

The Space of Documenta11. Documenta11 as a Zone of Activity

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For a long time Documenta enjoyed a reputation as the exhibition that provided the broadest overview of contemporary art worldwide—alongside the biennials of Venice and Sao Paulo, which were organized along national lines—but now it finds itself in a field of some fifty other biennials and triennials across every continent that also dedicate themselves to presenting contemporary art. But Documenta is distinct from these other exhibitions not only because of its five-year cycle¹ but also because its choice of artistic submissions is based neither on thematic grounds nor on geographical restrictions. Although certain external parameters such as its site in Kassel and the hundred-day duration of the exhibition are indeed set, the goal is still to reflect on and formulate Documenta anew each time. This process has made it an indicator of relevant expressions and positions within contemporary art. It is not just other art institutions and the art world as a whole that use Documenta as a point of orientation but also the broader public—the exhibition attracted more than 600,000 visitors last time.²

The first Documenta, which was initiated by Arnold Bode on the occasion of the Bundesgartenschau (Federal garden show) in Kassel in 1955 and was organized by Bode and Werner Haftmann, was originally conceived as a one-off event. It was designed as a large international exhibition of current artistic positions and followed in the tradition of the "classics" of this genre of exhibition such as the 1903 Salon d'automne (Autumn Salon) in Paris³ the 1912 Sonderbund Ausstellung (Sonderbund Exhibition) in Cologne,⁴ the Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon (First German Autumn Salon) in Berlin the following year,⁵ and the Armory Show in New York in 1913.⁶ "Documenta: kunst des XX. jahrhunderts" (Documenta: Art of the Twentieth Century), which took place in a Kassel still in ruins from the destruction of World War II, also picked up the thread of the tradition of the German avant-garde exhibitions that had been severed by the malicious "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art) exhibition organized by the National Socialists in Munich in 1937. By presenting a view of international modern art ranging from the 1920s and 1930s through positions then current, Documenta sought to re-establish contact with the activities of the international art scene and saw itself as a way of paying reparations to the art that the National Socialists had condemned.⁷

Documenta has since become a factor in the economic life of the city of Kassel and also a screen onto which a wide variety of expectations are projected; this weighs not only on the whole exhibition project but also on its curators. The latter are only too aware that the artistic positions selected will carry far more weight and have farther-reaching consequences than they would have if presented only at other exhibitions.⁸ The label "Documenta" constitutes an assessment and a decision in favor of certain artists whose names will then circulate in the art world under that label in years to come, and increasingly means that this exhibition, even more than others, specifies inclusions and exclusions. At the same time, however, the influence that Documenta has won also conceals an enormous potential: it has at its disposal multifaceted capital of both a symbolic and financial nature, which, applied appropriately, can open doors that would otherwise remain closed and can thus set many things in motion. In this way, Documenta has an opportunity to function as a corrective. For Documenta11 in particular this can mean taking up the long overdue challenge to reformulate a history of art that is linear and focused predominantly on the West, and this in turn would necessitate that from now on we would have to address artistic positions from all parts of the world and the specific conditions under which they are produced.

At the same time, art is a field of desires, one in which not only symbolic and real capital is accumulated but also one in which symbolic and real battles are waged. At Documenta this already (and especially) begins with the choice of the artistic director. Catherine David was the first woman to occupy the position, and now Okwui Enwezor is the first non-European artistic director. Each of these milestones resulted in specific challenges for Documenta, and it has become a difficult task for the artistic director to resist being taken over and instrumentalized by the art world.

Because Documenta was founded not just as an artistic statement but also as a political one, it cannot withdraw into an artistic field and block out what is going on in the world around it. Since 1998, when Okwui Enwezor was appointed, and during the time we have been working together with him on this project as co-curators, many things have happened in the world. The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia have continued; even with the start of the new millennium, civil wars rage throughout the world just as before; Africa has the highest rate of AIDS in the world but lacks the necessary medication; far-right and nationalist parties have participated in the governments of many European nations; "Fortress Europe" has been built, while the rights for which women and minorities struggled have been dismantled; the United States and NATO intervene militarily in many parts of the globe and join in antiterrorist pacts; in the Middle East the peace process has reached an end point; and in Argentina the economy and the public welfare system have collapsed. Even so, it is only since September 11, 2001, that we have been regularly asked whether and how Documenta11 intends to react to an event of such dimensions.

Even within our immediate, personal circle tragic events have occurred. The Spanish artist Juan Muñoz, with whom we had discussed his project for Documenta11 (the radio play, *A Registered Patent*) as recently as June 2001, in Paris, died unexpectedly at the end of August. In February, the Argentinian artist Victor Grippo died shortly before completing his work for Documenta11. And in January 2002, we learned of the death of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose concept of "distinction"⁹ dissected the field of Western culture.

