

OKWUI ENWEZOR

THE BLACK BOX

INTRODUCTION

Although preparation and research began nearly four years ago, it is nonetheless permissible to say that the discursive drive of Documenta11 will never see its conclusion in the spectacular spaces filled with art projects that the exhibition offers to visitors to Kassel. The exhibition, despite its ambition, scale, and complexity, and the sheer heterogeneity of the forms, images, and positions that encompass its far-reaching vision, is not to be understood as a terminus for understanding the wide-ranging disciplinary models spelled out in the first four Platforms of conferences, debates, and workshops that preceded it in five locations: in Europe (Vienna and Berlin), Asia (New Delhi), the Americas (St. Lucia), and Africa (Lagos). Built into interlocking constellations of discursive domains, circuits of artistic and knowledge production, and research modules, the parameters that have shaped the organization of this project are to be found in the complex predicaments of contemporary art in a time of profound historical change and global transformation.

The careful examination and analysis of contemporary art, visual culture, and its spectatorial regimes, as well as other material orders of representation, should also be understood in relation to those other changes taking place across disciplinary and cultural boundaries that inform today's artistic procedures. The horizon of Documenta11's project and the full scope that its five Platforms occupy are twofold: first, there is the spatial and temporal dimension; the second is historical and cultural in nature. The full measure of Documenta11's critical procedure, then, is to be sought not only within the optics and visual logic of contemporary art. Thus the entire scope of the project inverts the logic that the exhibition's centrality is what defines the proper meaning of the artistic and intellectual possibilities of its procedures.

To construct an exhibition, the curator is always confronted with the double displacement of space and time. If the function of the artwork and the story it tells in an exhibition is to be understood primarily through the nature of its presentation, or by calling upon the context of the exhibition system to restore the temporal displacement that a work is often pressed into through the empirical logic of one thing standing next to another, this would also mean to establish the artwork's limits as such. Another observation is to see an exhibition as a kind of meta-language of mediation that constructs a tautological system in which the artwork is bound up in its own self-referentiality through the relationships established between mediums, objects, and systems. This would be particularly true when calling upon the work of art to present for scrutiny all its constitutive formal, conceptual, and analytical relations to the language of the exhibition's ideology. Under such a condition there is no life for the artwork outside the system of art, no autonomy outside the framework of an *art exhibition*. The artwork—which, in any case, is understood a priori to be extraterritorial to an exhibition's logic—functions as time spatialized, but only inside the space in which it is corseted, which does not refer to an external world. However, there is another less formal route to penetrate the logic of the exhibition's viewpoint; this is through methods that are manifested in a range of social, political, and cultural networks that have incessantly marked the limit and horizon of global discourse today and that present a different context for working on a project such as Documenta11. As such, this exhibition could be read as an accumulation of passages, a collection of moments, temporal lapses that emerge into spaces that reanimate for a viewing public the endless concatenation of worlds, perspectives, models, counter-models, and thinking that constitute the artistic subject. The description offered above, however, proves inadequate to fully capture the interrogations to which Documenta11 has subjected current contexts of artistic production and reception. As an exhibition project, Documenta11 begins from the sheer side of extraterritoriality: firstly, by displacing its historical context in Kassel; secondly, by moving outside the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive; and thirdly, by expanding the locus of the disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and cultural interest.

In fact, if the larger intellectual and curatorial scope of Documenta11 is to be placed in proper perspective it is in the idea that there are no overarching conclusions to be reached,