



## CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION

Setting out to investigate whether the curatorial approaches of Documenta 11 could be considered as in any way exemplary, this study concluded in the preceding chapters that, whilst failing in some regard to redirect geocultural and geopolitical dynamics, Enwezor and his team succeeded in important respects to create an inclusive mega-exhibition in which imbalances and differences were underscored, if not transformed. It has also been argued that this Documenta, by virtue of the cumulative effect of curatorial strategies, showed a viable, if not unflawed, way to engage with cultural differences in a transcultural field.

In a sense this study extrapolates from notions put forward by the curatorial team of Documenta 11 in order to identify elements of a possible exemplar for transcultural curating:

- a differentiation of the centre,
- the renegotiation of North-South relations,
- valuing agonism and pluralism,
- an accented internationalism,
- targeting of transitions,
- embracement of the border,
- affirming the subversive promise of art, and
- locating art practice as social engagement.

In the discussion around each of these issues throughout the previous six chapters of this dissertation, the gains and inefficiencies, even contra-productive results, of curatorial strategies have been emphasised. While distinguishing itself from its predecessors and other contemporary transnational exhibitions in its non-exoticising approach to others and elsewhere, Documenta 11 demonstrated in no small measure how complicated the challenges are of transforming hegemonic global dynamics



and redressing inequalities and distortions within existing networks that are funded, and largely managed by the North. Whereas the tactical employment of postcolonial theory opened up possibilities for rethinking and rewriting art historical narratives and importing voices that have previously been silent, muted, or deemed insignificant, Documenta 11, by virtue of its canonising function as premier Northern exhibition, created its own parameters of exclusion and marginalisation. Nevertheless, the central argument of this study is that, regardless of its shortcomings, this Documenta broke new ground in the way that difference in the transcultural field was (re)negotiated.

In order to substantiate the main claims of this dissertation, the following summary of chapters two to six will outline the specific achievements, limits and inadequacies of Documenta 11's discussed curatorial strategies; firstly, with reference to the features of the transcultural paradigm identified above and, secondly, in comparison with some tactics employed in Documenta 12.<sup>1</sup>

## 7.1 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

*Chapter 2* engaged with the curatorial approaches by which Documenta 11 set out to differentiate the centre and renegotiate North-South dynamics by creating a nomadic space in which transitions could be fostered. Aiming for inclusivity and an expansion of representation that transcended the mere incorporation of former margins, by effectively transforming hegemonic structures of the centre, Documenta 11 attempted to open out the aesthetic to the public sphere of global cultural politics. *Opening out* was discussed in terms of the various horizontal and vertical extensions proposed by the curators; of the present space of engagement in a mega-exhibition, and historical interactions with cultural production not on the Euro-American axis. In this regard two key-tactics were evaluated: a commitment to open-ended dialogic space and postcoloniality as line of attack deployed, firstly, to rethink

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion of Documenta 12 will be restricted to information and impressions gleaned from the Documenta-website, podcasts of lunch-time lectures presented at Documenta 12, the catalogue and magazines published by Documenta 12, and reviews of the exhibition, since I had been unable to visit Kassel to view the exhibition.



the institutional premises of Documenta as historiographical site and, secondly, to tackle the uneven conditions of globalisation. The contention in this chapter is that Documenta 11 differed markedly from its predecessors in the way that difference in the transcultural field was approached. Strategic de- and extraterritorialisation of the exhibition in Kassel and the utilisation of a rhizomised exhibition structure shifted the Northern institution's proximity to 'elsewheres' significantly in this Documenta. However, the curatorial attempts at constructing a counter-hegemonic and counter-normative space to show art from, what could be considered, margins, centres and everything in-between, demonstrated how limited the possibilities of such an endeavour really are and, ultimately, fell short of the high standards that this Documenta set for itself in this regard.

