interconnectivity. It was argued that nomadic subjectivity also activated the in-between as space of obstruction or a wedge that could disrupt, displace and dislodge. Thereby the embracement of the border could be considered as, first and foremost, a commitment to agency that pushed beyond formulations of “border thinking” (Mignolo 2000:736) in terms of indeterminate liminality, suspended opposition and deferred action.¹⁰ The affirmation of agency – of artists and audience alike – by Documenta 11’s curatorial team was precisely such an attempt to transcend lame-duck oppositionality. The success of this transgressive project was, however, dependant upon the particular strengths and weaknesses of littoral curatorial practice, of which Documenta 11 could be considered a prime example. While the push beyond conventional knowledge could be considered a forte, dialogue and discourse are destined to have a limited effect on, and are largely determined by, existing power structures, and Documenta 11 did ultimately not escape the “discursive determinism” (Kester 1999/2000:5) underlying littoral practice. Despite this limitation, it was maintained that within the transcultural framework of Documenta 11 powerful breaches of borders were nonetheless achieved by artists from “experimental cultures” (Enwezor 2002b:45).¹¹

Adopting the position that in a transcultural field multiple connections between singular sites of cultural production present opportunities for the emergence of alternative art practices, forged in alternative contexts, a case was made that transculturality could expand the discourse beyond spectatorial, institutional aesthetics. Implemented in curatorial practice, transculturality is thus set to have “subversive potential” (Becker 1994:113); to curate against the grain. In *Chapter 6* aesthetic orientations of Documenta 11 were considered as

¹⁰ In this regard literary theorist Benita Parry (2002:245) criticises the inferences of Homi Bhabha’s use of open-ended determinations of liminality and negotiation: “The implications of rewriting a historical project of invasion, expropriation and exploitation in the indeterminate and always deferred terms Bhabha proposes and implements are [...] immensely troubling, since his elaborations dispense with the notion of conflict”.

¹¹ Experimental cultures emerging in postcolonial space “articulate modalities that define the new meaning- and memory-making systems of late modernity” (Enwezor 2002b:44) and the concept therefore defines “a set of practices whereby cultures evolving out of imperialism and colonialism [...] compose a collage of reality from the fragments of collapsing space” (Enwezor 2002b:45).



possible exemplar of such a transgressive practice, of a threshold aesthetic associated with a trickster-positioning. The chapter explored the subversive power of trickster-strategies for individual visual artists, as well as for the curator structuring an exhibition. The potential for disruption was discussed in terms of revolutionary negation or opposition from within the system. Documenta 11 was regarded as an example of the latter kind of trickster in the transnational exhibition circuit by: heightening awareness of complexity and multiplicity; including trickster-style artworks that show up the complexities of localised and transcultural production; undermining global market dynamics by favouring artworks and production strategies that resisted commodification, particularly collective and collaborative practices. Making an argument for an adversarial agenda grounded in agonism as counter-localisation to multiculturalism, the varied postcolonial counter-positionalities of Documenta 11 were contrasted to the single oppositional strategy of anthropophagy employed in the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (1998). Further adversarial strategies re-examined by Documenta 11, particularly Third Cinema, was explored as guiding an aesthetic of thirdness; of in-betweenness, multiplicity and resistance.

Whether these curatorial strategies of Documenta 11 pushed an adversarial approach far enough is debatable. Nevertheless, it is the contention of this dissertation that by constructing the exhibition as transcultural stage where transitions could potentially be made between diverse disciplines, viewpoints, approaches, artworks and production sites in an expanded public and aesthetic sphere, Documenta 11 functioned as “cultural agitator” (Basualdo 2001:27). Thus the emphasis on multiplicity, connectivity, flexibility and unpredictability could be construed as a subversive, if somewhat restrained, approach to art practice. Compared to Documenta 12, however, the subtle subversion of Enwezor’s Documenta seems to grow in intensity. While both Documentas set out to reassess modernity – Documenta 11 by focussing on transmodernities or “vernacular modernities”¹² and Documenta 12 by

