Documenta Platform 2, Delhi May 01

New Delhi, May 7–21, 2001

Report by: Sonia Khurana

Documenta 11 "As a fundamental and central feature of the dynamic process of creating Documenta11, Okwui Enwezor will develop, together with his co-curators, a series of so-called Platforms. The Platforms will introduce a variety of complex topics, at selected locales and in cooperation with chosen partners. These highly involved issues will inform the exhibition Documenta11 in Kassel, June 8-September 15, 2002, the final Platform. Therefore the discourse of the Documenta11 begins way ahead of the actual opening of the exhibition." ArtHist will report about the second platform at New Delhi in two parts today and tomorrow. As well ArtHist is looking for reviewers who will be able to participate in and monitor one of the other platforms.

Im Sommer 2002 beginnt in Kassel die Documenta 11. Zum ersten Mal seit Gruendung der immer noch als wichtigsten Kunstausstellung der Welt geltenden Documenta begann das Programm bereits mehr als ein Jahr vor dem Eroeffnungstermin in Kassel mit so genannten Plattformen, Diskussionsforen, die auf unterschiedlichen Kontinenten stattfinden. Die zweit Plattform wurde vom 7. bis 21. Mai in New Delhi unter dem Titel "Experimente mit der Wahrheit: Rechtssysteme im Wandel und die Prozesse der Wahrheitsfindung und der Versoehnung" abgehalten und wird in Berlin vom 9.-30.10. fortgesetzt. Wir werden heute und morgen einen Bericht ueber die erste Konferenz in Wien senden und suchen noch Interessierte, die an den naechsten Plattformen in Berlin, St. Lucia, Johannesburg und natuerlich Kassel teilnehmen und ueber sie berichten koennen. (I.M.)

Neu Delhi 07.-21. Mai 2001
India Habitat Centre
Konferenz 08.-12. Mai 2001
Film- und Videopraesentation 07.-21. Mai 2001

Experimente mit der Wahrheit: Rechtssysteme im Wandel und die Prozesse der Wahrheitsfindung und der Versoehnung.

Part 1: Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Process

of Truth and Reconciliation.
Reviewed for ArtHist by Sonia Khurana, New Delhi - Amsterdam
<sonia_khurana@yahoo.com>

India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
May 7 - 21, 2001
Platform 2 was twofold. There was a conference from May 8 - 12, and a video and film exhibition from May 7 - 21.

For those of us who are concerned with problematising the meaning of the terms art and art-making, it was very gratifying to witness and to engage with the recent Documenta event in Delhi. For a few weeks in the month of May this year the art space at the Habitat Center in Delhi was twisted, flattened, re-invigorated and re-shaped, as we traversed through an entire trajectory of several rarified fields of humanities at once. The entire conceptual orientation was meant to be interdisciplinary, connecting a wide range of scholars, philosophers, artists, filmmakers, institutions, cities, and audiences.

Conceptually, the gaze was shifted from the microcosm of personal introspection to the political gaze upon the big landscape of global politics. "It is important to do so because we are witnessing a global transition and it is more important than ever to engage in a dialogue with the various strands of this process." says Okwui Enwezor who is a writer, curator , a political scientist and is also the artistic director of the Documenta 11.

As an exhibition the Documenta has traditionally commissioned new works in the fields of sculpture, painting, photography, film, video, and installations. Since its inception in 1955 in Kassel, Germany, the Documenta has remained a vigorous supporter of the most difficult art, and has played a crucial role in introducing new vocabularies of contemporary art to a wider artistic and institutional sphere.
The Delhi chapter of the Documenta is the second platform in a series of five platforms of public debates, symposia, film presentations and lectures. Following the conclusion of these, in June, 2002 the very last platform will open in the form of the exhibition of Documenta11 in Kassel in Germany, its traditional home.

What is remarkable about the ongoing Documenta is that to begin with, it has attempted to move out of a euro-centic set-up, into places like Delhi, St. Lucia and Lagos. " The idea is to de-territorialise Documenta," says Nigerian - born Okwui Enwezor.
Further, the discursive space set up by the Documents has striven to animate the intellectual and creative methods that underpin the social, cultural, political, juridical, religious and philosophical

confrontation with one of the central pre-occupations of the 20th century.

In the last few decades a series of political, juridical and social assessments have been initiated all over the world to consider the nature of state impunity, genocide and gross human rights violations. The trauma of loss and the debilitating aspect of its impact on collective psyche have increasingly called for other mechanisms such as the Truth Commissions that could build a credible bridge between the juridical form of justice on the one hand and on the other the personal need of victims stories to be heard and entered into a historical record.

