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Article title: Schematising hospitality: Ai WeiWei's activist artwork as a form of dark travel

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Abstract

The article provides a holistic appraisal of activist-artist Ai WeiWei's work. It argues that, despite its topical innovations and evolution, it continues to be informed by narratives of 'hospitality' as an experiential form of engagement with variations of otherness (father, migrant, tourist and refugee). Dividing Ai's artwork into two overlapping phases of development (national and international/global), it considers the artist's construction of a cosmopolitan identity with uses of 'technology' as embodied and communal property. As Ai's work on the refuge crisis on Lesbos attests, his (dark) artistic cosmopolitan symbolisations use geo-political imaginaries of justice and hospitality in subsequent projects.

Key words: adventure; dark tourism/travel; edgework; global complexity; hospitality; migration; schematisation

Introduction

Disruptions in one's life define the most common form of adventure, claims Simmel (1919, pars. 2-3). Adventure and art are friends, he adds: displaying an affinity with dreaming and defined by experiential tensions, the life projects of adventurers and artists share in their capacity to produce versions of the human in her/his various life stages, which are not a-historical, but steeped in concerns about belonging to a world and a community, thus both enshrining old, and producing new idea(l)s of hospitality and cosmopolitanism. The present article explores tensions between disengagement and belonging, transgressing and fitting into imagined and real communities in artistic practice. The notion of 'community' borrows from Anderson's (2006) construction of nations through print and capitalist processes up to a point: artists also articulate their identity as members of borderless communities of affect (Gandhi 2006) and practice, proffering multiple versions of reality in their work, which transcend national boundaries. Increasingly, such practices are technologically mediated through photography, film and new digital technologies, shrinking the world as symbolic space of human conviviality or hostility.

I develop my analysis between political ecology (socio-cultural environments of political potency) and cultural economy (practices and norms of reciprocity and hospitality), with an emphasis on the ways the former becomes 'schematised' (Stiegler 2011) in artistic production. Schematisation structures consciousness in a cinematographic style, allowing for both selection and forgetting of pasts, objects and experiences, so that they form a *dérushage* or montage, complete with materialised ploys and bodily performances. Thus, artistic montages of regional, national and

transnational hospitality are exercises in the politics of temporal mobility, because they produce their own imaginary constellations of belonging (Cresswell 2010). To encapsulate this hybridisation of politics with art, I favour a cultural sociological hermeneutics (see Alexander and Smith 2001), enmeshing Georg Simmel's theory and its techno-scientific descendants (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Urry 2007). I test how artistic agency, which normally functions within large national and world structures, displays emancipatory potentialities, thus proffering better futures, even when it engages in dystopian discourses. Empirically, the paper concentrates on the work of artist-activist Ai Weiwei (b. 1957-), which brings to discourse tensions of artistic (non-)belonging we know as 'hospitality'. Ai's risqué political statements and ambivalent reflexivity – at once engaging with Chinese heritage and rebelling against it, by siding with its imagined European counterpart – portray an individual 'style' (Simmel 1971). I argue that the contradictions and ambivalences of this 'style' are both constitutive of cosmopolitan articulations of hospitality and dependent upon a particular form of physical and existential mobility known as 'dark travel', variations of which we encounter both in European and Asian cultures. First as a private, personal or familial engagement with sites of memory and from the 20th century as commercialised touring to sites of disaster, suffering and heritage that hurts (from war to Ground Zero visitations), dark travel/tourism guides Ai's artistic production to date.

Methodologically, I am aware that, privileging one particular register of meaning ('western explanatory concepts or non-western concepts' - Delanty 2015, 375) in Ai's artwork is unproductive, so I follow instead his own attempts to produce an alternative language, or privilege one cultural register over others. Given Ai's varied use of

‘technology’, I place all the technological assemblages (human artisans, computers, photographic and video cameras) he uses to make art under the axial rubric of ‘mediation mapping’: what, how and who enables his artwork to reach a global public (Conde 2011). I maintain that contemporary styles of dark travel do not necessarily reproduce ethno-national heritage (Korstanje and Ivanov 2012); on the contrary, they interpret it (Staiff 2014), opening up spatio-temporal fixities to the world. This mobile hermeneutic and risqué venture (see Büscher and Urry’s (2009) epistemological notes) transforms Ai’s artistic-activist practice into an example of the ‘edge’ or dangerous threshold, in articulations of the human project: between cosmopolitanism and rootedness; privileged travel and persecuted vagabondage; detached observation and empathy; and actor, agent and network articulations.

In the following section I define a series of key terms that frame Ai’s artistic-humanist project, explaining how they tie in with technological meaning-making – central to his artwork. The section also provides reflections on Ai’s earlier artwork to create a methodological and empirical background for the following section. In the third section I concentrate on Ai’s most recent public exhibitions that elaborate on the refugee crisis. My aim here is not to reflect on world migration crises, but to examine how they feed into Ai’s project. Ai’s transits and visitations into refugee reception hotspots and performative existential travels into suffering and death locate his adventurous humanitarian style on an edge or border-crossing from disinterested involvement to consumerist pursuit. Instead of engaging in normative evaluations of such ‘tendencies’, I explain how practices of in-between-ness and ambivalence are not autopoietic ‘performativities’ (Butler 2007), reiterating national or fixed cosmopolitan structures,

but agential-transformative moments achieving structural modification. The sections are organised on the basis of what I perceive of as Ai's professional transformation over the last decade: his slow shift from contemplations of Chinese and family heritage to compassionate creativity focusing on the international politics of mobility. Ai's 'biographical movement' is, therefore, both of intimate nature and indicative of contemporary global transformations in artistic intimations of the Self as part of a cultural whole (Giddens 1991; Bauman 1991).