¹² This term is borrowed from curator Gilane Tawadros (2003:17), who describes the work of the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy in terms of “a vernacular modernity”.



designating “Is modernity our antiquity?” as leitmotiv¹³ – the diverse aesthetic approaches resulted in some transgressive potential for the former curatorial project and none to speak of for the latter. Although the goal for artworks to be “art-ethical processing plants” (Maharaj 2002b:72) overstated the case for ethical engagement in art production, in my opinion, Documenta 11 created a critical-ethical space for the reception of art with a view to heterogeneous transcultural publics. Documenta 12 set out to fashion a very different viewing experience based on the notion of an uninformed audience that had to be educated about “the internal dynamic destinies of form” (Buergel & Noack 2007:12) by well-versed mediators, no less, aiming for “informative inspiration”.¹⁴ Reminiscent of Kantian Idealism,¹⁵ Buergel’s approach did not even acknowledge the issues of spectacularisation that Documentas 10 and 11 wrestled with. In a sense, artists intent on transgressive practices had to work against the curatorial interventions in Documenta 12.¹⁶

Conversely, the “CNN-Documenta” (Levin 2002:[sp]) emphatically raised questions about the social responsibility of artists in their own localities and about artworks as instruments of representation, narration and commemoration in the public sphere. While this approach resulted for some in a “truly international, politically acute” (Meyer 2002:168) watershed-Documenta, it needs to be considered whether such a strong ethical/political agenda would be exemplary for other transcultural exhibitions. The relevance of Documenta 11’s postcolonial project on a global scale is specifically in question.¹⁷ The tactical employment of postcoloniality as “incredible moment of transformation” (Enwezor 2002d:[sp]) aimed at institutional critique, could therefore be regarded as the singular and limited project of Enwezor’s

¹³ The other two leitmotifs are *What is bare life? What is to be done?* according to Buergel on the website at <http://www.documenta12.de/english/leitmotifs.html>

¹⁴ See more about the goals for the extensive art-education program at <http://www.documenta12.de/fuehrungen0.html?&L=1>

¹⁵ According to critic Melvyn Minnaar (2007:10) Buergel admitted his notions about the experience of art as “pure form” that can communicate itself on its own terms derived from German Idealism.

¹⁶ Heiser (2007:139) claims in this regard that Buergel and Noack “seem to have fallen back into a revisionist language of the 1950s, curating as though with their great uncles and aunts in mind, mildly shocking them in some ways (politics), while pleasing them in some ways (flowers and curtains)”.

¹⁷ Commentator Stewart Martin claims in this regard that (2003:18) the “political project of a globalized postcolonialism [...] remains currently highly indeterminate”.



Documenta. However, it could also be argued that Documenta 11 demonstrated that the connections and transitions made in the spaces of a transcultural exhibition were commensurate to the ethical positions adopted. By opting for a complex, discursive-ethical, expanded aesthetic sphere, Documenta 11 at times managed to push engagement with difference beyond the cultural regimes of the spectacle.

On the whole, a strong case can be made that the contributions by the curatorial project of Documenta 11 to the structuring and functioning of a transcultural exhibition changed the discourse around mega-exhibitions, even if its role as transformer of actual power structures remains debatable. To be fair, Enwezor never claimed to affect any large-scale changes (such as the scope of a single exhibition to change any system might be). In the catalogue he (Enwezor 2002b:43, emphasis added) defined the spaces of Documenta 11 as “forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the *possibility of rethinking* the historical procedures”. In that respect the curator’s brief for Documenta 11 was indeed successful. It could further be argued that the postcolonial engagement with the possibilities of rethinking the Northern institution of Documenta indeed met with some success; if not reforming the museum of Documenta, Documenta 11 at the very least differentiated the centre and opened up new channels for North-South currents.

