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**Art and Power:
Contemporary Figurations**

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Summary: In this text the issue of art and power is approached from a perspective that addresses, in particular, the symbolical – essential – power of artists through their ideas as authors. A double perspective that relates not only to the creative figuration of those ideas, illustrated here by some of the art works presented at the last *Documenta* in Kassel (2007), one of the pinnacles of contemporary art, but also to the chessboard of powers in artistic spaces. A figuration of interdependencies that raises questions about artistic power and its sovereignty and fragilities in the contemporary situation. In the light of the various forms of hetero-determination and hetero-legitimation of art that today subordinate this kind of reflection to the role of its patronage, intermediation, markets, media coverage and reception, among other instrumental uses of art and culture, the text then attempts to (re)position the power of artists in what seems to be a space that has been colonised by other powers.

Key-Words: Art and Power, Creative Ideas, Documenta in Kassel, Ai Wei Wei, Sakarin Krue-On, Sanja Ivekovic, Joseph Beuys

1. The power of artists¹

Saturday, February 10, 1979 –
... Victor called and started talking about ideas,
if I had any idea 'sophisticated' ...²
ANDY WARHOL

This very short note in the *Diaries* of Andy Warhol (1928-1987) provides a suitable opening for a reflection on 'art and power' in the contemporary situation, a reflection that is particularly concerned with the art and power of artists through their ideas. In Pop Art, too, these ideas were "sophisticated" by the heterodox elevation of banal, industrial and consumer icons to the status of works of art: *Coca-Colas*, *Campbell Soups*, *Brillo Boxes*, *Comics*, Polaroids, portrait series from *Mona Lisas* to *Marilyns*, *Mao-Tsé-Tungs* and *Nixons*, etc. – in all, a banquet of images produced by the Warhol *Factory* with his, at the time, new civilizational methods. And in the legacy of Duchamp (1887-1968), who, with the ready-mades and the provocative urinal that he entitled *Fountain* and signed "R. Mutt" (1917), gave artists the power of converting the commonplace to the rare, the multiple to the single, and the ordinary to the extraordinary: by the "magic" of his signature.³

This represents one of the aspects of our topic that is indeed very wide-ranging, from the relationship between art and power – or, rather, powers – to art's own power.⁴ That is, it may extend from the instrumental uses of art (as in religious iconography, the liturgies of princely and state power, or the ideological propaganda of totalitarian regimes) to the various expressions of artistic power: semiotic, aesthetic or ethical, plus the political manifestations in

¹ This text returns to the paper presented at the symposium "*Figures et Figurations du Pouvoir*" organized by Fiona McIntosh-Varjabédian and Marie-Madeleine Castellani at the research centre ALITHILA – Analyses Littéraires et Histoires, Université de Lille 3, 5-6 November, 2009. The symposium proceedings have been put forward for publication by Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers. Translation by Colin Archer.

A longer version is available in Portuguese at: Idalina Conde (2009) "Arte e Poder", *CIES e-Working Paper* No. 62, http://www.cies.iscte.pt/destaques/documents/CIES-WP62_Conde.pdf This English version includes more pictures of works presented at the last *Documenta* in Kassel (2007); they also belong to the project in progress with Fernando Ribeiro (since 2006), *Iconografias Europeias: Rotas de um Museu Imaginário/ European Iconographies: Routes of an Imaginary Museum*. Presented earlier at an Open Session at ISCTE (2 July 2009), the project includes a large image bank covering places, institutions and key works in various European countries. In Germany, the *Skulptur Projekte Münster* was also dealt with in 2007. A rare happening – it is held every 10 years, whereas the interval for *Documenta* is 5 years.

² In *Diários de Andy Warhol* (1989: 227).

³ To use the term that Pierre Bourdieu applied to this power of "symbolic transubstantiation", from his first writings on the artistic condition, picked up again in Bourdieu (1992).

⁴ Some historical references in Conde (2009a) among others (Clair, 1997 ; Poirrier, 2006 ; Jimenez, 2007 ; Groys, 2008 ; Acciaiuoli, Leal and Maia, 2008).

the other sense of a counter-power, as conducted by modernism and the avant-gardes in the 20th century. Though almost the same may be said for later critical movements. The artistic power is, then, the triple power to represent the real, to transcend it and to act on the imaginary. It is embodied in the works of art (and artistic postures) that run through the various cultural histories of heritage, idolatry, iconoclasm, conventions and subversions. In short, a symbolical power with reference to its “sophisticated idea” because it presupposes the uniqueness of artistic thought: the substance of this power that is first and foremost the specifically intellectual power, to institute and impose a “special category of signs”.⁵

So, it is not limited to the more institutional or corporative properties of a status that, moreover, in the case of artists, represents that of a specific cultural elite with its fairly charismatic identity.⁶ They constitute dimensions inherent in the notion of symbolic power (in art as also in science and other fields of authorship and creativity⁷) but it is anchored in the original nature of the ideas and, therefore, of the works. Though, bar exceptions⁸, the sociological approach (including Bourdieu’s) tends to subordinate this way by giving precedence to the effects and processes of the recognition of power with the more usual issues of domination and legitimation – particularly symbolic.

However, ideas are obviously a crucial matter and we could even go back to the role that the invention of the idea played during Mannerism or the Renaissance.⁹ A guide in the process of the intellectualization of artists under the umbrella of the Academy, after proliferating in Europe and helping to improve – emancipate and ennoble – the condition of artists. Moreover we must also remember the long road of ideas in connection with the notions of representation, invention, transcendence and the transfiguration of reality, with even the most banal transformed into art (Danto, 1989) in the post/modern regime. It is a trajectory that not only led to the conceptual movements de-materializing artworks (“art as idea as idea”, to cite Joseph Kosuth’s motto in an emblematic exhibition in 1966), but the concepts remain in other trends that are no less reflexive. For instance, more recent “re-objectivating” *assemblages*, installations and interventions through newer uses or re-visitations of the object, parallel to

⁵ To quote the well-known definition adopted by Pierre Bourdieu (1989).

⁶ In various of the publications I have addressed these aspects, from the historical origins to the present condition of artists: Idalina Conde (1994, 1995, 2009b, with several references). In the end, this liberty that artists have won, to live in the different or “exceptional” condition of singularity, is a form of legitimate (and expected) inequality in the “regime of community” (or commonality) itself, required for all citizens. It is what Nathalie Heinich describes as a “democratic commitment” between aristocracy and republicanism. A legacy from the nineteenth century and the two major revolutions (the French and Romantic Revolutions), which she revisited in Heinich (2005).

⁷ “Artists and scientists: a common portrait” (Conde, 2000).

⁸ On this topic, see Jean-Pierre Esquenazi (2007)’s perspective and detailed bibliography.

⁹ Thus, since the 16th century, Leonardo da Vinci’s earlier idea that *la pittura è cosa mentale* (painting is a mental matter) has served as an argument to claim *liberalità* for painting and sculpture. That is, a better, intellectually improved status for these manual crafts, considered to be on a lower level than poetic or literary arts in the symbolic hierarchy of the time. As Erwing Panofsky showed in his classic study *Idea – A Concept in Art Theory* (1924), it became a basis for *il furore dell’arte* (the passion of the arts), also advocated in the visual arts as *belle inventione* (beautiful inventions) that may exceed mimesis. Edition consulted: Panofsky (1987).

other kinds of ethnographic and cinematic images produced by contemporary art about our world.

Bringing this perspective to the present-day situation involves questioning ourselves about the independence and weaknesses of this symbolic power in artistic spaces overpopulated by other powers. That is, heterodeterminations and heterolegitimations that seem to subordinate the power of art to that of its guardians, patronage, the market, mediations, mediatisation and its reception. A whole ensemble of dependencies and contingencies to be considered in the following pages, with the help of a trilogy of major art works that were presented at the last *Documenta* in Kassel in 2007, as an example of the implementation of ideas. Intertextual ideas that show the complex construction of artistic projects, with two of them also bringing another angle to our topic: a postcolonial metaphor of civilizational powers confronting each other in the global world, as well as interchanges between the East and West.

