A new world art?

Documenting Documenta 11

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Documenta 11 was one of the most radically conceived events in the history of postcolonial art practice. It is exemplary of the influence of postcolonial discourses on critical art practice over the last twenty years in breaking profoundly with the colonial presuppositions of the nineteenth-century tradition of ethnographic or anthropological exhibitions of non-Western art as primitive culture. It exhibited contemporary art from across the globe in accordance with a profound critique of the orientalism and neocolonialism that this task faces, which in many respects went beyond that of previous landmark shows, such as the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris, or the 1993 *Whitney Biennial* in New York. It presents a watershed in the history of Documenta – one of the pre-eminent exhibitions of contemporary art, held in Kassel, Germany, every five years – the first to be curated by a non-European, with an unprecedented presence of artists from outside Europe and North America, and an extensive transform-ation of Documenta's geographical and intellectual constitution. However, despite predictably extensive coverage, the critical reception of Documenta 11 so far has been severely delimited.

It is now over a year since Documenta 11 closed its exhibition – your last chance to see the show was 15 September 2002 – and it has long since drifted out of the consciousness of art journalism. It is no longer *de jour*. And yet, all reviews of Documenta 11 to date have been premature, since only now, over a year on, has it completed the programme of placing itself in the public realm, with the publication of the last in its series of volumes. These volumes are not supplementary, since it is the distinctive curatorial innovation of Documenta 11 to constitute itself through a series of five 'Platforms', of which the exhibition – which traditionally has been the centrepiece of Documenta – is only one. These Platforms were intended as a displacement of the temporal and spatial centrality of Documenta's site in Kassel, that would actualize Documenta 11's postcolonial critique of the geopolitical constitution of the historical avant-garde. They mostly consisted of themed conferences, with occasional workshops and film and video programmes. The location, name and date of the Platforms were as follows: Platform 1, 'Democracy Unrealized', was held in Vienna, 15–20 April 2001, and Berlin, 9–30 October 2001; Platform 2, 'Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation', New Delhi, 7–21 May 2001; Platform 3, 'Créolité and Creolization', St Lucia, 13–15 January 2002; Platform 4, 'Under Siege: Four African Cities: Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos', Lagos, 16–20 March 2002; Platform 5, the 'Exhibition', Kassel, 8 June–15 September 2002.

The volumes of the proceedings of these confer-ences are the only public form of the Platforms, for those unable to attend them, besides the website.* They need to be examined as constitutive parts of the enterprise of Documenta 11. This has not been possible until now. It is questionable whether they would have been considered had they been available to reviewers originally. Few of the contributions to these extensive volumes even attempt to address art and they draw on a wide range of intellectual disciplines and knowledges

outside of conventional art theory and art history. While this is by no means unprecedented, it presents a massive extension of the already formidable task of assessing the artworks exhibited. And while there have been reviews of Documenta 11 that refer to Platforms 1 and 2, there is little sense that the absence of the other volumes is decisive. Indeed, some reviewers have maintained that the non-exhibition Platforms are superfluous.[1] Nonetheless, it is clear that this is a serious misconception of the project of Documenta 11.

Avant-garde or postcoloniality?

The immense scale and complexity of Documenta 11 is a formidable challenge to any attempt to assess it as an intergrated event. It was certainly the intention of the curators to frustrate reductive unifications. Nonetheless, if Documenta 11 is intended as a relatively coordinated and consistent project, as the curators make clear that it is, then this curatorial intention provides a point of departure for the attempt to apprehend it. This may be liable to objections about the general overvaluation of curators that has become so prevalent recently – according to which artists and artworks are reduced to the materials of the curator/ super-artist – but the assessment of an exhibition as novel in organizational structure and in the selection of artists as Documenta 11, would be naive if it did not examine the curator's intentions, albeit critically. The texts by the lead curator, Okwui Enwezor, are of particular interest here, especially his essay 'The Black Box'.[2] This is partly because of his organizational status, but also because, as one might expect, of all the curators' texts it offers the most programmatically comprehensive conception of the radical artistic and political claim of Documenta 11. It achieves this by addressing one of the decisive questions that is implicitly imposed by the historical site of Documenta itself: how do the kinds of postcolonial artistic practice and discourse selected for Documenta 11 relate to the history of avant-garde art that Documenta has, more or less problematically, tended to exhibit and be identified with? Enwezor's answer is radical, if not altogether novel or historically accurate:

> While strong revolutionary claims have been made for the avant-garde within Westernism, its vision of modernity remains surprisingly conservative and formal. … [T]he political and historical vision of the Western avant-garde has remained narrow. The propagators of the avant-garde have done little to constitute a space of self-reflexivity that can understand new relations of artistic modernity not founded on Westernism. The foregoing makes tendentious

the claims to radicality often imputed to exhibitions such as Documenta or similar manifestations within the exhibitionary complex of artistic practice today.[3]

From this equation of avant-gardism and Westernism, Enwezor derives the programme of Documenta 11 as a rupture in this culture, at one of its historic sites, and the institution of an alternative artistic culture of postcolonialism or postcoloniality.

The equation is a crude mixture of falsity and truth. There are few more unifying claims about the heterogeneous art practices described as avant-garde than that they constitute radical critiques of Western culture, including the culture of imperialism and colonization. Think of the surrealism of Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, or, more dramatically, the non-Western influences on the work denigrated by the Nazis in the 'Degenerate "Art"' exhibition of 1937. Enwezor appears to have reduced the avant-garde to Greenberg's highly sanitized and selective account of modernism, which traces a canon of Western art that is certainly indifferent, if not antagonistic, to any 'primitivistic' influences (although Greenberg did not even do justice to the art he sponsored, with both Picasso and Pollock profoundly influenced by non-Western art). But Enwezor's equation is constituted in relation to a critique of avant-garde art's orientalism according to which its critique of Western culture was not simply derived from, for instance, Africa or East Asia, but involved their phantasmatic projection by the West, which thereby, ironically, sustained a colonial culture in the very attempt to overcome it. Enwezor is indifferent to the complexities of these oriental critiques of the West, as some reviewers have noted.[4] But to fixate on this blindness is to overlook a fundamental shift that is at stake here in the structure of this critique of orientalism. On the one hand, this involves a certain radicalization of the critique of orientalism that rejects the implicitly colonial logic of incorporating or including the marginal or the other, and that instead insists on a politics and strategy of empowering the marginalized without making it partake of the centre, while displacing the centre as the arbitrator of empowerment. On the other hand, it concerns a historical transformation in the political context of the traditional sites of avant-garde art, namely the move from European colonialism to a period of decolonization and postcolonialism, as well as the emergence of novel forms of global imperialism. Enwezor's contention is that, despite the anomalies and exceptions, contemporary postcolonialism is a political form that fundamentally postdates the historical avant-gardes and that, as a consequence, the political task of

responding to contemporary postcolonialism demands a fundamentally new sense of radical art.