The institution of the notion of creolisation – both as metaphor for transculturation and as a paradigm for transcultural curating – could, nonetheless, be regarded as a fruitful innovation by Documenta 11. Creolisation as transcultural location served the dual purpose of highlighting not only asymmetries, but also resistance strategies. Thus, at the very least, a space was discursively created in which power relations could be engaged with and possibly altered. By showing up framing devices and the complexity of cultural translation in an expanded transcultural field of representations, Documenta 11 certainly created density in its inclusion-strategies and nomadic practices, thereby avoiding paternalism, political correctness and tokenisation. Though to what degree these tactics resulted in a transformation of the geocultural landscape remains questionable. It is my contention that such a project had to achieve more than merely incorporating artists and trajectories, since hegemonic structures feed off pronounced differences being absorbed into collective will. As Stuart Hall (1997b:58) reminds us: "Hegemony is not the disappearance of difference. It is the construction of a collective will through difference."

On the whole, although ultimately grounded in Northern Europe, Enwezor's Documenta approached a transcultural field in which the South could be heard – both in the North and South – and as such at minimum advanced the



prospect of dislodging hegemonic structures, in my opinion. This is not the case with Documenta 12, which embarked on a similarly inclusive project by inviting participation from across the globe. Whereas Documenta 11 played up the locatedness of practitioners in an uneven cultural, political and economic landscape – through the large selection of documentary-style works, among other tactics – the exhibition of Documenta 12 was approached as a “plateau where art communicates itself and on its own terms” (Buergel & Noack 2007:12). Artistic director Roger Buergel and his wife, curator Ruth Noack, seemed intent on freeing artists from any fixation of their “geopolitical identity (à la ‘art from India’)” (Buergel & Noack 2007:11) by even refusing to indicate their countries of origin on wall labels. (Re)contextualisation of works in Kassel was thus largely in the hands, or the eyes, of the curators who relied on formal correspondences between diverse objects to develop transcultural connections. Transcultural translation in this approach primarily amounted to the “migration of forms”.<sup>2</sup> By constructing Documenta 12 as a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which the exhibition became the medium,<sup>3</sup> cultural differences were inevitably flattened: spatial and temporal differences between visual artworks, decorative objects, cuisine and fashion<sup>4</sup> were obscured and mystifying links made. Furthermore, the implied Romanticism of Buergel and Noack’s notion that diverse cultural products divorced from their original contexts somehow communicated on their own terms, is deeply problematic, not least because the reading of the works was influenced by formal juxtapositions imposed by the curators. In retrospect, the rhizomatic approach of Documenta 11, in which artists were afforded their own spaces in which to contextualise their projects, were considerably more democratic and

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<sup>2</sup> Buergel approached the notion of “migration of form” as central curatorial method, expressed at a lecture in Dresden on 24 January 2007 (according to the news section of the Documenta 12-website, available at <http://www.documenta12.de/488.html?&L=1>) as: “An exhibition like the documenta needs something akin to a red thread. [...] The Migration of Form is intended as such a red thread. As a curatorial method, it addresses the vivid and sometimes dramatic interplay of the historic as well as the contemporary evolution of forms.”

<sup>3</sup> See the section “On the poetics of documenta 12” on the website at <http://www.documenta12.de/ausstellung.html?&L=1> for the formulation of this idea.

<sup>4</sup> Documenta 12 sought to integrate such miscellaneous cultural products as Persian calligraphy from the sixteenth century, an Indian miniature from the seventeenth century, watercolour presentations of ceramics from China, a garden carpet from Iran, a Central-Asian bridal face veil, the experimental cooking of Ferran Adrià and fashion of Oumou Sy with artworks ranging from Édouard Manet and Paul Klee to contemporary media-installations.



attested to curatorial transparency, the strong curatorial vision of Enwezor's team notwithstanding.<sup>5</sup>