2. A chessboard of powers and the power of ideas

The *Documenta* is one of the pinnacles of contemporary art and recognized as a “cathedral” of the avant-gardes since its foundation in the 50s. Held every five years it returned in 2007 with its “grand Mass of contemporary art.”¹⁰ But internationally and thus inescapably for any reflection on art and power, Kassel now shares this “exception” status of other “cathedrals of art” that suitably represent our times, where artists are acclaimed as their stars, after all the metamorphoses from “art at the time of the cathedrals”. To quote one of the historian Georges Duby’s titles, which brought us, in a wonderful way, the sacred art of the Gothic Middle Ages when, in the older state of zero autonomy, their predecessors, the medieval stonemasons and craftsmen, still had to serve a higher purpose: “What we call art had no other purpose than to offer God the riches of the visible world and to allow humanity, by means of these gifts, to appease the wrath of the Almighty and gain favour with him.” (Duby, 1979: 19).

Autonomy and, consequently, artists’ power, are a late conquest that are also symbolised here by the right to those new “cathedrals” in the circuits of contemporary production and circulation. As a matter of fact, some of them are major museums and centres, with a similar role (i.e. monumental) for their architecture, in addition to the art fairs and biennials around the world. Moving, however, from an abstract right to the conditions of access to these prestigious places, we must speak of the high admission costs for artists. That is, their dependency on a complex system of mediations and *gatekeeping*, exercised especially by commissioners, curators, programmers and exhibitors, as well as critics, essayists, opinion-

¹⁰ To repeat the church-related headlines in the press regarding this institution, created by Hermann Mattern and Arnold Bode in 1955. It was also set up as a project to rehabilitate Kassel, which had been heavily bombed in the Second World War on account of its munitions factories.

makers and various kinds of panels of judges, besides other cultural and institutional players – and, crucially, the state.

In this chessboard the market has a primary role. A global market nowadays, though with a segmentation and ranking by geographies of power that restrict international artistic leadership (and that of the “big ones” of the cultural industries) to a small set of countries (Quemin, 2002; VV.AA., 2002; Robertson, 2005). The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy, among certain others, are part of that central Western nucleus that shows how globalisation does not always signify a yeast for new and symmetrical relations between centres and peripheries. At least, for this piloting of the markets, it does not, in contrast to other possible cultural hybridisation and exchanges in our postcolonial condition and “global heteroglossia” (Mosquera and Fischer, 2005: 122). Precisely one of the main topics that contemporary art selects for its iconographies – and one that is present in the example of Kassel, as we shall see below.

It remains to add that, parallel to such major arenas, there are other kinds of artistic sets, somewhat multiform alternatives to the “cathedrals”.¹¹ I mean the networks, platforms and projects that have increased since a turning point in the 90s, to reconfigure the arenas of power with their new modes of organization and agency for artists and their peers (Conde, 2003a). They are micro-structures with elastic project portfolios, highly personalised, informal, flexible and interstitial, and with a translocal radiation (on the basis of new technologies) that has significantly altered the map of artistic peripheries, centralities and circuits. Moreover, such creativity, actually highly interdisciplinary, thus hybrid and diffuse, tends to be developed in niches (many of them adjacent to public policies) that promote new urban cultural skills, as well as spatialisations of “immaterial work”. In short, features and changes related to what has been called the post-Fordist paradigm in society, as in art (Nicholas-Le Strate, 1998; Menger, 2001; Gielen, 2009b; Pascal Gielen and Paul de Bruyne, 2009).

Media, new technology and network/project-based organizations, a type greatly boosted by electronic devices, represent, precisely, three major mediations in contemporary society that have actually restructured artistic spaces (articulating them with global environments) and creative practices from the digital, operational, logistic and communicational aspects (Castells, 1996, 1997; Hartley, 2005). A fourth mediation, no less inclusive, is the profuse and intertextual discursivity through which reflexivity about the contemporary world circulates. So, for art, these discourses on identity, the body, the feminine, emotions, violence, urbanity, post-colonialism, kitsch, the sublime etc., questioning the possibility itself of narratives and

¹¹ Like “cultural hypermarkets”, to recall Jean Baudrillard’s criticism of these mega-institutions in *L’Effet Beaubourg - Implosion et Dissuasion* (1977) which he viewed – excessively – as “*machines à faire du vide*” (vacuum machines) at the end of the 70’s. Nevertheless, despite that apocalyptic vision, these institutions were already more multifaceted and, meanwhile, they have seen changes towards a model that became rather complex and also flexible such as the case that Pascal Gielen (2009a).

representations, are a work tool. A basic resource for thought, action and the artists' power, for which they mobilize not only contemporary aesthetics and philosophy but also references from the social sciences, anthropology in particular, cultural studies, perspectives of post-colonialism, globalisation, and other mappings of macro-trends.¹²

From this point of view, the mapping of mediations¹³ (an axial concept as it is indexed to powers or resources for power) becomes somewhat wider in that it covers these four main aspects that have greatly altered the ways of communicating, producing and circulating images and information, and their reception, in addition to specific mediations, internal to artistic spaces, that are composed by an ensemble of intermediaries. Moreover, some of them with new profiles and increased powers, as curators or commissioners, that go further than the traditional role (judicative and commercial) associated with critics and gallery owners.¹⁴

To resume, mediations constitute an array of filters that the intangible and vulnerable power of an artist's ideas have to pass through to be accepted and recognised, even to become gainful. A process that is always run through with the double relationships of "calculation and affection"¹⁵ between artists and their intermediary alter-egos – the duplicity inherent in the production of symbolic value and its conversion into the commercial value of artworks and artists' reputations.¹⁶ In fact, the intermediations assure the arrival of ideas at the showcases of art, the "cathedrals" and other places, which in reality differ from the institutional point of view, though less and less in the content presented, given the context – currently so translocal – of the points of reference for contemporary art. So the images I give of three artworks in Kassel could have been somewhere else as rather paradigmatic examples of what making artistic ideas viable may mean in this context. Though in some cases they are, indeed, distinctive site-specific approaches, with a sense of universality, such as this one of Ai Weiwei, which manages to bring the East to the West in Kassel, literally and symbolically. A mission that he shared with other

¹² Some references in Conde (2009a).

¹³ I return here to the point on "Mapping Mediations" in the following text: Conde (2011). See also VV.AA. *Culture-Gates. Exposing Professional "Gate-Keeping" Processes in Music and New Media Arts*, Bonn, ArCultMedia, 2003. The book includes a chapter on Portugal and gender gatekeeping: Idalina Conde (2003) "Making distinctions. Conditions for women working in serious music and in the (new) media arts in Portugal" (with Teresa Martinho and João Pinheiro). Available at: http://www.oac.pt/pdfs/CultureGates_Portugal.pdf

¹⁴ To the extent that they inspired lampoons such as that of Yves Michaux (1989) *L'Artiste et les Commissaires: Quatre Essais non pas sur l'Art Contemporain mais sur Ceux qui s'en Occupent*. Nevertheless, as mediators, they are also the authors of ideas and attitudes that become forms, to paraphrase the title of Harald Szeemann's famous exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (Berne, 1969). See an interview in Nathalie Heinich (1995). This became a defensive case for the "era of the commissioners" that imposed itself so much since the 1990s. On the other hand, there are the mediations inherent in sustainability and regulation in artistic spaces, as well other pedagogical areas, with a growing number of activity leaders, trainers, educational service monitors etc specialising in cultural literacy and working with publics.

¹⁵ To quote the words of Erhard Friedberg (1995: 33ff) in a substantial essay on power.