By postcolonialism and postcoloniality Enwezor does not only mean the general political status of societies that have emerged from colonialism and that are still undergoing processes of decolonization. Rather, like many others, he understands postcolonialism as the break from the narrative or teleology of development that, whether positively or negatively, remains bound to a legacy of colonialism. The cultural and political logic of postcolonialism is therefore understood as a rupture and displacement of the relations of centre and margin, which are taken to dominate colonialism. It involves cultural forms that have developed outside of a strict relation of identification with, or opposition to, an imperial state. However, for Enwezor as for many others, postcolonialism is not exhausted by the recovery of national or individual sovereignty. Rather it introduces a new form of relations of difference. This is the global form that Enwezor emphatically ascribes to postcoloniality. In certain respects, this tends towards an exaggeration of the legacy of European colonialism. But it is bolstered by a diagnosis of the form of capitalism that has emerged from the Cold War and is now entering an eternal War on Terror, as a new, intensively globalized form of (strictly speaking, 'non-colonial') imperialism, which thereby generalizes and intensifies the condition of postcoloniality. Enwezor borrows Hardt and Negri's analysis of *Empire* in order to generalize the condition of postcoloniality by analogy with their characterization of the multitude – as a global political counter-power, emerging immanently from the globalization of transnational capital – while overdetermining this notoriously indeterminate category as a politics of postcoloniality.

This globalization of postcoloniality accounts for a number of the cultural and political features attributed to it. Enwezor emphasizes the spatial and temporal condensation that characterizes many aspects of globalization, in which distances and times are shortened to the point of near immediacy. This underpins the move from a geopolitics of centre and margin to one characterized by the immanence of the margin and the centre in which these relations do not dissolve completely, but are nonetheless destabilized and transformed in their dynamic relation, producing condensations, displacements and equivalences of margin and centre.[5] Enwezor refers to how modern communications technologies facilitate this immanence of margin and centre and constitute an everyday life, inflected by globalized relations of postcoloniality.[6] He also alludes to how these transformations of spatial and temporal experi-ence generate a transformation of subjectivity.[7] This informs his discussion of September 11. True to the transformed dynamics of global political forms, it is understood as the claim of an alternative world culture (Islam), not merely a marginal, nationalist culture, which is made at the very centre of the dominant world culture (North American capitalism), in an act that presents 'the full emergence of the margin to the centre'.[8]

Without identifying with this Islamism, Enwezor proposes a refunctioning of the name 'Ground Zero' that hijacks its deployment in the wars for a 'New World Order' and proposes it as the slogan for the regrounding of an alternative, postcolonial world. He thereby engages in an exemplary hegemonic strategy, proposing Ground Zero as a cipher in relation to which an inherently complex political constituency can combine to form an alternative global polity. (Given that Documenta is usually numbered according to roman numerals – the last was Documenta X in 1997 – the correspondence of Documenta 11 and September 11 is striking, although it is not explained as such.) Enwezor proposes Documenta 11 as a cultural formation of this project, aligning it explicitly with the combination of postcolonial and anticapitalist movements that have emerged recently.[9] This is the political act that Documenta 11 itself is intended to perform: the irruption of a central location of the art world by an alternative world art, the full emergence of the margin to the centre.

If we consider this political positioning of Documenta 11 as an agenda for a new form of radical art, it becomes apparent that it indicates transformations of a number of fundamental conceptions of the radical avant-garde. This is particularly clear if we relate it to the profoundly influential conception of 'historical avant-gardes' outlined by Peter Bürger, which emphasizes the revolutionary project of the early avant-gardes (especially, Dada, surrealism and constructivism) to expose art as the product of bourgeois institutions – the museums, galleries, art market and attendant discourses – and engage in the emancipatory dissolution of art into a life free from capitalist social relations.[10] This politicized project of a total transformation of social relations is distinguished from 'neo-avant-gardes' that attempt to continue the artistic heritage of the original avant-gardes, but in the knowledge that this revolution of art and everyday life is no longer at stake. The neo-avant-gardes therefore tend towards a parody rather than a reinvention of the historical avant-gardes. There are a number of ways in which Documenta 11 is conceived as a rearticulation

of this discourse. In relation to the historical avant-garde's claim for a total revolution of social relations, Documenta 11 proposes a new, postcolonial configuration of this totality of social relations, which is not historically the same as that available to the historical avant-gardes, or politically identical with the fight against imperialism as these avant-gardes conceived it. There is therefore a new political ontology of totalization at stake today. In the terms of phenomenological ontology, Documenta 11 discloses a different world to that disclosed by the historical avant-gardes. This infuses the other forms of totality at stake here: a transformation of subjectivity and everyday life is induced by the inflection of the condensed, displaced and equivalent spatio-temporal relations of a globalized culture. Documenta 11's Platforms engage in a re-territorialization of an art institution according to these transformed dynamics, which are not reducible to the critique of inside and outside, centre and margin, that characterizes the imperial metropolitan context of the historical avant-gardes.

Yet there is an obvious sense in which Documenta 11 remains caught in the predicament of a neo-avant-garde. Despite its political rhetoric, it is funded by national institutions and capitalist corporations.[11] Whatever the potential of its claim that the revolutionary force of postcoloniality is immanent, it is also currently deeply subordinated. There is also a sense in which its transformation of the avant-garde's discourse of totalization does not merely bring it to an end, but produces a critical renewal of it. In short, then, there is a persistent sense in which Documenta 11 proposes a radical transformation of avant-garde art, while remaining deeply entwined within its traditional problems. But in order to articulate this sense more concretely, we need to consider the actuality of Documenta 11 and examine its Platforms in the relative independence that they demand.

