



CHAPTER 3

ON EXPANDING PUBLIC SPHERES

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

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

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



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

3.1 POSTCOLONIAL PUBLIC SPHERES

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



3.1.1 Coming to terms with crisis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

3.1.2 Pluralism and transculturality

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



3.2 GLOBALISING THE DISCOURSE

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

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

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



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

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

3.2.1 Global capital and democracy

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

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

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

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

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



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

3.2.1.1 Transnational capitalist playing field

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

3.2.1.2 Democracy under threat

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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



3.2.2 Considering truth and justice

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

3.2.2.1 Multiplying definitions

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

3.2.2.2 Collective memory and amnesia

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

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

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



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

Film: 35mm transferred to DVD, 13 min.

Museum Fridericianum, Kassel.

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

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



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

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

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

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

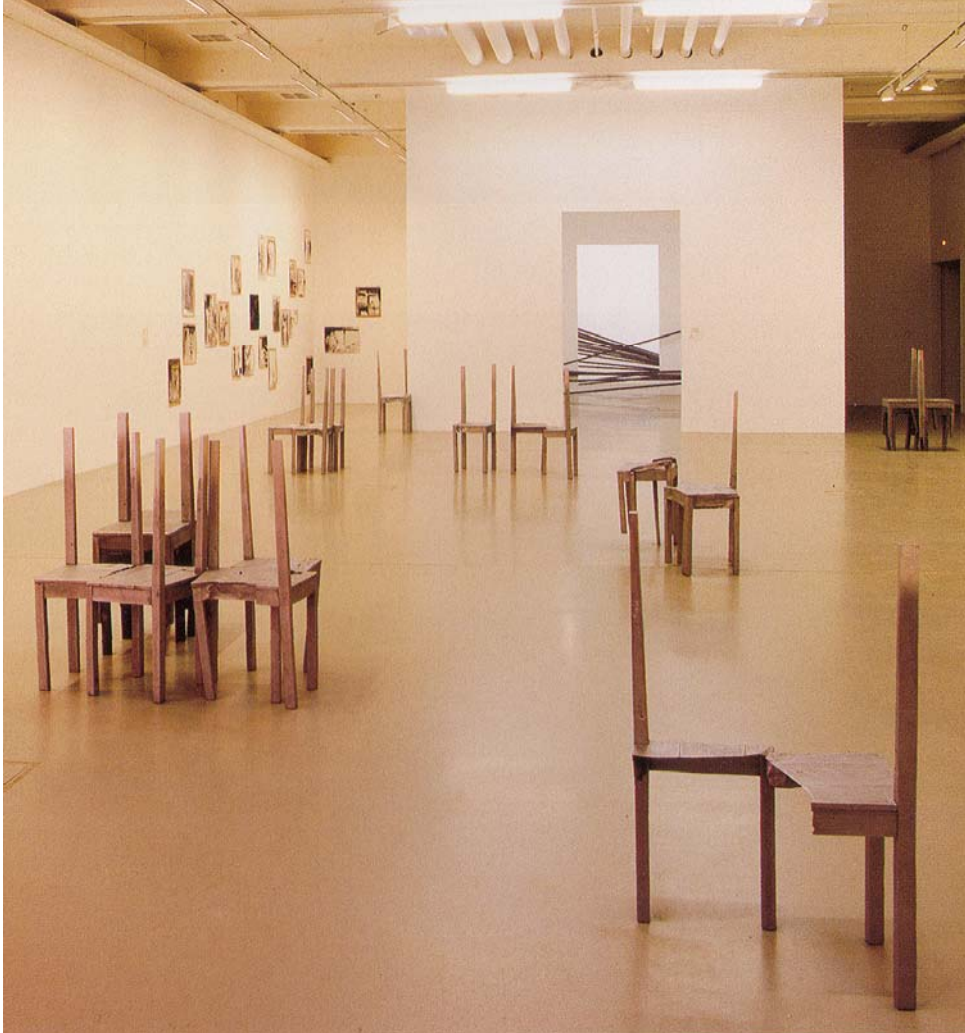


Figure 12: Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6*, 2001; *THOU-LESS*, 2001-2002; *Tenebrae Noviembre 7*, 1985, 1999-2000.
Installation: Stainless steel, lead, wood, resin and steel.
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel.
(*Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition venues* 2002:36).

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

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



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

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



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

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

3.3 AIDING THE ENEMY

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

³⁷ Platform 4 will be discussed in the next chapter.



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

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

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

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

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



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

3.4 CONCLUSION

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

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



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

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

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