Thus this study concludes that as *historical benchmark* in the construction of a transnational exhibition and reconstruction of a normative Northern institution Documenta 11 could be deemed exemplary. As possible *model* for transcultural practice this Documenta provided valuable insights into the exhibition as nomadic space for translation, the production of difference, potential dislodging of hegemonies and an adversarial aesthetics. Some tactics employed by the curatorial team could, however, be regarded rather as a ‘warning’ than an ‘instruction’.¹⁸ The proliferation of time-based artworks as some kind of slowing-down counter-strategy to voyeurism and spectacularisation jeopardised a critical engagement with precisely the kind of

¹⁸ See the discussion of the term *documenta* in Chapter 1.



multiple transitions that a discursive-ethical exhibition like Documenta 11 set out to achieve. The focus on multidisciplinary and complexity could similarly turn into a curse if it limits participation by cultural practitioners and audiences.

Whether successive Documentas will reflect, what in the Documenta archive is termed, Enwezor's "taboo-break" of the primacy of Western culture, remains to be seen. It could be argued that by incorporating cultural products from all over the globe and recontextualising collected objects from the past, Documenta 12 followed the lead of Documenta 11 to engage with the construction of inclusive art practices. For Hall (2003b:198) the effects of the postcolonial Documenta can only be measured over time:

We will see [...] whether Documenta 11 is greeted as an interesting diversion; written off as a momentary interruption, a moment of the exotic, a temporary deviation from what 'art' is really about; an interlude of 'cultural diversity' in the onward march of Western civilizational discourse.

In the long term, future Documentas and other transnational mega-exhibitions will show whether Documenta 11 has in fact refigured the constellation or will shine as its brightest, exotic star.

7.2 CONTRIBUTION OF STUDY

Given the exceptional scale and complexity of Documenta 11, this study endeavoured to engage with the themes and interconnections between the platforms in a single integrated unit, while tackling some key-issues in transcultural art production. Conducted from a Southern perspective, the study is sensitive to concerns about inclusion/exclusion and the construction of locality/identity by artists in the South for mega-exhibitions that function as cultural ports of import for legitimising Northern institutions. In this regard an investigation of strategies employed by artists in the most inclusive Documenta yet could be productive – as possible models to critically engage with local-global flows.



Embarking from the position that new curatorial approaches need to be developed beyond both multiculturalism and a vociferous embrace of globalising market dynamics, this study explored the potential for such practices. Its examination of Documenta 11 as a serious attempt at curating as transcultural or littoral practice could therefore be regarded as a contribution to discourses surrounding, not only the institution of Documenta, but also the construction of mega-exhibitions and transculturality.

7.3 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

While engaging in passing with various issues that each could generate a field of research, this study is limited to framing Documenta 11 in terms of transculturality. This focus tends to exclude a discussion of Documenta-artworks that deal with themes that could be considered personal, rather than political. Given the preponderance of politically-engaged work in this Documenta, a total of sixty-one artists and artist-groups were discussed in some detail. While an analysis of non-political work would certainly add nuance to the experience of Documenta 11, the contention of this study is that such an endeavour would confirm, rather than detract, from the theses discussed in the previous chapters.¹⁹ The underlying assumption to this single-mindedness of purpose is, of course, that a transcultural approach to curating in a decentralised global network of representations could be preferable to other approaches. Further biases expressed in this study are: postcoloniality could provide an important framework for redress; subversivity is a value to aspire to; art practice ought to have an ethical dimension, however ambiguous ethical-interactions in the field of visual arts might be. In its assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Documenta 11, this study is ultimately limited to a short-term view. How the curatorial choices of

¹⁹ A case can for instance be made that the lyrical-poetic work of Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky, *Flow* (2002) – a multi-screen video-projection of discarded objects floating in water – shared an aesthetic orientation with Iranian Seifollah Samadian's film *The white station* (1999), of a covered woman with an umbrella waiting for a bus in snow storm. Both works leave the narrative open, destinations and departures undisclosed, thereby reinforcing the experience of Documenta 11's spaces as ambiguous.



Enwezor and his team impacted artistic practices can be ascertained only after a study of succeeding Documentas and other mega-exhibitions.²⁰

7.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further avenues for research proposed in this section could be divided into themes implied by the project of Documenta 11 and aspects of this study that could to be developed to broaden the understanding of transculturality and its impact on curating.

