

# Binding Agents: Toward an Aesthetic of the Postcolonial in Contemporary Exhibition

Spring 2020

**CURPR 6020-02; FINAR 6020-6**

Thu, 8:30–11:30 a.m.

**California College of the Arts**

**Curatorial Research Bureau, YBCA, 701 Mission Street**

Professor: James Voorhies

**Description** Bracketed mostly between the first Documenta of the new millennium curated by the first non-Western director, Okwui Enwezor, in 2002, and documenta 15 in 2022, *Binding Agents: Toward an Aesthetic of the Postcolonial in Contemporary Exhibition* parses activity in exhibitions, institutions, and publications around the globe in order to define and analyze situations wherein the contemporary art world of the West has influenced an aesthetic of the postcolonial. Students are introduced to a discourse surrounding a selection of international exhibitions, institutions, and publications that articulates and traces situations in art over the past two decades where the postcolonial is increasingly aestheticized, from art presented at major international exhibitions to work seen at smaller institutions and informal arts initiatives. The course collects this nuanced material into a synthesized whole in order to critically assess it, ultimately seeking to generate better clarity about the impact of globalization on contemporary art, aesthetics, and exhibition.

**Goals** Students become familiar with and proficient in a vocabulary for communicating about historical, aesthetic and conceptual topics related to current issues in art, visual culture, and exhibitions. They are introduced to a range of curatorial models and approaches in order to provide knowledge and insight into the working relationships among contemporary artists, curators, and institutions.

**Requirements**

- (1) Each week a group of students are required to introduce and formally lead discussions on readings assigned to the class meeting. As groups (designated A, B, C, D), students work together to lead the discussions. These seminar discussions are accompanied by visual and audio materials (compiled in advance) supporting and illustrating the main points of the readings. Images are organized in PowerPoint (or comparable application). (40%)
- (2) Each student is required to provide a 200-word written reflection on each reading for each course meeting (excluding meetings when students lead seminars). (20%)
- (3) Students are expected to participate in class conversations. Participation is defined as responding to peers' comments, engaging actively in dialogue with materials and readings, and overall contributing to a convivial academic atmosphere in higher education. (20%)
- (4) Each student is required to write a 1500-word reflection on the criticism published in arts and culture journals about a recent large-scale exhibition, comparing and contrasting the range of authors' perspectives and voices, along with the arguments foregrounded, and the selection of art works used to support their thesis. (20%)

**Evaluation** Students are evaluated on the quality and frequency of participation in the course. Quality is based on organization, images, content and delivery of ideas; attendance; consistent communication during each class session. They are evaluated on in-class group presentations and written reflections on texts.

**Attendance** Students are expected to attend all class meetings. They will fail the course with more than three unexcused absences. Notification of absences must be given in advance by email. Students are expected to arrive on time. Three unexcused, late arrivals equals one unexcused absence.

**Screens** Students are permitted to have computers only to refer to class readings. Phones are not permitted. They should be silent and not be visible during class discussions.

**Jan 21**                    **An Introduction and Course Outline; Cinema Olanda, and The Silent University**

**Jan 28**                    **Documenta 11**

Ute Meta Bauer, "The Space of Documenta 11. Documenta 11 as a Zone of Activity," in *documenta 11\_Platform 5: Exhibition: Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002): 103–7.

Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *documenta 11\_Platform 5: Exhibition: Catalogue*: 42–55.

Chakravorty Gayatri Spivak, "Who Claims Alterity?" (1989), in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2012): 57–72.

Jeannine Tang, "On the Maintenance of Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft." *The Brooklyn Rail* (March 2016).

Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" (1995), in George E. Markus and Fred R. Myers (eds.), *The Traffic in Culture. Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995): 302–9.

**Feb 4**                    **Documenta 11**

Rasheed Araeen, "A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics." *Third Text*, 14 (2000): 3–20.

Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, "Ordering the Universe: Documenta 11 and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze." *Art Journal*, 64 (2005): 80–89.

Anthony Downey, "The Spectacular Difference of Documenta 11." *Third Text*, 17 (2003): 85–92.

Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," in Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 63–84.

**Feb 11**                    **Document 13**

Okwui Enwezor, "Place-Making or in the 'Wrong Place': Contemporary Art and the Postcolonial Condition," in Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (eds.), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016): 47–57.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time," in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (ed.), *dOCUMENTA (13): The Book of Books* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2012): 30–45.

T.J. Demos, "Curating Against the Apocalypse: Document 13, 2012," in Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mørland *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2015.): 71–88.

Elizabeth Schambelan, "Talks with Curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev about Documenta 13." *Artforum* (May 2012).

**Feb 18**                    **Documenta 13**

Simon Sheikh, "Towards the Exhibition as Research," in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.), *Curating Research* (London: Open Editions, 2015): 32–46.

Daniel Birnbaum, "Documenta 13." *Artforum* (October 2013).

Chuz Martínez, "How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog—Belated Aesthetics, Politics, and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research," in Christov-Bakargiev (ed.), *dOCUMENTA (13): The Book of Books* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2012): 46–57.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Letter to a Friend," 100 Notes—100 Thoughts, N°003, in Christov-Bakargiev (ed.), *dOCUMENTA (13): The Book of Books* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2012): 74–79.

**Feb 25**                    **Writing Seminar**

**Mar 3**                    **Reading Contemporary Art**

- Walter Benjamin**, “The Author as Producer,” in Peter Demetz (ed.), *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken, 2007): 220–38.
- Okwui Enwezor**, “Bio-Politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of “Truth” in Contemporary Art, in Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (eds.), *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Center for Curatorial Studies, Berlin: Sternberg, 2008): 62–102.
- Polly Staple**, “1000 Words: Maria Eichhorn.” *Artforum* (April 2017).
- Renée Green**, “Archive, Documents? Forms of Creation, Activation, and Use” (2008), in Gloria Sutton (ed.) *Other Planes of There: Selected Writings, Renée Green* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014): 176–90.