¹⁶ Which the history of art records, from the most ancient to the contemporary, with many episodes of loyalty, instrumentalisation and ambivalence. Some references and examples in Conde (2009a). Thus, it is a history of stories, too, for which micro-history is heuristic, according to Carlo Ginzburg (1991)'s perspective. In art, then, it means rehabilitating the documentary function of the biography, the episode, the intrigue and even the forgotten and rejected *petite histoire*, which so often reveal how notable decisions in art history and the art market depend on the interpersonalism and "passions" of this small world.

artists at the *Documenta*, as we will see below with another example, though he achieved it with an impressive participation in the exhibition.¹⁷

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957), one of China's most prominent artists and an outspoken critic of the communist regime (well-known, meanwhile, for his arrest in 2011), presented *Template* and *Fairytale*, a double project, also, with an objecthood installation and human figuration. *Template* was a large open-air structure composed of shabby wooden Ming and Qing Dynasty doors and window frames salvaged from demolished houses¹⁸. It turned into a ruined sculpture after collapsing during a storm on 20 June 2007. Nevertheless, the piece that assembled "fragments of domestic spaces in a collective monument"¹⁹, apparently as a symbol of "ancestral pride" for a pre-communist era in China, remained on display outside the Aue Pavilion at the *Documenta*, both regaining its original meaning and gaining a new one. As Ai Weiwei declared, it even became more beautiful than before – "it comes from ruins and now it's really a ruin" and therefore "a remix by fate" that, ultimately, offered a metaphor, too, for China's recent history of "disasters and contradictions", as he has already stated.²⁰

¹⁷ For the *Documenta*, see <http://archiv.documenta12.de/geschichte010.html?&L=1>; for a photo tour, see <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/documenta/eng/2007/tour/index.htm>; "The alchemy of curating" by Jerry Saltz in: <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/saltz/saltz7-17-07.asp>

¹⁸ "In the Shanxi province in northern China, a region where entire towns have been cleared away for redevelopment": Tesar Freeman, "Ai Weiwei's Fairytale, the dérive and glocalism in Kassel Germany" at <http://academic.reed.edu/art/courses/art301/papers/kassel.pdf>. Ai Weiwei is a well-documented artist and available online. For a rapid view of his work, see: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturepicturegalleries/8426543/Ai-Weiwei-a-selection-of-work-by-the-Chinese-artist-and-political-activist.html>

¹⁹ Idem, *ibidem*

²⁰ Idem, *ibidem*, and the artist's words about *Template* in an interview: "It is really made for indoors; it was not prepared for the German weather and wind, so it collapsed after six days of showing there. I was a little surprised, but not very surprised, because I knew it was not strong. When I saw how the site had collapsed – not totally, it has turned into some other shape – I thought it is now really like a ruin. I was quite impressed. It comes from ruins and now it's really a ruin." And, with regard to *Template*, if it is a monument to the Chinese past, he also rejects nostalgia: "I don't believe there is anything we make that can permanently stay as it is. I think we are ready to create a new world – after all, it's not going to be a new world, it's still going to be an old world. Now of course, China makes a lot of mistakes. It is devastating, suicidal – with injustice, corruption, criminality, but we have to go through it. No one can save us." In "Ruined Sculpture, 1,001 Chinese: Ai Weiwei Steals German Show" available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a8FBBN6tb3z4&refer=home>

IMAGES 1. *Template* by Ai Weiwei at Documenta 12, 2007²¹



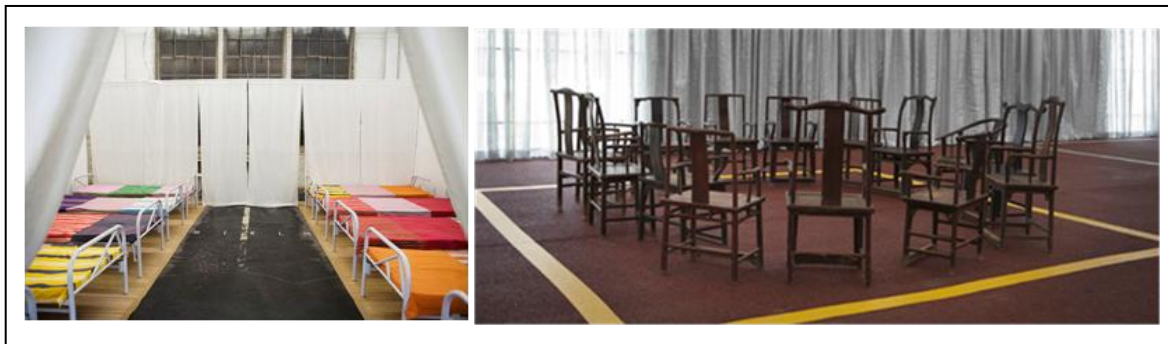
Conde and Ribeiro © 2007

If China was well represented in this way, what shall we say then for its presence in the form of the other two-sided project: the unique *Fairytale* that actually transcended the patterns of current practices of “relational aesthetics” (Bourriaud, 1998; Ardenne, 2002), since this

²¹ The two first pictures are available from several sources. For instance, these were taken from: <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/documenta/eng/2007/tour/ae-pavillon/img-19.htm>; <http://blogs.arte.tv/Documenta12/frontUser.do?method=getHomePage> <http://ckkoeln.blogspot.com/2007/09/documenta-xii-ai-weiwei.html>. More images at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14971397,00.html>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/architektur/528189498/>

unique (and expensive²²) Ai Weiwei project invited 1001 Chinese citizens, “such as workers, students, a rock’n’roll band, etc.” to visit the Documenta city Kassel in five stages (200 people at a time, given the complexity of the logistics), from 12 June to 14 July 2007. Quoting from the catalogue, “they come from different regions of China, were chosen from thousands of applicants, have never been in a foreign country, and most do not speak a foreign language.” (VV.AA., 2007: 208) ²³ In addition, while the Chinese merged with the waves of visitors (namely, the very artistic and international participants in the *Documenta*), the exhibition was also populated, through several pavilions, with 1001 wooden chairs, again from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), “that Ai, an antique aficionado, has collected and had restored.”

IMAGES 2A. *Fairytale* by Ai Weiwei at *Documenta 12*, 2007



Finally, such a “fantastic undertaking” bore the title *Fairytale* in homage to the Brothers Grimm, who wrote most of their fairy tales in Kassel between 1812 and 1815. But apart from the local reference – and it was indeed a “sophisticated idea” to create a powerful figuration, both human and symbolical, for the East in the West – *Fairytale* intended to be “a source of inspiration in its pedagogical function as a transmitter of values and foreign worlds.” As the artist himself lived in a foreign country, he “knows about the potential for change in a new place

22 “Fairytale’ is the most expensive exhibit in this year’s Documenta, costing a whopping €3.1 million (\$4.14 million).” In: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/0,1518,488259,00.html>. Two Swiss organizations, the Leister Foundation and the Erlenneyer Foundation, provided the funding . “With a team of about 40, Ai organized passports and visas for the visitors as well as arranging accommodation in an old factory in Kassel. ‘In China, getting a passport is a big thing,” he explains. Applicants must return to the authorities in their province of birth no matter where they now live, and may be asked for document after document, ‘so you have to keep going back,’ Ai says. Conditions for the participants are that they chronicle their trip and stay in Kassel, a small, industrial town. Each has a USB memory stick strapped to the wrist to store text and photos” (...) “Ai chose the visitors from among 3,000 who replied to an advertisement on his personal Web log. Few have previously traveled abroad and most don’t speak a foreign language. They include farmers from remote villages, students from Beijing, policemen, teachers and artists.” (...) “Ai says the project will spawn at least one book and several documentaries. *Fairytale*’ has its roots in Ai’s own youth in communist China, where there was little scope for travel and limited creative freedom. His father, a poet, was exiled. Ai got a rare chance to study in New York in the early 1980s and spent 12 years in the U.S., returning to Beijing in 1993.” In: “Ruined Sculpture, 1,001 Chinese: Ai Weiwei Steals German Show” in: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a8FBBN6tb3z4&refer=home>