1_Democracy unrealized

Platform 1 sets out to examine issues surrounding the emergence of democracy as the hegemonic political form of contemporary globalization, particularly as it has been articulated by the neoliberal capitalism that has emerged since the end of the Cold War. More critically, the platform is intended as an examination of the ways in which democracy serves as an ideology of political Westernization that sustains the very undemocratic dominance of the economic interests of the leading capitalist nations, especially those of Europe and North America. It is the contradiction or tension between the ideology and the actuality of

international democracy that explains the attention to democracy's 'unrealized' condition and the way in which the Platform responds to the general preoccupations of Documenta 11.

Almost without exception, the contributors to Platform 1 assume democracy to be the most appropriate political form for the tasks of a globalized postcolonial politics. The closest to an exception to this rule is perhaps Bhikhu Parekh, who draws a sharp distinction between democracy and liberalism in order to argue that today's liberal democracies should respond to the challenge of multiculturalism by an increase in the liberal respect for individual freedoms and further neutralize the cultural presuppositions of the state.[12] But this is addressed solely to liberal democracies and therefore ignores the political predicament of many postcolonial states. This liberal objection is matched, at the other end of the political spectrum, by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's communism of the multitude.[13] They conceive the multitude as an immanently self-relating multiplicity, which is thereby understood as incompatible with antagonistic and representative political forms, which they attribute to conventional forms of democracy. Instead they argue that the politics of the multitude is a form of self-realization or 'absolute democracy'. But this remains abstract with respect to the elaboration of historical forms of postcolonial politics. The most widely canvassed position is probably that of a constitutively unrealizable democracy that would enfranchise the complex constituencies of a postcolonial globe through refusing any realized or substantive totalization of the political community.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who have done most to theorize a constitutively unrealizable conception of democracy as a radicalization of the political, both contribute essays, but these are very formal and do not address the question of a globalized postcolonial politics. Laclau's essay argues for democracy as caught between tendencies to autonomy and heteronomy, and Mouffe sketches the concept of a democratic public sphere as constitutively agonistic, which may allude to the problem of a global public sphere, but only refers explicitly to rethinking the federalist conception of Europe.[14] It is largely left to Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha to elaborate this political theory more explicitly in relation to postcolonial politics, both effectively proposing an openness to the infinite play of difference. Immanuel Wallerstein is among the few contributors to consider democracy as a political project that was yet to be fulfilled and so is 'unrealized' in the more straight-

forward sense, arguing that, when considered at the level of world history, democracy (in the sense of a demand for equality) has been increasingly realized up to the present, and that this has led to an impending crisis for the structural inequalities that characterize capitalism. His diagnosis is not intended to defer political action into long-term historical movement, but to anticipate an impending political struggle over democracy, in which its currently assumed legitimacy would give way to a critical struggle.

These contributions all remain extremely abstract with respect to actual political organizations or politi-

cal disputes in which a postcolonial democracy is at stake. But this is corrected, in part, by texts from a number of political organizations: kein mensch ist illegal, Multiplicity, Arquitectos Sin Fronteras–España, and Demokratische Offensive. It is perhaps unfortunate that these are all European organizations and there is an obvious disparity between their aspiration to global enfranchisement and their political activities. But this is consistent with the geopolitical condensation of locality and globality that is a theme of Documenta 11. Platform 1 was held in Vienna and Berlin. Nonetheless, there is a lamentable absence of more extensive groupings, such as the World Social Forum that has emerged in opposition to the World Economic Forum.

As is characteristic of the Platforms more generally, very few of the contributors even attempt to write about art or address the artistic context of Documenta. Of the twenty-six papers, only those by Boris Groys and Iain Chambers do so substantively.

Emblematically, the text by the group Multiplicity, who exhibited at Platform 5, makes no mention of art at all. This is characteristic of the eccentric logic of much of the discourse surrounding contemporary art. However, it leaves a number of decisive questions about the political situation and strategy of Documenta 11 unaddressed, especially in relation to the history of avant-garde art. I have addressed some of these issues above and others will be dealt with below, in connection with the other Platforms, as their distributed form demands. But it is worth noting here that the complex history of relations between political discourse and avant-garde art has in many respects been dominated by a more or less dissident communism. This raises the question of how Platform 1's discourses on democracy relate to communism; in particular, how they relate to the communist critique and politics of anti-imperialism that infused the historical avant-gardes. Traces of this prehistory are detectable in the communist sentiments of Hardt, Negri and Žižek, but they make no address to avant-garde art. Groys comes the closest, but he does so through a very dubious aesthetics of anticapitalist politics as essentially ascetic.[15] This is a blind spot of Documenta 11, intensified by its indifference to art history and the history of avant-gardes.

2_Experiments with truth

Platform 2 is an attempt to deal with the novel conceptions of right and justice that have emerged in response to aggression perpetrated by states on their own people, as well as others, and which, to that extent, fall outside of juridical processes circumscribed by the sovereignty of the nation-state or, at the very least, create a crisis for it. To this end the volume deals with the theoretical and historical predicament of the development of universal human rights, from its institutional inception in the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War (1945–46), to the institution of a permanent International Criminal Court. The volume is also preoccupied with a number of other experimental juridical processes established to institute a solution to the contradictions of national justice, in particular

the various Truth and Reconciliation Commissions that have been established, not only in South Africa, but also in the former Yugoslavia and Argentina.[16] It is largely in the context of these institutions that the volume addresses the concept of transitional justice as a novel juridical form geared towards negotiating a transformation of political forms, such as the end of apartheid in South Africa. The main controversy that emerges is whether transitional justice is part of the generation of a less nationalist or statist conception of law, which is increasingly needed, or whether it is an ideology that depicts a narrative of organic change, but which conceals key political decisions or struggles. For example, Ruti Teitel argues for the former, with respect to post-apartheid South Africa, claiming that processes of transitional justice, like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, enable the state to re-establish its legitimacy in circumstances of constitutional crisis, where this demands convicting itself of illegal acts.[17] Conversely, Boris Buden argues that the truth and reconciliation processes in the former Yugoslavia are part of a depoliticizing ideology of post-communist neoliberalism, which conceals the political decisions that are at stake and which results in a general impoverishment of democratic political culture.[18] This tension between juridical and political responses is expressed across the Platforms, with Mouffe also arguing against the privilege of juridical or moral forms of resolving social disputes.