A cosmopolitan project: dark travel, hospitality and art-making

Most publications on Ai comment on the exilic experience of his childhood to a rural outpost in Xinjiang because of his father's (Ai Qing) suspected 'anti-communist' activities.. His adult involvement in the institution of the avant-garde School Seven Stars in Beijing after the death of Mao Zedong, and his self-exile to New York (1981-1993), where, alongside other diasporic Chinese artists, he began to capture political issues with the use of photographic techniques, point to the beginnings of his engagement with technological media (Obrist 2016, vii-xi, 76). The artist spent his formative creative years in social and cultural environments, both at home and abroad, fostering an 'edgy' style of cultural expression. Yet, this expression was firmly rooted in heritage and bound with cultural reproductions constitutive of networked diasporic art-making (Baronian, Bessser and Jensen 2007; DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015): it was reacting to the Maoist regime, as was the case with other diasporic Chinese artists.

Ai's shift from *Seven Stars*' critical take on Beijing's Cultural Revolution to New York's anti-authoritarian punk scene in the 1980s enriched his reflections on the nation's Maoist heritage. His self-portrait at a site of massacre, Tiananmen Square (1984), 'giving the finger' to Chairman Mao's portrait, or his photographing of his wife, Ly Qing, lifting her skirt to reveal her underwear in front of the Chairman's poster in his *Studies in Perspective* (Panero 31 September 2012, 54), are studies in political perspective from within China's spectacular urban spheres. The photographs' erotic subtext (political disrespect equated with genitalia exposure) and endangering of artistic freedom retain the quality of adventure (Simmel 1919, pars. 13 & 17). This adventure necessitates what is known as 'edgework', a wide range of voluntary risk-taking behaviours that negotiate 'the boundary between chaos and order' and which 'involve a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or of one's sense of an ordered existence' (Lyng 1990, 855, 857). The live background of Beijing's urbanscape in such images, where strangers mingle and play their activist or conformist parts, is also crucial. 'We are a productive reality', Ai proclaims in a recent interview. 'We are the reality, but that part of reality means that we need to produce another reality' (Obrist 2016, 7). In his 'sacrilegious' Tiananmen Square shots he walked a fine line between disrespecting the state and those murdered by the state. This is a recurring pattern in artistic audio-visual dark travels aiming to shock, which connect Ai to Western artistic-activist trends ('Fluxus'), as I explain later (Tzanelli 2016, 26). As a result, through a combination of his inner, psychosocial travels and physical movement across different continents and sites (art galleries and exhibitions, refugee camps, war zones and sites of political murder), Ai enacts 'dark tourism' as both a radical rejection of conventional approaches to heritage and as digital commercialisation of the *thánatos* (death) of old

cultural forms and the human populations that uphold them (Seaton 1996, 2002). I stress ‘digital’, because Ai’s emphasis on the role of new technologies in fostering global connectivity and revising stale realities has become central in his art-making.

Artistically, this style is used in collective and individual reflections on what establishes the boundary between self and other as the ‘stranger’ we welcome into our home (Westmoreland 2008, 4). Ai’s understanding of home(land) was specifically filtered through Chinese divisions between the country (rural outposts to which dissidents were sent) and the city (China’s party-controlled cosmopolitan atmospheres, steeped in propagandist image-making for China’s Communist Party (CCP)). The split between exilic, but romanticised rurality, and spectacular, but disenchanting urbanity, frames his artistic-humanist perspective. At the forefront of these concerns has been the treatment of alternative voices in an authoritarian environment – therefore, state laws regulating civic freedom. Naturally Ai would focus on interplays between ‘the law of hospitality’ (absolute hospitality, the ‘norm’) and ‘hospitality laws’ (citizenship rules and regulations conditioning one’s legal status as national, foreigner, refugee and migrant) (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 76-78). On several occasions, Ai used technology to explore tensions between unwritten norms (accepting the other/stranger/dissident in their own terms) and written rules (hostility towards documented dissidents and undocumented strangers).

For Ai, technology enabled, rather than distorted the production of narratives about human nature. Commenting on his activist blogging, he notes that, if handwriting encloses ‘so much feeling’, blogs become the artist’s modern drawing, ‘showing [his]

complete surroundings' (Obrist 2016, 44-45) – something he links to uploaded images on his blog. *The Wave*, a collection of Ai's early ceramic works and objects, includes photographs in airports, which exemplify the unprocessed quality he attributes to images he generates: 'pure recording: no judgement' (ibid. 65). The immediate, existential connection images foster to the object they depict for the photographer, makes them indexes of what will eventually be symbolised in the final artistic product (Barthes 2000, 77). Much like Duchamp's *inframince* (literally 'ultrathin'), 'a pellicle-like interface at which meaning is mediated or deferred' (Gibbons 2007, 31), Ai uses digital imagery as a work in progress before reaching better-defined statements in his artwork. Given his self-acknowledged influence by Fluxus and conceptual art from the 1960s (Obrist 2016, 82) these everyday snapshots figure as deferred memories awaiting articulation. After all, both Fluxus and conceptualism thrived on singularities (focusing on one idea that defines the artwork). Ai's airport snapshots, which depict non-spaces of global capitalism, where surveillance technologies are implemented to monitor diverse mobilities (Kesselring 2009), would herald his work on hospitality conundrums.

Where artistic indexes outlive their purpose, symbols emerge to define end products. At this end, when art is released for public spectatorship, Ai's conceptions of 'human nature' would first refer to our organisation into communities based on professional but also emotional cultural consciousness, including artisan and craft, ethnic and minority, as well as disenfranchised and uprooted/refugee experiences. At an institutional level, such organisation reveals forms of 'technopoesis': 'the totality of practices and processes of "self-making" available to a community and embodied in the artefacts, techniques and technologies available to a culture' (Hand and Sandywell 2002, 208).