In the spirit of interconnectivity fostered by Documenta 11, an examination of the common and particular discourses bound up in Platform 4, *Under siege: four African cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* and in the research project, *Urban Imaginaries from Latin America (2003)*²¹ would be a fruitful exercise in South-South scholarship. The latter analysis of social imaginaries, or “citizen sketches” (Silva 2003:14), are methodologically approached with strategies ranging from psychoanalysis and semiotic-cognitive studies to polls, projectural curves and statistical surveys. It engages with urban forms as “aesthetic and political act[s]” (Silva 2003:29), symbolic (re)territorialisations of cognitive-spatial narratives that present the lived cities under discussion. This study could complement the postcolonial focus of Platform 4, or even function as, what Martin (2003:16) perceive as, “a corrective: a postcolonial psychogeography”. In this regard the work of Cuban artist Carlos Garaicoa could be considered as such a bridging of postcolonial and utopian sensibilities. In one of his works included in Documenta 11, *Continuidad de una arquitectura ajena* (Continuity of a detached architecture) (2002), he digitally (re)constructed visionary models of the actual ruins of

²⁰ Exhibitions that could be potentially fruitful in this regard are: the 27th Bienal de São Paulo (2006), titled *How to live together*, with Lisette Lagnado as chief-curator; the second Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla (BIACS 2) (October 2006 to January 2007), *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society*, curated by Enwezor; the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), *Think with the senses – feel with the mind: art in the present tense*, curated by Robert Storr.

²¹ Edited by Armando Silva, this publication gathers together research by more than 300 (Silva 2003:14) urbanists, geographers, architects, economists, sociologists, social historians and anthropologists about Barcelona and 13 Latin American cities: Asunción, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Havana, La Paz, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Panama City, Quito, Santiago de Chile and São Paulo.



unfinished architectural projects, thereby healing past wounds and instituting hope for the future. The identification of connections between postcolonial and other approaches by artists participating in Documenta 11 would indeed be productive towards an expansion of transcultural strategies.

The valuing of transculturality impacts numerous issues about the role and function of the curator if curating is approached as a translatory practice. It needs to be considered what it means for the transcultural curator to curate with the ears, rather than the eyes, as Mosquera (2001c:124) claims: “The ear is especially important in transcultural curating, because you need to learn to react to art that might not correspond with your taste, knowledge, and experience”. Does this role, that transcends that of connoisseur, tastemaker, auteur and explorer, spell the end of any over-determined notion of curatorial autonomy? Even a diasporic curator like Enwezor is still located and ultimately limited by the visual-conceptual languages he can speak. On the one hand, there seems to be a drive in global art circuits towards the construction of the role of über-curator and of meta-curating that smack of transnational monopolising. Yet, conversely, the complexities of translatory curating tend to favour a collaborative practise that could put an end to monopoly claims. Collaboration extends to all aspects of production: in a nomadic cultural field the separation between the roles of curator and artist becomes less defined if the exhibited artwork is considered the result of a process of translation.

If transculturality is deemed paradigmatic for artistic practice, the possible ethical and normative implications of such an orientation are of vital importance for success. The emphasis on diversity built into transculturality could be as problematic as in multiculturalist agendas. In this regard Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005:153) points out that the valuing of diversity does not come to terms with the “moral convergence” implied by such a supposedly democratising vision. Rather than correlating with non-domination and autonomy, the principle of diversity underlying a politics of difference could impose hegemony if diversity, plurality and multiplicity are approached as homogenised values. The value of indeterminacy, lack of consensus, indeed



agonism in a liberating transcultural approach should therefore not be underestimated. To what extent such an orientation dovetails with, or becomes an expression of, cosmopolitanism as transnational value system could offer further productive insights into the ethics and aesthetics of globalism. In the end, for transculturality to be regarded as exemplar for contemporary art practice, it has to be shown as a constructive approach to production in and for diverse *global villages*.



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