Platform 2's preoccupation with these juridical forms may appear to be somewhat removed from the principal themes of Documenta 11, but on reflection it is apparent that they are significant for the emergence of global forms of political legitimacy and citizenship central to the novel forms of postcolonial political culture that Documenta 11 addresses.[19] In this context, the controversy over human rights therefore takes two forms: a controversy over whether juridical processes are adequate to empower a postcolonial and global citizenship; and a controversy over whether they conceal political processes, particularly whether or not they are just the veil for a neo-imperialism.

Besides juridical forms, Platform 2 also addresses a number of more experimental theoretical and cultural issues that surround or underpin these forms, incorporating essays on questions of trauma, witnessing, memory, testimony, narration, and so on. It is largely in this context that the Platform addresses art, although, as with the other theoretical Platforms, this is limited to a few contributions. Susana Torre's article discusses a number of contemporary memorials that negotiate the public construction of memory and

thereby justice.[20] For instance, Jochen Gerz's *2146 Steine – Mahnmal gegen Rassismus* (2146 Stones – Monument against Racism) in Saarbrücken, Germany, which replaces seventy cobblestones in a major public space with identical cobblestones inscribed with the names of obliterated Jewish cemeteries in Germany, but on their underside so that they are invisible to the passer-by. Alfredo Jaar's article discusses his series of artworks about the indifference of the media Western to the massacres in Rwanda and the challenges of his attempts to depict and bear testimony to it.[21] Some of this work was also exhibited at Platform 5. Jaar is in many respects exemplary of a heritage of avant-garde art that is evident in the artworks exhibited at Platform 5. The form of politicized art practice that he has developed – exemplary of the set of concerns addressed by Documenta 11 – is made possible by a course of formal and ontological transformations of what can and cannot be considered an artwork, which pay a particular debt to conceptual art and its radical exposure of art to its contextual discourses. This has enabled Jaar to give his lecture in a form that is appropriate to a conference. However, it also expresses issues of justice in forms that are awkwardly expressed in juridical discourses. It is at the limits of juridical discourse that it establishes itself as an art practice, not merely through the prescribed use of a medium or space. It is in this sense that criticisms of post-conceptual art as a collapse into other cultural forms – criticisms that pervade the reception of Documenta 11 – are misconceived.

3_*Créolité* and creolization

Many of the issues surrounding postcolonial culture and the processes of cultural 'mixing' and exchange that have become characteristic of contemporary forms of globalization, were pursued in Platform 3 through the examination of the concepts of *créolité* and creolization. The concept of *créolité*, or creoleness, was introduced by three Martinican intellectuals, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant – in their 1989 publication *Eloge de la Créolité*, translated in 1990 as *In Praise of Creoleness* – in order to theorize the socio-economic, cultural and creative form of creole languages that have emerged within the Caribbean Basin. It was proposed in order to demarcate the specificity of these forms with respect to more general forms of cultural mixing, and as an alternative to the racialized concept of negritude developed by Aimé Césaire, which, following Fanon, they reject as the replacement of a European illusion of primitivism with an equally illusory myth of the African. Creoliza-

tion is a concept that Edouard Glissant has proposed as a corrective to *créolité*, emphasizing the processual, open-ended and expansive character of creole cultural formations that extend well beyond the Caribbean to a generalized process of globalization. As he puts it in an epigraph to the volume's Introduction, 'The whole world is becoming creolized.' Conversely, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant insist that *créolité* is a form of autonomization, emerging from a wider process of creolization.

This precarious debate about the specificity and universality of creole cultural form – traversed by questions of literary form, linguistics and political history, among others – structures many of the articles and contributions in the publication of Platform 3. It also structures the relation of this Platform to the other ones. The formation of a specific, localized culture, through processes of colonial and post-colonial transculturation, on the one hand, and the transculturation of a general process of contemporary globalization, on the other, is a tension that profoundly inflects the whole project of cultural analysis and politics informing Documenta 11. This remains implicit in most of the contributions. But Platform 3 does deal more explicitly with art than Platforms 1, 2 or 4, especially in relation to creole poetry and literature – Derek Walcott addressed the conference a number of times – as well as through such forms as Jamaican dancehall music. Isaac Julien showed his films and discussed them, including the film he was to show at Platform 5, *Paradise Omeros*. And Petrine Archer-Straw explicated a number of relations between avant-gardism, primitivism and colonialism through a discussion of 'negrophilia' in Parisian avant-garde circles of the 1920s, in comparison to a certain reversal of this in the re-appropriation of primitivism among contemporary Caribbean artists – although, in many respects these artists seemed to engage in a reinvigorated negritude.[22]

Many essays and much of the discussion – which was published in the volume as a series of 'Open Sessions' – revolves around the definition and clarification of the concepts of *créolité* and creolization in relation to various meanings and allusions associated with creole forms, as well as in terms of diaspora, hybridity, *métissage* and miscengenation. This includes instructive comparisons and distinctions of creole as the generation of a 'third' language, distinct from the mixing of the two languages from which it emerged. In the case of the Caribbean the creoles are distinct from the dominant colonial language of French, English or Spanish, on one side, as well as the dominated African languages of the plantation slaves, on the other. The specific linguistic form of Caribbean creoles is therefore also determined by particular political formations, which seem to be decisive. Even the meeting of separate cultures in the context of European enslavement of Africans in Central America is not adequate to explain the emergence of creoles, as Virginia Pérez-Ratton points out in relation to Costa Rica, where the arrival of slaves in the 18th century did not produce creole languages. She argues that this was due to their small numbers (relative to the Caribbean), their arrival from the Antilles rather than Africa, and their employment as domestic servants, which meant that 'under the master's roof' *métissage* took place rapidly; all of which resulted in the complete suppression of alternative languages or contexts for the formation of a creole language.[23] Conversely, in the port of Colón in Panama, on the coast of the Atlantic, despite a high degree of ethnic mixing among Hindus, Chinese, Arabs, blacks and Europeans, there is no real linguistic mixing, but a near total bilingualism of English and Spanish. Indeed, the volume is littered with anomalous linguistic communities.