Agencement and Dispositif

All these events are arranged around Documenta11, and together their statements form an *agencement*¹⁰ (stratification) of interrelations—in the sense discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, that is, of artistic, political, social, and discursive points of contact, divergences, links, and transitions. Within these circulations and constellations, and confronted with the question of how Documenta11 could plug into them, a look at their *dispositif* (apparatus)—what Michel Foucault calls the "strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge"¹¹—leads at the same time to a level at which the exclusivity and limits, the distribution and flow of knowledge, describe a fabric of relations of power, in which, however, incursions and openings are also possible. Okwui Enwezor's decision to take six co-curators from a variety of work backgrounds and begin early with a process of "thinking and doing Documenta," as Sarat Maharaj describes it, to concentrate and solidify this process of knowledge production and of transparent research into five thematic platforms of different form and at various sites, signaled from the very beginning a methodological approach for Documenta11 that took aim against the usual exclusive procedures. Extending Documenta in both a spatial and temporal sense by opening on March 15, 2001, with Platform1 in Vienna, over a year in advance of the planned opening on June 8, 2002, and increasing accessibility to its "knowledge capital" by opening for various audiences at different sites, helped to partially break down the authority inherent in Documenta. By locating the platforms on four continents, through numerous partnerships, cooperative ventures, and coproductions, and by deliberately extending the themes to the sociopolitical, Documenta not only expanded its territory but also abandoned it. Selective, temporary deterritorializa-

tion¹² into Vienna and Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos, and into other thematic fields, should be understood not least as a reaction to the claim, which can no longer be asserted, that Documenta must take place at a particular time, in a predetermined format, for a fixed audience—namely, the Western art world as it has for more than fifty years.

Deterritorialization and Dislocation

When the platforms were located at sites closely associated with the themes to be addressed, well before the opening date the organizers had originally set for the eleventh Documenta, it was lamented as a loss of territory, especially by the arts sections of newspapers in Germany. This insistence that the entire discourse must be held at one's own front door is more than a little surprising, given that the art world is especially proud of being cosmopolitan. However much Documenta—as an exhibition and as the site of Platform5—may be situated in Kassel, the themes of the four previous platforms were rooted elsewhere, both in fact and in degree of awareness. Therefore they could not have been relocated to Kassel without further ado. Documenta had to make the journey there.

The decision to begin addressing the questions raised in the five platforms at the relevant sites was a sign of genuine interest in dialogue, in exchange, and in discourse, and was thus much more than a symbolic act. It meant recognizing the specificity of each location and the conditions of each lived social space; it meant, above all, a respect for those who established these discourses—discourses determined by personal perceptions, experiences, and living circumstances. It would be absurd to assume that Documenta11 was simply being politically correct or operating as a charity organization. Quite the contrary, the engagement and generosity of everyone who participated in the platforms, who tried to open up fields of discourse that had been generated over many years and to make them accessible to the Documenta audience, ultimately benefited everyone.

Even the exhibition in Kassel itself is subjected to a series of displacements, through the use of various sites such as the art college, the seminar room, the museum, the multipurpose arena, the train station, the industrial building, print media, radio, and the internet. Documenta11 is, above all, a space of dislocation, of displacement, and it is precisely this that makes it a kind of temporary "adopted country" for an intellectual diaspora from many disciplines and origins. Postcolonial conditions, hegemonies, migration, democracy, cultural differences, racism, gender and class relations, child labor, sex work, privatization of education and other structures for the public benefit, urban conditions, and so on, are all themes that accompany globalization—or at least may have become more critical problems as a consequence of it—but which are most often dealt with economically and politically as merely an annoying side effect. In the space that Documenta11 establishes, there is an encounter of varied postcolonial topographies, heterogeneous political and religious roots, wide-ranging geographic circumstances, and diverse situations and juxtapositions. This, however, raises the question: How is it possible, in the European milieu of the exhibition in Kassel, to exhibit art from all over the world without smoothing away the details of their local identity and the specific geographic and political circumstances under which these statements were produced?

