

From the Earth to the World.  
Ai Weiwei's Functional Dante  
Reference in the Music Album  
*The Divine Comedy* (2013) and  
in the Lego Portrait  
*Dante Alighieri in LEGO* (2016)

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**Abstract**

This article sets out to illuminate two intermedial Dante references in the artwork of the Chinese-western artist Ai Weiwei: the music album *The Divine Comedy* (2013) and the Lego portrait *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* (2016). By paying special attention to surfaces, the “surface reading” presented in this article seeks to interrogate the function of these references. However, in place of *Why?* the question in this article is shaped more by *How?* Due to Dante's inherent mediality, the intermedial Dante references function as a social medium. The article demonstrates, how mediality becomes evident through two operators: seriality and combinatorics. By placing the artist on one of the two sides of mediation, this article implicitly reverses the role long reserved for Ai Weiwei: that of the cultural mediator.

**Keywords**

Intermediality; Mediality; World Literature; Dante; Surface Reading.

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K. behielt den Brief in der Hand und sah den Mann an, der ihm im Augenblick wichtiger schien.<sup>1</sup>

Kafka, *Das Schloß*

## Introduction

Observing the various artworks of the Chinese-western artist Ai Weiwei, it would be incorrect to assert that Dante occupies a central focus. In the context of the recent debate on mediality and intermediality it is nevertheless curious that a linkage between these two nodes has not been described, since the conceptual artist Ai Weiwei has frequently taken an interest in Dante Alighieri. This article sets out to illuminate this connection. The motives of Ai Weiwei's Dante references - be they personal, artistic, or political - are not discussed in this article. In place of *Why?* the question in this article is shaped by *How?* This question

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<sup>1</sup> «Holding the letter in his hand, K. looked at the messenger, who just now seemed to him more important than the message itself» Kafka 2009: 23.

already points us in a certain direction, as *Why?* accentuates one side of intermedial transfer, which forms the framework of this article: «How-questions are always surface-questions» («Wie-Fragen' sind immer Oberflächen-Fragen»), write Helmuth Feilke and Angelika Linke in the preface to their linguistic anthology *Oberfläche und Performanz* (2009: 5). Thus, our specific interest will be in the surfaces and the «signalling strength of certain surfaces» («Signalkraft bestimmter Oberflächen») (*ibid.*: 7). Focusing on communicative aspects of mediality, our approach is, furthermore, in line with Giuliana Bruno's shift toward a *haptic materiality*, which she explored in her brilliant book *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Bruno 2014: 3).

The thesis we will discuss below is simple: Dante has a *function*<sup>2</sup>; on the surface the Florentine poet functions as a sounding board. We will concentrate on how Dante himself works as a medium. In short, and more to the point, the intermedial Dante references in the works of Ai Weiwei function as a *social* medium, thanks to the mediality of Dante himself.

To begin with, the broad thesis – Dante as a *social* medium – must be related to two concrete Dante references in Ai Weiwei's work and expanded in the light of their combinatorics and seriality, with the aim of then bringing these two references to the level of intermediality. Intermediality: in a recent article Irina Rajewsky (2018) has clearly differentiated the concept of intermediality from that of transmediality: while transmediality investigates the representation of an element (such as a motif, a theme, a subject) in different epochs and in different media (such as literature, theatre, film), she limits the concept of intermediality as an instrument of analysis to the investigation of «concrete media practices with specific procedures and strategies that involve more than one medium and bring out a certain 'friction' between them» («pratiche mediali concrete con specifici procedimenti e strategie che coinvolgono più di un medium e fanno emergere una certa 'frizione' tra essi») (*ibid.*: 8-9). Rajewsky's concept of intermediality helps us in the choice of the object of research - the *What?* Her definition of intermediality as

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<sup>2</sup> In a mathematical sense.

«between media» (*ibid.*: 9), however, can only be a starting point of the present study. *What?* must be supplemented with *How?* We want to respond to this question with an operation that focuses on the underlying mediality of the research objects themselves: The method consists in a form of “surface reading”. In the influential introduction to a special issue of the journal *Representations*, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus (2009) have problematized “symptomatic reading” and proposed, instead of a hermeneutic approach, a reading that does not seek to uncover a deeper hidden meaning, but which focuses more on the surface of the text, what they understand as «what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts» (*ibid.*: 9). Our surface reading shall be realized with an operation that deserves more attention in comparative literature: «not interpretation, not explanation, not prediction, not prescription» (Marcus-Love-Best 2016: 1), but *description*.

