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**Ai Weiwei's Functional, FAKE and Fantasy
Design Studio**

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Ai Weiwei's Functional, FAKE and Fantasy Design Studio.



**Dissertation submitted for the Degree of B. A. Honours in
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Abstract

This dissertation will unravel the mechanisms working within Ai Weiwei's studio [fig. 1] in order to assess the way in which it functions as a potent agency for social reform in China.¹ It will investigate the role of Ai Weiwei's studio within not only his artistic oeuvre, but also its significance within the political and social climate of contemporary China. This is an important study to be undertaking at this present time because Ai Weiwei is the most famous Chinese artist, blogger, architect, and activist of 2015. He is celebrated globally for his collaboration with architects Herzog and de Meuron in the design process of Beijing's National Stadium [fig. 2] for the Olympic Games in 2008. In Great Britain he is notorious for his resonant installation *Sunflower Seeds* [fig. 3] which was exhibited at the Tate Modern in 2010. This installation evoked an underlying sense of adversity due to its explicit reference to propaganda imagery from the Cultural Revolution. For example, *Beloved Chairman Mao, we are loyal to you forever*, [fig. 4] printed in 1967, portrays Chairman Mao as the sun illuminating his sunflowers which symbolise his citizens.² This investigation will speculate on the way in which the role of the artist's studio revolves around a similar commentary on past adversity, whilst creating a sense of hope for the future. It will illustrate the way in which the paradoxes and seemingly banal and rudimentary references combine to produce a powerful and dissident effect. This enquiry will reveal the way in which the condition of China in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution becomes the fuel for the existence of his studio. During the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao brutally replaced past Chinese traditions with a highly idealised collective notion of 'Reality' in China. He aimed for life to mimic art, so he seized control of any form of artistic expression and consequently requisitioned any form of individuality.³ The hypothesis will scrutinise the material, literary and aesthetic mechanisms of the studio that combine to form such a strong revolutionary engine. Furthermore, this thesis will relate the paradigm of philosophies that inform the studio practises, to the material existence of the studio. It will argue that together they

¹ T. Eller, 'The Material Rhetoric of Aesthetic Resistance In the Contemporary Art of East and West' in G. Sievernich [ed.] *Ai Weiwei, Evidence*, (Berlin, 2014) p. 30.

² S. J. Henderson, Lily Cho [ed.] *Human Rights and The Arts; Perspectives on Global Asia*, (Lexington Books, London, 2014) pp.1-20.

³ T. Eller, 'The Material Rhetoric of Aesthetic Resistance In the Contemporary Art of East and West' in G. Sievernich [ed.] *Ai Weiwei, Evidence*, (Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 2014) p. 34. Published in conjunction with the exhibition, *Ai Weiwei, Evidence* in July 2014 in the Martin-Gropius in Berlin.

combine through the body of the studio in order to claim back individuality and stimulate a global debate on the notion of reality for the inhabitants of China.

Ai Weiwei's Studio, Photograph courtesy of Anthony Pins 'Last Night at the Studio, 2011



Introduction

“For artists and intellectuals today, what is most needed, is to be clear about social responsibility.... You don't have to march on Tiananmen, but you have to be clear- minded, to find your own way of expression.... The bottom line is that you are an individual person; while you are here you'd better be yourself and speak what you think is right. In China we have a saying that goes: You're in a valley and overhead between the cliffs you see a white horse jump over the gap. That's life. It could be a few concepts or moments in which you live that have no meaning to others.”⁴

Ai Weiwei.

The above quote epitomises Ai Weiwei's enormous moral concern. This thesis will evolve around the premise that moral reform is the critical component driving the conception and mechanism of his studio. Thus, it will breach the canon of Western anthologies on artist's studios because of this specifically Chinese solicitude and moral intention. This line of argument will be supported by the fact that the studio is primarily a safe and simple structure in which to inhabit. However, this enquiry will demonstrate the dissident potential and nature of such a seemingly innocent intention. Ultimately, this investigation will divulge the way in which both the material and conceptual properties of his studio amalgamate and rely on one another to form an overall greater system of reform.

The first chapter will reflect on the material and architectural components of his studio. It will assess the extent to which the materials and structure combine to firstly produce a safe and inhabitable structure. Secondly it will consider the social implications of the new structural design. The second chapter will address the literary significance of the title of his design company; FAKE Design. This literary significance will iterate the position of his studio within the discourse of Modernism and Globalisation.⁵ The third chapter will reveal the artist's pursuit of a speculative fantasy which will be explored through the notion of authenticity. His conceptual installations and self-reflective architecture work through a framework of different philosophies and western artistic movements. The philosophy behind

⁴ Ai Weiwei, spoken in 2003 to Chinese art specialist Chin-Chin Yap in “*Conversations*” In C. Merewether [ed.] *Ai Weiwei, Works: Beijing 1993-2003* (Beijing: Timezone.) pp. 46-57.

⁵ Z. Wenjun, X. Jie, L. Xiaowei [ed.], *New Chinese Architecture*, (Laurence King Publishing Ltd. London, 2009) p. 13

his FAKE design company considers the myths of modernism through postmodernist philosophical theory. There is a great emphasis on the influence of Jaques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Wittgenstein, Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol.⁶ It is through their post-modernist investigations into authorship that become the paradigm behind his conceptual works. These theories deconstruct the pre-conceptualised ideas about originality and authenticity. This produces artistic explorations such as the idea of deconstructing and reconstructing the significance of a readymade object and its link to fantasy and reality. Ultimately, the discussion will identify role of the artists studio as a key agent for deconstructing the “top to bottom” design doctrine in architecture, art and society.⁷

It is important to consider the study of Ai Weiwei’s studio in relation to the role of artist’s studios in general because it is a widely disputed topic within of History of Art. The trajectory of the study can be mapped out in relation to the emergence of the autonomous artist.⁸ Both interdependent discourses gained momentum with enlightenment values of self-determination, self-expression and later becoming the decisive measurement of authenticity.⁹ Daniel Buren’s analysis on the interdependent relationship between artistic site and artistic intention insinuates that, a work of art cannot escape its origin.¹⁰ However, the interactive and paradoxical nature of Ai Weiwei’s studio accommodates a more transient approach to the discussion on his studio, such as Art historian Claire Bishop’s engagement with temporal and interactive characteristics of studios, thus superseding the canonical method of study.¹¹ Ai Weiwei’s emphasis on collaborative techniques within his studio correspond with the

⁶ W. Herzogenrath, ‘Ai Weiwei with References to European Modernism’, in [ed] G. Sievernich, *Ai Wei Wei - Evidence*. Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Ai Wei Wei - Evidence* from April 3 to July 7, 2014, in the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, p.54.

⁷ L. Xiaowei [ed.], *New Chinese Architecture*, (London, 2009) p.15

⁸ S. Alpers, *The Vexations of Art: Velazquez and Others* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) p.i.

⁹ R. L. Zakon, *The Artist and the Studio in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), p.13 in M. J. Jacob and M. Grabner, *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists*, (University of Chicago Press, 2010) p.3

¹⁰ D. Buren, ‘The Function of the Studio’ (1971) pp. 156-62

¹¹ L. Relyea, ‘Studio Unbound’, M. J. Jacob and M. Grabner, *The Studio Reader; On The Space of Artists*, (Chicago, 2010) p.341

modernist workshops of William Morris, the Bauhaus, Frank Lloyd Wright's home and studio¹² and Warhol's factory [fig. 5].¹³¹⁴

However, this thesis will demonstrate that Ai Weiwei's studio is a particularly unique example to explore because of three key reasons. Not only was it the artist himself who designed the architectural plans which he sketched onto the back of a napkin in June of 1999, but also he managed the construction process between June and October of the same year.¹⁵ Thus, Ai Weiwei's studio could be seen as the greatest example of Buren's theory of origin because of the fact that it was conceptualised, planned and materialised by the artist himself. Therefore, it is necessarily linked to the artist and consequently to the production ethos and processes within. Thus, it can be explored in terms of the role it plays as an architectural structure, an artist's studio and an artwork in its own right. Secondly, Ai Weiwei's studio does not only act as a studio space but it is also his home and meeting space. This is made even more interesting because this studio and residential space is constantly patrolled by police cars and surveillance cameras.¹⁶ Thus, it could be argued that the structure begins to take on several manifestations. In this case, the artist's home versus a potent symbolic icon of freedom. Consequently, both the role of the architecture of the studio and events taking place within the structure take on a more significant and emblematic role within the political climate of China. Thirdly, the studio cannot be considered in isolation because it acts as a prototype for all of Ai Weiwei's architectural designs within his architectural company; FAKE Design Ltd. Thus, the studio must be recognised within a much greater system of architectural designs. Consequently, the expanse of its influence and extent of political and social significance cannot be underestimated in the context of urban China.¹⁷