Ai's *Sunflower Seeds* (2007) has this quality of arte-factual craftsmanship, which produces arts out of the everyday, in Warhol's tradition. As is the case with Warhol (Obrist 2016, 81), Ai's gaze on what is set to signify 'tradition' in the exhibit is iconoclastic: using 'stuff' at the scale of furniture (Molotch 2004), 'which can be put in any place', it interrogates craftsmanship's origins as 'something useless or even nameless' that is 'not there' before its nomination by the state or the artist (Obrist 2016, 64). At the same time, Ai's works such as that with Neolithic vases dipped in cheap Japanese paint and photographed as he smashes them on the ground (*Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995 – Royal Academy of Arts 2015, 155-167) deconstructs ideas of authenticity that the national centre uses in its orchestrated technopoetic representations.

The same critique informs his work with furniture in *Table with Two Legs on the Wall* (1997) and other similar exhibits, featuring deformed everyday objects, in which he saw displaced memory traces. For Ai, much like Walter Benjamin's historian (1992, 2005), the artist has the responsibility to 'locate' such traces in a contemporary socio-political whole, hence to exercise his/her hermeneutic right and duty to re-member past communities under contemporary conditions of hypermobility (Obrist 2016, 97). The Fairytale exhibition of 1,001 chairs for Documenta (2007) also grasped the moment assemblages of *téchne* (craft) escape the technopoetic eye of the centre, to become travelling (but not rootless) cultures (Clifford 1997). The artist invited 1001 Chinese citizens from all walks of life to visit Kassel and mingle with global visitors, thus equating the 1001 wooden chairs from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) with human configurations of cosmopolitanism that blend Eastern and Western worlds (Conde 2012, 9, 18). His decision to handcraft rather than produce seeds industrially, deconstructs

imaginaries of China as ‘the factory of the world’, excelling in homogenisation, but the exhibit’s accompanying documentary offers glimpses at the ‘Porcelain Capital’ of Jingdezhen, from where, mostly young female artisans were filmed working on the seeds in western clothing and with mobile phones (Hancox 2012). Given the cine-tourist potential of this installation, the images of modern female workers attain become empowering tools for those society renders less mobile, and who now can circulate across the world (Paolucci 1998). Ai sees such technical skill as part of a culturally manufactured human nature: competing with nature like Picasso or Matisse, he says, ‘is basically a Western idea. As a Chinese, you are always part of your surroundings. Nature can be a man-made or an industrial postmodern society...you’re in there, trying to build some kind of a relationship’ (Obrist 2016, 69). However, at the same time, our participation in a world which is increasingly more like a sphere and ‘has no East or West’ (Hancox 2012, 279), acknowledges the cosmopolitan unity of humanity.

The world as a sphere is also a cybernetic organism that flattens experience to comprehend it, something put under scrutiny in art-making of emotive content: if the world is one, its hospitable nature demands comprehension from below, rather than afar. Hence, technology’s aesthetics of distance stands as a contradiction in Ai’s self-declared committed art: can things be lived in and experienced ‘from afar’? For him, the answer is positive. Consistent with his blogging practices is his involvement in the Serpentine Map Marathon in London at the Royal Geographic Society in 2010, which he coordinated with his installation at Tate Turbine Hall. His involvement with cartographic techniques dated back to 2003, when he taught students at Tsinghua University on a bus tour in Beijing (Obrist 2016, 107). Recording the tour in a city that

changes at a faster pace than European cities produced a collection of material and cultural traces otherwise condemned to oblivion. Much like Kracauer's (1997, 170) cine-realist vistas of street life (Gilloch 2007, 115), Ai and his students' urban flânerie lodge their digital narrative between mobility systems (vehicles, audio-visual machines) and spatially detached hermeneutic presentations of a cityscape en route to transformation. The optics' actor-network flair (cameras as extensions of the eye and the heart – Latour 1999) project an urbanised vision of modernity, central to Ai's cosmopolitan identity.

Ai's hermeneutics of recovery organise practices and norms of being together with others (communal belonging) in time (history, remembrance), with all the limitations such ideas of hospitality entail as a portmanteau of strangerhood (urban flâneurs, migrants and exiles, travellers and tourists), guest identity (receiving hosts' kindness) and power (institutional and homely/intimate) (Caputo 2002, 110-111). The imaginary of village life is displaced to a utopian space of dreaming, which blends manual craft with creative labour nostalgically: modernity destroys rootedness. Nevertheless, in Ai's artwork such organisation of practices also implies the sinister presence of bio-technologies of population management, community surveillance and discipline – all variations of modern institutional power vying to control independent human creativity. On this, Ai employs the means/tools of power (technologies of gazing) to critique its production of hostipital (hostile to guests/hosts – see Derrida 2000; O'Gorman 2006) environments, thus enmeshing his utopian project into realist political ecological contexts. He communicates the phenomenological character of these 'schematised' ecologies via a digitised reality in his recollections about his secret recordings of the

MoMA group visit during the annual meeting on literature and art commemorating the end of the Long March (2006). In his usual risqué style, he notes that his use of recording devices is both reacting to and mimicking state practices: '[secret cameras] are often used by a group when it wants to monitor another group's activity' (Obrist 2016, 12-13).

Thus, monitoring and spatializing freedom – claiming public space, in a 'Smart Mob' activist style (Salmond 2010) – becomes a central feature in Ai's work. Eventually, the aesthetics of distance would equip him with a means to disseminate ideas when the CCP would render him physically immobile, without a passport and under home surveillance. This aesthetics of distance realised his Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads exhibition in Somerset House's courtyard in London (2011), when he was under arrest in Beijing. The exhibition focused on questions of 'looting and repatriation, while extending [Ai's] ongoing exploration of the "fake" and the copy in relation to the original' (Tzanelli 2013, 143). The Yuanming Yuan, the original home of the heads, was ransacked in 1860 by French and British troops and the heads were pillaged. Yet, their reproduction by Ai as public art at the heart of a former European imperial power, also highlights the complexities of 'homecoming', when art-making itself has to relocate abroad to avoid oppression. Unsurprisingly, his recent large-scale commission for the infamous island of Alcatraz (2014), which includes both public installations and a line-up of public programmes with a film-screening series, transforms a site of incarceration into a shrine to the struggle for human rights. Working with organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Ai also uses the prison's space as a live tourist site that 'has nothing to do with museum or gallery conditions' (Obrist 2016, 137).