## I - Combinatorics

As already mentioned, Ai Weiwei has repeatedly taken an interest in Dante Alighieri. The first Dante reference we want to discuss here is *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* (2016). In the exhibition *Ai Weiwei. Libero* (23.09.2016-22.01.2017) a portrait of Dante Alighieri in coloured Lego bricks was exhibited in Palazzo Strozzi in Florence. The portrait shows a lateral left bust profile of the poet against a white background. Dante is wearing a red robe and headdress, garlanded with the leaves of a green laurel wreath. *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* has a clear «intermedial reference» (Rajewsky 2018: 11-12): the model is the well-known portrait of the first *Commedia* illustrator Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510).

*Dante Alighieri in LEGO* is one of four Lego portraits of historical personalities shown in the exhibition. Arturo Galansino, the Director General of the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and curator of the exhibition, states that these Lego portraits on the one hand are firmly connected to the history of Florence and on the other are dedicated to political dissidents all over the world: alongside the portrait of Dante, the exile *par excellence* in the history of literature, there is a portrait of Galileo

Galilei, a figure who embodies the ideals of truth and oppression against the progress of science, of Savonarola, the preacher symbol of morality who resists power, and of Filippo Strozzi, the founder of the palace and a bitter opponent of the Medici family (Galansino 2016).

Art here serves to raise a serious question, a question that Roland Barthes outlined in *Mobile* (1962) by Michel Butor and described as «the possibility of the world, or to speak in a more Leibnizian way, of its composability» («la possibilité du monde, ou pour parler d'une façon plus leibnizienne, de sa compossibilité») (1993: 1307). In his Lego portraits, Ai Weiwei combines two approaches: the logic of Lego and the logic of the jigsaw puzzle. The logic of the classic Lego bricks wants every single piece to be combined with every other single piece *ad libitum*; there is no pre-structured order. In contrast to Lego bricks, puzzle pieces cannot be combined at will, but have an overall pre-structured order due to their shape and the surface picture as a whole. Furthermore, the goal of Lego, if one can define one at all, is to construct buildings and other, primarily three-dimensional objects, whereas the puzzle pieces serve to reassemble two-dimensional pictures.

By replicating Botticelli's well-known work of art with Lego bricks, Ai Weiwei exposes what the philosopher of language Sybille Krämer has been describing for years as a «cultural technique of spatial flattening» («Kulturtechnik räumlicher Verflachung») (2019: 836): not only «Lucio Fontana's cuts through the surface of his paintings open up his pictures to three-dimensionality and a plastic depth» («Lucio Fontanas Schnitte durch die Oberflächen seiner Gemälde öffnen seine Bilder der Dreidimensionalität und einer plastischen Tiefe») (*ibid.*: 835); Ai Weiwei, too, «exposes and infiltrates [...] two-dimensionality as a familiar condition of traditional pictoriality» («er exponiert und unterwandert [...] die Zweidimensionalität als vertraute Bedingung traditioneller Bildlichkeit.») (*ibid.*).

*Dante Alighieri in LEGO* must therefore be considered as a *digital* work of art. Why digital? At first glance, this categorization may seem surprising, since in *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* no technical devices are used at all; there is no flat computer screen, there are no flashlights shining with special effects. However, it is the etymology of the word *digital* that

brings the category to mind. Etymologically speaking, the *digital* has something to do with the fingers: with the *digitus* we count from one to ten and we touch; *digitalis*, then, is everything that belongs to the fingers, that is within its reach (“digital”). However, *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* is not a digital artwork just because it was composed with the fingers from Lego bricks. The visitor who does not *touch* the Lego bricks with their own fingers but takes a close look with their eyes will appreciate why *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* is a digital work of art: it is the simulation of *derangement*<sup>3</sup>. By using Lego bricks to portray Dante, Ai Weiwei disturbs the viewer, as the Lego bricks interrupt the mediality of the image. The bricks’ inherent nature, their robust, angular, non-round, blocky shape, trigger a sensation of viewing pixels in the viewer’s eye. The viewer perceives the picture no longer as a whole, but as the sum of a multitude of small, assembled details, which can be placed and rearranged together in new and different ways. The distant viewer may still be able to perceive the picture as a whole, but from close up the viewer sees nothing but small, colourful Lego bricks: like pixels on a television screen. As a result of this interruption of mediality, Dante in *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* does not emerge as “auctor” or as “agens” (Contini 1970: 341), but as a surface.