Diaspora and a Space of Refuge

These "intruders," these migrants in the field of art, were not merely acknowledged with goodwill—here, too, there are strange rules of inclusion and exclusion. Do these intellectual "guestworkers" from other disciplines displace anyone from the admittedly limited number of spaces at the feeding

trenches of the Western art world? We love the "foreign" so long as it remains far away and does not attempt to assert its right to exist alongside us, so long as it remains outside—"outside" in the sense of an exception as well—or among its own kind. Between the two options of exiling the "foreign" to its place or assimilating it to our own surroundings, Documenta11 tries to open up a space of in-between, of transition and of passage, a space of the diaspora, a "third space,"¹³ 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 that can be developed—perhaps as productive misunderstandings,¹⁴ perhaps to goad us toward more intense engagement, perhaps in fruitful confrontation of different methods, ways of thinking, and languages. This strategic affirmation of discrepancy is also found when marginalized positions are moved into the mainstream and when ephemeral, performative practices, and practices that emphasize process, are adopted for the purposes of an exhibition.

At the same time, this in-between space allows art to function as a space of refuge for approaches and methods, from a variety of disciplines, which are experimental, critical, and not oriented around commercial success. Both nonacademic, urbane approaches to research and those that emphasize the practice of resistance and activism find, in the place of refuge that is art, the prerequisites for free, experimental thinking about, investigation and research into, and articulation and exploration of circumstances beyond institutional codes and methods. A transdisciplinary and antidisciplinary interlacing of fields results in modified forms of research, of presenting that research, and of documenting or archiving it, and conversely results in new artistic approaches.

Fragment and Multitude

Nevertheless, a temporary event like Documenta remains a "realm of rarity ... which creates these unusual movements ... To our amazement, this 'incomplete, fragmented form' shows, when it comes to statements, how not only few things are said, but few things can be said."¹⁵ Documenta11 has had many centers and many edges. The many ways in which the five platforms were realized—as public conferences, seminars, non-public workshops, lectures, the Educational Project for young curators and cultural workers from all over the world, or as presentations of art works, films, concerts, and videos, or as communications in print media, cinema, radio, and on the internet—make Documenta accessible in many formats other than its traditional one. These generate a form of productivity that is initiated by Documenta but that breaks free of it and continues independently in the form of continuously shifting mechanisms of reception and interventions. At the same time, these fragments—the individual positions presented and the various contributions, whether installation, film, video, sound, text, lecture, discussion, or whatever—are connected like a rhizome that branches into a whole that is not immediately perceptible.¹⁶ Although one can no longer speak of a metanarration, it is nevertheless obvious that there are connections among all these formats by which they are transformed into one another and interwoven, a stratification of forms of exchange that emphasizes the principle of manifold connections in the rhizome, of diversity, of *multiplicite*. In his extrapolation of this aspect, Antonio Negri also speaks of "multitude."¹⁷

Diagonals and Zone of Activity

Gilles Deleuze points out that Foucault, in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, distinguishes between three realms of space—collateral, correlative, and complementary space—that encircle any statement.¹⁸ With the help of these spatial concepts, Documenta11 can be defined as a communicative space, a zone of activity, in which curatorial and artistic, social and political theories and practices

intersect. Collateral space is "formed from other statements ... each statement is inseparable from the heterogeneous statements with which it is linked by certain rules of change (vectors)."¹⁹ With this in mind, I do not perceive Documenta11 as an institution, though as one of eleven Documentas it is certainly that as well, but as a statement in a contextual field.

In correlative space, Documenta11 enters into a "link ... with its subjects, objects and concepts."²⁰ Who are the authors of Documenta11? Who articulates which position? What language is employed? What medium and what materials are selected? The concepts treated in the five platforms democracy unrealized, civil society, the nation state, transitional justice, processes of truth and reconciliation, *créolite*, creolization, the state of siege in African cities, colonization and postcolonialism, diaspora and migration, living conditions in Eastern Europe and in the megalopolises of Latin America, racism, xenophobia, assimilation, Eurocentrism and androcentrism—all relate to Documenta11 as its core statement.

Finally, there is "the *complementary* space of non-discursive formations," to which belong "institutions, political events, economic practices and processes."²¹ This would include, first of all, the Museum Fridericianum, one of Europe's first public museums, and the Documenta that Arnold Bode initiated that has since become an institution itself. It would include the many wars that are found throughout the world, then and now; Western capitalism; nationalism and fundamentalism; processes of globalization and antiglobalization; and such crucial events as the genocide in Rwanda; the opening of the border between North and South Korea; the recognition of rape as a war crime in the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, and the extradition of Slobodan Milosevic to this tribunal; the abuse of power and violence on the part of the Italian state against opponents of globalization at the G8 summit in Genoa; September 11; and the sentencing of a midwife to eight-and-a-half years of imprisonment for illegal abortions in Portugal.