²³ “Those who came were accommodated on the grounds of the former tent factory Gottschalk & Co, which was adapted for the purpose.” See, also, a summary of the project in Tesar Freeman, “Ai Weiwei’s Fairytale, the *dérivé* and glocalism in Kassel Germany” at <http://academic.reed.edu/art/courses/art301/papers/kassel.pdf>.

and the strength of personal experience. (...) Against the backdrop of a totalitarian past and massive social changes China is particularly in need of an exchange not based on institutions but rather on the individual” (VV.AA., 2007: 208).²⁴ The following images give a certain record of this “social sculpture” which was certainly a personal adventure for many of its participants, with the trip to Kassel, though it had broader and more conceptual and political connotations for its hosts, Ai Weiwei and *Documenta*:²⁵

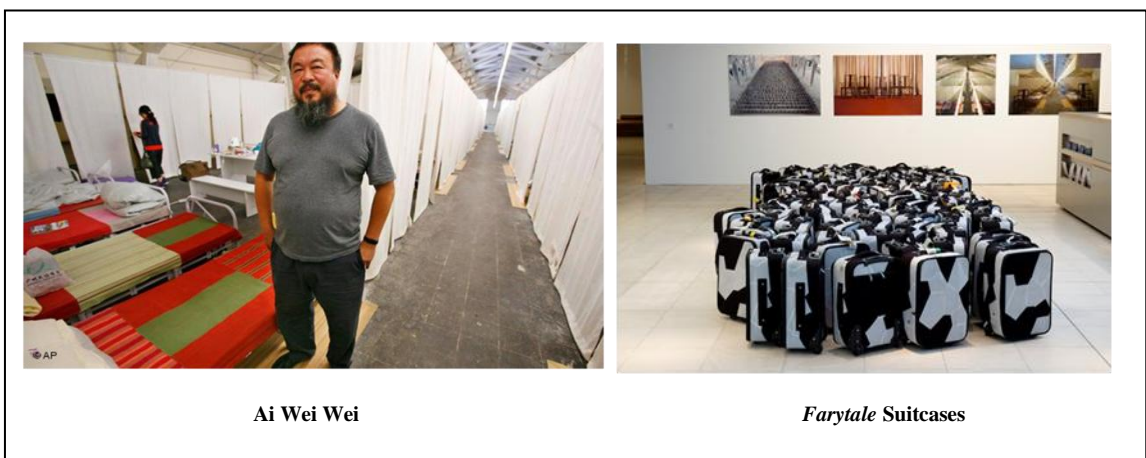
**IMAGES 2B. *Fairytale* by Ai Weiwei at *Documenta 12*, 2007
1001 Chinese visitors, 1001 Qing Dynasty wooden chairs**



“Each participant in *Fairytale* was provided with a complete travel set designed by Ai Weiwei, that included clothing, luggage and bedding. Participants ranged in age from 2 to 70 and came from diverse professional and geographic locations throughout China.” Photo Courtesy of Ai Weiwei

²⁴ From 1981 to 1993, he lived in the United States and studied at Parsons School of Design and the Art Students League of New York.

²⁵ The following images and remarks in: <http://archiv.documenta12.de/ausstellung.html?&L=1>; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/ai-wei-wei/slideshow-ai-weiwei-art/#ixzz1j4FGFx9j>; <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14970341,00.html> ; http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2007-05/29/content_882137.htm; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/ai-wei-wei/slideshow-ai-weiwei-art/#ixzz1j4DBVql4>; <http://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/fotostrecke-22365.html>





**IMAGES 2C. *Fairytale* by Ai Weiwei at *Documenta 12*, 2007²⁶
1001 Chinese visitors, 1001 Qing Dynasty wooden chairs**

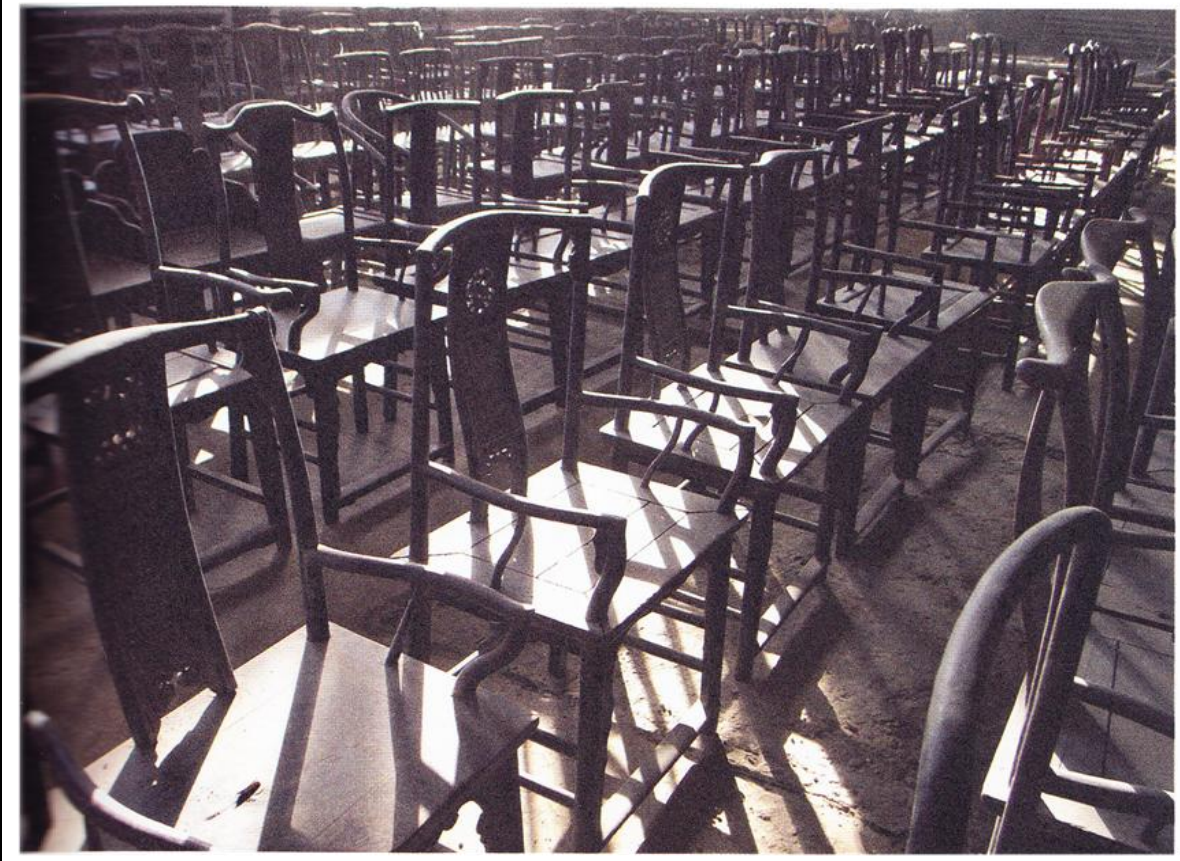


²⁶Images from: <http://academic.reed.edu/art/courses/art301/papers/kassel.pdf>;
<http://blogs.artetv.com/documenta12/frontUser.do?method=getPost&postId=14109&blogName=Documenta12>;
<http://jusdeananas.wordpress.com/2011/02/05/review-collectors-stage-and-ai-weiwei-fairytale/>
See also a slide show in "The end of Fairytale" at <http://archiv.documenta12.de/index.php?id=987&L=1>