Curating works that reference prisoners transported to secret locations (Traces), handmade kites with images of birds and flowers related to the homelands of prisoners of conscience (With Wind), a wing sculpture, symbolising the idea of escape (Wing) and sound installations in cells to symbolise the human need for communication (Stay Tuned), is also coupled with encouragements of visitors to write down their feelings and send them to prisoners. This act bridged the tourist's alleged audio-visual distance and insensitivity (e.g. Bauman 2007; Korstanje 2016), injecting to the project a politics of empathy (small acts for human rights – Fassin 2013) and the poetics of hospitality (assuring prisoners that they still have a 'home' among fellow humans – Derrida 2000). The artist's reference to Alcatraz's infamy as a 'dark tourist spot' is connected to the commercialisation of variations of suffering as a form of dark tourism (Rojek 1993). Yet, his exhibition's dark aesthetics of the spectacle are overlaid with a humanitarian ethics rooted in autobiographical discourse: speaking about his father's imprisonment, he admitted his past fear that he would never make it under these conditions – 'but suddenly I was arrested. That moment, that day, I was somehow relieved...we were in jail for the same reason' (Obrist 2016, 139). The admission highlights the emotional depth of Ai's cosmopolitan 'edge', which is as much a project of self-betterment as it is of educating the world of pólis (an urban miniature of the world) to be fair and beautiful (the double meaning of kósmos) through the subject's personal suffering. The pressures of Ai's detention, its inhospitable nature, have been constitutive of his subjective maturity: when they became psychologically and physically violent, 'they gained mastery over the material through which they realise[d] themselves' to give rise to his

accomplished artistic-activist adventure (Simmel 1919, par. 28). I return to this point in the following section.

Family and the (Chinese) nation comprise Ai's artistic beginnings. His conception of technopoesis and cosmopolitanism have now moved to post-national, network articulations of belonging within artistic communities of practice that are globally mobile: artists and architects (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Cosmopolitan technopoesis is technologically mediated by default, given the geographically dispersed nature of its artistic human resources. Here, Zolberg's (2015) analogy between the processes by which certain frameworks of analysis and categories came to be incorporated into the scientific cannon (Latour 1987) and the processes by which artistic cannons are established (Bourdieu and Darbel 1990) provides insight into the ways artistic communities, such as that to which Ai currently belongs, operate. This guided Ai's collaboration with Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron to design the Olympic Stadium (Bird's Nest) as a sort of urban landscape or 'public sculpture' (Orbist 2016, 32), or his connection to Wittgensteinian theory for the design of his Beijing Studio (ibid. 53). Both designs are extensions of his philosophy of homeliness in a hostile Chinese environment – the first as an educative democratic playground for locals and tourist globetrotters, the second as his own homestead. True to his principles of inclusivity, Ai rejects technological separations of 'high' (art) from 'low' (popular, everyday) production, something which would equip him in his architectural endeavours with an inclusive policy-making flair (DiMaggio 1992; Goldfarb 2012). As is the case with his mass production artwork featuring variations of cultural community, his architectural turn is orientated toward the functional, uncluttered and liveable space.

His company, FAKE Design, treats projects as ‘evidence of mankind at the time’ of production, as realities and conditions of an ongoing human struggle (Obrist 2016, 93). Again, conceptions of technology as a phenomenological artistic articulation play a significant role: not only do they account for Ai’s increasing focus on the urban project as a form of art (Olsen 1986), they communicate ideals of a better world, thus exceeding the engineering principles adhering to material construction (Coleman 2013, 137).

Ai’s own admission that architecture ‘tells people about possibilities, and the ways things can be changed’ (Obrist, 2016: 22), recalls Jameson and Bloch’s views on it as a ‘utopian vocation’: its role is to critique and disrupt a repressive society’s established codes, to act as a mediator between politics and aesthetics and to enable active participation of the public in the city’s commons (Bloch 1988; Hays 1998). Its equivalence to politics in the aesthetic realm (like mundane politics, it organises space by ordering values and shaping human perceptions of the lived environment – Rancière 2009), grants it with a purpose. This materialisation of utopianism is also mediated in Ai’s work through spatialized dystopias of surveillance. The display of his six-part architectural installation S.A.C.R.E.D. (2011-2013) at the 55th Venice Biennale revels in this contradiction: the work comprised six enclosed metal rooms into which visitors spy from above, and which function as realist dioramas of scenes from Ai’s 81-day incarceration by the Chinese authorities in 2011. It is reminiscent of his installation of four surveillance cameras streaming live feeds of him at home in 2012, offering viewers the opportunity to ‘see like a state’ (Scott 1998), then shutting down the stream with a sarcastic ‘bye, bye to all voyeurs’ to embarrass the transfixed gazers (Sorace 2014, 405). Ai admitted that, after his release, he used Google Maps to search for the location of his

detention, as he had memorised every inch of the space in which he was held. Installed in the Church of Sant'Antonin, for some S.A.C.R.E.D. points to 'things such as the stations of the cross', positioning Ai 'as a martyr' (Higgins 30 May 2013). Viewing the installation as part of the overall exhibition, however, suggests art's ability to juxtapose biographical to biological life and thus to 'recover' (Dallmayr 2001) possibilities of a better future that transcends personal biography.

