


From documenta to the document: a German return to truth and reconciliation

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DOI: 10.1080/0893569042000193407

Publication Frequency: 4 issues per year

Published in:  **Rethinking Marxism**, Volume 16, Issue 1 January 2004 , pages 49 - 56

Subjects: Avant-Garde Art; Contemporary Art; Marxism & Communism; Theory & Political Sociology;

Formats available: PDF (English)

Abstract

Documenta 11, the international platform of contemporary art and ideas, was held in Kassel, Germany in 2002. Following its aim to "activate the space of public art as a site for the reconciliation of current political conflicts," the curators designated "Truth and Reconciliation" as one of the platform themes. This essay evaluates Documenta's success at staging this theme, and addresses the criticism that the curators' emphasis on public discourse diminished the aesthetic effects of the art shown. It elaborates a comparison between two works: Eyal Sivan's film about Adolf Eichmann, *The Specialist* (1996-1999), which featured in the 2002 exhibition, and Peter Weiss' earlier play *The Investigation* (1964), which dramatizes the Auschwitz Trials held in Frankfurt from 1963-1965. Drawing from Theodor W. Adorno's writings both on the Documenta projects of the 1950s and 1960s and on the aesthetics of the documentary, this essay demonstrates that the contemporary art exhibited in Documenta 11 does not advance any critical strategies beyond those that emerged in Weiss's drama. *The Investigation* offers an aesthetics of negativity that *The Specialist* does not match.

Keywords: Documenta 11; Documentary Film; Documentary Literature; Truth and Reconciliation; Eyal Sivan; *The Specialist*; Peter Weiss; *The Investigation*; Theodor W. Adorno; *Aesthetic Theory*