



## CHAPTER 5

### MIN(D)ING THE GAP

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## 5.1 IN-BETWEEN: HOMELESSNESS AS DESTINATION

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



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

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

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

The space of in-between is, in a sense, a sprawling zone of indeterminate locations: the space of ambivalence, of passage, of refuge<sup>5</sup> and camouflage, of border conflicts and of insurgency. It is as outsider-space under the sign of rebellion, transgression, insubordination and insurrection that the in-between creates the space for indeterminate agency. In facilitating breaches and breaks the in-between functions as space of emergence. For the postcolonial project of Documenta 11 this aspect of dislocated cultural practice offered the crucial promise of intervention and change. Artworks situated in such a homeless state can act as gateways to what Bhabha (1994:7) describes as “revisionary time”, stating:

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

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

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

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



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

### 5.1.1 Mapping passages forking endlessly<sup>6</sup>

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

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

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

The indetermination reaches as wide as it is deep, leading Basualdo (2002a:57) to formulate Documenta 11's position as the "conjunction of an encyclopedia<sup>7</sup> and a mirror", as the space of "refract[ion] in the multiple systems through which the artists of a generous geography have organized the world and their own worlds". Both these metaphors – the encyclopaedia and mirror – indicated the fragmentation, complexity and uncertainty embraced by this Documenta. As a "collection of encyclopedias, a world of worlds" (Basualdo 2002a:57) or, conversely, as a "book of mirrors" (Basualdo

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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



Another artist commissioned by Documenta 11, Canadian Stan Douglas, also attained polyvalence through the interstitial production of his work. In *Suspiria* (2002) (Figure 21) he addressed the phantasmagorical character of late capitalism by relating diverse visual, textual and auditory spectral elements into an uncanny experience of a logic operating between nightmare and fantasy. The work takes as its point of departure two historical features of Kassel – the home of the brothers Grimm and the site of the monumental Herkules Octagon. The labyrinthine-like passages of the monument replace the setting of the forest for the enactment of narrative elements from the Grimm’s collection of fairytales, combined with literary allusions in volume 1 of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx.<sup>9</sup> The title of the work derives from Dario Argento’s horror movie, *Suspiria* (1977), which technically influenced the visual style of Douglas’ imagery, as well as the soundtrack performed by the Italian prog-rock<sup>10</sup> group, Goblin. Visually Douglas achieved a transmogrified, ghostly reality, by exploiting technical features of the North American NTSC television system<sup>11</sup> and superimposing imagery manipulated by computer so as not to repeat any images over the hundred days of the exhibition. Bleeding lines and vibrating colours, sound distortions, as well as fore- and background shifts, all merge together to dissolve the visual-textual-sonic plane into a spectral dimension. The fairy tale of what the artist perceives as the hollow triumph of capitalist democracy could thus be experienced on a mind-bending cognitive-visceral level.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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





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

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

### 5.1.2 Nomadic subjects on the war path

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

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



and nomadic. In contrast with the topos of the exile favoured by Said,<sup>13</sup> feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti (1994:21-24) opts for that of the nomad, claiming the exile stays focussed on loss and reminiscence, while the migrant is suspended in the present by being stuck in an orientation around origins. Also, the idea of diaspora could result in essentialist notions of ethnicity or, what Hall (2003b:189) terms, an insertion of the mythical into historical time.<sup>14</sup> The nomadic, on the contrary, “does not stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity” (Braidotti 1994:22). The nomadic choice is not rootlessness, but a “situated form of heterogeneity” (Braidotti 1994:17) in which connections<sup>15</sup> and transitions are superseding separations and traditions. As “vectors of deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:382) nomads embody the line of flight in nomad thought that value exteriority over interiority, difference over identity.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the nomad functions in a state of becoming, rather than that of being.

Thus, by extending the notions of Braidotti and Deleuze and Guattari, nomadic identity can be considered as the site for resistance, if it is actively adopted and embraced. The deterritorialised, transitory nomad is a “transgressive identity” (Braidotti 1994:35) who can destabilise all kinds of conceptual hallowed grounds. It is as inhabitants of smooth space<sup>17</sup> that nomads are potential men of war and pose a threat to any order that they are exterior to. For the nomad *unheimlich* translates as undomesticated, untamed,

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

### **5.1.3 Displacement, archiving and counter-memory**

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Installation view, Fridericianum, Kassel.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