¹² M. Grabner, *The Studio Reader*, (Chicago, 2010) p.3

¹³ C. Jones, 'Andy Warhol's "Factory": The Production Site, Its Context and Its Impact on the Work of Art' *Science in Context*, (1991, Vol.4), pp.101-132

¹⁴ R. Geiser, 'In The Realm of Architecture; Some Notes on Ai Weiwei's Spatial Temptations', *Ai Weiwei, Spatial Matters*, (Massachusetts, 2014) p.120

¹⁵ E. Kogel, 'Conversation between Ai Weiwei and Eduard Kogel, July 2007', in Eduard Kogel [ed.] *Ai Weiwei: FAKE Design in the Village*, (Aedes, 2007) p.4.

¹⁶ L. Lim, 'Ai Weiwei Says He is Barred From China', June 21, 2012, 6.21 AM ET. *National Public Radio*, <http://www.npr.org/2012/06/21/155481606/chinese-court-hears-artists-tax-evasion-case>

¹⁷ Please see the map of modern L. Xiaowei [ed.], *New Chinese Architecture*, (Laurence King Publishing Ltd. London, 2009) p. 19

Furthermore, his building practises cannot be considered in isolation, but have to be viewed as a paradigm for his whole oeuvre. The artist himself invokes that each aspect of his oeuvre relates and informs one another.¹⁸ He asserts that “art, architecture, human behaviour, everything, it’s all one thing; the product of knowledge and culture.”¹⁹ Reto Geiser reinforces this from the way in which he compared both an example of Ai Weiwei’s architecture; a sequence of buildings that were designed by Weiwei in collaboration with HHF Architects called the *Tsai Residence*, 2005-08, [fig. 6] and the artwork *Moon Chests* [fig.7] to a conceptual piece by Donald Judd created in 1984. [fig. 8] Judd’s unnamed installation was comprised of aligned or stacked three-dimensional geometric artefacts that were derived from mathematical progressions. The indistinguishable qualities between these three examples illustrate the artist’s transient definition between artistic discourses. Thus, the influence of his studio extends into the rest of the artist’s oeuvre which heightens the potency of the symbolic prototype. This is reinforced by Art Historian Caroline Klein who defines architecture as “an ongoing endless system”²⁰ in terms its potential to create a climate of possibility for the inhabitant. It is in this way that it could be argued that Weiwei’s studio acts a paradigm that informs a series of sub-creations, with the same potential to spark reform within the Beijing metropolis, regardless of what outward guise they take on.²¹

¹⁸ R. Geiser ‘In The Realm of Architecture’ *Spatial Matters, Art, Architecture and Activism* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2014) p.1

¹⁹ Ai Weiwei, In conversation with Peter Pakesch. Ed. Cristina Bechtler *Art and Cultural Policy in China: A Conversation between Ai Wei Wei, Uli Sigg and Yung Ho Chang. Art and Architecture in discussion*, (Austria, 2009) p.80

²⁰ C. Klein, *Ai Weiwei Architecture* (Daab Media GMBH, Kohm, 2010), p. 4

²¹ L. Xianting and Y. Zhang, *Ai Wei Wei is a Creative Artist*. online - available at: <chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/06/li-xianting-and-zang-yiheai-weiwei-is-a-curative-artist/>.[accessed August 2011].

Ai Weiwei, Moon Chests, 2008



Ai Weiwei in collaboration with HHF Architects, Tsai Residence, Location: Ancram, New York, USA, Designed 2005-2006. Constructed: 2006-2008. Area covered: 375sqm



Ai Weiwei, Exterior and Interior View of Artist's Design Studio/ Studio House, 1999.
Location: Caochangdi, Beijing, China.



Chapter 1. Function - The Role of Architecture

Material and Structural Analysis

The hypothesis of this investigation relies on the assertion that materiality and conceptuality combine through the body of the studio. Thus, it is necessary to enquire into the role of the material structure. This chapter will argue that the simple structure and common-place materials of the artist's studio provide a safe and inhabitable environment. It will endeavour to reveal the underlying liberating and reformative implications that are embedded within this seemingly innocent material structure.²²

Reto Geiser, in his text 'In The Realm on Architecture' highlights the fact that Ai Weiwei's huge emphasis on materiality is astonishing yet it is fundamental to the conceptual element behind the building.²³ The key principles behind his architecture are "clarity, simplicity, straightforwardness, and accuracy when building."²⁴ The key issue here is that attention to accuracy and clarity is a rarity in comparison to the majority of rapid constructions in China.²⁵ The modest structure of Ai Weiwei's studio contrasts the soulless, repetitive and unstable high-rises that overwhelm and permeate throughout Beijing. Instantly, the low-lying, flat roofed and one story building disrupts the government's banal and burgeoning habit of building identical skyscrapers. Furthermore, the rudimentary quality of the structure is complemented by the traditional red bricks that are adorned with a concrete facade, which is composed of Beijing's traditional blue-grey bricks [fig.9].²⁶ This is an example of how his choice of materials instantly contends with the hasty and thoughtless didactical architectural commissions.²⁷ This demonstrates only the beginning of Ai Weiwei's subversive and dissident constructive techniques. The studio covers an area of five hundred metres squared

²² M. Wagner, *Das Material in der Kunst. Eine andere Geschick der Moderne*, (Munich, 2002) p280.

²³ Reto Geiser, 'In the Realm of Architecture', in *Ai Weiwei, Art/ Architecture* (Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 2011) p. 40

²⁴ Ai Weiwei, "Architecture and Space," bolt entry posted on January 13, 2006, published in *Ai Weiwei's Blog Writings, Interviews and Digital Rants, 2006-2009*. Ed. Lee Ambrozy, (Cambridge (MA), 2011) . p.6.

²⁵ [ed.] L. Xiaowei, *New Chinese Architecture*, (London, 2009)

²⁶ C. Klein, *Ai Weiwei Architecture*, (Daab Media GMBH, Kohm, 2010), p. 14

²⁷ A. Pins, 'The Nudged Vernacular' *Ai Weiwei, Spatial Matters*, (Massachusetts, 2014) p.143

and is located in the urban village of Caochangdi. This is fundamentally a *ziran fun* which is an autonomous village that allows for a vaguely unrestricted evolution of culture.²⁸

Therefore, his studio could be regarded as a dissident embryo growing in the midst of a comparatively non-conformist urban periphery, just outside the Fifth Ring Road in the northeast of Beijing.[fig. 10]²⁹

Anthony Pins asserts that in terms of the structure, Ai Weiwei's studio "resists the didacticism" of Chinese Communist Architecture.³⁰ He supports this assertion by linking it to the artist's *Study of Perspective* [fig.11] which is a series of photographs portraying the artist raising a finger to global architectural symbols. He describes the way in which the artist's moral agenda can be inscribed within spatial and physical matter through philosophies such as Michel Foucault's power and knowledge theory in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.³¹ If Ai Weiwei's studio is considered in terms of the connection Anthony Pins makes between the material and spatial element of design, and the conceptual element; then the artist's studio becomes fuelled with potent political activism. This is reinforced by the most definitive element within the structure of Ai Weiwei's studio. It is the wall [fig.12] which encompasses a T-shaped studio compound. The fact that the wall is the defining feature of the studio compound immediately creates a physical severing between the corrupt laws the Chinese Communist Party from the artist's artistic and moral philosophies.³² Thus, immediately fuelling it with political symbolism.³³ The wall's great presence is noted by the majority of individuals who have recorded their visit to the studio and compared it to *The Wall of Democracy*. [fig.13]³⁴ This is another example of the way in which a physical structure of bricks and mortar can be so politically and morally charged. In 1978, a series of artists, workers and intellectuals including Ai Weiwei, formed an artistic active group called

²⁸ R. Mangrian and M. Ray, 'Urban Rural Conundrums: Off Centre People's Space in Caochangdi, Beijing', in *Caochangdi: Inside Out*, (Timezone 8, 2009), p.425

²⁹ *ibid.* p.13

³⁰ Anthony Pins, 'The Nudged Vernacular' in *Spatial Matters*, (Massachussetts, 2014) p.138

³¹ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage, (1995) p.27 viewed on <http://www.amazon.com/Discipline-Punish-The-Birth-Prison/dp/0679752552> accessed 04/03/15

³² G. Sievernich, *Ai Wei Wei - Evidence*, (Berlin, 2014) p.14.