It is in the ambit of the issues discussed in *Chapter 3* that the crucial dissimilarities between the last two Documentas are most obvious and where, in my view, the curatorial orientation of Documenta 11 distinguished itself in an important respect, namely by valuing contestation and agonism. The curatorial designation of Documenta 11 as “a constellation of public spheres” (Enwezor 2002b:54) was evaluated in this chapter, considering that such an expansion of the parameters of an exhibition, while pluralising discourses, could also aid a globalising cultural economy. It is my contention that in its postcolonial reworking of the notion of the public sphere – of heterogeneous participation in several overlapping spheres with sensitivity to incommensurability in the interface between cultures – Documenta 11 indeed made a valuable contribution to engagement with transculturality. By aiming to construct a critical space in which to consider that which defies translation, even if employed strategies were sometimes inadequate, the curators of Documenta 11 avoided the trap of multicultural managerialism. In my opinion, the significance of the focus on agonism, on keeping the dialogue open in shared transcultural space where consensus is ultimately unrealisable, is that Enwezor's project showed a way out of the multiculturalist impasse that plagues mega-exhibitions. In comparison Documenta 12, in which commonality was presumed on a linear visual and conceptual plane, came across as an anachronistic *Wunderkammer*.<sup>6</sup>

Although a strong case can be made that Documenta 11 offered new insights in the construction of an accented cultural space in which the tone of voices,

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<sup>5</sup> Curator-critic Helen Molesworth (2007:141) claims the abiding difference between Documentas 11 and 12 is in the implied social models: the former presented a democratic model by a diverse curatorial team that constructed a “wildly heterogeneous exhibition – filled with internal contradictions”, whereas the latter got stuck in the “insular logic of the couple” and their “experiment in pure experience, an experience the terms of which were reached through neither debate nor consensus”.

<sup>6</sup> According to critic Marco Scotini (2007:67), the anachronistic exhibition practices of Documenta 12 displayed past events and contemporary work together in glass vitrines, against coloured walls and in curtained spaces in a “contextual mise-en-scene [...] that not even Alexander Dorner would have been able to imagine”.



discourses and narratives in different production sites can in principle be grappled with, the casting of its curatorial team as translators in the global sphere did not safeguard this Documenta against criticism of complicity to expansionist neocolonial market forces; of delivering “others” for sale. To a certain degree the platforms were set up to undermine instrumentalisation and co-optation by specifically engaging with globalisation discourses. Yet, any agonism generated in this regard, did not stretch to mapping out ways to confront, and indeed jeopardise, co-optation dynamics. It was up to artists who resisted delivering marketable products and managed to create an ethical space for the contemplation of particular collective narratives to effectively defy levelling globalism. The inclusion of such artworks could be considered the strongest statement against cooptation by Documenta 11, an underwhelming result given the weighty curatorial rhetoric concerning globalisation.

Nonetheless, how Documenta 11 positioned itself within a global art network – the focus of *Chapter 4* – is considered a curatorial strong suit in this study. Within a field of proliferating transnational exhibitions pursuing global aspirations, Documenta 11 critically engaged with the dynamics of a decentred art network. The contention of this chapter is that whereas globalised exhibition networks tend to advance artworks that adhere to a transnational style, in transcultural space the locatedness of cultural producers is pivotal to meaningful engagements. It was argued that although Documenta 11 as mega-exhibition par excellence instituted mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion particular to deterritorialised art practices, both a gleeful affirmation of globality and powerless submission to fragmentation were nevertheless eschewed. One of the most positive offshoots of the postcolonial orientation of Documenta 11, in my estimation, is that the global sphere was provincialised by adopting proximity – “the terrible nearness of distant places” (Enwezor 2002b:44) – as its focus. Thereby globalising flows were reterritorialised to show how artists cope with the promise and limitations of producing locality in diverse production sites, especially in spaces on the edge of globalisation, such as African cities and aboriginal Inuit land.