## 5.2 RECONSIDERING THE ARCHIVE

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





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

### 5.2.1 An anarchival impulse

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

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

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

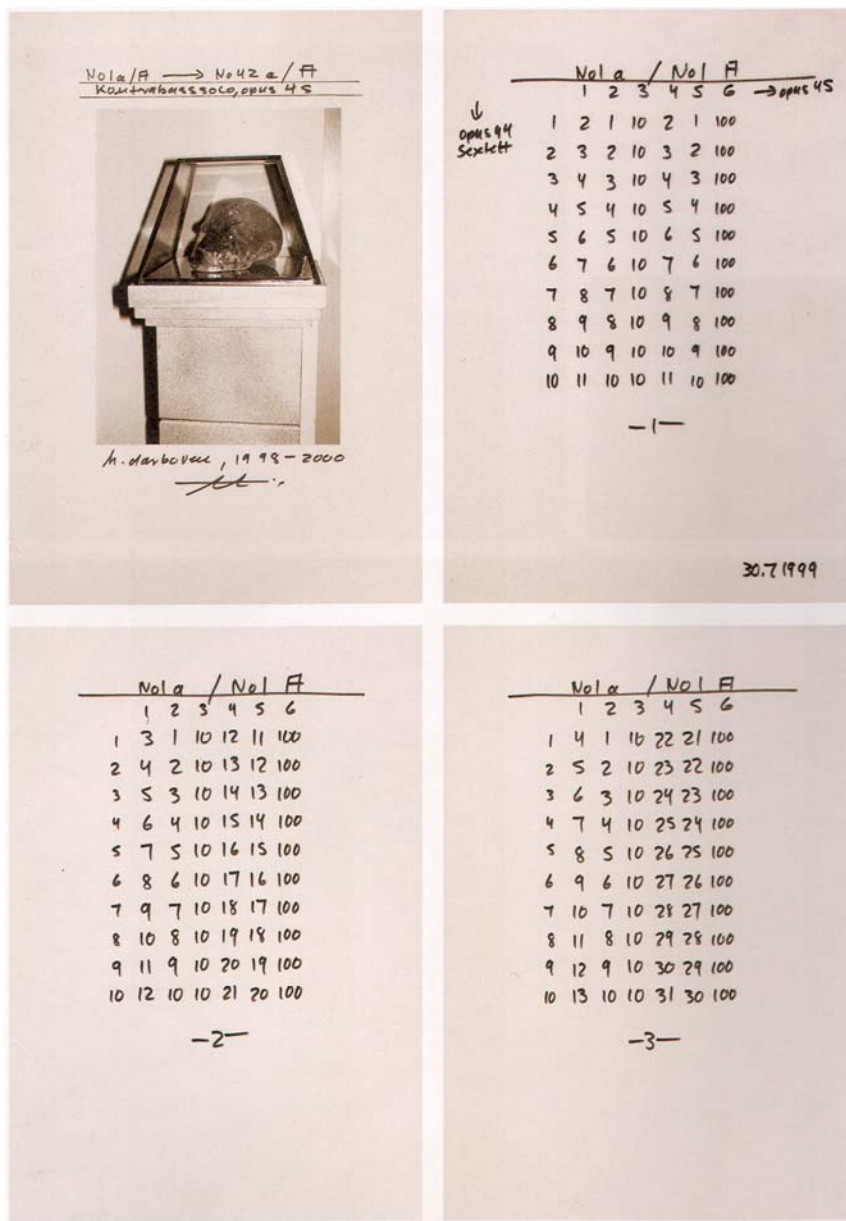


Figure 24: Hanne Darboven, *Kontrabaßsolo* (Solo for Double Bass), opus 45, 1998-2000, detail.  
 First file of series: drawings and photograph.  
 Fridericianum, Kassel.  
 (*Documenta 11\_Platform 5: Exhibition catalogue 2002:236*).

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

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



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

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

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



Documenta as prime exemplar<sup>27</sup> of exhibition practices in the colonial metropole. Coming to terms with the canonical trajectory of Documenta, therefore means for Enwezor (2002d:1) to “unhinge and to make unstable the grounds around which we have conceptualized Documenta over the years”. It also means, according to Bauer (2002:103), that Documenta 11 was conceived as a “corrective” project in order to “reformulate a history of art that is linear and focused on the West”. This dual agenda, of both unhinging and reformulation, is set to anarchise the archive on various levels: as canon ascribing value to certain art and artists while excluding others, as repository for the construction of historical narratives, and as conceptual framing mechanism altering realities.

### 5.2.2 Not Northern time and space

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

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

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

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



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

The theatre of history is thus construed as the exclusive domain of the West with the Rest consigned to prehistory, irrelevant to, or forever trying to catch up with, what is considered the real or universal history. In Hegel's view, Sub-Saharan Africa could be dismissed from this universal history and could not even claim a particular African history.<sup>30</sup> Whereas histories of the non-West were constructed around either lack and absence, or, at the most, incompleteness and inadequacy, the history of 'Western civilisation' was sanitised notably in relation to its origins.<sup>31</sup> The notion of a mythical past combined with that of pure, national identities resulted particularly in Germany in cultural and civic exclusions that have only been amended in German law in the year 2000.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, constructions of Western cultural superiority can only be maintained by positing an inferior non-West as the outside to this binary frame, as Edward Said has revealed in his analysis of Orientalism.<sup>33</sup> This perception of cultural distance is consequently employed as a discursive template to reproduce existent narratives and reaffirm perceived differences.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

viewpoints of an originator in art history<sup>36</sup> and a self-taught artist, respectively, were thus staged as belonging to the same mottled modernity, or conversely, as different moments of corresponding modernities.



