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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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