The sense of locatedness engendered by the selection of artworks distinguished Documenta 11 from the dislocation at the heart of Documenta 12's curatorial practices.<sup>7</sup> Compared to the problematic formal, and inevitably superficial, migration-patterns enforced by Buergel and Noack, Enwezor's preoccupation with actual diasporic artists informed by nomadic localisations seems the lesser of two evils. Limiting participation to artists that produced, what Enwezor (2002c:51) consider as "international advanced art", often translated as artists living in urban centres and that represent marginalised production cites only by proxy. However, this very limitation allowed for the construction of a translational, transcultural framework for the display of diverse artworks while steering clear of the fetishisation of disparate objects. Of the two Documentas, the particular focus on placed identities – on location as well as dislocation – produced a far better model for the construction of an accented transcultural exhibition, in my view. Documenta 11, at its very best, avoided the levelling of shared space and thus showed a way in which the understanding of difference might be broadened. It is my further contention that for those artists from Southern margins lucky enough to be included in this Documenta, the introduction of distinct accents opened up a space (albeit a small one) for dialogue, transgression and negotiation within the hegemonic languages of the centre.

While a rethinking of the centre and the museum of Documenta was central to the last three Documentas, it seems that the process started by David and progressed by Enwezor was pushed back by Documenta 12. In terms of its representation of women artists – more than half the artists in Documenta 12 were female – the last Documenta was praised for readdressing a critical imbalance not dealt with by Documenta 11. Yet, the display of far-flung collected pre-modern objects in juxtaposition with contemporary works smacked of orientalism.<sup>8</sup> Even if the intention was to show the implied logic in the categorising and collecting of cultural products from other cultures by the

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<sup>7</sup> Critic Nancy Princenthal (2007:175) asserts Buergel and Noack are well known for seeking out wide-ranging projects and "forc[ing] disparate artists into unwonted association".

<sup>8</sup> Critic Jörg Heiser (2007:137) comments on the "obnoxious" juxtaposition of, for instance, the mandala painting of John McCracken, *Tantric* (1971), with Tajik bridal veils from the nineteenth century and David Goldblatt's photographs *The transported of KwaNdebele* (1983) in the Aue Pavillion, designated the "Crystal Palace" by Buergel.



West,<sup>9</sup> by attempting to draw a Theseus-thread of formal correspondences throughout the exhibition, the result was reminiscent of Enlightenment aesthetics aiming for a common grid of representations. In effect the project of Documenta 12, therefore, did not seem far removed from Said's (1987:12, emphasis in original) formulation of orientalism as the "*distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts".

In contrast the extensive engagement with the archive by Documenta 11, discussed in *Chapter 5*, was constructed as an anarchival project to readdress various canonical trajectories, reformulate historical narratives, unhinge conceptual framing mechanisms and reshape the organising principles of the archive. It is the contention of this study that the aim of the curators of Documenta 11 of an indeterminate, visual-sonic discursive framework showed a viable approach to difference and translatability, even if the realisation of this aim was not an unqualified success. In my view, cultural translation is central to transcultural curating if a single, dominant code is replaced by multimodal signification systems. Therefore, it could be argued that Enwezor's specific engagement with the thorny issue of cultural translation singled this Documenta-project out as moving in an exemplary direction for transcultural curating.

The location of Documenta 11 as translatory, interstitial transcultural space was particularly investigated with a view to examine the transformative possibilities of such a borderised location. The curatorial project was interpreted as *mining* the potential of the gap, or in-between, while being mindful of gaps, omissions and disparities in cultural framing devices. By choosing homelessness as destination, Documenta 11 embraced nomadic identity and set out to create an indeterminate zone of passage in which paths

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<sup>9</sup> With regard to the exhibited connoisseur's representation of Chinese porcelains from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, Johannes Wieninger states in the catalogue (2007:20): "The presentation of the ceramics in isolation without a spatial context corresponds to the traditional depiction of objects, a response to the question of objectivity and reality." Whether this position reflects that of Buergel and Noack is unclear, because they did not supply any coherent conceptualisation of their project (a total of four paragraphs in the catalogue), relying instead on the installation/exhibition to speak for itself.