³³ Anthony Pins "The Nudged Vernacular' Build. in *Spatial Matters, Art, Architecture and Activism* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, 2014) p.138

³⁴ G. Sievernich, *Ai Wei Wei - Evidence*, (Berlin, 2014) p.14.

‘Stars’ and posted thoughts and statements of a piece of wall in Beijing.³⁵ The way in which the *The Democracy wall* acted as a physical structure on which to bare the hopes and pleas for a more democratic form of government is transcribed on to Ai Weiwei’s studio wall.³⁶ Thus, it articulates the voices of activists such as Wei Jingsheng who was imprisoned for more than eighteen years in an attempt to silence him. He is the author behind ‘*The Fifth Modernism*’ which articulated that China could not truly modernise without democracy.³⁷ Thus, the presence of Weiwei’s studio wall references the turmoil and animosity that the inhabitants of China have weathered up until the present day. In this way the wall on its own is fuelled with an active stand against the Chinese government, who are in fact also constantly physically present on the other side of the wall in an attempt to police and monitor the artist’s actions. Subsequently, the police force almost unintentionally form part of this performance art that is being created on either side of the wall. Ultimately, the emphasis that Ai Weiwei places on the wall frames and sets up a dichotomy between a politically charged wall and a structure which frames an environment for everyday activities.

Ai Weiwei Study of Perspective 1995-2011, 2014



Zuo You Studio, Beijing, China, 2007

50 x 75 cm

© Ai Weiwei

Courtesy Christine König Galerie, Vienna

³⁵ B. Martin, *Hanging Man; The Arrest of Ai Weiwei*, (Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 2013) pp. 51-57

³⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/may/28/ai-weiwei-artist-hari-kunzru> accessed 04/04/15

³⁷ <http://www.weiijingsheng.org/wei/en.html> accessed 16/04/15

The second instance of the way in which the artist subverts the regular building technique is that the artist's studio displays an example of safety and stability within an urban climate of destruction and ruin.³⁸ This is exemplified by the fact that Ai Weiwei's artistic oeuvre was further incited by the tragic Beichuan earthquake in Sichuan province that killed eighty-seven thousand, one hundred and fifty people due to the weak, inaccurate and hastily erected buildings.

This is supported by a BBC report:

“Schools were unfortunately also not built to withstand such an earthquake, with many collapsed classrooms contributing to the deaths of thousands of children.”³⁹

Thus, the material significance of Ai Weiwei's studio must be investigated within the discourse of Chinese architecture during Beijing's current explosive and chaotic growth within the realm of urban construction.⁴⁰ Ai Weiwei responds to the ruin and chaos through the accuracy and simplicity displayed by the exposed concrete frame of his Studio. It is this purpose and function that begins to introduce the conceptual element behind the building of the artist's studio and provides the basis of his moral concern within his architecture. This is reinforced by the installation that he produced in 2009 and installed on the facade of Munich's Haus der Kunst. *Remembering* [fig. 14] uses hundreds of children's brightly coloured rucksacks to spell out “she lived happily in the world for seven years”⁴¹ in response to a parental meeting between mothers that lost their children due to the weakness of the infrastructure of their school. A mother reported to Ai Weiwei that the government called for “stabilising our families (so that it will) ... stabilise Beichuan.”⁴² Ai Weiwei reacts to the response of the government sarcastically and uses his architecture to show the government an alternative example of stability. It is in this way that this investigation introduces the moral and conceptual manifestations within the material structure.

³⁸ Ai Weiwei, 'Documenting the Unfamiliar Self and the Non-self: Rongrong and inri' a blog entry posted on November 15, 2006. in *Ai Weiwei's Blog Writings* (2011)

³⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-22398684> accessed 16/04/15

⁴⁰ L. Xiaowei [ed.], *New Chinese Architecture*, (Laurence King Publishing Ltd. London, 2009) p.12

⁴¹ Ai Weiwei, 'Letter from a Beichuan Mother.' A blog entry posted on March 20, 2009. In *Ai Weiwei's Blog Writings* (2011) p. 210

⁴² *ibid.*

Destruction following the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008.



Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*, 2009, backpacks on the facade of the Haus der Kunst, in Munich



Effect of Architecture.

“If any constructed object is not imbued with its builder’s reverential spirit for the unknown, or does not make a higher intellectual appeal, then it is merely a dumping ground for materials.”⁴³

Andres Lepik’s recent research into Weiwei’s architecture identifies the moral elements within this building design.⁴⁴ Works such as *Citizen Investigation* [fig. 15] documented the name of every child that died in the earthquake. The prominence that he gave to the name of each individual confronted the government’s method of numbering each victim which removed any sense of personality and faded them collectively into the unanimous urban desert.⁴⁵ He exposed the ongoing corruption that is still prevalent within China despite the efforts of the government to conceal it behind the country’s economic boom and capitalist growth. Consequently, it is interesting to contemplate the surveillance team who guard his structure and actually augment the materials and thus magnifying the inflammatory political commentary that is embedded within the materials.

He introduces very simple interferences and inconsistencies within the architectural space in order to create a self-reflexive experience for the subject.⁴⁶ Weiwei’s emphasis on intuition could be compared to post First World War, post-structuralist French Philosophers such as Henri Bergson who condoned that art should be used as an extension of perception and consequentially create a new topography of the virtual.⁴⁷ Ai Weiwei adopts this

⁴³ Ai Weiwei, ‘Architecture and Space’ blog entry posted January 13, 2006. published in [ed.] Lee Ambrozy *Ai Weiwei’s blog* p. 5.

⁴⁴ A. Lepik, *Ai Weiwei, Art and Architecture*, published in conjunction with the exhibition ‘Ai Weiwei Art and Architecture’ presented by Yilmaz Dziewior in 2011. (Kunsthau Bregenz, 2011)

⁴⁵ A. Weiwei. ‘Guests from All Corners of the Earth’ Posted on March 24, 2009. A blog entry in *Ai Weiwei’s Blog Writings* (2011) p. 211

⁴⁶ Ai Weiwei, ‘Ordinary Architecture’ Blog entry posed 22nd June 2006, Translated by Philip Tinari, published in *Ai Weiwei, Spatial Matters*,(Massachusetts, 2014) p.120

⁴⁷ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory 206* Translated by N. M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer. (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1911): pp.170-231 https://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Bergson/Bergson_1911b/Bergson_1911_03.html accessed 09/01/15

phenomenological philosophy into his artistic process in order to produce an extension of reality. The simple geometry and materials evident in the courtyard cannot be over emphasised because they welcome the subject to determine their own interpretation of reality within one of Ai Weiwei's FAKE designs. A more advanced duplicate of Ai Weiwei's studio, also situated in the village of Coachangdi, is the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre [fig. 16].⁴⁸ It uses more obvious devices to promote a sense of contemplation and possibility. He deliberately uses two combined L shapes which combine to form an unusual structure in the external space. In this way he exploits the traditional notion of what balanced indoor and outdoor space means. He uses cut outs to create ephemeral divisions between spaces as the long parts of the L are split up through changes in natural and artificial light, creating a screen out of something that isn't physically there but can be seen and sensed as division between spaces through the light. The subtle shift of geometry has a considerable impact on the perception of the what could first be considered as minimal space. It is this witty use of materials and space that produce such a contemplative experience. It is in this way that Weiwei uses architecture purely as an extension of his conceptual art.⁴⁹

Ai Weiwei, Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Coachangdi, Beijing, China.
Design date: 08.2006, Total area built: 2000 metres squared



⁴⁸ Ai Weiwei, *Three Shadows Photography Centre*, the first institution for the exhibition and production of photography and video art, commissioned by Chinese photographer Rong Rong in 2006.