This brings to the fore the role of culture/ cultural activities in the processes of truth and reconciliation. The Documenta, then, set out to highlight and examine this role with the support of the Prince claus Fund that has for long been engaged in looking at the truth and reconciliation initiatives aroound the world. Els Van Der plas , director of the Prince Clause Fund believes that "the bringing together of theoreticians and artists, and theory and art could develop the thinking about T&R processes and change the behaviour of people towards traumatic experiences. Cultural memory (Literature/films/art) are essential for the cultural heritage and the writing of history for a country and for an individual. It can have a therapeutic role if you want and therefore help the healing process, and contribute to forgiving, and to not forgetting." Okwui Enwozer further proposes that : "It is the intention of this conference to examine not only the central arguments that form the core of the juridical and social methods of "Truth Commissions" as they pertain to state crime and violence; it also argues for a sober reflection on other complex conflicts (ethnic, racial, religious, and sectarian) that are seen as extra-territorial and marginal to the discourse of the search for truth and reconciliation."

The symposium at the Habitat Center was significantly titled Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation. With the symbolic inclusion of Gandhi's moral philosophy, the symposium then extended its focus to the catastrophic fate of the holocaust and other systemic state violence and repression all around the world, while peripherally including the diverse issues from within India. As the week progressed, hazy areas on the map of the world began to sharpen to focus, unveiling lives and histories of peoples from all over the world. Delving into the very meaning of "reconciliation", "transitional justice", the "subaltern", one traversed the whole wide territory of ethics and the nature of evil; the representation of trauma; and modes of justice

for healing, the individual as well as the collective psyche of the victim and the victor; the role and relevance of "truth commissions" and indeed the very meaning of " truth" and "What constitutes truth?"

Amidst the debate that ensued, in which the meaning of each of the words in question is minutely examined, someone in the audience - Ramu Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, as it happens) - stood up and gently insisted that reconciliation can only ever mean any good if it were accompanied with 'original ' felicitation. Dwelling upon the 'absolute' nature of Truth, he pointed out the very paradox of " truth and reconciliation", suggesting that any auxiliary to Truth that less than matches it in strength of meaning could well be redundant.

Gandhi in his Experiments with Truth had touched upon the complex intersection between truth, justice, and representation, which presented itself at the time of postcolonial transition in India and South Africa. Today the search for "truth" proliferates into an array of perspectives and such notions as juridical truth, narrative truth, experiential truth, ontological truth, and finally, performative truth, the significance of which is perhaps that much greater for the purpose of representation and art-making.

The role of the artist as witness, as narrator, and as a presentor of truth came to surface several times during the Symposium: traversing a series of fragments, stories, anecdotes, memories, and testimonials Rustam Bharucha's paper reflected on experiments in truth - making and conflict resolution on the borders of theatre and public culture. While Rory Bester's paper explored the role of historical representations of interrogation and torture in "criminalizing" the apartheid state, as well as the truth commissions' use of policing amnesty to mediate contemporary attituded to the impunity of the apartheid state. In one of the stirring moments during the symposium artist Alfredo Jaar made a presentation/ performance of his work on genocide in Rwanda. This, then, became the poignant framework in which one could set out to understanding the times we live in, and how to make sense of it within the context of what we do.

For the global media audiences who are inundated by unrelenting spectacles of suffering and trauma, the demand today is for comprehension. If this is true, then how can visual documents speak about that which resists language? How to bear witness and ensure re-presentation? How to remember and represent the past and historicize its reality? How to find mechanisms to both represent and narrate the

truth? How to negotiate the tensions between collective memory and official history? How to engage one's art-practice to these 'larger' human concerns, in the present day context?
These to me are the big issues, and it was exciting to see these being tossed up during the course of the Symposium. While much was said and shown, my training as a visual artist sensitises me just that much more to the central value and facility of representation of the 'unspeakable' that the visual can often afford. It is, indeed, the unique language of film that probes the taut membrane of that which resists representation.

A rare collection of films were shown in the Visual Arts gallery at the Habitat Centre, which became "the extended discursive space, for the dialogue to continue", explained Dr. Alka Pande (Indian co-ordinator for the Documenta symposium Event)
The films were largely concerned with the dilemma and problematics of representing the history of the tragedies of the modern period, while keeping in view the imposssibility of experiencing tragedy in the modern world. The Documenta catalogue claims that " its purpose is not to grasp the totality of what Hannah Arendt had called the "banality of evil" (with reference to the trial of Eichmann). but instead to take the measure of the historical responses to various modern tragedies through the purview of committed filmmakers who have mapped out a critical orientation of filmic strategies to analyse their impact on our collective consciousness."

Part documentary, part archival - the films engaged with a critical assessment of the representation of tragedy and of the banality of evil.The "truths" of the archive are always provisional, forever requiring qualification and correction. Each of the films shown here marked an attempt to give a language to the unspeakable while trying not to bear witness. Instead, what we could glean from each recording is an audiovisual writing of history.

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