## II - Seriality

Despite a statement by Ai Weiwei published on his blog in 2006, confessing that he is «not a huge music fan» (2011: 60), he released the

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<sup>3</sup> Amitav Ghosh opens his essay *The Great Derangement* (2016) with the idea that the interruption of mediality causes sudden awareness of the medium: «Who can forget those moments when something that seems inanimate turns out to be vitally, even dangerously alive? As, for example, when an arabesque in the pattern of a carpet is revealed to be a dog’s tail, which, if stepped upon, could lead to a nipped ankle? Or when we reach for an innocent-looking vine and find it to be a worm or a snake? When a harmlessly drifting log turns out to be a crocodile?» Ghosh 2016: 3.

music album *The Divine Comedy* on 22 June 2013. Together with the Chinese rock musician and friend Zuoxiao Zuzhou, Ai Weiwei produced six tracks with a total length of about 27 minutes. Ai Weiwei, who performed as a singer for the first time, chose Chinese as the language for this project. Nevertheless, the album was conceived as a bilingual album: at least in terms of the written language, both the album title and the six songs are in Chinese and English. Furthermore, the official website of Ai Weiwei provides the English translation of the Chinese lyrics ("The Divine Comedy"). The content of the album is inextricably linked to his personal experience of his own arrest in 2011, which at least for Saviano (2013) is linked to an event that has had a lasting influence on Ai Weiwei: the earthquake in Sichuan.

We have set out on the reverse path to describe the way from the earth to the world, from the earthquake to world literature. Hence, we will briefly mention the background of the earthquake that hit Sichuan province on 12 May 2008. Ai Weiwei travelled to the earthquake zone at the end of May to record his impressions. Shortly before his departure, *Grief*, the first of a series of blog posts on the event, appeared on 22 May 2008. Expressing his solidarity with the earthquake victims, Ai Weiwei asks rather casually: «Who are they [?]» (Ai: 150). The question related to the identity of the victims was taken up again in a second blog post published on 28 July 2008, titled *Does the Nation Have a List?* In this blog post, Ai Weiwei criticizes the *Erinnerungskultur* of the Chinese government and links the catastrophic event more explicitly to local discourses about China in general and the province of Sichuan in particular, by asking the still officially unanswered question of how many people died (Ai 2011: 178). Disappointed with Chinese remembrance work, this blog post provides the impetus for the *Citizens' Investigation project*: between 15 December 2008 and 2 September 2009 Ai Weiwei collected with the help of volunteers data from 4,851 students

who lost their lives in the earthquake<sup>4</sup>. However, the research work in Sichuan increasingly led to disputes with the Chinese police, which was hostile to the work of Ai Weiwei and his supporters. After several clashes, Ai Weiwei was arrested in 2011 by the Chinese police. Although his arrest was widely covered by the media worldwide, Ai Weiwei was imprisoned for several months and then placed under house arrest.

Ai Weiwei released the music album two years later on the music platform *SoundCloud*. The platform plays a decisive role. SoundCloud was founded in 2008 as an online music service for the exchange and distribution of audio files with its head office in Berlin. According to a search query with Google Trends, the countries with the greatest interest in SoundCloud in 2013 were: South Africa, Australia, United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, Netherlands, Pakistan, Germany, Belgium and Egypt. In contrast, the cities with the highest interest in SoundCloud in 2013 were Berlin, Amsterdam, Melbourne, Manchester, New York City, London, Los Angeles, Sydney, Hamburg and San Diego – in other words in a global context, interest in the SoundCloud platform in 2013 was highest in western metropolitan areas.