⁴⁹ C. Klein, *Ai Weiwei Architecture* (Daab Media GMBH, Kohm, 2010), p. 113

For Ai Weiwei, his studio should be understood as a symbolic system that contributes to the formation of individual experience.⁵⁰ The subversive nature of this aesthetic devices can be compared to those used by Gordon Matta-Clark (an artist working in New York in the 1970's at the same time as Weiwei.)⁵¹ Art historian Brandon LaBelle identifies key architectural devices that are comparable to Weiwei's conceptual designs. Indeed, his architectural work is very different to Ai Weiwei's in terms of functionality but it acts as a very useful parallel in terms of conceptuality. Matta-Clark's work called *Days End* [fig.17] realised in 1975 in New York, offers a more dramatic example of Weiwei's splicing and fragmenting techniques.⁵² His artwork is very similar to Ai Weiwei's in terms of how it both addresses the issue of ruins and applies the same deductive and constructive theories to create a contemplative space. *Days End* dissects a derelict structure of a nineteenth-century steel warehouse on Pier 52 in Manhattan. He creates a sail-like sickle-shape splice in the west facade so that the warehouse's interior is permeated with shafts of light. In this way he has inserted a sculptural intervention within an architectural structure. Both artists create radical alterations of space that reposition the body so as to "convert a place into a state of mind."⁵³ Such urban infiltrations pose counter narratives as to how architecture may perform.⁵⁴ However, it is important to remember that Ai Weiwei designed his studio on the back of a napkin for functional purposes as well.

⁵⁰ B. LaBelle, *Background Noise; Perspectives on Sound Art* (Bloomsbury Publishing Inc. London/ New York, 2006), p.161

⁵¹ Chin-Chin Yap, 'A Handful of Dust', in *Spatial Matters*, (2014) p.57.

⁵² G. Matta-Clark, quoted in A.Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945*, (Oxford University Press, 1998) p.200

⁵³ J. Attlee, "Introduction: How to explain?" in *Gordan Matta-Clark: The Space Between* (Tuscon, AZ: Nazraeli Press, 2003), p.40

⁵⁴ Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise; Perspectives on Sound Art* (Bloomsbury Publishing Inc. London/ New York, 2006), p.161

Ai Weiwei's performance artwork *Fairytale* [fig.18] which Weiwei organised for the Documenta X exhibition in Kassel in 2007, acts as an intensified, exaggerated and magnified example of what he hoped to achieve through his architectural designs.⁵⁵ He used humans as the prime subjects of dislocation on a magnanimous scale. It utilises all his artistic devices simultaneously into a total-work-of-art that encapsulates the intention behind his architecture. This is articulated through the description below.

“People had to apply for passports. this process made people really realise what it means to be a man or a woman and have an identity, to be part of a nation: you have to go through a system, and the system can be simple or complicated. The participants started thinking about getting a visa, and the visa is a matter of foreign affairs. I had to meet with the German ambassador, Mr Voker Stanzel. Many people said “Oh, it is already a miracle for us, it is already a fairytale.. even if I cannot go, this will make me think differently for the rest of my life.”⁵⁶

The title *Fairytale* defines the relationship between the installation and his studio.⁵⁷ This parallel is reinforced by art historian Philip Tinari, who during his visit to the studio, described it as “grey on the outside and red on the inside - where one man's modernist fantasy was beginning to gain some traction.”⁵⁸ It is clear that he intended to use the word “fantasy” in order to allude to Ai Weiwei's occupation with reality and fake, which is epitomised by the artist's *Fairytale*. Furthermore, Tinari asserts that, “In its emphasis on changing individuals by changing their material circumstances, *Fairytale* resonates with both midcentury Western architectural idealism and current Chinese political ideology.”⁵⁹ Suggesting that Ai Weiwei's studio acts in the same way, in terms of the correspondence between pre-conception, fake, reality and fantasy that is manifested within the construction and materiality. Thus, it could be argued that the architecture of the studio acts as the base

⁵⁵ F. Xiaodong, 'A Fairytale Becomes Reality', in *Spatial Matters*, (2014) pp.404-411

⁵⁶ Peter Pakesch *Art and Cultural Policy in China: A Conversation between Ai Wei Wei, Uli Sigg and Yung Ho Chang. Art and Architecture in discussion [ed] Cristina Bechtler (Austria 2009) p.97*

⁵⁷ https://slought.org/resources/fairytale_project accessed 03/12/14

⁵⁸ P. Tinari, 'Ai Weiwei: Some Reflections on an Artist In a City, 2001-2007' *Parkett Magazine 81*, (2008)

⁵⁹ P. Tinari, 'A Kind of True Living: The Art of Ai Weiwei' posted 01/06/07 8.02 am. published in *Artforum*, Summer 2007. <http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=15365>

ammunition for reform. The ambiguous nature of devices and theories used in both the studio and *Fairytale* will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Fairytale Project | 童话项目 |



A research initiative and archive about the lives and experiences of 1001 Chinese participants who traveled to Kassel, Germany for Ai Weiwei's project "Fairytale" (2007)



Chapter 2. FAKE - The Role of Language

Literary Definitions within the Discourse of Modernism

The significance of Ai Weiwei's studio is heightened when considered in terms of Tinari's suggestion that the "artist's attention to architecture resonates far beyond the visual structure, but reverberates from within his habitual domain and into the greater urban discourse that is Modernism."⁶⁰ Ai Weiwei's studio works within a specifically Chinese interpretation of Modernism that is defined by its attention to autonomy. He creates a sense of Modernism or autonomy by combining the vernacular materials discussed in the first chapter with vernacular language.⁶¹

In conversation with Fu Xiadong, the artist articulates that:

"Modernity cannot exist without freedom of speech...New linguistic possibilities will also become available to forms of expression for the consciousness and feelings in human beings."⁶²

He illustrates the role of language within the term 'Modernism'.⁶³ Like architecture, language operates as a system that lends definition to the individual by "allowing a conscious exertion of will".⁶⁴ For example, language is a combination of conventions of speech and limits of articulation that are confined within a set of values. These are related to the same promotional values that architecture allows for, namely movement, access and mobility. However they are also confined by the same set of values, thus harnessing free movement and access.

Architecture, like language, liberates the individual and restricts him at the same moment.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ P. Tinari, 'Chairs and Visitors' posted January 20, 2008 @ 8:54 am originally published in U. Meile [ed.] *Ai Weiwei Works 2004-2007*, (JRP Ringier, 2008) P.12

⁶¹ B. Martin, *Hanging Man, The Arrest of Ai Weiwei*, (Faber and Faber, London, 2013) p.10

⁶² Ai Weiwei 2007 in conversation with Fu Xiadong (Fairytale as exhibition work), in: Lee Ambrozy (Berlin, 2007), p.259.

⁶³ M. Wigley, "Whatever Happened to Total Design?" *Harvard Design Magazine*, No. 5, Summer 1998, p. 1

⁶⁴ B. LaBelle, *Background Noise; Perspectives on Sound Art* (Bloomsbury Publishing Inc. London/ New York, 2006), p.161

⁶⁵ B. LaBelle, *Background Noise*; (London, 2006), p.161

It is through the play of Eastern and Western languages, old and new interpretations of words and attention to vernacular and global differences that he entertains the idea of producing an autonomous version of Modernism. Through language in the 1970s, Ai Weiwei wished to re-establish the idea behind the Chinese word *Ziwo*, which means "I myself". The transient and fluid manner in which the artist plays with both Eastern and Western interpretations of language promotes a sense of *Ziwo* self reflection and autonomy.⁶⁶ This chapter will reveal the liberating potential of language and its role within the studio engine to produce such an effect as *Ziwo*.

Ai Weiwei's Instagram Post, 16/04/15, Screen Shotted from the author's Instagram on the same day.



Ai Weiwei posted this image on Instagram [fig.19] on 16th April 2015. It depicts a segment of his installation *258 Fake*, [fig.20] which is comprised of a large neon sign with the Chinese pronunciation of the word 'Fake' hanging on the outside of his studio wall.