This is a reference to Hannah Arendt's work on the politics of freedom. If biological life is repetitive (birth, growth and death), biographical life sketches multiple paths to betterment, potential futures and the ability to inspire the good through exemplary action (Arendt 1958). Biographical life is based on work, which allows for transcendence and the production of future goals, thus granting the world with more durable positive structures (Brun 2016, 399). It all begins with memory-work for Ai: note for example that the 150-ton steel installation (Straight) in the Zuecca Project Space on the island of Giudecca from pieces recovered from a school building that collapsed during the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, killing thousands of children, displays a national tragedy in the same Biennale. Ai himself notes that his team's collection of children's name and 'rubble from the disaster' highlight that Chinese modernity fosters a 'provisional landscape: after they destroy the old and before they've built the new, they have a gap' that his artwork encapsulates (Obrist 2016, 119). The 'gap' is nothing other than the architectonics of hospitality: the spatialisation of human presence or the ways memory registers human beings in particular locations, buildings and social settings, which they continue to haunt, long after their departure as their past inhabitants. For Ai it is not just that discarding spatialised memory in favour of state

beautification and prestige-making is equated with turning memories of places into strangers, but that we cannot learn from these pasts. This ‘hauntological’ statement, the colonisation of the present by the past, is supposed to tell a story about the ways inclusive and hospitable human futures are built, and not about the past itself (Derrida 1994). The role of hauntology and the movement from biological to biographical life are central to Ai’s schematisations of hospitality in the current refugee crisis.

Heritage coming apart

Few linger on Ai’s memories from his first years in New York, where he tried to survive by doing any kind of work. Yet, exilic experience still lingers in his self-accounts, which stress that he does not see himself as the artistic stranger who arrives today is gone tomorrow, but the guest ‘who arrives today and remains tomorrow’ (Friese 2004, 68). Ai’s transitive biography exemplifies understanding of hospitality: the Latin root of ‘guest’ as *hostis* (master of the house) and *hospis* (representative of household identity), blends two different semantic fields to signify that, a guest is accepted only if (s)he enters an alliance with the host based on reciprocity (ibid. 69; Westmoreland 2008, 6). Much like the symmetry between art and adventure, hospitality is an integral part of an ethics of the good life and responsibility, rendering Ai’s art with an activist spectatorial form: to see is to change the world. For example, he admits that ‘after Duchamp, [he] realized that being an artist is more about a lifestyle and attitude than producing some product’ (Obrist 2016, 87). This ‘lifestyle’ evolves with the human subject upholding its values and rhythms – just as art’s vital flow emulates life (Sheller 2014; Sheller and Urry 2003). Simmel, who saw adventure as the prerogative of youth, which fosters a romantic worldview in artistic production, also

stressed the historical monumentality of older age, which carries a more scientific approach to life and revels in the preservation of substance ‘beyond the inexpressible process of its presence that can only be experienced’ (Simmel 1919, par. 23). The explicit historicity of Ai’s more recent artwork on the refugee crisis does not discard the ‘presentness’ of adventure (ibid: par. 24), it externalises it, positioning the art-maker and his audiences as helpless spectators of a human drama (Boltanski 1999). Much like his earlier counter-biopolitical manifestos, Ai’s recent reflections on distant suffering in global contexts mobilise the enemy’s tools to articulate a problem: modernity’s obsession with the spectacle, which can incorporate and celebrate death as a touristic commodity (Urry 2002, 2004; Bauman 2007). Schematisations of death mobilities in televised risk cultures critique the simulacrum workshops of contemporary consumerism, which turn suffering into entertainment (Korstanje 2016; Tzanelli 2016). Such schematisations of refugee suffering in Ai’s artwork, aiming to shock through the display of emotional distance, provoked negative reactions, setting in motion new hermeneutic cycles in regional geopolitical imaginaries of mobility.

Renditions of hospitality in colloquial and formal Chinese (Dài kè (待客): n. hospitality, v. to entertain) enmesh two activities with conflicting meaning in contemporary Western consumption milieus. The two activities converge in now-globalised business contexts, where hospitality has to be both a practice and a norm (provision of shelter, food and entertainment as well as respect for guests – see Lashley and Morrison 2000; O’Gorman 2007; Lynch et.al. 2011). Hospitality is about amicable emulations of familiarity existing in meso-level social interactions (family reciprocities) in micro-level contexts (Herzfeld 2005). It is about the ways the human subject’s inner lived

experience – what Simmel (1997, 91) terms *Erlebnis* – is made visible in art. Note also Ai's recognition that art and architecture cannot be separated from conceptions of 'social sculpture' was realised artistically in his studio in Berlin. This thesis is central to the Fluxus movement and to Joseph Beuys' (1921-1986) work that first promoted urban renewal in Kassel as part of a growing activist-ecological consciousness (Conde 2012, 20). Ai always viewed the sociality of human populations as structurally integral to spatialized narratives of belonging, which are materialised in architecture. Working with 15 students on the condition that new human movements sketch around the world, he started collecting drawings from a refugee camp in Iraq before moving on to similar work on the camps of Lesbos, Greece. There, with 'his partner and his boy', he started photographing refugees moving from Turkey into Greece under risky conditions (Obrist 2016, 151). The constant loss of refugee lives in the sea convinced him to coordinate a humanitarian mission between local authorities, the mayor of Lesbos and Greek ministers to offer help, while also building a new studio on the island.