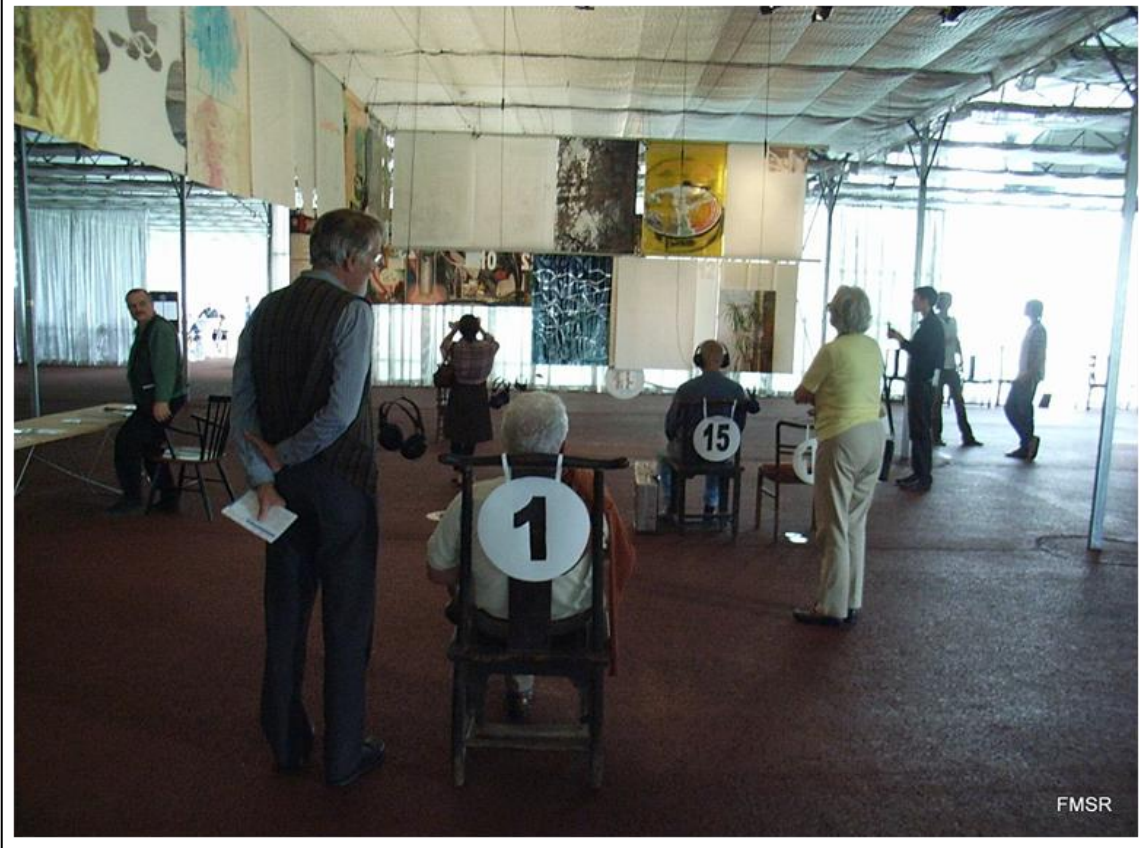
**IMAGES 2D. *Fairytale* by Ai Weiwei at *Documenta 12*, 2007
1001 Chinese visitors, 1001 Qing Dynasty wooden chairs**



“One thousand and one antique Chinese chairs for the 1,001 Chinese visitors Ai Weiwei brought to Kassel, Germany, for *Documenta 12* (2007) as part of his project, *Fairytale*”. Photo courtesy of Ai Weiwei



IMAGES 2E. *Fairytale* by Ai Weiwei at *Documenta 12*, 2007²⁷
1001 Chinese visitors, 1001 Qing Dynasty wooden chairs



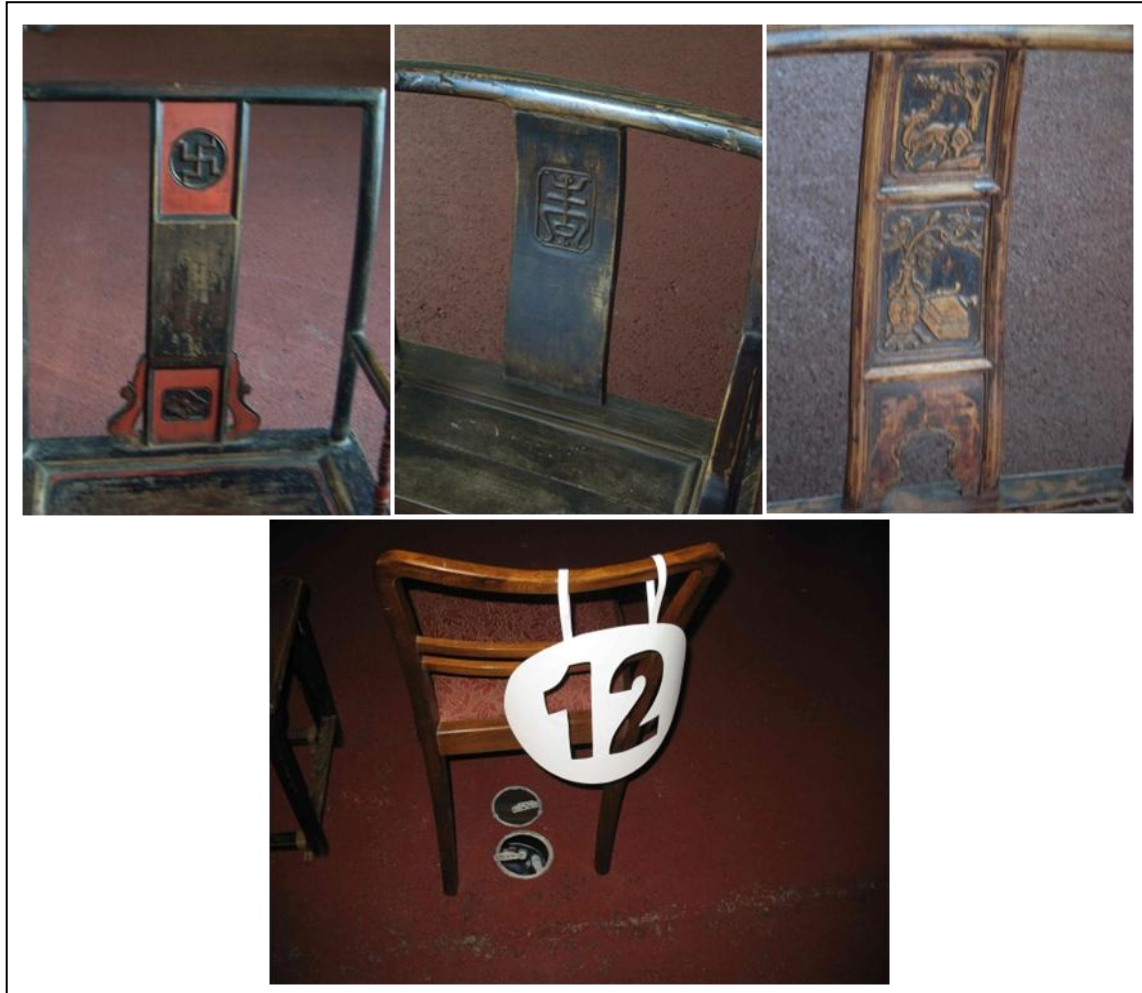
²⁷ First picture from: <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/documenta/eng/2007/tour/aue-pavillon/img-04.htm>.
Second picture: Conde and Ribeiro@2007

IMAGES 2F. *Fairytale* by Ai Weiwei at *Documenta 12*, 2007
1001 Chinese visitors, 1001 Qing Dynasty wooden chairs



Conde and Ribeiro© 2007

IMAGES 2G. *Fairytale* by Ai Weiwei at *Documenta 12*, 2007²⁸
1001 Chinese visitors, 1001 Qing Dynasty wooden chairs



Actually, as I said before, Weiwei was not alone in the purpose to bring the East to the West: this appeared, for instance, in another open-air installation with its postcolonial metaphor, equally interesting but less spectacular. The Thai artist Sakarin Krue-On (b. 1965) used traditional methods to plant a large rice field beside Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, an 18th-century castle. The project, entitled *Terraced Rice Field* and conceived to bring “a little of the East to Europe”, was the artist’s boldest project hitherto. He himself was surprised at its approval: “When I proposed the project to *Documenta*’s curator, Ruth Noack, I never thought it would be approved – it’s the craziest project I’ve ever done.”²⁹ Nevertheless, as the text of the catalogue

²⁸ Last picture from: <http://blogs.artetv.com/documenta12/frontUser.do?method=getHomePage>

²⁹ In http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/07/22/lifestyle/lifestyle_30041862.php

seems to acknowledge, the rice field had, indeed, the merit of challenging – politicising and destabilising – our perceptions with its powerful and puzzling image: East and West, field and park (a plot of agricultural land stolen from the immense *Bergpark* surrounding the castle) and, also, history “rewritten” by the present (VV.AA., 2007: 274). That is, the whole of a colonial past and, by extension, the multifarious domination of the West, which thus seemed subverted by this assault from the East. And in a key place for our times: Kassel.