fork endlessly, home to artworks accomplishing transigrations, polyvalence and interconnectivity. It was argued that nomadic subjectivity also activated the in-between as space of obstruction or a wedge that could disrupt, displace and dislodge. Thereby the embracement of the border could be considered as, first and foremost, a commitment to agency that pushed beyond formulations of “border thinking” (Mignolo 2000:736) in terms of indeterminate liminality, suspended opposition and deferred action.<sup>10</sup> The affirmation of agency – of artists and audience alike – by Documenta 11’s curatorial team was precisely such an attempt to transcend lame-duck oppositionality. The success of this transgressive project was, however, dependant upon the particular strengths and weaknesses of littoral curatorial practice, of which Documenta 11 could be considered a prime example. While the push beyond conventional knowledge could be considered a forte, dialogue and discourse are destined to have a limited effect on, and are largely determined by, existing power structures, and Documenta 11 did ultimately not escape the “discursive determinism” (Kester 1999/2000:5) underlying littoral practice. Despite this limitation, it was maintained that within the transcultural framework of Documenta 11 powerful breaches of borders were nonetheless achieved by artists from “experimental cultures” (Enwezor 2002b:45).<sup>11</sup>

Adopting the position that in a transcultural field multiple connections between singular sites of cultural production present opportunities for the emergence of alternative art practices, forged in alternative contexts, a case was made that transculturality could expand the discourse beyond spectatorial, institutional aesthetics. Implemented in curatorial practice, transculturality is thus set to have “subversive potential” (Becker 1994:113); to curate against the grain. In *Chapter 6* aesthetic orientations of Documenta 11 were considered as

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<sup>10</sup> In this regard literary theorist Benita Parry (2002:245) criticises the inferences of Homi Bhabha’s use of open-ended determinations of liminality and negotiation: “The implications of rewriting a historical project of invasion, expropriation and exploitation in the indeterminate and always deferred terms Bhabha proposes and implements are [...] immensely troubling, since his elaborations dispense with the notion of conflict”.

<sup>11</sup> Experimental cultures emerging in postcolonial space “articulate modalities that define the new meaning- and memory-making systems of late modernity” (Enwezor 2002b:44) and the concept therefore defines “a set of practices whereby cultures evolving out of imperialism and colonialism [...] compose a collage of reality from the fragments of collapsing space” (Enwezor 2002b:45).



possible exemplar of such a transgressive practice, of a threshold aesthetic associated with a trickster-positioning. The chapter explored the subversive power of trickster-strategies for individual visual artists, as well as for the curator structuring an exhibition. The potential for disruption was discussed in terms of revolutionary negation or opposition from within the system. Documenta 11 was regarded as an example of the latter kind of trickster in the transnational exhibition circuit by: heightening awareness of complexity and multiplicity; including trickster-style artworks that show up the complexities of localised and transcultural production; undermining global market dynamics by favouring artworks and production strategies that resisted commodification, particularly collective and collaborative practices. Making an argument for an adversarial agenda grounded in agonism as counter-localisation to multiculturalism, the varied postcolonial counter-positionalities of Documenta 11 were contrasted to the single oppositional strategy of anthropophagy employed in the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (1998). Further adversarial strategies re-examined by Documenta 11, particularly Third Cinema, was explored as guiding an aesthetic of thirdness; of in-betweenness, multiplicity and resistance.

Whether these curatorial strategies of Documenta 11 pushed an adversarial approach far enough is debatable. Nevertheless, it is the contention of this dissertation that by constructing the exhibition as transcultural stage where transitions could potentially be made between diverse disciplines, viewpoints, approaches, artworks and production sites in an expanded public and aesthetic sphere, Documenta 11 functioned as “cultural agitator” (Basualdo 2001:27). Thus the emphasis on multiplicity, connectivity, flexibility and unpredictability could be construed as a subversive, if somewhat restrained, approach to art practice. Compared to Documenta 12, however, the subtle subversion of Enwezor’s Documenta seems to grow in intensity. While both Documentas set out to reassess modernity – Documenta 11 by focussing on transmodernities or “vernacular modernities”<sup>12</sup> and Documenta 12 by

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<sup>12</sup> This term is borrowed from curator Gilane Tawadros (2003:17), who describes the work of the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy in terms of “a vernacular modernity”.