How is SoundCloud connected to Dante? We would like to anticipate the answer: in terms of social mediality. Before we turn fully to this point, however, let us first clarify something crucial. The explicit Dante reference in the title, both in English (*The Divine Comedy*) and in Chinese (*Shenqu* 神曲), evokes several questions about intermedial Dante references in Ai Weiwei's music album. Can the question about the reception of Dante in China help us here? This issue has been addressed recently by Alessandra Brezzi (2011) who studied thoroughly the history of Dante in China. However, for us it does not seem very useful to put the intermedial Dante reference in the works of Ai Weiwei into the context of the way Dante is received in China. We will certainly not undertake too close a reading of the lyrics here, which would offer

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<sup>4</sup> First artistic results were the installations *Snake Ceiling* at the Mori Art Museum (*Ai Weiwei. According to What?*, 25.07.2008-08.11.2009) and *Remembering* at the Haus der Kunst in Munich (*Ai Weiwei. So Sorry*, 12.10.2009-17.01.2010).

many insights simply because Ai Weiwei's understanding of Dante could be based on a specific Chinese approach to Dante that recognizes the figure of the exiled writer, as the Chinese writer Mao Dun (1896-1981) first did in his article on Dante's *Commedia* published in 1934 in the magazine *Zhong xue sheng* 中学生 (*ibid.*: 260). Furthermore, reflections based on the Chinese character for *Inferno* (which is *diyu* 地狱) would also provide some pointers: in China, the Catholic-Christian spatial concept of hell as an eternal place does not exist; in four modern Chinese translations, *Inferno* has been translated as *diyu* 地狱 which is also the meaning for *prison* (*ibid.*: 266). Following this, the music video for the single *Dumbass*, which Ai Weiwei released on Youtube on 22 May 2013 shortly before the release of the entire music album on SoundCloud, could be interpreted in this respect as an allusion to the Chinese interpretation of *Inferno*: The music video shows Ai Weiwei in the role of a prisoner performing everyday activities such as washing, eating and sleeping, while being constantly monitored by two policemen, possibly a reappraisal of his own brief incarceration in 2011 and a parallel between his fate and that of Dante.

As already mentioned, we do not want to expose ourselves to the hermeneutic fallacy any further and do not want to expand on these approaches. Instead, we want to take up again the *function* of Ai Weiwei's intermedial Dante references and look elsewhere, thus the mediality of Dante Alighieri himself.

### **III - Surface, Readymade and World Literature: Dante's Mediality**

On 4 May 2006 Ai Weiwei wrote an essay about Andy Warhol, published on his blog on 3 October 2007 (Ai 2011: 127-130). From the perspective of an eyewitness he writes about the loss that the death of Andy Warhol on 22 February 1987 represented. After compiling the most important key data of the life and attempting to classify the art, he quotes Warhol saying: «If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just

look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it» (Warhol, as cited in Ai 2011: 129). This interest in surfaces can also be tracked in the artworks of Ai Weiwei. We have already referred to the surface in *Dante Alighieri in LEGO*, by means of which the portrait of Dante is *disturbed* and its mediality is exposed. However, we have not yet fully examined the surface of the music album.

The album cover for Ai Weiwei's *The Divine Comedy* shows a detail of a phone picture in black and white. In the foreground of the picture is Ai Weiwei with his mobile phone, who is about to take a photo against a mirror with a flashlight in order to capture the situation. In the background of the photograph we see police officers and the musician Zuoxiao Zuzuhou. The photograph documents a situation that took place in an elevator in Sichuan in 2009 after Ai Weiwei was arrested by the police. Since then, the photograph has been reproduced and has been placed in new contexts. For example, it introduces the exhibition catalogue for his exhibition in Munich (Ai - Simmons 2009: I) and has since been reused in various contexts as in the series *Illumination*.

Seriality is a key concept for Ai Weiwei since his very first beginnings. The exhibition catalogue for his Munich exhibition *So Sorry* is illustrated by two black-and-white photographs from the photo series *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, one of the first projects after Ai Weiwei's return to Beijing in 1995. In front of a camera, Ai Weiwei had photographed himself as he dropped a two-thousand-year-old vase from the Han Dynasty on the floor and destroyed it. On the front of the exhibition catalogue, a full-length photograph shows the artist standing in front of a wall, looking into the camera: in the upper third of the picture, he is balancing the vase with his index fingers diagonally in the air; on the back, the same shot is shown again, but now pieces of the vase are lying scattered on the floor: the artist has dropped it and now, without having changed his facial expression even slightly, turns his palms towards the camera: *So Sorry* is written in large orange letters where the name *Ai Weiwei* had been in the previous shot in the same large orange characters. In the description of *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* for the exhibition *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World* (6.10.2017-

07.01.2018) at the Guggenheim Bilbao (2017) it is stated that: «With this work, Ai Weiwei began his ongoing use of antique readymade objects, demonstrating his questioning attitude toward how and by whom cultural values are created». In other words, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* was seen as the starting point for Ai Weiwei's attempt «to make Chinese culture into a readymade» (Siemons 2009: 26).