A number of contributors were undeterred from thinking more broadly about the relation of these forms of creole culture to broader processes of cultural formation, whether in relation to diverse linguistic forms – such as Spanglish in New York or the tentative emergence of Euroenglish across the European Union – or in relation to global processes of cultural exchange and resistance. Given this context, it is surprising that there was no reflection on the globalization of American English through computer and media technologies. Stuart Hall's contributions are notable here. While insisting on the Caribbean specificity of *créolité* and creolization in certain respects, he also presents these processes as exemplary or limit-cases of cultural change *tout court*, opening a perspective onto the processes of globalization as a contemporary political project. Hall emphasizes the relation of these questions to a political engagement with the present, that is, to a desire and a project of hope and transformation, which make them irreducible, if not indifferent, to empirical verification and specification. Moreover, this is set within the context of a diagnosis of the novel form of globalization that has become evident since the mid-1970s, a phase of transnational neo-Liberalism, distinguished from the initial, colonial and postcolonial phases of globalization. In this he probably does most to articulate the relation of this Platform's concerns to the project of Documenta 11

as a whole. Indeed he provides a striking formulation of what is at stake in its reception:

> 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. Or whether it represents a more permanent break in the regime which governs the international circulation of the artwork.[24]

4_Under siege

The project of Platform 4 was to analyse the contemporary African city as exemplary of the various and complex effects of postcolonialization and globalization. The Platform presents investigations and analyses of a collection of African cities – not only Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos, as the title suggests, but also Pikine, Marrakesh, Kisangani, Addis Ababa and Douala, among others – that are currently constituted by dramatic transformations in their urban form and that, as such, present themselves as symptomatic of fundamental changes in relation to modernization, particularly in so far as this modernization presents a sedimented form of cultural Westernism. It is in this context that the editors call for a rethinking of Africa's urban spaces and practices, as a way of rethinking the social constitution of a postcolonial urban citizenship that is taken to be symptomatic of a new global trend.

In general, the essays are committed to criticizing the practical and theoretical effects of the 'Westernized' mode of modernization to which African cities have been subjected, stretching from European colonialism, through the processes of decolonization and independence, and up to the generally disastrous policies of the International Monetary Fund and the 'structural adjustment' programmes inaugurated by the World Bank since the 1980s. This more or less tragic narrative is the prehistory for the common undertaking by the Platform's contributors to rethink radically the horizon of development for the postcolonial African city. For most contributors, this takes place through a reconsideration of 'failed' urban forms, which, instead of treating them as failures, looks at them in terms of an alternative to received paradigms of urbanization. This demands not just a closer look, but a new sense of what is being looked for, and therefore a new conception of urbanization. This introduces a methodological theme of the Platform that is conspicuously indebted to Merleau-Ponty. As AbdouMaliq Simone

argues, in terms of the received Western conceptions of urbanization, many of the emergent urban forms of contemporary African cities are rendered invisible.[25] Indeed, he argues that invisibility has become the pervasive condition for the citizens of cities such as Lagos and Douala, because their activities are often occluded by what is considered significant by received models of urbanization and urban behaviour.

For Rem Koolhas – whose paper on Lagos derives from a large research project that he has directed on the contemporary city, *Project on the City* – the transformation of urban studies at stake here is radical: 'Taken together, these studies [from *Project on the City*] suggest that the notion of the city itself has mutated into something that is no longer Western.'[26] Koolhas's interest in Lagos concerns the symptomatic significance of its exceptional transformation: in fifteen years it will be the third largest city in the world, able to support a colossal population despite the apparently terminal decay and breakdown of the programme of modernization undertaken in the 1970s after a period of postcolonial affluence from its oil fields. This combination of decay and population explosion has become characteristic of Africa's exponential urbanization. Largely as a result of rural decline, 40 per cent of Africa's population live in cities today, with population increases in cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam or Kinshasa dramatically exceeding the world's metropolitan growth. Through the metaphor of a camera's field of vision, Koolhas describes how, on his first trips to Lagos, what appeared close up as apocalyptic rubbish heaps, chronic overcrowding and dysfunctional transport systems subsequently, and from a different angle, revealed complex systems of recycling and highly sophisticated strategies of trading that enable the sustenance of millions of people in a deeply impoverished environment. In this sense, Lagos's emergence as one of the world's largest cities is built on conditions that depart radically from the 'Western' model of urbanization.

This revised conception of urban studies brings into view many of the so-called 'informal' activities of these cities, which are conventionally disregarded as supplementary to the essential activities of urban citizens. This is especially the case in cities where the state's power has declined to the point that its formal structures conceal informal but habituated conventions that effectively determine urban life.[27] It is in this context that certain themes of global and postcolonial citizenship developed. Antoine Bouillon's examination of identity in post-apartheid Durban is particularly interesting here, insofar as it is an example

of political tensions that have emerged between a global and a postcolonial citizenship.[28] It discusses not just how black South Africans, who remain impoverished after apartheid, have rationalized an animosity to immigrants according to a nationalistic ideology – that is inscribed geographically in relations to the city – despite the fact that their nationalism is forged explicitly on the anti-apartheid movement's premiss of universal human rights.