designating “Is modernity our antiquity?” as leitmotiv<sup>13</sup> – the diverse aesthetic approaches resulted in some transgressive potential for the former curatorial project and none to speak of for the latter. Although the goal for artworks to be “art-ethical processing plants” (Maharaj 2002b:72) overstated the case for ethical engagement in art production, in my opinion, Documenta 11 created a critical-ethical space for the reception of art with a view to heterogeneous transcultural publics. Documenta 12 set out to fashion a very different viewing experience based on the notion of an uninformed audience that had to be educated about “the internal dynamic destinies of form” (Buergel & Noack 2007:12) by well-versed mediators, no less, aiming for “informative inspiration”.<sup>14</sup> Reminiscent of Kantian Idealism,<sup>15</sup> Buergel’s approach did not even acknowledge the issues of spectacularisation that Documentas 10 and 11 wrestled with. In a sense, artists intent on transgressive practices had to work against the curatorial interventions in Documenta 12.<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, the “CNN-Documenta” (Levin 2002:[sp]) emphatically 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. While this approach resulted for some in a “truly international, politically acute” (Meyer 2002:168) watershed-Documenta, it needs to be considered whether such a strong ethical/political agenda would be exemplary for other transcultural exhibitions. The relevance of Documenta 11’s postcolonial project on a global scale is specifically in question.<sup>17</sup> The tactical employment of postcoloniality as “incredible moment of transformation” (Enwezor 2002d:[sp]) aimed at institutional critique, could therefore be regarded as the singular and limited project of Enwezor’s

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<sup>13</sup> The other two leitmotifs are *What is bare life? What is to be done?* according to Buergel on the website at <http://www.documenta12.de/english/leitmotifs.html>

<sup>14</sup> See more about the goals for the extensive art-education program at <http://www.documenta12.de/fuehrungen0.html?&L=1>

<sup>15</sup> According to critic Melvyn Minnaar (2007:10) Buergel admitted his notions about the experience of art as “pure form” that can communicate itself on its own terms derived from German Idealism.

<sup>16</sup> Heiser (2007:139) claims in this regard that Buergel and Noack “seem to have fallen back into a revisionist language of the 1950s, curating as though with their great uncles and aunts in mind, mildly shocking them in some ways (politics), while pleasing them in some ways (flowers and curtains)”.

<sup>17</sup> Commentator Stewart Martin claims in this regard that (2003:18) the “political project of a globalized postcolonialism [...] remains currently highly indeterminate”.



Documenta. However, it could also be argued that Documenta 11 demonstrated that the connections and transitions made in the spaces of a transcultural exhibition were commensurate to the ethical positions adopted. By opting for a complex, discursive-ethical, expanded aesthetic sphere, Documenta 11 at times managed to push engagement with difference beyond the cultural regimes of the spectacle.

On the whole, a strong case can be made that the contributions by the curatorial project of Documenta 11 to the structuring and functioning of a transcultural exhibition changed the discourse around mega-exhibitions, even if its role as transformer of actual power structures remains debatable. To be fair, Enwezor never claimed to affect any large-scale changes (such as the scope of a single exhibition to change any system might be). In the catalogue he (Enwezor 2002b:43, emphasis added) defined the spaces of Documenta 11 as “forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the *possibility of rethinking* the historical procedures”. In that respect the curator’s brief for Documenta 11 was indeed successful. It could further be argued that the postcolonial engagement with the possibilities of rethinking the Northern institution of Documenta indeed met with some success; if not reforming the museum of Documenta, Documenta 11 at the very least differentiated the centre and opened up new channels for North-South currents.