I started my analysis by highlighting the role of edgework in the consolidation of an artistic cosmopolitan identity, adding in this section notes on the historicity of mature artmaking. Ai's globetrotting style is now closer to that of an invested pilgrim, not a persecuted vagabond or a carefree tourist (Bauman 1996). But looking past his Fluxus-inspired activism, what does he truly worship in his emotional and aesthetic sojourns? It seems that his 'coming of artistic age' is refracted through his own experience of fatherhood and being a family carer (see interview in Marlow 2016, 25) – the very core of utopian imaginaries of belonging in many societies, which is now challenged by processes of modernisation, war, genocide and uprooting. Such self-confessed

refractions of responsibility correspond to the artist's original journey to the 'edge', where he could pay his debts to his heritage and be like his father. However, even after securing the minimum 'masculine capital' (De Viser and McDonnell 2013) by means of humiliation and torture by the hateful Chinese state, he had to define his post-national cosmopolitanism as a successful fusion of cultural horizons: his art had to learn to foster a hybrid vocabulary to untangle 'global heteroglossias' (Conde 2012, 5). This does not involve him being the iconoclastic dandy, who smashes Chinese heritage to pieces, then reassembles them in novel ways, but becoming a mnemonist, who collects fragments from different cultural narratives of loss and pain, to produce a global narrative of mobilities and immobilities: to be a sort of impressionist historian. This kind of 'edgework' (Lyng 2005) solidifies affects as cognitive-emotional properties, and is replete with cross-cultural comparisons (East meets West, Europe meets China, the Global North meets the Global South, and so on), so as to generate observations on what unites human action and vision (de Sousa Santos 1995, 267–8). Indeed, Ai's new cosmopolitan identity is based on a strategic interdependence between his reputation as a martyred activist and the regional conditions under which he works (Condi 2012).

The aforementioned discussion makes accusations of Ai as an insensitive artist capitalising on the suffering of dying refugees sound absurd: ultimately, it challenges arguments that risk-taking itself is emotionally constructed only by women, especially if they act in care-work contexts (Lois 2001, 2005). He says about the refugee camp of Moria on Lesbos: 'As an artist, I have to relate to humanity's struggles ... I never separate these situations from my art...The border is not in Lesbos, it really [is] in our minds and in our hearts' (Associated Press 1 January 2016). Damned if he thinks as a

contemporary Chinese professional and father, damned if he acts as an artist-activist, who has to work with commercial institutions especially in Europe and the US (Danto 1974), all he can do is ignore such accusations (Lyng et.al. 2007). This conundrum is replicated in the locations that inspired his relevant artwork, which carry both a heavy heritage burden of their own and the contemporary ethical tensions inherent in the governance of mass human mobilities: the reproduction of the logic of World War II camp settlement in the global refugee crisis (Agamben 1998). The two observations set the scene for a more nuanced appreciation of Ai's public artwork. Henceforth I argue that criticisms of Ai's recent performative artworks reject fusions of artmaking as a form of public culture with non-artistic activism; at the same time, they ignore art's intertextual depth, which connects to Ai's own incorporation into post-statist cosmopolitan communities. Where critics read offense, we could see the need to belong.. The politics of mobility on Lesbos and the margins of Europe are textbook cases of a serendipitous fusion of horizons in understandings of hospitality, with all their contradictions. Here we can begin to interrogate the many meanings of *Dài kè* - not generally in market society contexts, but in particular socio-cultural domains that have to negotiate a fragile truce between the rules of the (artistic and tourist) market, adjacent *Realpolitik* visions of belonging (in Europe and a national community), and their norms of hospitality.

Ai's engagement with refugee flows into Greece and the Mediterranean basin fused the stylistics of reportage with those of cinematic realism. Not only has he shot over 600 hours of footage for a feature-length film (*Human Flow*) about the refugee crisis (Obrist 2016, 155), he has spent several months volunteering at refugee camps on the Greek-

Macedonian border, with Reuters reporting that he wants to share the shocking experience with the world (Denham 3 May 2016). The style of recording fuses Brecht's realist theatricality with simulations of objective testimony to shock the senses into full awareness (Kracauer [1960] 1997, 158-159). The mimicked objectivity of reporting counters suggestions on Twitter and in the press that his Lesbos work will culminate in the creation of a conventional monument. Again, borrowing from his self-made tools of 'conceptualism with a conscience', Ai notes that he is interested in devising a new language in dealing with the crisis. 'In every crisis...there's also an opportunity for people to give new definitions and recognize learning, and to come up with new forms', he concludes (Obrist 2016, 151). Steeped in touristic proto-ethnographic naturalism (Graburn 2002, 23), Ai's mnemonist style is meant to assault spectators with audio-visual signs of an impending death of world societies. This is 'dark tourism' shedding its commercial pretensions, to problematize the metaphor of 'social death' in an artistic-activist style.

Ai's most controversial photograph did not include portraits of refugees, but of himself. Against a black-and-white seascape, he recreated the image of drowned Syrian infant, Alan Kurdi washed ashore on a beach near Bodrum in 2015 (Tan 1 February 2016). For the recreation, he lay face down on a pebbled beach of Lesbos, with his palms upturned in the same manner as Kurdi to be captured by Rohit Chawla for the magazine *India Today*. The image featured in *India Art Fair* at an exhibition called *The Artists*, where it captured the attention of art lovers and gallery owners. Co-owner of *India Art Fair* Sandy Angus remarked that the image is haunting and iconic 'because it is very political, human and involves an incredibly important artist like Ai Weiwei' (Lakshmi

30 January 2016). The image sparked a heated debate on social media, dividing opinion on Twitter, with many praising it as ‘powerful’ and some deeming it ‘a “weird” move from the artist’ (BBC News 1 February 2016; Shaw 3 February 2016).