### **Mar 10                    Reading Contemporary Art**

- Walter Benjamin**, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,” in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essay and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 2007): 59–67.
- Dieter Lesage**, “Research and Form: On ‘Artistic Research’ and Its Aesthetic.” *Texte Zur Kunst: idiom—Languages of Art* (December 2017): 136–44.
- Simon Sheikh**, “Talk Value: Cultural Industry and the Knowledge Economy,” in Maria Hlavajova (ed.), *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Utrecht: BAK, 2008): 182–97.

### **Mar 17                    Toward an Aesthetics of the Post-Sensual**

- Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**, “Notes on Perceptual Thinking and Its Possibilities Today,” on Rudolf Arnheim, in Christov-Bakargiev (ed.), *dOCUMENTA (13): The Book of Books* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2012): 650–61.
- Immanuel Kant**, “General Remark Upon the Exposition of the Aesthetical Reflective Judgement,” from Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*: 87–132.
- Sebastian Egenhofer**, “Aesthetic Materiality in Conceptualism,” in Arment Avanessian and Luke Skrebowski (eds.), *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011): 87–99.
- Simon Sheikh**, “Thinking with Exhibitions, Thinking with People,” in Choi Jina, Helen Jungyeon Ku (eds.), *What Museums Do: The Curatorial in Parallax* (Seoul: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, 2018): 159–70.

### **Mar 24                    Spring Recces**

#### **Mar 31                    Case Studies: Cairo/Alexandria**

- Anthony Downey**, “Critical Propositions and Institutional Realities in the Middle East,” in Anthony Downey, *Future Imperfect: Contemporary Art Practices and Cultural Institutions in the Middle East* (Berlin: Sternberg Press): 14–46.
- Jens Maier-Rothe** and **Sarah Rifky**, “Institutional Role-Play: The Case of Beirut,” in Downey, *Future Imperfect*: 247–61.
- Ania Szremski**, “How Much Future is Left? On Speed and Withdrawal in a Cairo Arts Institution,” in Downey, *Future Imperfect*: 232–46.
- Williams Wells**, “Thinking Within and Beyond Institutions: Williams Wells in Conversation with Amal Khalaf and Anthony Downey,” in Downey, *Future Imperfect*: 221–31.

#### **Apr 7                    Case Studies: Istanbul**

- Tom Snow**, “An Institutional Retreat: The 13th Istanbul Biennial in the Context of Gezi Park,” in Downey, *Future Imperfect*: 378–93.
- Eray Çayli**, “Istanbul’s Artist-Run Institutions: The Case of PiST///Interdisciplinary Project Space,” in Downey, *Future Imperfect*: 395–407.
- Nicolas Bourriaud**, “The Seventh Continent: Theses Upon Art in the Age of Global Warming,” in *The Seventh Continent Field Report* (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Arts and Culture, 2019): 46–67.

## **Apr 14                      Writing Seminar**

### **Apr 21                      Case Studies: Amman**

Toleen Touq, "A Sense of Scale: Art and Cultural Practices Beyond Institutions in Amman," in Downey, *Future Imperfect*: 205–20.

Suha Shoman in conversation with Adriano Pedrosa and Eline van der Vlist, in *HIWAR: Conversations in Amman*, van der Vlist (ed.), (Amman: Darat al Funun-The Khalid Shoman Foundation, 2017): 19–26.

### **Apr 28    Ruangrupa—and: Documenta 15, 2022**

Irit Rogoff, "Turning," in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010): 32–46.

Reinaart Vanhoe, "Ruangrupa: An Artists' Initiative from Jakarta, Indonesia," in *Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking* (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2016): 25–56.

David Teh, "Who Cares a Lot?: Ruangrupa as Curatorship," in Ute Meta Bauer, Brigitte Oetker (eds.) *SoutEastAsia Spaces of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016): 170–78.

### **May 5                      Wendelein van Oldenborgh, Silent University**

Lucy Cotter (ed), *Cinema Olanda: Wendelien van Oldenborgh* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2017): 41–109.

Florian Malzacher, Ahmet Ögüt, and Pelin Tan (eds.), "Introduction," in Florian Malzacher, Ahmet Ögüt, and Pelin Tan (eds.), *The Silent University: Towards a Transversal Pedagogy* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016): 6–10.

Florian Malzacher, Ahmet Ögüt, "How can we imagine a school culture based on solidarity?," in Malzacher, Ögüt, and Tan (eds.), *The Silent University: Towards a Transversal Pedagogy* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016): 12–23.

Pelin Tan, "The Silent University as an Institutent Practice," in Malzacher, Ögüt, and Tan (eds.), *The Silent University: Towards a Transversal Pedagogy* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016): 24–33.

## **Course Learning Outcomes**

Students can reason systematically in support of an idea, action or theory. Students can structure and sustain this argumentation in an extended piece of writing.

Students can articulate the significance of the shift in curatorial focus post 1989, and begin to understand developments in post-colonial theories and art making

Students evince a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of historical and contemporary art and curatorial practices. Students demonstrate an increased level of proficiency in engaged, rigorous, and careful evaluation, interpretation, and explication, including skills to decode public and exhibition spaces.

Students can orally communicate their ideas in class to professors and peers.

Students can articulate ideas clearly and concisely, synthesizing research and their own ideas in writing.

Students can conduct research by capably and confidently accessing resources in the form of artists and arts professionals.