This approach can be traced back to Marcel Duchamp, who repeatedly used ready-made utility objects and declared them to be finished works of art.<sup>5</sup> Following incomplete studies in New York, Ai Weiwei returned to Beijing in 1993. Nevertheless, his time in New York did not leave him unaffected. Beside Andy Warhol, it was Marcel Duchamp «who would most influence his own career» (Ambrozy 2011: XIX); he also forms a point of reference relevant to the question we are asking: the social mediality of Dante. One cannot underestimate the influence of Marcel Duchamp in art enough. He plays a special role for the art of China in general and for the art of Ai Weiwei in particular<sup>6</sup>.

Can we consider Dante Alighieri also as a “readymade”? Like the old vases from a long-gone dynasty, the figure of Dante represents something preformed, something finished, something found, to which a certain cultural value is attached. Just as Ai Weiwei, by destroying the vases that function as media, asks about the conditions of cultural value attribution, *The Divine Comedy* and *Dante Alighieri in LEGO* also raise the question of the conditions of cultural value attribution. However, the disruption of mediality is no longer the destruction of a material object, the broken jug, the disturbance now is based in terms of “seriality” (*The Divine Comedy*) and “combinatorics” (*Dante Alighieri in LEGO*). By thus focusing on Dante and his *Commedia*, Ai Weiwei reveals the mediality of world literature.

This is what we have described as the functional Dante reference: the slow movement away from the earth and the Sichuan earthquake of

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<sup>5</sup> His best-known readymade to this day is the exhibition piece *Fountain* (1917), a urinal which was denied its original semantics by the fact that the exhibition context in a museum ascribed the value of an art object to it.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Tancock 2014: 50, Barry 2019: 209.

2008 towards the world of world literature. But which world? Whose world? Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora, and Francesca Orsini have clearly identified the problems of the word *world*, since it always implies *a priori* a perspective: «‘world’ is always a view from somewhere» (Laachir – Marzagora – Orsini 2018). Instead of thinking about world literature, they suggest the extremely useful term “significant geographies” to examine the implicit attribution of value: «The advantage of thinking of significant geographies over ‘world’, we contend, is that it makes us consider local and distant geographies [...] and their interrelationship in ways that [...] make us think about *actual trajectories and specific uses of spatial concepts/images* [...]» (*ibid.*).

If we also do not simply include Dante in world literature, but on the contrary, critically question the ascription of value and follow the trajectories, we come very close to what we have intended to describe as a *social* medium. Dante functions as a bond between local and distant geographies, but he is also *social* in the sense that he points to «what concerns human society, the coexistence of people and their constitutional order as well as economic conditions» («was die menschliche gesellschaft, das zusammenleben der menschen und seine staatlich - rechtliche ordnung wie die wirtschaftlichen verhältnisse betrifft») (“sozial”). Dante: *locus*, a place, a spatial concept, a platform on which people can meet, exchange ideas and/or quarrel.

#### IV - The Intermediality of Dante as Latency

If we now want to work out the final point and bring it to the level of intermediality, we must first ask and recapitulate: what are media in general? How do media work? The above-mentioned German philosopher Sybille Krämer has been dealing with these questions from a philosophical perspective for many years. In her article *Epistemologie der Medialität* she has brought this question to the point by assuming that media «functionally take the position of a third party or a Third that mediates between two different sides, fields or systems and creates a nexus of connection and transmission between them» («funktional die