⁶⁶ S. Macdonald, "Modernism" in *Modern Chinese Literature: The Third Type of Person* As a Figure of Autonomy. *Scientific Journals*. Volume No.29, Issue: 2-3, (June 2011) <http://www.sciary.com/journal-scientific-comparativelit-article-542937> accessed 05/03/15



This displays a deliberate play on the liberating effect of paradoxes within different languages. In the anglican language it is pronounced 'fake' and in China it is pronounced Fuck. This epitomises the techniques that Ai Weiwei used to break down the authoritarian notion of reality. The artist adopted Western post-modernist philosophies and applied them to his designs. The most prominent example is Jaques Derrida's theory on 'Deconstruction'.⁶⁷ Derrida theorised that all words can only be described in terms of their associations with the different systems in which they were used. Thus, she believed that a word does not possess an essential truth or universal dependance on reality. Ai Weiwei's 'Fuck' sign deconstruct's previously trusted pre-conception of a word or faithfulness to a preconception of reality. The 'Fuck' sign deconstructs the meaning of the title of his company which is; FAKE Design, and allows the viewer to re-construct their own subjective interpretation of its meaning. The key significance of the FUCK sign is that it evokes a playful insight into the artist's sceptical postmodernist stance on the master narratives and universal truths that have been imposed onto China by both the Chinese Communist Party and the Western audience. His FAKE architectural designs explicitly transcribe the concepts and experience of his conceptual art

⁶⁷ C. Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002) p.15
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into the space created. Space in which to break down the social systems imposed on Chinese citizens both by the Chinese Communist Party and the identity given to China by the West. The title of his FAKE design show that we live, not inside reality, but inside representations and constructions of it.

In essence, the emancipating effect of the paradoxical Fuck sign is emphasised by the way in which Ai Weiwei questions the authoritarian dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party. This questioning of authorship alludes to Roland Barthes' publication *Death of the author, The Pleasure of the Text* (1975)⁶⁸ through the nature of his approach to language. Barthes believes that text should be removed from its provenance and author, and that the text should be defined by the reader's interpretation and not the author's aim. Thus, it could be argued that his studio is particularly potent if it is placed in context of Barthes' theory because it allows the spectator to think about the link between authorship and illusion in terms of their place in society.⁶⁹ Ultimately, the freedom, fluidity and interrelatedness that stems from the lack of particular authorship over the pronunciation of Fake or Fuck questions the spectator's historical, cultural and psychological assumptions and dislocates the word from preconceived notions of meaning and truth.⁷⁰ This is reinforced by art historian Susan Sontag who investigates Martin Heidegger's seminal work 'Being and Time'⁷¹ on the link between dwelling and thinking which French philosopher Heidegger traced back to etymology. She reinforces the potential of language to put mankind in their own authentic experience.⁷² Consequently, the role of language is significant whether his studio is considered from the perspective of a safe house, design studio or prison. It is the language, artworks and architecture that work in combination as a vehicle or total-work-of-art in order to relentlessly questions of the political, social and psychological status quo.⁷³

⁶⁸ R. Barthes, *Death of The Author*, (1975) Pdf copy. http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf accessed. 12.12.14

⁶⁹ W. Herzogenrath, 'Ai Weiwei with references to European Modernism' *Evidence*, (Berlin) p.54.

⁷⁰ C. Butler, *Post-Modernism, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002) p.62

⁷¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (1927) translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 1962)

⁷² S. Sontag 'Pop, The Aesthetics of Silence, and the New Sensibility', S. Harrison *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Moderism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) P. 172

⁷³ H. Kunzru, *Ai Weiwei: The dissident Artist*, 28/05/11 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/may/28/ai-weiwei-artist-hari-kunzru> accessed 03/02/15

His installation *He Xie* [fig. 21] consisting of more than 3,000 porcelain river crabs is an example of the way in which the artist utilises language in a subversive manner. *He Xie*, means river crab in English, but it was adopted by the Chinese Communist Party in their slogan “the realization of a harmonious society.” *He Xie*, became a homophone for the Chinese word for “harmonious.” The artist has played on the satirical nature of the term, because *He Xie* has become a mock term for official online censorship.⁷⁴ Exemplifying, the way in which Ai Weiwei’s dissident language games that are embedded within his studio ethos have dissipated within the urban metropolis. His attention to language and architecture can be traced back to the fact that Weiwei familiarised himself with a book about the Palais Stenborough or ‘Haus Wittgenstein’ [fig.22] designed by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1929. The philosopher notoriously tried to work out an absolutely stable and reliable relationship between language and the world in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922). Anthony Pins identifies key connections between Haus Wittgenstein and Ai Weiwei’s studio. He illustrates the way both buildings are built on a T- shaped foundation, with a balanced site configuration, fringed with outdoor terraces. He reveals that both houses do not invite the visitor through the front entrance but instead intuitively suggest an alternative principle path of entry to the side of the building. Both designers have eliminated the idea of a processional entry hall and have placed key emphasis on a studio space.⁷⁵ Wittgenstein’s structure is an example of the way in which philosophical concepts can be embedded within architecture and language. However it is important to differentiate it from the dissident substance that is prevalent throughout Ai Weiwei’s structure.

⁷⁴ <http://newsdesk.si.edu/releases/hirshhorn-presents-ai-weiwei-according-what> accessed 23.03.15

⁷⁵ Anthony Pins, ‘The Nudged Vernacular’ in *Spatial Matters*, (Massachusetts, 2014) p.138

Chapter 3. FANTASY - The Role of Ai Weiwei's Studio Practise

Readymade in China

Another way in which Ai Weiwei subverts authoritarian rule is through his studio practises. He dislocates traditional materials and combines them with new materials in order to overturn existing pre-conceptions of their original use.⁷⁶ His installation *Template* [fig. 23] was realised for the exhibition Documenta X, in 2007 and it exemplifies the use of such devices. He relocates 1001 timber doors and windows from demolished houses and temples from the Shanxi area, in Northern China. He re-arranges them to form eight, seven-metre tall wings into a tent like skeletal base so that they arch over the Aue-Pavillon. Essential to this enquiry, they now form a strange and undefinable gap or space, that is protected and shadowed by the vast and towering doors. These now function as an aesthetic structure that stimulates an contemplative experience for the viewer.⁷⁷ It is in this way that, he forces the viewer to reconsider their own position and relationship to the structure. In relation to the hypothesis of the essay, it could be argued that indeed, this form of aesthetic production has the ability to destabilise power relations with an urban context because it promotes questions to be asked. It stimulates questions surrounding the role of the doors which could easily lead to speculation surrounding an individuals role within China. Thus, what is perceived as authentic or real is disrupted. It is significant that he designed it for the exhibition Documenta X in Kassel in Germany which was established in 1955 in order to bring the German people up to date with contemporary art following the repression of art during the Nazi reign. Further liberating parallels can be drawn from the fact that Ai Weiwei exhibited *Template*, in the Aue-Pavillon in Kassel which was created in order to re-evaluate the nature of a repressed nation.

⁷⁶ <http://www.lissongallery.com/artists/ai-weiwei> accessed 12.12.14

⁷⁷ Ai Weiwei, in interview with N. Colonnello, *ArtNet*, 10 August 2007, <http://www.artnet.de/magazine/11000/>, accessed 20/12/14

Ai Weiwei, Template (2007)
Wooden doors and windows from destroyed Ming and Qing Dynasty houses
(1368-1911)
720 x 1200 x 850cm



Ai Weiwei himself parallels this sort of artistic practise with the work of Marcel Duchamp and his interest in Readymades. Weiwei asserts that:

”My work is always a readymade. It could be cultural, political, social or art - to make people re-look at what we have done, its original position, to create new possibilities.”⁷⁸

Thus, it could be argued that his artwork is reminiscent of the subversive nature of Dada and it is transcribed on the ethos of his studio. He alludes to the way in which Marcel Duchamp removed everyday objects from their original purpose and placed them into an exhibiting context. By being in this new context they still retain the same physical structure, but this structure is no longer viewed as functional, but aesthetic. The original material can now be observed as a set of abstract forms which challenge accepted conventions of sight and function.⁷⁹ Ai Weiwei’s architecture can once again be compared to Haus Wittgenstein [fig. 22]. Weiwei was well versed in his manifesto; *Tractatus*, which identifies the relationship between language and reality. In order to explain this link he alludes to Plato’s world of forms which essentially lie at the base of Ai Weiwei’s philosophy on authenticity. In his propositions 2 and 3, Wittgenstein discusses objects, form and substance; three essential foundations of Ai Weiwei’s work. His discussion on objects as metaphysical substances invites Weiwei to treat objects with such subjectivity. Essentially, he is referring back to Plato’s notion of the static unchanging form which Wittgenstein takes as a premise for his philosophy.⁸⁰ Weiwei questions the unchanging form by changing its original function, thus the perception of the form has changed and the substance has changed. This could be contrasted with the Chinese notion of Qi which was a changing, unfixed and connects everything in the world.