In certain respects, *Under Siege* is the Platform that responds most directly and concretely to Documenta 11's preoccupation with postcolonial globalization. The selection of African cities obviously affects profoundly the kind of postcolonial urbanization at stake, but the curators are explicit about this and do not propose the Platform as exhaustive of the topic. However, except for an interesting essay on Nigerian home videos, this Platform is also even more indifferent to questions of art than any of the others.[29] And yet, in raising the issue of the contemporary city in this form, Platform 4 proposes a novel critique of the relation of the city to avant-garde art that is profoundly significant. If the aspiration to overcome the institutional autonomy of the museum or gallery is taken to be one of the decisive gestures of the historical avant-garde, it has been the city that has nearly always awaited this escape with problematic demands of its own. Equally, if the modern institutional autonomy of art can be traced back to the Louvre's relocation of artefacts from Napoleon's imperial campaigns, and in particular from the 'beautiful city' of Rome, then the city can be seen to frame the beginning and end of art.[30]

More topically, it is clear that art museums and exhibitions have become popular ways in which to advertise cities within a global economy, partly for tourism, but also as part of the establishment of these cities as nodal points in the increasingly flexible and transnational movement of capital. Documenta stands in a peculiar relation to this history. Its periodic form – every five years – was conceived as an attempt to overcome the avant-garde's objection to the classicizing form of the museum, without obviously going so far as to abolish it altogether.[31] Kassel is also both an exception to, and proof of, the significance of art shows in establishing a world city: it is only because of Documenta that Kassel is known internationally. Within this situation, Documenta 11's dedication of a Platform to African cities can be interpreted as a profound critique of the urban presuppositions of the historical avant-garde. Although Kassel is hardly Paris or New York, the displacement of Documenta's urban site into these postcolonial cities, in the context of

their emergent global significance – which takes place literally in so far as Platform 4 was held in Lagos – performs a critique that, on the one hand, reveals the Western, imperial urban site of the historical avant-gardes, and, on the other, resonates with the new urban politics of contemporary globalization.

Urban Imaginaries of Latin America

Although published under Documenta 11's imprint, *Urban Imaginaries of Latin America* is not formally attached to any particular Platform, but it is undoubtedly very close to Platform 4 in its concerns and should be examined as such. It serves to supplement the African bias of Platform 4, presenting studies of Asunción, Barcelona, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Havana, La Paz, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Panama City, Quito, Santiago de Chile and São Paulo.[32] *Urban Imaginaries* is far more unified in its form than the volumes published from the Platforms, as one would expect from the publication of a research project. It assumes the protocols of conventional social science, with texts clarifying its hypothesis, theoretical presuppositions and methodology, written by the director, Armando Silva – although the theorization is generally very poor, particularly in the recourse to psychoanalysis, and it tends to undermine rather than enhance what is, otherwise, a fascinating project. As its title suggests, the aim of the project is to examine the imaginary dimension of urbanization within the cities under consideration, not merely as an unreal form of social perception or illusion, but as a substantive mode of the constitution of urban spaces and practices. As such, it is oriented against a purely objective or physical conception of urban forms and systems – exhausted by the building of roads, residential areas, parks, and so on – and, instead, develops a form of urban analysis that examines the city as the formation of a social imaginary, invoking the imaginary city as an object of analysis. The project has a further critical and emancipatory dimension in so far as it is oriented towards the enfranchising of citizens' imaginary constitution of public space, as an alternative or corrective to the norms imposed or induced by a city's physical environment, in so far as that is overwhelmingly forged by the state. The volume includes numerous studies of urban fantasies and imaginary constructions, in practices such as graffiti, forms of dance and protest.[33]

Silva itemizes a number of methodologies or techniques through which urban imaginaries may be examined. These include 'points of view', understood not merely as opinions, but as the 'operation' of a

In this relation to public art, *Urban Imaginaries* responds more directly to questions of art than *Under Siege*. And, although the psychoanalytical presuppositions of the project are confused, the project suggests a social scientific institution of the kinds of psychoanalytically informed urban practices developed by avant-garde groups such as the surrealists and, in particular, the situationists and their quasi-scientific practice of 'psychogeography'. This encourages the reconfiguration of urban space according to psychic associations and desires induced by moving through the city. Guy Debord understood this as an emancipatory form of urbanism, partly in the specifically historical context of breaking free from the military presuppositions of Paris's urban modernization. Such a historical contextualization of urbanism is absent from the conception of *Urban Imaginaries*. But in the light of the historical critique of colonial and postcolonial urbanization developed in *Under Siege*, we could begin to imagine a corrective: a postcolonial psychogeography.

gaze, in which the imaginary relation of an observer to an urban space is revealed. These are examined through what Silva refers to as 'visual sketches', which are various forms of figuring, symbolizing or constructing an image of the city. Largely, they are derived from the imaginary associations that roads, neighbourhoods or spaces acquire, such as the different colours, ambiances or genders with which certain streets are associated.[34] These are collated through polls, and various statistical representations of these are included throughout the book. While many of the imaginary forms are subterranean and unofficial, the book also includes studies of high-profile media representations of the city, as well as a fairly extensive collection of postcard depictions of the cities. Silva also refers to the significance of the study of 'family histories', although there is little evidence of this in the book. Part of the volume displays a series of identification card portraits of people from these cities as part of their image culture, without any information about who is being depicted. Finally, a number of 'parallel representations' are cited. These take the form of public interventions, modelled on the critical function of public art events, which attempt to disrupt the received mediation of the city. Silva refers to a project on public radio, in which pivotal historical moments in a city's life are spliced into radio programmes in the style of an oral memory. The research project has also bought a monthly page in a paper circulated with *El Tempo*, in which they attempt to review the news of the month in images.

5_Exhibition

Enwezor insists that the exhibition of Platform 5 – which has traditionally been the only site of Documenta – should not be understood as the result or destination of the other Platforms. Their unavailability until after the exhibition ensured that this would not be the case. But, contrary to the dismissal of the theoretical Platforms as irrelevant to the exhibition by certain critics, reviewing the exhibition in conjunction with them is revealing, although not in the sense that they explain the exhibition and its works in the instrumental form of a methodology. The exhibition is far too complex for this, as are the foregoing Platforms, and many of the artists provide theoretical contextualizations of their own work that resist such a connection. But the Platforms do generate a set of debates in relation to which one's experience of the exhibition may be inflected and, in important respects,

enriched. This relation is probably most straightforwardly informative in some of the photographic work. David Goldblatt's photographs of post-apartheid South Africa are illuminated by the questions of post-apartheid citizenship addressed in *Experiment with Truth*. The photographs of Lagos by Muyiwa Osifuye resonate with the context of urban studies presented in *Under Siege*, as does Ravi Agarwal's photographs of casual labour in India. But there are also works that seem directly to contradict the themes or ethos established by the other Platforms, or at least to go against their grain. Constant's utopian urbanism sits ambivalently among the critiques of Westernism presented by *Under Siege*. His models are fantastically unconventional, while still partaking of a kind of planned utopianism largely absent from *Under Siege*. In this sense, the aged and faded inclusion of these works from the late 1950s and 1960s seems to be critical of them. But this is certainly not the case in the fantastic urban landscapes of Bodys Isek Kingelez, who lives in Kinshasa but whose urban imagination projects a utopianism largely absent from the sensibilities of the urbanism of *Under Siege*, although perhaps not of *Urban Imaginaries*. And yet his use of readily available materials speaks a certain distance from cutting-edge modernity.