At least two potent public interpretations of this image may have induced criticism. The first links Ai’s move to Duchamp’s disengaged conceptualism, which smacks ‘ultrathin’ realities at the face of highly sensitive social situations. This also connects to Ai’s ‘offensively tasteless’ decision during his Berlin exhibition to ask a room of celebrities at a fundraiser event to pose for selfies in gold emergency thermal blankets, like refugees. Tim Renner, the city’s culture secretary, described the stunt as ‘clearly obscene, even if understood as an act of solidarity’ (Denham, 3 March 2016). Such inframince infinitesimal hermeneutics employ the rules of the recorded spectacle, hence the ‘eye of horror’, in a cine-realist style, to shock helpless spectators (Clover 1994). The ‘offensive’ move revises Duchamp’s rejection of art-with-politics and inverts the aesthetics of cinematic verisimilitude to interrogate social contradictions: ‘we ought to think of ourselves as affluent spectators of a human drama; shame on us’.

The second interpretation is more solidly rooted in European histories of dark travel, and mobilises the Grand Tourists’ (17th-19th century) artistic interest in the macabre of destitution and the slum tourists’ (19th-21st century) welfarist engagement with urban poverty (Tzanelli and Korstanje 2016). Both tourist types originate in the evolution of a middle-class need to return to naturalist egalitarian simplicity, into adventurous journeys (gout du risqué) of emotional depth that tourist markets would eventually commercialise (Graburn 2012, 2014). Such esoteric journeys are also compatible with

the stylised Chinese traditions of *nō* theatre, which are inspired by Zen Buddhism (Tze-Yue 2010, 14). The stiffness of *nō* performances is supposed to capture the oblique aspects of language and the heroes' psychological state in an embodied, performative style, compatible with Zen Buddhist teaching. However, this is compatible with Western and aboriginal artistic registers around the world (Ingold 2010) and specifically Duchamp's original *inframince* idea of giving voice to the invisible and disarticulated moment. In the representational arts, Zen Buddhism also demands acute observational skills from the painter and realist depictions of the Zen master (Tze-Yue 2010, 30). We are then back to the eye of horror – or, more precisely, interpellations of a desire for adventure, whereby 'a person deliberately places himself [sic] in distressing situations, thereby repeating an old [but unremembered] experience' (s)he now wants to 'get right' (Clover 1994, 208).

This self-positioning moves us to a third interpretation of Ai's death image, which illuminates his new cosmopolitan connectivity as a cross-cultural interpreter. The black-and-white image of him on Lesbos' shore belongs to a hermeneutic constellation that emerged when the news of his detention went viral. Amongst the many acts of protest abroad against the Chinese government's decision, we may note twenty-five-year-old artist, He Xiang's display of a sculpture in a window front in Bad Ems, Germany. The life-size display featured a corpse resembling Ai face down; it was made from fiberglass and plastic, with real human hair and was titled *The Death of Marat* after Jacques-Louis David's painting (1793) (Sorace 2014, 416). The reference to the incarnation of revolutionary principles in martyred heroes is shared in the two apparently different political and cultural contexts of the French and the Chinese Communist Revolutions:

martyred heroes partake in mythopoetic processes necessary for the consolidation of the imagined community (Anderson 2006, 198). Thus, Ai's transfer of the statement on to his own dead image on Lesbos speaks a cosmopolitan language: first, it acknowledges the kindness of his young compatriot, but second, it highlights the cultural transferability of the visual sign of death as a 'thanatourist' (dark tourist) memento mori (Seaton 1996) in globalised contexts of martyrdom (refugees are the unsung dead of national communities dismantled by war and other disasters). The sea, the final frontier of mobility, is turned into a cemetery, and the landscape's bare silence communicates the refugees' 'bare life' (Agamben 1999): a biological life stripped of its right to extend to a biographical future, then of itself, thus reaching pure death. The landscape's complete silence, death's muted singularity, signifies the absolute withdrawal of absolute hospitality, which is not replaced by a respect for the other-refugee in their difference (Derrida 1996, 60). 'Voicing' the refugees' humanity points to Ai's theatrical conceptions of architecture: the void or space of silence, the uncluttered, corresponds to Chinese theatre's inactive art of ma as the 'science of time and space' (Tze-Yue 2010, 34).

All these artistic activities schematise the right to hospitality that new economic and political conditions withhold from host societies' needy world guests. The death of disinterested giving, which some connected in Ai's artistic symbolisms to the onset of a failing neoliberal system of market exchange (Hancox 2012), eradicates the absolute law of hospitality in favour of regionally managed laws. This was the theme of Ai's exhibition at the National Gallery in Prague in 2016 under the title *The Law of the Journey*, after Walter Benjamin's reading of Franz Kafka's *Das Gesetz der Fahrt* as 'a

route of unexpected reversals and distortions that derange casual connections between origins and destinations, wishes and fulfilments, annunciation of messages and their reception' (Kordic undated). The exhibition's centrepiece, a brown inflatable boat with human dummies wearing life vests elevated on the room, was accompanied with interviews by Ai stating that 'we have lost our values' and that 'in this time of uncertainty, we need more tolerance, compassion and trust for each other since we all are one. Otherwise, humanity will face an even bigger crisis' (ibid. emphasis in text). As a critical reversal of Fairytale in Kassel, based on people thinking they are moving to the Grimm Brothers' dreamy castle (Obrist 2016, 153), *Law's* elevated story is a sober tale of mobility into endless uncertainty, the aquatic unknown matching the legal indeterminacy of strangerhood. Again, the displacement of refugees into a sea of nature, which has been at the forefront of state borders between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean Sea, signifies bare life.