The second string of this investigation in terms of the ‘Readymade’ is going to follow the theory held strongly by art Historian Christian Sorace who claims that his political-aesthetic interventions are a direct response to growing up during the cultural revolution. This is supported by the fact that all his statements hold a specific interpretation of a Maoist training

⁷⁸ A. Weiwei quoted in V. Maldonado, “Harming the Art: Ai Weiwei’s Wicked Sense of Humor,” www.ultrapdx.com/zero/2010/08/30/review-harming-the-art-ai-weiweis-wicked-sense-of-humor/

⁷⁹ Chin-Chin Yap, ‘A Handful of Dust’, *Ai Wei Wei, Spatial Matters*, (Massachusetts, 2014) p.32

⁸⁰ http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/ai-weiwei-a-retrospective-of-his-works/2014/06/20/ad14ef9c-f59a-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1_story.html accessed 09/01/15

in public criticism and self-reflection.⁸¹ These can be found in his book titled ‘Weiwei-isms’. These are something also investigated by Philip Tinari who describes this phenomenon as “surveillance and self-surveillance.”⁸²

“I was born in a society that emphasised critique, bestowing on self-criticism the highest value. Chairman Mao instructed us to carry out criticism and self-criticism, so we always looked at our surroundings and objects with a critical world-view. It could target any cultural organization, government, and also any person or system of power.”⁸³

Thus, it could be argued that the ethos and conceptual structure of Ai Weiwei’s studio ultimately takes the authoritarian regime and treats everyday lives and inhabitants just like Duchamp manipulates an everyday object. This is epitomised by Ai Weiwei himself:

“Duchamp had the bicycle wheel, Warhol had the image of Mao. I have a totalitarian regime. It is my readymade.”⁸⁴

Thus, it could be argued that within the discussion on the Readymade. Ai Weiwei’s studio could be considered a Readymade in terms of the way he turns a functional building into an artwork and thus changes its apparent original purpose. Consequently, Ai Weiwei’s studio takes on the same dissident qualities as a Readymade, fuelling it with conceptual ammunition.

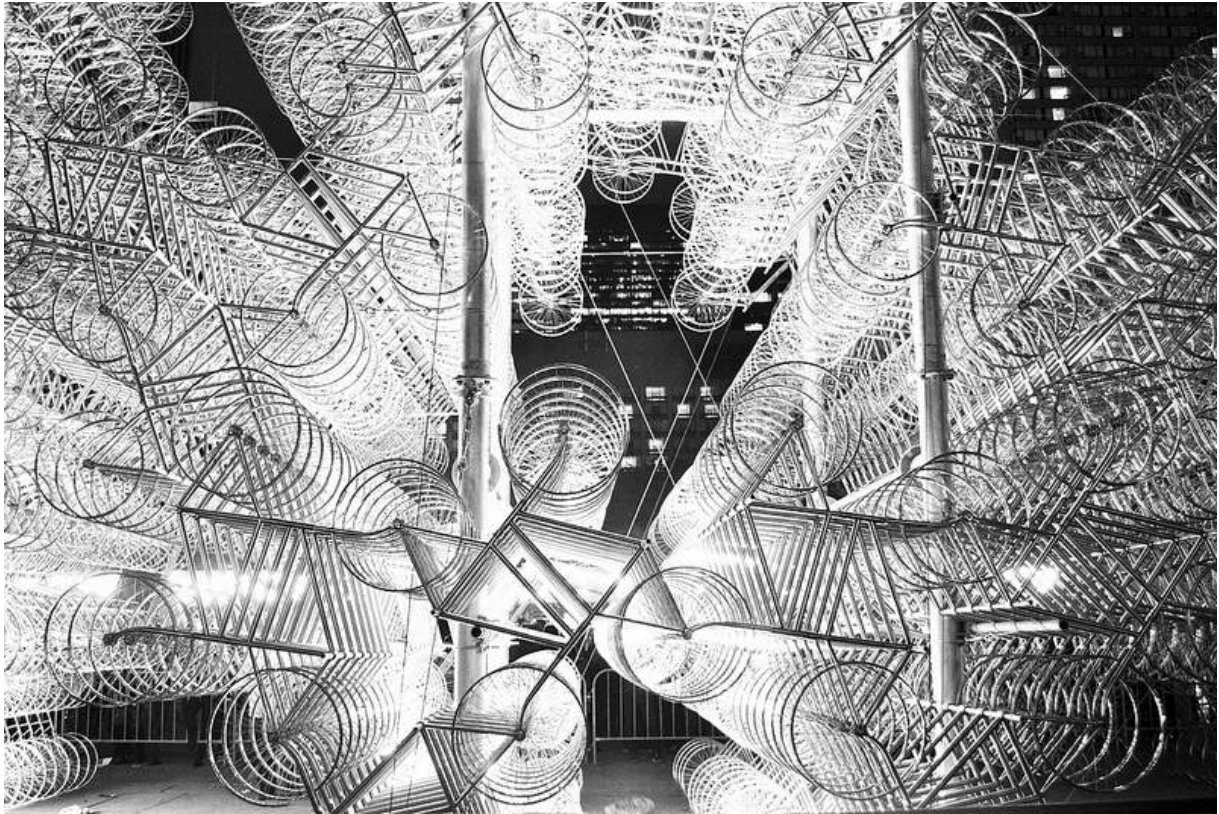
⁸¹ Ai Weiwei in Aiweiweidocumentary, “艾未未工作室：老妈蹄花 (Ai Weiwei : Lao Ma Ti Hua),” [youtube.com/watch?v=TUizD8WDDFI&feature=plcp](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUizD8WDDFI&feature=plcp) accessed 24/03/15

⁸² P. Tinari, ‘China, Power and Chinese Power’ Blog posted on 08/10/06 9am. Published in *Fused Magazine*, accompanying the exhibition ‘China Power Station, Part One’, Battersea Power Station, (London, 2006)

⁸³ C. Sorace, ‘China’s Last Communist: Ai Weiwei’ *Chicago Journals, Critical Inquiry*- Vol. 40, No. 2, Winter 2014.

⁸⁴ A. Weiwei, quoted in V. Maldonado, “Harming the Art: Ai Weiwei’s Wicked Sense of Humor,” www.ultrapdx.com/zero/2010/08/30/review-harming-the-art-ai-weiweis-wicked-sense-of-humor/

Suspension and Illusion



Ai Weiwei's 'Readymades' must be considered in terms of the liberating effect of the Readymade. Essentially, the readymade intercedes memory and perception. It is neither subjective nor objective, neither abstract nor empirical. Thus, they are suspended images, a mix of virtuality and actuality, which liberates the spectator from pre-conceived values.

Forever bicycles [fig. 24] is a symbolically abundant conceptual installation of hundreds of bicycles, interlocking to form an organism for change.⁸⁵ It could be interpreted as a continuation of the famous bicycle sculpture by Marcel Duchamp. It could be viewed as a nostalgic installation because the bicycle used to be the most common form of transport in China, with 'Forever' being the most popular brand of bicycle. However, it is the magnanimous scale of glistening wheels, interlocking frames and sensuous forms that contributes to the mystery behind Readymades.⁸⁶ Essentially, the weightless and dreamlike

⁸⁵ C. Lauvergne, *Ai Weiwei, Renaissance*, exh. cat., (Modern Chinese Foundation, 2004), p.8.