Even so, only the diagonal movements of the "discursive relations ... with non-discursive milieux,"²² which bring collateral and correlative space in relation to the complementary space of nondiscursive formations, make it clear that Documenta11 is a discursive field, a zone of activity. Understood in this way, Documenta11 becomes an open, unlimited, unending process,²³ and it keeps itself productive by means of the multiplicity of possibilities for relationships that are opened up in that process. It is not a self-contained event but is more like a constantly changing, fluid organism that will not become rigid even on the day the exhibition opens in Kassel. The processes of formulation are not detached but rather are integral elements that do not necessarily go together well with the framework and the functional specifics of such a large event—the loan agreements, insurance valuations, educational programs, catalogue production, opening hours, and admission fees. Documenta11 serves as an arrangement that provides room for experiments, experiments in thinking, in methodological approaches, in all forms of translation, and in other forms of the production of knowledge. It is only through this connection of the statements of Documenta11 with the nondiscursive formations of Documenta as an institution that a discursive field is produced, along with a productive dis/continuity of Documenta that will extend beyond the end of Platform5 in September 2002.

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References

- 1 From 1955 to 1972, Documenta took place every four years, with one exception, and since then it has taken place every five years.
- 2 According to the annual report "Geschäftsbericht der Documenta und der Museum Fridericum Veranstaltungsgesellschaft," the number of visitors to Documenta X for the report on the fiscal year 1997 was calculated to be 633,276.
- 3 See Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994, p. 10.
- 4 See Wulf Herzogenrath, "Internationale Kunstausstellung des Sonderbundes Westdeutscher Kunstfreunde und Künstler zu Coln 1912," in Bernd KICiser and Katharina Hegewisch, eds., *Die Kunst der Ausstellung: Eine Dokumentation dreißig exemplarischer Kunstausstellungen dieses Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1991, pp. 40-47.
- 5 See Peter Selz, "Der ‚Erste Deutsche Herbstsalon,‘ Berlin 1913," in KICiser and Hegewisch, eds., *Die Kunst der Ausstellung*, pp. 56-63.
- 6 See Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*, p. 60 ff.; Milton Brown, "Die Armory Show: Ein Medienereignis, New York/Chicago 1913," originally published in a German translation by Max Looser, in KIOser and Hegewisch, *Die Kunst der Ausstellung*, pp. 48-55; and Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 2nd edition, New York: Abbeville, 1988.
- 7 See Walter Grasskamp, "documenta. kunst des XX. jahrhunderts: internationale ausstellung im museum fridericianum in kassel, 15. Juli bis 18. September 1955," in KIOser and Hegewisch, *Die Kunst der Ausstellung*, pp. 116-25.
- 8 See Walter Grasskamp, "Modell documenta; oder, Wie wird Kunstgeschichte gemacht?" *Kunstforum international*, no. 49, 1982, pp. 15-22; revised version translated by Rebecca Pates as "For Example, Documenta; or, How is Art History Produced?" in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, eds., *Thinking about Exhibitions*, New York: Routledge, 1996.
- 9 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984; originally published as *La distinction: Critique social du jugement*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979.
- 10 On the term "stratification" (agencement), see Gilles Deleuze und Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 3ff.; originally published as *Mille plateaux*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980.
- 11 Michel Foucault et al., "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. and ed. Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon, 1980, p. 196; originally published as "Le jeu de Michel Foucault," *Omicron*, no. 10, July 1977.
- 12 On the term "deterritorialization," see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 508-10.

- 13** On this understanding of "third space" and "cultural difference," see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 32-39; and Bhabha's essay "Democracy De-realized," in *Documental I_Platform 1: Democracy Unrealized*, ed. Okwui Enwezor et al., Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002.
- 14** On the possibility or impossibility of cultural translation see Sarat Maharaj, "Sounding Difference': Ein Gespräch zwischen Sarat Maharaj und Anni Flechter Ober den Umgang mit kultureller Differenz," *Springerin* 4:1,2000, pp. 18-21.
- 15** Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 3; originally published as *Foucault*, Paris: editions de Minuit, 1986. Deleuze is quoting Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 157 (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon, 1972, p. 119).
- 16** On the term "rhizome," see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 5-25.
- 17** See Antonio Negri, *Exil*, Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 1998, p. 24ff.; and also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 393-413.
- 18** See Deleuze, *Foucault*, pp. 4-10.
- 19** *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6 (translation modified).
- 20** *Ibid.*, p.6.
- 21** *Ibid.*, p. 9 (translation modified). Deleuze is quoting Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 162.
- 22** Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 9.
- 23** Along with Okwui Enwezor and the co-curators, it was above all Stuart Hall who emphasized and supported the approach that *Documental I* should be understood as an open, unending process; see Stuart Hall's essay "Democracy, Globalization, and Difference," in *Documenta11_Plattform1: Democracy Unrealized*, and his contribution to *Documental I_Platform3: Créolite and Creolization*, both ed. Enwezor et al., Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2002.