Thus this study concludes that as *historical benchmark* in the construction of a transnational exhibition and reconstruction of a normative Northern institution Documenta 11 could be deemed exemplary. As possible *model* for transcultural practice this Documenta provided valuable insights into the exhibition as nomadic space for translation, the production of difference, potential dislodging of hegemonies and an adversarial aesthetics. Some tactics employed by the curatorial team could, however, be regarded rather as a ‘warning’ than an ‘instruction’.<sup>18</sup> The proliferation of time-based artworks as some kind of slowing-down counter-strategy to voyeurism and spectacularisation jeopardised a critical engagement with precisely the kind of

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<sup>18</sup> See the discussion of the term *documenta* in Chapter 1.



multiple transitions that a discursive-ethical exhibition like Documenta 11 set out to achieve. The focus on multidisciplinary and complexity could similarly turn into a curse if it limits participation by cultural practitioners and audiences.

Whether successive Documentas will reflect, what in the Documenta archive is termed, Enwezor's "taboo-break" of the primacy of Western culture, remains to be seen. It could be argued that by incorporating cultural products from all over the globe and recontextualising collected objects from the past, Documenta 12 followed the lead of Documenta 11 to engage with the construction of inclusive art practices. For Hall (2003b:198) the effects of the postcolonial Documenta can only be measured over time:

We will see [...] whether Documenta 11 is greeted as an interesting diversion; written off as a momentary interruption, a moment of the exotic, a temporary deviation from what 'art' is really about; an interlude of 'cultural diversity' in the onward march of Western civilizational discourse.

In the long term, future Documentas and other transnational mega-exhibitions will show whether Documenta 11 has in fact refigured the constellation or will shine as its brightest, exotic star.

## 7.2 CONTRIBUTION OF STUDY

Given the exceptional scale and complexity of Documenta 11, this study endeavoured to engage with the themes and interconnections between the platforms in a single integrated unit, while tackling some key-issues in transcultural art production. Conducted from a Southern perspective, the study is sensitive to concerns about inclusion/exclusion and the construction of locality/identity by artists in the South for mega-exhibitions that function as cultural ports of import for legitimising Northern institutions. In this regard an investigation of strategies employed by artists in the most inclusive Documenta yet could be productive – as possible models to critically engage with local-global flows.



Embarking from the position that new curatorial approaches need to be developed beyond both multiculturalism and a vociferous embrace of globalising market dynamics, this study explored the potential for such practices. Its examination of Documenta 11 as a serious attempt at curating as transcultural or littoral practice could therefore be regarded as a contribution to discourses surrounding, not only the institution of Documenta, but also the construction of mega-exhibitions and transculturality.

### 7.3 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

While engaging in passing with various issues that each could generate a field of research, this study is limited to framing Documenta 11 in terms of transculturality. This focus tends to exclude a discussion of Documenta-artworks that deal with themes that could be considered personal, rather than political. Given the preponderance of politically-engaged work in this Documenta, a total of sixty-one artists and artist-groups were discussed in some detail. While an analysis of non-political work would certainly add nuance to the experience of Documenta 11, the contention of this study is that such an endeavour would confirm, rather than detract, from the theses discussed in the previous chapters.<sup>19</sup> The underlying assumption to this single-mindedness of purpose is, of course, that a transcultural approach to curating in a decentralised global network of representations could be preferable to other approaches. Further biases expressed in this study are: postcoloniality could provide an important framework for redress; subversivity is a value to aspire to; art practice ought to have an ethical dimension, however ambiguous ethical-interactions in the field of visual arts might be. In its assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Documenta 11, this study is ultimately limited to a short-term view. How the curatorial choices of

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<sup>19</sup> A case can for instance be made that the lyrical-poetic work of Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky, *Flow* (2002) – a multi-screen video-projection of discarded objects floating in water – shared an aesthetic orientation with Iranian Seifollah Samadian's film *The white station* (1999), of a covered woman with an umbrella waiting for a bus in snow storm. Both works leave the narrative open, destinations and departures undisclosed, thereby reinforcing the experience of Documenta 11's spaces as ambiguous.



Enwezor and his team impacted artistic practices can be ascertained only after a study of succeeding Documentas and other mega-exhibitions.<sup>20</sup>

#### 7.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further avenues for research proposed in this section could be divided into themes implied by the project of Documenta 11 and aspects of this study that could to be developed to broaden the understanding of transculturality and its impact on curating.

