



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.

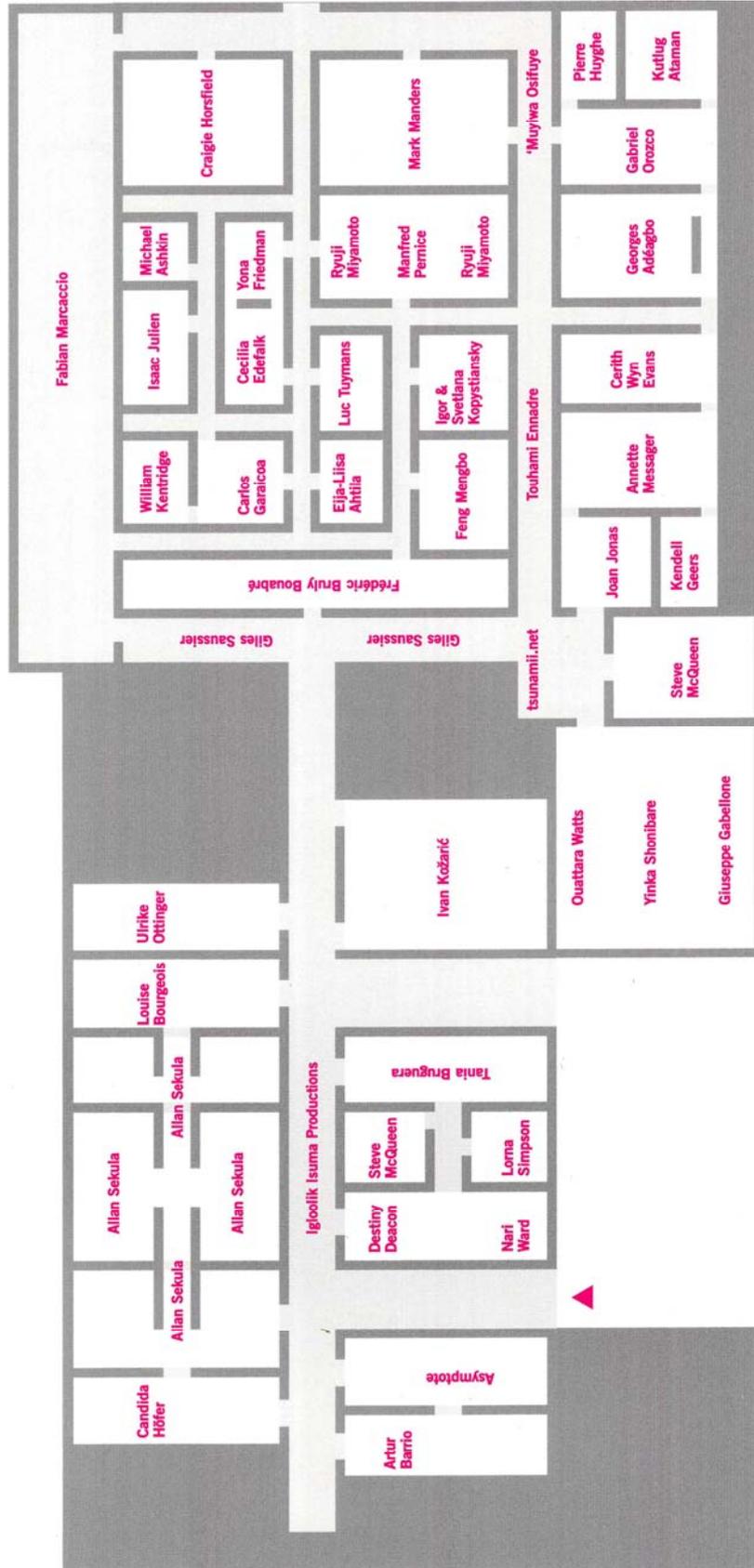


Figure 3: Schema of artists displayed in the Binding-Brauerei. 2002.
 (Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition Venues. 2002:119).



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.