⁸⁶ K. Smith, 'Giant Provocateur', in Hans Ulrich Obrist, Karen Smith and Bernhard Fibicher [eds.], *Ai Weiwei*, (Phaidon, London, 2009) p.49.

nature of the structure could be described as an apparition or even a soul suspended in mid air. It is this crucial inverted, contemplative and emotive form that is at the centre of Ai Weiwei's studio life. It is the way in which he plays with paradoxes, subverts objectivity, questions authenticity and looks for shadows that is evident within the discourse of the Readymade. For example, the combination between the labyrinth nature, simple structure and symbolic resonance is all a personal commentary on the accepted pre-conception of reality. Thus, the way in which the Readymade is suspended between meanings and co-existences, can be paralleled with the virtual reality that the artist is constantly alluding to in everyday life. Ultimately, the intellectual expression that stems from Ai Weiwei's studio "lies not in representation but it is suspended in between."⁸⁷

Furthermore, the liberating idea of the Readymade is crucial when referred back to the context of moral the discourses discussed previously in the investigation. The liberating devices evident within the building process of his studio and used within his studio life are crucial for Ai Weiwei. Essentially, he is allowing Chinese inhabitants to uncover the character and illusion of authoritarian rule for themselves. He asserts that, "Once again, facts have been erased."⁸⁸ The Readymade concept allows Ai Weiwei to disarm attested structures within politics and perform his duty in creating a better society. For example, *Forever Bicycles* was designed in commemoration to Yang Jia, a man who was arrested in 2007 for riding a bicycle he borrowed from someone that allegedly hadn't been registered. He was arrested, accused of theft and abused by his guards. He then dared to complain about the way he had been maltreated. When an attack was perpetrated on a police station in Shanghai in 2008, officials claimed Yang had been responsible. He hadn't committed the crime, but he was executed nonetheless.⁸⁹ These installations the realisation of the work as a metaphor of the illusion and lies within the fabrication of power.⁹⁰ Subsequently, it could be argued that the ethos of his studio, namely; FAKE, fantasy and function resonates from such emotive forms.

⁸⁷ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* 206. https://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Bergson/Bergson_1911b/Bergson_1911_03.html accessed 15/03/15

⁸⁸ Ai Weiwei, "Our Duty is to Remember Sichuan" Guardian, May 25. 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/may/25/china-earthquake-cover-up/print> in L. Walsh [ed.] *Weiweisms* p.60

⁸⁹ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/ai-weiwei-exhibition-underscores-dangers-and-importance-of-art-a-961990.html> accessed 25/02.15

⁹⁰ <http://saci-art.com/2013/01/25/ai-weiwei-at-the-galleria-continua-in-san-gimignano/> accessed 25/02/15

Ai Weiwei, *Forever Bicycles*, 2013
Nathan Phillips Square, 100 Queen Street West
Photo © City of Toronto



Conclusion

In conclusion, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that yes indeed, the combination of the architectural structure, the language of, and artistic devices used within Ai Weiwei's studio, interrelate to form a potent, autonomous and isolated reformatory weapon. This investigation has identified the key liberating paradoxes that act within a greater organism of possibility and personality. The three primary discourses that I have identified within the investigation into Ai Weiwei's Studio are; Materiality, Modernism and Authenticity. These combine to form a total-work-of-art. His studio could be placed in the context of the postmodernist musical work of John Cage and his piece 4 minutes 33 seconds in terms of how Cage has created a silent space within a musical context whereby the public and audience are the participants. This could be paralleled with the way in which Weiwei also relies on the public for the material.⁹¹ Through this comparison, the reader can gauge the Chinese artist and his studio's position within the discourses of Globalisation and Modernism. This thesis however, has identified a moral sentiment that makes Ai Weiwei's studio so unique in this context. Thus unraveling the ambiguities bound up in the specifically Chinese experience of Globalisation and Modernism. It is this way in which he plays on dichotomies and paradoxes in order to reveal and conceal a true representation of China.

Fundamentally, this thesis has proven the pure ability of Ai Weiwei's studio to scrutinise and unearth the darkest shadows of reality, and consequently shatter the illusion of China painted by the Chinese Communist Party. He iterates that:

“We live in a time where black and white are reversed, in the utter absence of right and wrong, a time with neither history nor future, where one is ashamed of one's own shadow and embarrassed at one's own face, and an era where our greatest efforts are poured into concealing reality and truth”⁹²

This quote encapsulates the significance of Ai Weiwei's studio because not only does it form the paradigm that informs his oeuvre, but also it acts as a reformatory weapon within the social and political context of China. The apotheosis of this investigation follows art historian

⁹¹ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/searching-for-silence> accessed 20/03/15

⁹² Ai Weiwei, Blog entry posted on November 4, 2006. 'Hypnosis and Fragmented Reality: Li Songsong' published in L. Ambrozy, *Ai Weiwei Blogs*, (MIT Press, 2011) p.106

Reto Geiser's suggestion that Ai Weiwei must have envisioned the possibility of initiating social change by means of building when he engaged with architecture.⁹³ Thus, every aspect explored in this investigation proves that from Ai Weiwei's prison or home that he calls his studio; the artist is linked to the shadows, interlocking forms, paradoxes and parallels that both free him and restrict him. Even though the government confines the artist to his studio and restricts his physical movement by confiscating his passport. He is still essentially liberated by the FAKE, fantasy and functional nature of his studio. However, it is clear that he is surviving within the conceptual shadows of his artistic resonance because. For example, in 2008 the Chinese government without warning, demolished and bulldozed the artist's Shanghai studio[fig. 25]. It could be argued that this form of government manipulation only liberated the artist further, because of the way in which they utilised Ai Weiwei's own deconstructive and reconstructive theories and unintentionally became part of just another liberating performance art and another social stand. However, the sad reality is the fact that the location of Ai Weiwei's studio, the autonomous village of Caochangdi, is fate to imminent demolition by order of the government.⁹⁴ Therefore, the future of Ai Weiwei's studio is unknown, and perhaps it will be another example of martyrdom liberation through deconstruction and ruin.

This thesis relied on the combination of secondary and primary sources. It is limited because they are primarily western anthologies which may have been inclined to heroise and romanticise a dissident and intimidated Chinese artist.⁹⁵ However, there is enough primary evidence through Ai Weiwei's interviews and blogs to suggest that the significance of the artist's studio is not being exaggerated by Western commentators. Thus, this emotive and fascinating investigation has not been sensationalised. However, this investigation is still limited because the author was unable to visit the studio or talk to the artist personally. Furthermore, this could form a greater investigation in which the role of digital and social media and the role that virtual reality plays within the discussions surrounding reality and the artist's studio ethos. This was touched on during the discussion on language and Instagram,

⁹³ R. Geiser, 'In the Realm of Architecture' *Ai Weiwei Art and Architecture*, (2011 Kunsthaus Bregenz)

⁹⁴ Anthony Pins, 'The Nudged Vernacular' in *Spatial Matters*, (Massachusetts, 2014) p.138

⁹⁵ A. Ong (Professor in Department of Anthropology California) 'What Marco Polo Forgot' Contemporary Chinese Art Reconfigures the Global' *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 53. No. 4; August 2012.

However, it is a further extension of his studio compound; beyond architecture, art and language and therefore it would involve making a part two of this thesis.

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List of Works of Art ⁹⁶

1. Ai Weiwei, *Studio House/ Design Studio*, Caochangdi, Beijing, 1999
2. Ai Weiwei and Herzog and de Meuron, *National Stadium*, Beijing, 2007
3. Ai Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds*, Tate Modern, London, 2010
4. Unknown Artist, *Beloved Chairman Mao, we are loyal to you forever*, China, 1967
5. *Warhol Factory*, Manhattan, 1962-1984,
6. Ai Weiwei in collaboration with HHF Architects, *Tsai Residence*, New York, Designed 2005-2006
7. Ai Weiwei, *Moon Chests*, Changing locations, 2008
8. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, Laumeier Sculpture Park Collection, 1984
9. Photograph of brickwork of Ai Weiwei's *Three Shadows Photography Art Centre*, Coachangdi, Beijing, 2006
10. Map of Coachangdi Art District
11. Ai Weiewi, *Study of Perspective*, Tiananmen, Beijing, China; The White House, Washington D.C., USA; Reichstag, Berlin, Germany; Eiffel Tower, Paris, France; Tiananmen, Beijing, China; Viking Line Ferry, 1993-2005
12. Unknown artist, photograph of Ai Weiwei's studio gate under surveillance
13. Unknown artist, photograph of what was termed *The Democracy Wall* in the 1970's
14. Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2009
15. Ai Weiwei, *Citizens Investigation*, 2008
16. Ai Weiwei, *Three Shadows Photography Art Centre*, Coachangdi, Beijing, 2006
17. *Gordon Matta-Clark, Days End*, New York, USA, 1972
18. Ai Weiwei, *Fairytale*, Kassel, Germany, 2007
19. Author's photograph copied from Ai Weiwei's Instagram account
20. Ai Weiwei, *258 Fake*, Ai Weiwei's Studio Wall, Coachangdi, Beijing
21. Ai Weiwei, *He Xie*, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, 2014
22. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Haus Wittgenstein*, 1926-1929
23. Ai Weiwei, *Template*, Kassel, Germany, 2007
24. Ai Weiwei, *Forever Bicycles*, 2013
25. Unknown artist, Photograph of the demolition of the artist's Shanghai Studio, 2011

⁹⁶ Ai Weiwei's oeuvre works as a total-work-of-art, therefore, I have referenced them in order of how they appear in the text and I have not made distinctions between photographs, paintings, installations and architecture.