The materials and formal strategies of much of the art display a range of practices that have become characteristic of contemporary art since the breakdown of the medium-specific narratives of modernism in the 1970s. In one sense this breakdown is a rather 'Western' affair. However, it has resulted in an experimental openness that has destroyed a number of conventions that previously excluded work developing outside the leading art centres by ascribing it a purely ethnographic status. This is particularly apparent in the montage of high- and low-tech practices. In some instances these are characterized by cultural contexts, or perhaps preconceptions. Compare Feng Mengbo's videogame with the simple arrangement of books, images and artefacts in a room by Georges Adéagbo. There was also a conspicuous use of photography, video and video projection that often directly or indirectly invoked the news media. It is noticeable that Platform 5's larger exhibition catalogue opens its pages onto a series of news images from a number of familiar, dramatic recent events: bombings in Palestine and Israel, Ground Zero, anti-globalization demonstrations, and so on. This image culture seems archetypical of the condensation of spaces and times that Enwezor attributes to everyday life in the age of postcolonial globalization. In certain respects, this is the combined

effect of the exhibition as a whole. It is less the experience of ethnographic wonder or shock that is prevalent here, than the both strange and familiar experience that results from the critical assemblage of the spaces and times that constitute our everyday life today, indeed our subjectivity.

Various works deal with the vicissitudes of global passage and communication. Allan Sekula's series of photographs and texts, *Fish Story*, documents the lie in the popular image of contemporary global capitalism as a virtual and rapidly moving substance, depicting aspects of the massive industrial cargo ships that actually transport goods and that generate forms of manual labour that persist as if regardless of its obsolescence. Tsunamii.net is a group of computer artists that have developed a programme that demands that one is actually in the physical locality of the server that hosts the website you wish to visit in order to access it, thereby subverting the virtual forms of accessibility generated by the Internet. There are photographs of the members of the group travelling, with computer and receiver in their backpack, in order to visit a website. Certain artists made works that deal with the specific locality of Kassel. This may seem to contradict the eccentric logic of Documenta 11, but there are some ingenious solutions to this. Jens Haaning exchanged a light bulb between a street light in Kassel and a street light in Hanoi. This minimal, largely invisible exchange presents a kind of internationalist reinvention of Dan Flavin's constructivism, elegantly expressing the kind of equivalence of distant spaces that is symptomatic of various aspects of globalization. Thomas Hirschhorn constructed a monument to Georges Bataille in a predominantly Turkish, working-class residential estate on the outskirts of Kassel. This involved a library, café, play area and media centre, all run by local kids. Hirschhorn narrated this as a displacement of the central exhibited spaces of Kassel, thereby reiterating Documenta 11's project in Kassel's own back yard amidst its own immigrant communities. Ironically, the surrealist fantasy of the primitive becomes the memorial with which to criticize Documenta 11's own limits.

It is evident that Documenta 11 remains entwined in the legacies of a heritage of radical avant-garde artistic practice in a number of complex ways, many of which it conceals from itself. With respect to Bürger's influential distinction of historical and neo-avant-gardes, Documenta 11 is ambivalent. On the one hand, like the neo-avant-gardes, it proposes a radical revolution in the institutions of art, while

presupposing them in various ways. Documenta 11 is proposed as the *détournement* of the spectacular visibility of Documenta, in order to pursue a destructive critique of Documenta. But this is par for the course of contemporary exhibiting. Otherwise, let's face it, Documenta wouldn't have let it happen. However, like the historical avant-gardes, Documenta 11 is conceived in conjunction with a radical political project that promises a dramatic transformation of social relations. Moreover, it does this through a conception of the totality of social relations that is distinct from the historical avant-gardes and therefore not merely a parody of them. But this political project of a globalized postcolonialism that is to replace the project of communism remains currently highly indeterminate, leaving Enwezor's artistic gambits in debt to a future that demands a formidable struggle. If we are to judge Documenta 11 in a way that is less directly indebted to such a future, then it is as a watershed in the development of a postcolonial art practice. It is certainly not unprecedented in conception. The discourses of postcoloniality have been well established over the last twenty-five years. Its novelty is more curatorial and opportunistic. It articulates the unity of the discourses and practices of postcolonialism and avant-gardism on the global stage provided by Documenta.

Notes

1. Axel Lapp's review in *Art Monthly* is symptomatic of this problem. Referring to the inaccessibility of the non-exhibition Platforms, he complains: 'since they could not normally be attended by visitors to the exhibition (one was closed to the public altogether) and since the publication of their proceedings will not be completed before the end of the show, this contextualization will only be virtual and will only happen with hindsight. This later aggrandisement of the exhibition through theoretical discourse seems quite unnecessary. "Platform 5" could well stand on its own.' *Art Monthly* 258, July/August 2002, p. 8.

2. Okwui Enwezor, 'The Black Box', in *Documenta 11_ Platform 5: Exhibition*, pp. 42–55.

3. Ibid. p. 47.

4. See Anthony Downey, 'The Spectacular Difference of Documenta 11', *Third Text*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2003, pp. 85–92.

5. Enwezor does not fully address the complex persistence and dissolution of postcolonial relations of margin and centre. But, as I have tried to indicate, there is a sense in which this problem can be negotiated via an Althusserian concept of contradiction, whereby a structural relation (for Marxism, superstructure and infrastructure; for postcolonialism, margin and centre) is not completely dissolved but subject to various forms of overdetermination. See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. B. Brewster, Verso, London and New York, 1969.