Position eines Dritten bzw. einer Drittheit ein[nehmen], die zwischen zwei unterschiedlichen Seiten, Feldern bzw. Systemen vermittelt und einen Nexus der Verbindung und Übertragung zwischen ihnen stiftet») (Krämer 2019: 837-838). Krämer thus understands mediality as a form of relation; in doing so, she turns against Marshall McLuhan's old commonplace and emphasizes that the medium *is not* the message, but that media *communicate* messages, that they *deliver* messages. Media, and this is their merit, mediate what is to be communicated: they stand between two sides and are thus *in between*. Krämer follows this approach by developing the concept of medial "transfiguration" on the basis of a painting by Raphael (*Transfiguration*, 1516/20): «The medium shows itself in the transmitted content in the form of a trace.» («Das Medium zeigt sich am übermittelten Gehalt in Gestalt einer Spur.») (*ibid*: 844) Media transmit from *in between*, but the transmission is not to be understood as a neutral process. Media do not simply transport a message, but in the act of transmission they exert a formative force on the message, which is not evident, but latent: «Traces are changes in the visible in the mode of a latency [...]» («Spuren sind Veränderungen am Sichtbaren im Modus einer Latenz [...]»), (*ibid.*) as Krämer writes. It is sufficient to recall that already in the etymological root of the word *medium* we find these two dimensions, on the one hand "betweenness" and on the other a quality of "becoming" (Bruno 2014: 5). This may be what is shared by the act of mediating and Lévi-Strauss' concept of "bricolage": just like the material of the *bricoleur*, the medium gives form to the message, turning the *signifiés* into *signifiants* and vice versa (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 34).

We have now dealt exclusively with the operation of mediality and have not yet spoken about intermediality. It is important to make and clarify this distinction and to differentiate the media-philosophical concept of mediality from the comparative concept of intermediality. In the act of mediation several intermedial references can therefore be differentiated and considered separately and independently. In light of this, the accusation of Irina Rajewsky seems unfounded. In her aforementioned article, she sees the field of intermediality represented by two non-complementary poles:

a first pole (mostly in the fields of genealogy, history, philosophy or general media theory) to which can be traced approaches that consider intermediality as a fundamental condition of our culture and therefore as a *basic phenomenon*; a second pole consisting instead of approaches (originated mainly from literary studies) that conceive 'intermediality' as a category for the analysis of concrete media practices or configurations - in case these manifest specific elements or strategies of an intermediate type.

(un primo polo (per lo più negli ambiti di genealogia, storia, filosofia o teoria generale dei media) cui sono riconducibili approcci che considerano l'intermedialità come una condizione fondamentale della nostra cultura e quindi come *fenomeno di base*; un secondo polo costituito invece da approcci (originati prevalentemente dai literary studies) che concepiscono 'intermedialità' come una categoria per l'analisi di pratiche o configurazioni mediali concrete – nel caso queste manifestino specifici elementi o strategie di tipo intermediale). (Rajewsky 2018: 6)

Instead of attributing Sybille Krämer to the first pole, which was contested by Rajewsky, we want to differentiate the concept of mediality from that of intermediality as complementary but supplementing categories and understand Dante as a Third, a mediator-figure. Hence, by placing the artist on one of the two sides of mediation, we have very implicitly turned the role long reserved for Ai Weiwei: that of the cultural mediator.

The innovative aspect of Ai Weiwei's art has often been explained in terms of the symbiosis of Western and Eastern culture: «The complicated convolution of ways of speaking and interests in East and West», as Siemons puts it (2009: 27). But Ai Weiwei worked hard to deny the image «as the supreme interpreter of his country» (*ibid.*: 28). This can be seen from the research subjects we have dealt with. Although garnished with Western elements, Ai Weiwei's music album *The Divine Comedy* is oriented towards the Chinese discourse and deals with his own experiences in the outcome of his earthquake works. In contrast,

*Dante Alighieri in LEGO* is one of the numerous examples of Ai Weiwei's artwork with which he turns away from his one-sided role as China's cultural mediator in the West. By taking a stand on Western discourses, he simultaneously rebels against this image. Thus, at the height of the European refugee crisis, he addresses the European discourse in his exhibition in Florence: not only explicitly, by having twenty-two refugee rescue boats installed on the exterior walls of Palazzo Strozzi (*Reframe* 2016), but also implicitly, latently: by exhibiting Dante as a surface, that is to say: a Third. The trace, the trajectory of Dante-surface leads to a debate about attributing social value. Concluding, we can affirm that surfaces are not superficial at all.

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