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

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

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



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

### 5.2.3 Unframing the gaze

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

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

The power to shape the organising principles of the archive is at stake: admittance to an archive that embeds the rhetoric of othering in the ways it stores, organises, excludes, possesses and constructs public narratives would be adding insult to injury. The aim is to transform the one-sided dynamic of what Mosquera termed curator versus curated cultures<sup>37</sup> dictating the archive.

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





The imperial gaze<sup>38</sup> relies on constant surveillance to maintain power over its panoptic structures, as Foucault pointed out. If the panopticon is taken as a generalised model for the mobilising of power relations, as Foucault's (1995:213) suggests, then the panopticon as metaphor for "surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency" (Foucault 1995:257) is closely linked to the archive. In this context the archive – being what Derrida calls an archontic principle<sup>39</sup> – institutionalises patriarchal logic by imposing domiciliation and demanding filiation. Any project to unhinge the imperial archival structures of subjugation, taming, interpellation and consumption, therefore, has to contend with the violence at the heart of the archive: "It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place" (Derrida 1996:2, emphasis in original). The archive is ultimately a framing regime that "produces as much as it records" (Derrida 1996:17) and thereby govern the existence and the future of what is recorded. On some level, that which is excluded from the archive never existed, and distortions within the frame warp reality to be what it never was. This is why the archive impact the present for Ugandan born artist Zarina Bhimji, whose family was expelled with other Indians by Idi Amin in 1972. Writing about *Out of blue* (2002), her filmic exploration of a personal coming to terms with this past for Documenta 11, Bhimji (2002:552) claims "history serves the present" since "[w]hat is not recorded does not exist".

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

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

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

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



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

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

Fridericianum, Kassel.

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

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



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

In the context of Documenta 11 the power of the archive could be harnessed by showing up the frame, by framing the frame as it were. This was achieved, to some degree, through curatorial strategies, such as the instituting of platforms to de- and reterritorialise narratives and a rhizomatic approach to the exhibition in order to open up the experience of space and time (See Chapter 2). The display of a large amount of artworks excavating the archive and documenting the process of archiving<sup>40</sup> was, however, for viewers the main portal of entry into an engagement with the archive as “system of discursivity” (Foucault 1972:129).<sup>41</sup> It is on this basic level, of what can be said, that the archive functions as a set of complex relations which define discourse – “its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance” (Foucault 1972:130). It is therefore on this very level that the uncovering of disparities and omissions in discursive practices hold the greatest promise of transforming the functioning of the archive. It could be argued that, if the spaces of Documenta deepened understanding of the archive, shifts could be attributed to the insights of individual artists, rather than professed curatorial views. Nevertheless, the connections established between the collected artworks within the postcolonial curatorial framework amplified perceptions.

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

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

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



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

Seen together with other works engaging with archiving in the Fridericianum, in particular, the discussed works of Tan, Wall, Bhimji, Feyzdjou, Goldblatt, Mofokeng and Darboven indeed contributed to a reconsideration of the enunciative possibilities of the archive. Whether these artists aligned themselves with the postcolonial project of Documenta 11 or not, in the context of the exhibition their work supported the curatorial aim of dislodging frames by showing up framing devices and making gaps visible. If the affecting of epistemic discontinuities is regarded as a first step to de-hegemonise discourses and change the way cultures are coded and decoded in both the North and South, then Documenta 11 could be considered as a step in the right direction. In a transcultural exhibition any rethinking of the archive requires the dismantling of monocultural trappings<sup>43</sup> by superimposing

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

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



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

### 5.3 TRANSCULTURAL TRANSLATION

At the centre of the postcolonial archive aimed at construction and deconstruction around the gap is the issue of cultural translation: how signification systems can be translated if the universality of a single, dominant code is eschewed. Coming to terms with difference means embracing the uncertain territory of the gap, since difference “is that which denies a common index of measure in which the one entity triumphs and the other entity fails” (Rogoff 2001:88).<sup>44</sup> Difference inhabits the liminal<sup>45</sup> spaces between frames and is most palpable as what Maharaj (Hall & Maharaj 2001:46) calls “elusive liquidity” or “that which resists translation”.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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





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

#### 5.4 CURATING AS LITTORAL PRACTICE

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

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

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



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

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

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

If the avant-gardes of the past (Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, let's say) anticipated a changing order, that of today is to make impermanence, and what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls *aterritoriality*, the principal order of today's uncertainties, instability and insecurity. With this order in place, all notions of autonomy which radical art had formerly claimed for itself are abrogated.

This view of the space of cultural production as impermanent and aterritorial fundamentally challenged not only localisations of previous Documenta's, but also acted as a declaration of Documenta 11's own historicity and limitations – of a positioning in the gap, knowing some spaces can never be filled.

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<sup>52</sup> According to art historian Martha Ward (1996:459), the notion of exhibitions as "historical actors" is a modernist development, in which "representations of the exhibition's transformative power and historical mission [...] were accelerated for the distribution of modern art by an entrepreneurial avant-gardism".