For its part, *Terraced Rice Field* seemed an opportune image for a reflection on art and power, in two senses. In the first place, as a double metaphor of contrasts, not only between different powers of civilisations but also between the lordly impressiveness of the castle and the plebeian rusticity of the rice field – the power and the people. Secondly, for including within itself different powers of the artistic space: first of all, the essential founding power of the artist’s vision, but also the decision-making power of the curatorship to welcome it.

The incidents themselves that befell the project shed light on the importance of ideas beyond their circumstances, as the project was, we may say, a certain failure. Although it was announced as “the first rice field in the open air, the first time in Germany” (whose climate precludes this kind of agricultural production) and the field was planted extremely carefully by specialists (with peasants?) brought from home by the artist, the terrain was too permeable and did not retain the water. As a result, the field failed to grow as expected for the opening of *Documenta*. Ultimately, it was neither grandiose nor insignificant. And it was smaller, not the 7000m² that the artist planned in the project, but only 3200m². Yet, though it was even hardly recognizable as a rice field in August 2007 when I visited Kassel, in that plot of land turned into terraces, with stunted green tufts and insistent irrigation tubes, a dense complexity of feelings survived. The giantism of the idea – to bring the East to the West – and the cryptic intertextuality that defines many artworks by internal citations.

“The rice at the castle gate”, *The Nation*, ‘*Bangkok’s Independent Newspaper*’, 22 July 2007. “The first Thai to participate in *Documenta* consulted an archaeologist, a geologist, an agriculturist and an engineer and negotiated with the staff of the public park on the castle grounds before sowing the first actual seeds for his *Terraced Rice Fields Art Project*.” Also: <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/documenta/eng/2007/tour/wilhelmshoehe/img-03.htm>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mediachef/751428395/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/picme/2248418324/>; http://www.wired.com/underwire/2007/05/when_rice_grows/; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1Qy1Oel4lo>

IMAGES 3. Terraced Rice Field by Sakarin Krue-On at Documenta 12, 2007

SAKARIN KRUE-ON

Terraced Rice Field Art Project Kassel, 2007
Terrassierter Reisanbau | terrace rice
farming activity; ca. | approx. 3200m²

Mit Unterstützung von | with the support of
the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture,
Ministry of Culture, Thailand

cat. S. | p. 274



Conde and Ribeiro © 2007

In fact, the imagined 7000m² of the original project were to pay homage to Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), one of the most charismatic figures of the post-war avant-gardes and a key reference in *Documenta*. More specifically, homage to the 7000 oak trees that began to be planted in Kassel thanks to Beuys' project for *Documenta 7* in 1982, which was completed 5 years later with the planting of the last tree at the beginning of *Documenta 8* in 1987. This was the first stage in the intervention that Beuys promoted in Kassel for local urban renewal, on which, however, he wanted to impress a greater mission as a "social sculpture" for ecological awareness and change – with other plantings throughout the world.³⁰ Especially in New York City, where the project was continued by the Dia Art Foundation in 1988 and 1996, with more kinds of trees besides the oaks³¹, each paired with a basalt stone column, following Joseph Beuys' original idea.

For the beginning of his *7000 Eichen - Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung / 7000 Oaks - City Forestation instead of City Administration*, Beuys piled up 7000 basalt blocks in Friedrichsplatz in Kassel, in front of the Museum Fridericianum, corresponding to the 7000 trees to be planted in the urban area of Kassel. The mound of blocks, each one to be placed beside one of the trees, shrank at the speed of the tree-planting, which was completed five years later. The oaks and the basalt columns then composed a piece of "environmental art" with organic materials (in contrast to the urban landscape) as the basalt is a volcanic rock, though it looks like ordinary rock.³²

³⁰ For more information on the project, with statements by de Beuys, see the Dia Art Foundation site: <http://www.diaart.org/sites/page/51/1364> ; <http://www.diaart.org/sites/page/51/1295> . More pictures, references and extensions relating to the project at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Beuys ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/7000_Oaks ; <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/cookebeuys.pdf> ; <http://www.walkerart.org/archive/9/A143E5F68AFD50EC6177.htm> ; "Joseph Beuys 7000 Oaks Project Continuation at Hartwick College" in http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_j9S4b41y4

³¹ "Bradford Pear, Chinese Elm, Elm, Gingko, Honey Locust, Linden Oak, Pin Oak and Sycamore", as we may read on the inauguration plaque: it helps New Yorkers identify the origin of the trees with "the mysterious Stonehenge on West 22nd Street" – <http://www.scoutingny.com/?p=1358>

³² <http://jessbens.wordpress.com/2011/06/16/joseph-beuys-700-oaks-land-art-meets-urban-renewal/>

**IMAGES 4. 7000 Eichen - Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung /
7000 Oaks - City Forestation instead of City Administration by Joseph Beuys,
begun for Documenta 7, 1982³³**



First picture: Joseph Beuys planting the first of the 7000 oaks in front of the Fridericianum in Kassel for the VII *Documenta*. In the second and third pictures: some of the 7000 Oaks planted between 1982 and 1987. Fourth picture: Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oaks*. West 22nd Street between 10th and 11th Avenues in New York City³⁴

³³ Pictures from: <http://d13.documenta.de/panorama/#archive/d7-1982/>
<http://0100101110101101.org/home/reenactments/performance-beuys.html>

Returning to the *Terraced Rice Field* it is, then, its inter- and intra-textuality, remissions both “within” the history of *Documenta* and “outwards” (to our global and post-colonial world, now capable of existing without East and West, besides synchronic, and compacted in its past and present times) that bears witness to the conceptual value of the idea and the transfiguring power of the real. The lawns of an imperial garden in Germany literally and symbolically transformed into a Thai rice field by the power of thought. But if Sarakin Krue-On was in the company of Ai Weiwei in the purpose of bringing the East into the West, he was, similarly, not alone when he thought of Beuys, because, with the same inter- and intra-textual logic that weaves a web between different artistic ideas, the Croatian artist Sanja Ivekovic (b. 1949) also dug up Friedrichsplatz, where Beuys planted his first oak and piled up the basalt columns. This time, not to sow rice but his, a different, idea: *Mohnfeld/Poppy Field*. A “red square” in front of the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, as a sea of poppies, in which the seeds consisted of 90% red poppies and 10% opium poppies; a “transitory performance by nature” with a strong poetic and, again, political metaphor in various senses, placed in a historical terrain in Kassel that, besides the reference to Joseph Beuys, is “saturated with the ambivalence of the Enlightenment”. Indeed, “where the enlightened bourgeoisie of the Hessian royal city once strolled, where troops paraded during the German Empire and under the Nazi dictatorship, where the books were burned in 1933.” (VV.AA., 2007: 260).