6. Enwezor writes that postcoloniality 'exceeds the border of the former colonized world to lay claim to the modernized, metropolitan world of empire by making empire's former "other" visible and present at all times, either through the media or through mediatory, spectatorial, and carnivalesque relations of language, communications, images, contact, and resistance within the everyday.' Enwezor, 'The Black Box', p. 45.

7. Ibid. p. 44. Enwezor is indebted here to the link made between postcolonial everyday life and regimes of subjectivity in an article by Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman, 'Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis', originally published in *Public Culture* 16, Winter 1995, but which is reprinted as part of Platform 4 in *Under Siege*, pp. 99–128. See discussion of *Under Siege* below.

8. Ibid., p. 47.

9. 'As the battle with the forces of "terrorist" elements continues apace in Afghanistan and elsewhere – as Palestinians fight Israeli hegemony in the Occupied Territories; as anti-globalisation groups battle the police in Genoa, Seattle, Montreal, and other cities in Europe and North America; as protesters in Argentina, Turkey, Nigeria, and all across the developing world engage the pernicious policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – there is a view today that Ground Zero represents the clear ground from which the margin has moved to the centre in order to reconceptualize the key ideological differences of the present global situation.' Ibid., p. 48.

10. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. M. Shaw, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.

11. While Documenta is funded by the German state and various German art foundations, it also has a number of corporate and charitable sponsors, which include the Ford Foundation, the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, Deutsche Telekom, Finanzgruppe (whose advert says: 'Artistic freedom is a fundamental right. And we feel free to promote it.'), Volkswagen, and others.

12. Bhikhu Parekh, 'Deepening Liberal Democracy', in Enwezor et al., eds, *Democracy Unrealized*, pp. 55–66.

13. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Globalization and Democracy', in ibid., pp. 323–36.

14. Chantal Mouffe, 'For an Agonistic Public Sphere', in ibid., pp. 87–96; and Ernesto Laclau, 'Democracy between Autonomy and Heteronomy', in ibid., pp. 377–86.

15. Boris Groys, 'Beyond Diversity: Cultural Studies and Its Postcommunist Other', in ibid., pp. 303–22.

16. See, respectively, Albie Sachs, 'Different Kinds of Truth: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission', in Enwezor et al., eds, *Experiments with Truth*, pp. 43–60; Gurjot Malhi, 'An Experiment in International Justice: The Philosophy, Methodology and Working of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia', in ibid., pp. 195–204; and Maria Jose Guembe, 'The Search for the Turth Before the Courts', in ibid., pp. 231–40.

17. See Ruti Teitel, 'Transitional Justice as Liberal Narrative', in ibid., pp. 241–60.

18. See Boris Buden, 'Truth and Reconciliation Are Not What We Really Need', in ibid. pp. 65–79.

19. This is indicated by the source of the title 'Experiments with Truth', which is derived from the processes of decolonization and postcolonialism addressed in Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

20. See Susana Torre, 'Constructing Memorials', in Enwezor

et al., eds, *Experiments with Truth*, pp. 343–60.

21. See Alfredo Jaar, 'It's Difficult', in ibid., pp. 289–310.

22. See Derek Walcott's contributions, 'Exasperating Theory', 'More than Criticism', and especially, 'The Length of the Breath', all in Enwezor et al, eds, *Créolité and Creolization*, respectively, pp.19-20, pp.43-6, pp.241-44. See also Isaac Julien, 'Creolizing Vision', ibid. pp.149-56; Petrine Archer-Straw, 'Paradise, Primitivism, and Parody', ibid. pp.63-76.

23. See Virginia Pérez-Ratton, 'Central America and Creolization: The Invisible Caribbean?' in ibid. pp.77-86.

24. Stuart Hall, 'Creolization, Diaspora, and Hybridity in the Context of Globalization', in ibid. p.198. See also his '*Créolité* and the Process of Creolization', ibid. pp.27-42, and various of his contributions to the 'Open Sessions'.

25. See AbdouMaliq Simone, 'The Visible and the Invisible: Remaking Cities in Africa', in Enwezor et al., eds, *Under Siege: Four African Cities*, pp. 23–44.

26. Rem Koolhaas, 'Fragments of a Lecture on Lagos', in ibid., p. 175. *Project on the City* has otherwise concentrated on the Peal River Delta between Hong Kong and Macao. See Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas and Sze Tsung Leong, eds, *Great Leap Forward*, Harvard Design School Project on the City, Taschen, Cologne, 2002. For a review of this project see Fredric Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left Review* 21, May/June 2003, pp. 65–79.

27. See Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman's discussion of Cameroon in 'Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis', ibid. pp. 99–126.

28. See Antoine Bouillon, 'Between Euphemism and Informalism: Inventing the City', in Enwezor et al., eds, *Under Siege: Four African Cities*, pp. 81–98.

29. Onookome Okome, 'Writing the Anxious City: Images of Lagos in Nigerian Home Video Films', ibid. pp. 315–36.

30. For an account of this imperial origin of modern art, see Hans Belting, *The Invisible Masterpiece*, trans. H. Atkins, Reaktion Books, London, 2001. It should be noted that Belting is principally concerned with a particular myth of the masterpiece, rather than the avant-garde dissolution of art into life.

31. See Manfred Schneckenburger, *Documenta: Idee und Institution*, Bruckmann, Munich, 1983, pp. 7–28.

32. Note the exceptional inclusion of Barcelona among these Latin American cities, Silva, ed., *Urban Imaginaries from Latin America*.

33. See for instance Miguel Ángel Aguilar, 'The Full, Imagined, and Invisible Centre of Mexico City', in ibid. pp. 152–69; Armando Silva, 'Graffiti, Humour and Citizens of Latin America', in ibid., pp. 212–23; Guillermo Mariaca, 'Bodies of Air: On Three Chola Dances', in ibid. pp. 240–47; Valeria Silvina Pita and Alejandra Vassallo, 'Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: From Dictatorship to Democracy', in ibid. pp. 248–61.

34. See, for instance, Natalia Fernández and Teresa Velázquez, 'Barcelona: Resonance, Smells, and Chromatisms', in ibid., pp. 176–91.

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