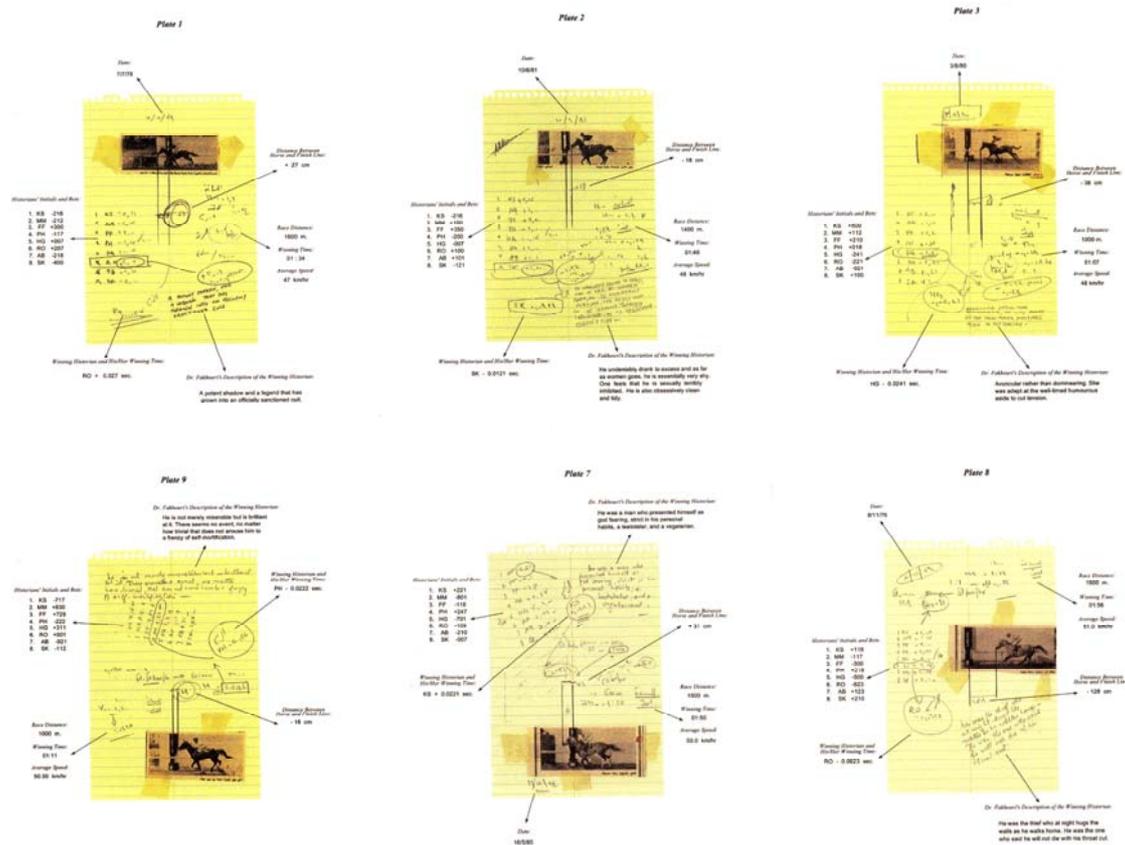


Figure 6: The Atlas Group, *Notebook Volume 72: Missing Lebanese Wars*, 1999.

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.

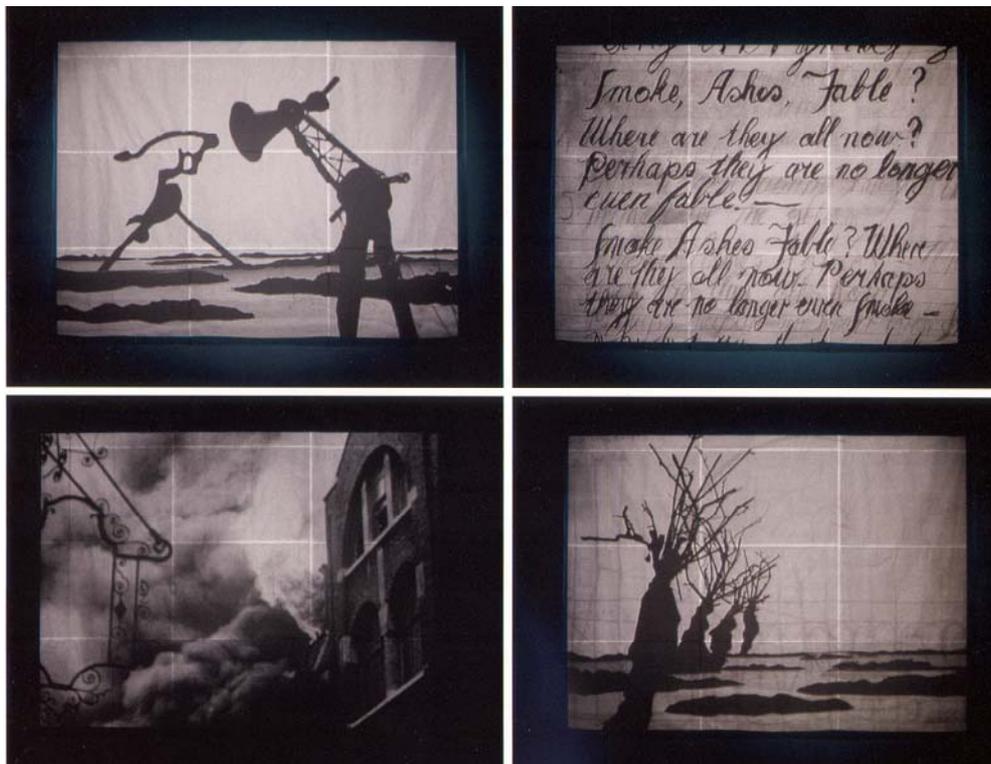


Figure 7: William Kentridge, *Zeno writing*, 2002.
Film installation, 16 mm film transferred to DVD (11 min.), stills.
Binding-Brauerei, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues*. 2002:161).



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.