So the poppy – which “has lost all metaphorical innocence, in German at the latest (*sic*) with Paul Celan’s volume of poetry *Poppies and Remembrance*”; a flower of dangerous beauty “mythologized in antiquity as the flower of sleep, death and forgetting, glorified in romanticism, when heroin was still called Laudanum”³⁵ – was there to recall that art does not forget history. In parallel, that is, with its direct association by the artist with the opium farming economy, as in Afghanistan, which became the producer of 92% of the world’s opium supply after the American-led war against the Taliban regime, “along with a drug war from which many profit but the opium farmers themselves benefit least” – in particular, the Afghan women, victims to whom Sanja Ivekovic addressed her *Mohnfeld/Poppy Field*. In addition, “twice a day revolutionary songs sound out, sung by Afghan women who struggle against fundamentalist terror and the self-righteousness of the Allies in their own country – from the loud-speakers that often spread opium for the masses”(VV. AA., 2007: 260).³⁶

³⁴ The copyright for the first two photographs is held by Dieter Schwerdtle Fotografie; pictures available at <http://www.artsandecology.org.uk/magazine/artworks/project-6>. The third photograph is from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Beuys. The fourth photograph belongs to Ken Goebel, available at <http://www.diaart.org/sites/main/51>; http://welt-der-form.net/Rekorde/60-Beuys-1982-7000_Eichen.html

³⁵ (continuing) “... and De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* caused a great public furor,”; “...[*the poppy*,] a symbol for fallen soldiers in many English-speaking countries.” (VV. AA., 2007: 260).

³⁶ Other remarks from this presentation: “By sowing seeds of the opium poppy (the seeds consist of 90% ‘red poppies’ and 10% ‘opium poppies’), Iveković contextualizes the issue of opium poppy cultivation for drug purposes. Today, six years after the ‘democratic’ government has been installed by the USA, Afghanistan has become the producer of 92% of the world’s opium supply. Afghan women are often direct victims of atrocities resulting from the illicit drug trade. As in many other of her public art works, Sanja Iveković has been collaborating here with

It was, then, with such symbolic multi-layering that Friedrichsplatz appeared to the visitors at *Documenta 12* as a “deceptively beautiful” scene, a “false idyll”, a political “painting of exploitation and resistance” with a statement in defence of human rights. As Sanja Ivekovic said, with the utopian or visionary conviction that disarms us when artists declare the *impossible*: “Since red is slowly taking over Friedrichsplatz it gives me some hope that it will turn into a ‘red square’ (and maybe in the future Friedrichsplatz will be Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz!) ‘Now it’s time for women’s voices to be heard.’”³⁷

feminist/activist organizations - in this case with Lezbor from Zagreb, Croatia, and with RAWA, The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. Therefore, the voices of Afghan and Croatian women’s choirs singing revolutionary songs, collected by the artist, were heard at Friedrichsplatz (via loudspeakers) twice a day. By occupying the public space, Sanja Iveković thematizes the human rights’ component of the subject. The project not only functions as a criticism of the violation of women’s rights, Ivekovic and her collaborators also radically critique the ‘democratic’ societies they live in. The poppy field in front of the Fridericianum provides both a projection surface and a background against which the multiple implications, images and references can be investigated.”

at http://www.tba21.org/program/commissions/27/page_2?category=commissions

³⁷ At: <http://www.documenta11.de/index.php?id=1049&L=1>

IMAGES 5A. *Mohnfeld/Poppy Field* by Sanja Iveković at *Documenta 12, 2007*³⁸



³⁸ First picture: “A field of red poppies planted by Sanja Iveković (Croatia) was supposed to bloom on Friedrichsplatz. But while poppies were long since in full bloom on fields all around Kassel, only weeds sprouted on this square when documenta 12 was opened. Photo: Haupt & Binder” in: <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/documenta/eng/2007/tour/fridericianum/img-01.htm>.
Second picture from: <http://www.tba21.org/program/commissions/27?category=commissions>. Also in <http://www.documenta11.de/index.php?id=1049&L=1>.

IMAGES 5B. *Mohnfeld/Poppy Field* by Sanja Iveković at Documenta 12, 2007³⁹



³⁹ Pictures from: <http://www.digitalmediatree.com/sallymckay/comment/42042/>

IMAGES 5C. *Mohnfeld/Poppy Field* by Sanja Iveković at *Documenta 12*, 2007⁴⁰



Could the less informed visitor understand all this polysemic radiation of meanings – precise and explosive – which Sanja Iveković desired with her both real and metaphorical poppies? Certainly not, whether we consider those who saw them with the basic perception of an enchanted garden blooming unexpectedly in Friedrichsplatz or even those who immediately constructed their perception with a more personally interpretative or poetic drift. Which is normal, moreover, for the public expecting “open artworks”. Thus, more or less forewarned

⁴⁰Pictures from: <http://theartblog.org/2007/08/report-from-documenta-12-an-overview/> ; <http://www.tba21.org/program/commissions/27?category=commissions> ; and Conde and Ribeiro @ 2007.

about artists' semiotic traps and therefore anticipating that poppies there, at that time, "sown" by an artist, had of course to mean something else, as each viewer liked. In effect, these situations of under- and over-comprehension are two fairly common limits for the adventures of the meaning with which the public confronts artworks that are cryptic or more linearly suggestive of emotions and discourses.

In the aspiration, however, to understand them (as we should) according to the original signification with which they were thought out, the third, more developed track of a reception that is informed and restores the author's intentions is required and exists. This was what I needed after, first of all, *looking* at the poppies, which were already dying when I visited Kassel, and listening to the women's songs without knowing that they were Afghan: to seek the key to their code in the passage in the catalogue presenting the artwork. Then, in order to go back to the *Mohnfeld/Poppy Field* and be able to *see it* with other ideas, constructed by the artistic idea. That is, by the intricate and intertextual web of a founding idea that, here, transfigures the poppies in the same way that, literally and symbolically, it had transformed the lawns of an imperial garden in Germany into a Thai rice field by the power of thought. It is the power of artists, which is particularly reflexive nowadays – and an equally fundamental resource for curators, programming and endeavour in contemporary art.

Thus, the idea relativised the failure of Sakarin Krue-On's "real" rice field because it transfers the work of art from the artefact (or results) to the project (and process). An artistic matter since the conceptual *avante-gardes*. And, at the limit, the relativisation of the physical substance of an idea may be such that it permits a very free kind of hermeneutics for these works, speculative digressions and unexpected analogies. That is what happened to me, thinking now of the archaeology – from the Renaissance – of the artistic idea. For we could well apply to the quasi-rice field of 2007 what Francisco da Holanda wrote in 1548 in his treaty *Da Pintura Antiga (On Painting in the Old Style)* about an already intellectual definition of the idea in painting: "...painting, I would say, is a declaration of thought in a visible and contemplative work, and a second form of nature". Further, he did not miss the chance to add an ethical note that has not aged with time: the artist's duty is always to follow and respect his idea.⁴¹

However, when re-reading this 16th century text, we also find the idea inspired by the *divino furore* of the master and model Michelangelo, whom Francisco da Holanda met on a visit to Italy and quotes in some of the dialogues in his treatises. But the idea reaches us, in fact, after all the most secular and post-romantic changes and deflations in its transcendence. So it

⁴¹ More beautiful words: "The idea in painting is an image that should relate the interpretation of the painter with the inner eye in the greatest silence and secrecy. He should imagine and choose the rarest and most excellent that his imagination and prudence can achieve, like an example from a dream, or one seen in the sky or somewhere else, which he should pursue and want to imitate later and display with the work of his hands just as he conceived and saw it within his interpretation. This idea is marvellous in great interpretations and inventions and is sometimes such that there is no hand that does not know he can imitate or match it" (Holanda, [1548] 1984: excerpt from pp. 20-21, 42-46).

becomes a partial analogy since, in the name of more rational and reflexive bases of artistic thinking, that idea has ceased to arise from a higher or marvellous gift, to be limited to a conceptual purpose. And we may retain only this part of Francisco da Holanda.

