



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 Pearlette 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.