In the spirit of interconnectivity fostered by Documenta 11, an examination of the common and particular discourses bound up in Platform 4, *Under siege: four African cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* and in the research project, *Urban Imaginaries from Latin America (2003)*<sup>21</sup> would be a fruitful exercise in South-South scholarship. The latter analysis of social imaginaries, or “citizen sketches” (Silva 2003:14), are methodologically approached with strategies ranging from psychoanalysis and semiotic-cognitive studies to polls, projectural curves and statistical surveys. It engages with urban forms as “aesthetic and political act[s]” (Silva 2003:29), symbolic (re)territorialisations of cognitive-spatial narratives that present the lived cities under discussion. This study could complement the postcolonial focus of Platform 4, or even function as, what Martin (2003:16) perceive as, “a corrective: a postcolonial psychogeography”. In this regard the work of Cuban artist Carlos Garaicoa could be considered as such a bridging of postcolonial and utopian sensibilities. In one of his works included in Documenta 11, *Continuidad de una arquitectura ajena* (Continuity of a detached architecture) (2002), he digitally (re)constructed visionary models of the actual ruins of

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<sup>20</sup> Exhibitions that could be potentially fruitful in this regard are: the 27<sup>th</sup> Bienal de São Paulo (2006), titled *How to live together*, with Lisette Lagnado as chief-curator; the second Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla (BIACS 2) (October 2006 to January 2007), *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society*, curated by Enwezor; the 52<sup>nd</sup> Venice Biennale (2007), *Think with the senses – feel with the mind: art in the present tense*, curated by Robert Storr.

<sup>21</sup> Edited by Armando Silva, this publication gathers together research by more than 300 (Silva 2003:14) urbanists, geographers, architects, economists, sociologists, social historians and anthropologists about Barcelona and 13 Latin American cities: Asunción, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Havana, La Paz, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Panama City, Quito, Santiago de Chile and São Paulo.



unfinished architectural projects, thereby healing past wounds and instituting hope for the future. The identification of connections between postcolonial and other approaches by artists participating in Documenta 11 would indeed be productive towards an expansion of transcultural strategies.

The valuing of transculturality impacts numerous issues about the role and function of the curator if curating is approached as a translatory practice. It needs to be considered what it means for the transcultural curator to curate with the ears, rather than the eyes, as Mosquera (2001c:124) claims: “The ear is especially important in transcultural curating, because you need to learn to react to art that might not correspond with your taste, knowledge, and experience”. Does this role, that transcends that of connoisseur, tastemaker, auteur and explorer, spell the end of any over-determined notion of curatorial autonomy? Even a diasporic curator like Enwezor is still located and ultimately limited by the visual-conceptual languages he can speak. On the one hand, there seems to be a drive in global art circuits towards the construction of the role of über-curator and of meta-curating that smack of transnational monopolising. Yet, conversely, the complexities of translatory curating tend to favour a collaborative practise that could put an end to monopoly claims. Collaboration extends to all aspects of production: in a nomadic cultural field the separation between the roles of curator and artist becomes less defined if the exhibited artwork is considered the result of a process of translation.

If transculturality is deemed paradigmatic for artistic practice, the possible ethical and normative implications of such an orientation are of vital importance for success. The emphasis on diversity built into transculturality could be as problematic as in multiculturalist agendas. In this regard Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005:153) points out that the valuing of diversity does not come to terms with the “moral convergence” implied by such a supposedly democratising vision. Rather than correlating with non-domination and autonomy, the principle of diversity underlying a politics of difference could impose hegemony if diversity, plurality and multiplicity are approached as homogenised values. The value of indeterminacy, lack of consensus, indeed



agonism in a liberating transcultural approach should therefore not be underestimated. To what extent such an orientation dovetails with, or becomes an expression of, cosmopolitanism as transnational value system could offer further productive insights into the ethics and aesthetics of globalism. In the end, for transculturality to be regarded as exemplar for contemporary art practice, it has to be shown as a constructive approach to production in and for diverse *global villages*.