Works of Art

Title Image - A photograph depicting the front gates to Ai Weiwei's studio under surveillance by police patrol officers. (Image courtesy of Ng Han Guan/Associated Press, for the New York Times, 2011) Also referenced in text as fig. 12.



Fig. 1. Ai Weiwei, Design Studio/ Studio House,



Fig. 2. Ai Weiwei and Herzog de Meuron, *National Stadium*. Built: September 2007, Beijing.



Fig. 3. Ai Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds*, (Tate Modern 2010)

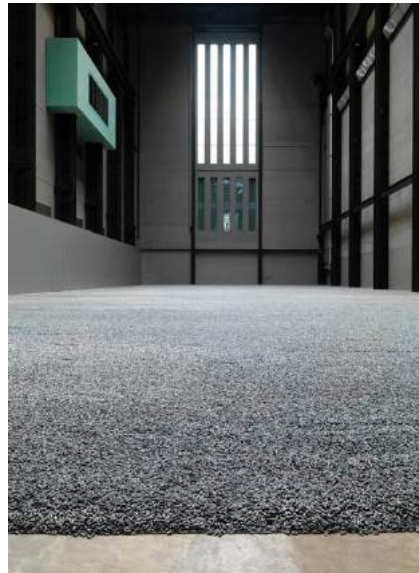


Fig. 4. Unknown artist, Propaganda Poster, *Beloved Chairman Mao, we are loyal to you forever*, 1967



Fig. 5. Warhol Factory, Photograph courtesy of Proud Chelsea presents 'The Factory: Warhol & His Circle,' Fifth floor at 231 East 47th Street, in Midtown Manhattan, 1962-1984



Fig. 6. Ai Weiwei in collaboration with HHF Architects, Tsai Residence, Location: Ancram, New York, USA, Designed 2005-2006. Constructed: 2006-2008. Area covered: 375sqm



Fig. 7. Ai Weiwei, Moon Chests, 2008 (Photograph of the installation located at 'According to What?' Exhibition, at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2013)

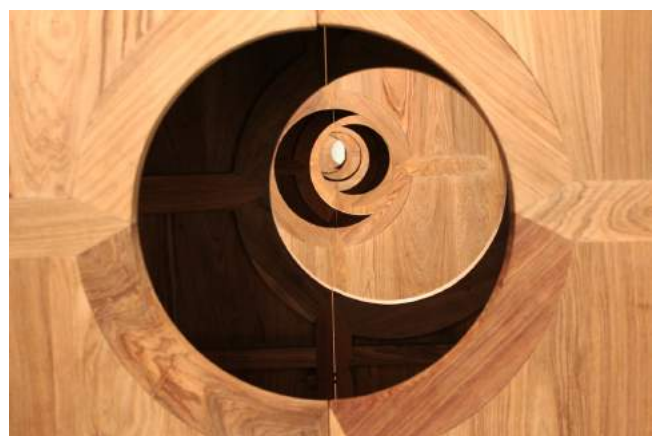


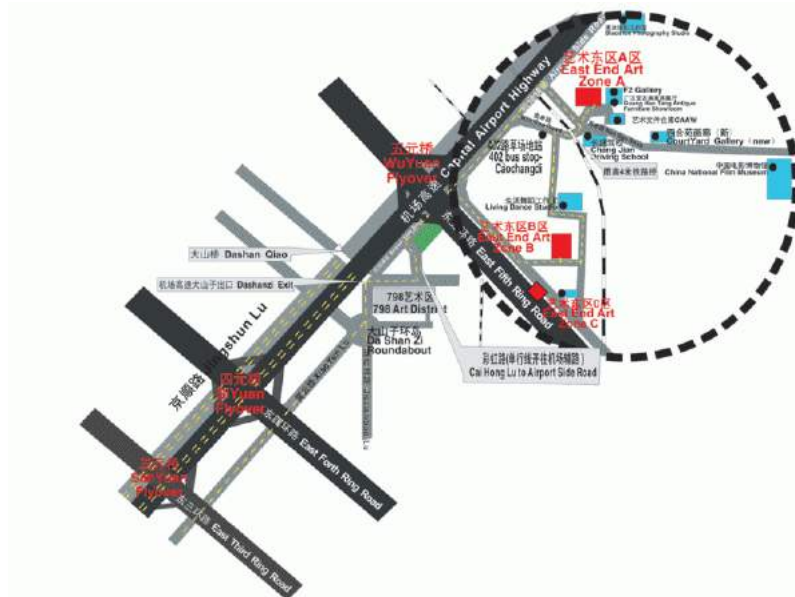
Fig. 8. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1984, Laumeier Sculpture Park Collection



Fig. 9. Ai Weiwei, Detail of Materials used on Three Shadows Photography Art Centre.



Fig. 10. Caochangdi Village, Beijing
a. Map of Art District



b. Example of Ai Weiwei's design influence within Coachangdi.



Fig.11. Ai Weiewi, *Study of Perspective*: (clockwise) Tiananmen, Beijing, China; The White House, Washington D.C., USA; Reichstag, Berlin, Germany; Eiffel Tower, Paris, France; Tiananmen, Beijing, China; Viking Line Ferry (1993-2005)



Fig. 12. Ai Weiwei's studio wall with entrance gates that are guarded by a twenty-four hour surveillance team.



Fig. 13. The Democracy Wall that was used by writers, artists and theorists to post notes inscribed with their hopes for the future of China in the 1970's.



Fig. 14. Ai Weiwei, *Remembering*, 2009, backpacks on the facade of the Haus der Kunst (Munich)



Fig. 15. Ai Weiwei, *Citizens Investigation*, a collection of the names of the victims of the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008, exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2013.



Fig. 16. Ai Weiwei, *Three Shadows Photography Centre*, The first institution for the exhibition and production of photography and video art, commissioned by Chinese photographer Rong Rong in 2006. His Studio was a prototype for the architectural design.



Fig. 17. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Days End*, 1972. The reworking of what was once Pier 52 along the Hudson River, New York, USA.



Fig. 18. Ai Weiwei, *Fairytale*, 1001 Qing Dynasty Wooden Chairs to seat 1001 emigrants, For the Documenta 12 exhibition, Kassel, Germany in 2007.



Fig. 19. Author's i-phone screen shot taken from Ai Weiwei's Instagram account. It is the First Letter of the 'Fuck' sign installed on the artist's exterior wall.



Fig. 20. Ai Weiwei, *258 Fake*, 2011©Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Galleria Continua



Fig. 21. Ai Weiwei, *He Xie*, 2010. A satirical installation that mocks the government's catchphrase "Harmony." Photograph taken at Blenheim Palace, November, 2014.



Fig. 22. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Haus Wittgenstein, 1926-1929



Fig. 23. Ai Weiwei, *Template* (2007)
Wooden doors and windows from destroyed Ming and Qing Dynasty houses
(1368-1911)
720 x 1200 x 850cm



Fig. 24. Ai Weiwei, *Forever Bicycles*, 2013
Nathan Phillips Square, 100 Queen Street West
Photo © City of Toronto



Fig. 25. Ai Weiwei, The Demolition of the artist's Shanghai Studio, 2011