Ai has been obsessed by the biopolitical symbolism of inflatable lifejackets, which appeared in many of his photographs (worn by refugees and himself) from Lesbos. He was captured on camera assisting asylum seekers who had arrived on a dinghy that landed on a beach near Lesbos's Mytilene port. Photos and videos posted on the Facebook page of Ai's studio with the hashtags #refugees and #lesvos depicted women, men and children wearing lifejackets and being given food and drink (Tan, 1 February 2016). However, he also proceeded to donate 1,000 Little Sun solar lights by Olafur Eliasson to people on Lesvos, as 'there is hardly any light in the temporary camps on the island' (Curators Without Borders 3 January 2016). Key in the development of a critical interrogation of positive cross-cultural exchanges both in

institutional tourism and migration environments is to empower marginalised social and ethno-cultural groups (Lashley et.al. 2007). Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to disseminate his new work reiterates his belief that cyberspace can function as a poetically habitable topos for cosmopolitan art (Cruz 2002, 149 in Conde 2012, 28). Praising the people of Lesbos for having a ‘very good understanding’ of the refugees’ needs and for their tolerance, but stressing their limited resources to deal with the issue (Associated Press 1 January 2016), he proceeded to denounce Europe’s response to it for the past year and to cover Berlin’s concert hall in 14,000 washed-up life-jackets (Denham 3 March 2016). He also announced his decision to close the exhibition *Ruptures* at Denmark’s Faurshou Foundation Copenhagen, in protest at a new law that allows Danish authorities to seize valuables from asylum seekers (BBC News 1 February 2016). Yet, the donation of the 14,000 life-jackets by Lesbos mayor, Spyros Galinos, certainly signalled a convergence of life with art in local policy-making. The donation aims ‘to mobilise the global community regarding the crime carried out daily in the Aegean by ruthless people smugglers’, according to a statement issued by local authorities and published by the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*. Made in sweatshops in Turkey and sold for high sums to refugees by traffickers, the cheaply-made lifejackets have come to symbolise the struggle of hundreds of thousands of people reaching Europe by boat in the hope of a better life but meeting their death in transit (Shaw 3 February 2016).

Let’s follow Ai’s observations here: ‘seeing is never purely a matter of the eye...It includes both structure and subjective intention’ (Sorace 2014, 410). Much like the plural hermeneutics applied to Ai’s dead image,, the statement suggests intentionality:

historically, it connects to Lesbos' use as a refugee reception centre after the last Greek-Turkish War (1919-1921) and the exchange of populations between the two states, which are recalled in the current refugee crisis. The current context of endless economic recession in Europe and Greek state bankruptcy added more complexity to the picture (Urry 2003): the orchestration of racism and xenophobia by extreme right-wing groups in the country and the refugee crisis that risks renaming Greece a country of slums and camps, threaten both policies of destination branding (Lesbos as a holiday resort) and the state's ethical integrity abroad as the heir of ancient Greek *philoxenia* (the love of strangers). Both stress the importance of hospitality and tourism generation for countries of the Global South as a developmental path or a regional leadership strategy (Beek and Schmidt 2012). Also, the collective responsibility about public knowledge of communal inheritance in and through tourism requires clear understanding and consciousness about the invisible ways in which Euro-racist stereotypes cause cultural damage (Dann 1996, 255, 257; Hollinshead 1999, 271; Triandfyllidou and Mikrakis 1995). Positioning lifejackets as the 'gift of afterlife' (Hocart 1952) - commensurate with Ai's admission that his spatialized installations pay respects to his father - in an exhibition by a renowned human rights activist-artist, presents the island as a contributor to humanity's utmost heritage: the UN-sanctioned respect for human dignity. Set to circumnavigate the rules of the market, which threaten to smear the donation with accusations of capitalist opportunism (Bell 1976), this hermeneutics becomes reciprocal, because it feeds back into Ai's artwork: the Lesbos experience now figures prominently in the artist's latest ambitious project to map global population mobilities in times of crisis, including 'dark events' (see Hannam et.al. 2016) and frames of war such as Vietnam and the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Obrist 2016 156). The

mnemonist-historian is thus coming of age by documenting hospitality's cosmopolitan paradox: the survival of empathy in a market-led globe, which flattens out human experiences of (non)belonging.

Conclusion

It has been argued that the first call for a sustainable future is to design a scheme that 'draws together the increasingly marked ecological, biomedical and cybernetic interests that are charting the course of Humanity 2.0' (Fuller 2012, 122). This godless design produces a new project and interdisciplinary methodological agenda for the social sciences. Ai Weiwei's artistic project borrows from these emerging registers but posits a counter-argument, not following their clear-cut rationalist course. Instead of endorsing 'Humanity 2.0's' decision to side-line representational and aesthetic schemas, which address questions of aesthetic and emotional reflexivity (Lash and Urry 1994; Tzanelli 2016), it highlights their significance as meta-narratives transcending the notion of 'interest' while producing social realities. Art can counter the nation-state's monumentalisation of the dead, which generates bad hauntological situations in its living cultures, by giving them a passage to life, thus making them not just 'grievable objects' (Butler 2006) but welcome subjects in a new context. At the same time, as Ai's Lesbos art attests, it focuses attention upon new realities and challenges in solidified political settings, alerting institutions to the need to recognise new strangers into their territories – or, humanity meets its ultimate social death.

Ai's artistic poetics fall into two overlapping but distinctive phases: one that retrieves variations of family belonging from the shards of the Chinese nation-state's internal

(politically-motivated human displacements), and global ‘wars’ (economic globalisation); and another that explicitly concentrates on mapping the consequences of such withdrawals of hospitality on a global scale (endless human mobilities). This shift to a dystopian meta-scenario of mobility rests on a hermeneutics of cosmopolitanism, which prioritises empathic belonging in the world and emotional connectivity through one’s personal (artistic) projects. The project of retrieval of something that was never there as such contradicts the argument that schematisations ‘engender a gigantic hole, a loss of connection with the past’ (Stiegler 2011, 75). Their new role is to question the centrality of the human without her technologies in articulations of a positive global future (Latour 2005; Braidotti 2013). At the same time, the right to belong anywhere stands at the heart of Ai’s schematisations, which pair humanity’s technological development (making crafts and arts) with hospitality as ‘culture itself and not one ethic among others’ (Westmoreland 2008, 3).

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