Modernity has radicalised the de-sentimentalisation and even subjectivation of the idea by processes of intellectualisation and abstraction to the extent that it appears to be blotted out or disavowed in extreme definitions of art. Even though declaring ground zero for the idea and for emotion in their most inexpressive and pragmatic forms would constitute, precisely, a great idea. A “sophisticated” one, as in Andy Warhol’s Pop Art, with its irony towards the “creative”, subjective and rhetorical excess of other artists or, even more, in the example of the composer John Cage (1912-1992), a leading post-war avant-garde figure who, in Woodstock in 1952, presented his work entitled *4’33*: the interval of time during which no sound was produced and only the noises of the environment could be heard.⁴² “No subject, no image, no taste, no object, no beauty, no message, no talent, no technique, no idea, no intention, no art, no feeling...”: this is how he answered the question about his aesthetic principles⁴³, perhaps even radicalising what Marcel Duchamp could say about his ready-mades. Despite all, these were “produced” for the situation of an exhibition, although with another – so revolutionary – idea for art at the beginning of the 20th century.

In postmodern and more recent trends, however, the idea returns to the real with the effect of the ethnographic, sociologising and political “turns” since the 1990s, which made art the stage for the reflexivity of/about our time (Foster, 1996).⁴⁴ From huge installations, as in the example of Kassel, to discrete gestures (symbolically dense), explorations of web art for a “poetic habitability of cyberspace” (Cruz: 2002: 149), or community involvement and intervention promoted by the “relational aesthetic” or “contextual art” (Bourriaud, 1998; Essche, 2007), many images of art operate, then, like a scanner and symbolic transfiguration of the world. That is, portraits of contemporary landscapes – society, individuals, stories and history – which this art can bring in almost all types with realism or fiction. From the clinical to the critical and even the cynical in an art that can be highly abrasive, battling a world also dulled by easy emotions or sentimentality.

The artistic power lies in these acts of art fitting into the world and re-writing or “re-programming” it (Bourriaud, 2000; 2004) with countless apprehensions, configurations and

⁴² “The premiere of the three-movement *4’33*” was given by David Tudor on August 29, 1952, at Woodstock, New York as part of a recital of contemporary piano music. The audience saw him sit at the piano and, to mark the beginning of the piece, close the keyboard lid. Some time later he opened it briefly, to mark the end of the first movement. This process was repeated for the second and third movements” (in *4’33*”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4%E2%80%B233%E2%80%B3>). See, then: “John Cage about silence” in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y&feature=related>; “John Cage - *4’33*” by David Tudor” in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY>; also, among other videocasts, “John Cage: *4’33*” for piano (1952)” in http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN2zcLBr_VM.

⁴³ “Aucun sujet, aucune image, aucun goût, aucune beauté, aucun message, aucun talent, aucune technique, aucune idée, aucune intention, aucun art, aucun sentiment” in Marc Jiménez (2005: 192).

⁴⁴ Changes that I have addressed in Conde (2003a, 2010a, 2010b).

interventions. This means, to quote Marc Jiménez (Jiménez, 2005: 260) on the dispute over contemporary art, which was particularly fierce in France in the 1990s, “If art is a way of making the world, the reciprocal case is true. The world, its tensions, its conflicts and its disturbances burst forth in contemporary art and, in a certain way, ‘make’ it.” What may therefore seem to the eyes of reticent publics and critics to be the “formless magma” of contemporary art – arbitrary, “gaseous” (Michaud, 2003, 1997), heterogeneous and provocative to the limit of using the “insignificant, abject and ignoble” – is often the effect of our own problematic “formless world”. With a rejoinder: “21st century artists refuse to pass on the sweetened and complaisant representation of the real, placed under the sign of Beauty and the Sublime, formerly considered transcendent, timeless and immutable values” (Jiménez, 2005: 267).

The relationship of this art with the publics and public space, arising from the limited circle of peers and the initiated, raises another issue: that of the forms of its reception and of what competence – resources, references – to possess to deal with artworks that, in their codes, are so often deceptive and difficult in the eyes of the less initiated. Well-known forms of misunderstanding in connection with art, which the pedagogical mediations mentioned above seek, precisely, to mitigate, by developing an adjusted visual literacy among the (non-)publics. (Conde, 1987, 1992, 2004).⁴⁵

3. A figurational perspective of power

For some closing remarks we may return to the issue of the reception of art because it may be seen through another prism that is currently no less of a priority and is of interest to our topic: a figurational perspective of power that means sociologically a chessboard of interdependencies among several players. In fact, the reception is not apart but participates here even by the instrumentalisation itself of the publics, be it from the economic point of view (they are valued as resources⁴⁶), or as an entity of legitimation (symbolic as well as tangible) for cultural policy itself and the overseers and institutions. Especially when they tie their support to criteria such as audience size and the social impact or democraticity of cultural and artistic initiatives.

It is therefore one more track to insert in the agendas of art and power, because in these instrumental attitudes, as in other capitalizations of culture and creativity in general⁴⁷, we see a

⁴⁵ See also various studies in Ancel and Pessin (2004).

⁴⁶ Through the returns that they may provide for the sustainability of cultural markets, which exist, moreover, in a sector substantially supported by public and private funding.

⁴⁷ As it is so highly proclaimed today as a resource for development and innovation, among other expectations on the contribution of art and culture to imaginaries, identities, education, social inclusion etc. On this point, see for example

good part of the cross-play of expectations, conditions, influences and dependencies with which artists exercise their activity. They may seem to be the tiny part of a grand game of chess when all the parties in play are brought together, though, ultimately, they are one of its main aspects. A source of raw material circulating there with their ideas. Then, for the artists, the contemporary situation obliges to abandon, too, traditional and bipolar approaches to the protectors and protected. A representation inherited from a system of clients, courtesans and patrons that hypostasises the asymmetry between art and power – the latter associated with the domination of institutional and political systems⁴⁸ while artists may be viewed simply as beneficiaries, dependent or dominated, somewhat separate from the central *enjeu* of their protectors. Understandably, the persistence of this representation is due to the professional dependence of the artists (socio-economic and reputational) on the state and other agents. Nevertheless, even if we take into account this precarious status that may even deteriorate with the current financial crisis⁴⁹, today the relationship between art and power fits into an all-embracing – multilateral and multipolar – scenario.

So, the power game, or rather power games, even on the level of the political, institutional and economic regulation of art and culture that counts on the welfare state, contemporary forms of patronage (by companies and foundations), other agents and a globalised market, have transformed traditional forms of tutelage from a central regulator to a complex chessboard of actors. Alternatively, the notion of governance on various scales, from the local to the global, which combine cultural policy and the state with various partners in the “game”, becomes more relevant. Including, many figures from civil society who are part of the hybrid “third sector” of culture⁵⁰, which is also a zone for the proliferation of new intermediate powers and spheres/logics of political, economic and cultural legitimacy.

The issue of power, or rather powers, is thus presented as a strategic interdependence, including the part in play of the artists’ most symbolic power (basically, that of their ideas) with its relational and pragmatic nature; contingent, constructed, arbitrable. In contrast to that (self-) representation of artists simply as somewhat apart from the central game of their protectors, they know the “palace culture” with their long cohabitation with this tradition of sociability, leisure, business and power. They have experienced it, on the fringe or at the centre, with the various historical (and ideological) figures of the artist as an artisan, professional, courtesan, bohemian, outsider, insider, prophet or celebrity (Heinich, 2005; Conde, 2012). So artists know

three references: VV.AA. (2001, 2006, 2009). Also useful for several surveys is this Council of Europe sponsored database, which is regularly brought up to date: *Cultural Policies in Europe: A Compendium of Basic Facts and Trends* (<http://www.culturalpolicies.net>).

⁴⁸ Which may be hegemonic, though more exceptionally in authoritarian regimes.

⁴⁹ Especially with regard to the welfare state, which aids a large part of the cultural sector; some references to the European situation in Conde (2009b).

⁵⁰ Hybrid, because it is public and private with various institutional rearrangements (associations, NGOs, foundations etc), where ‘mixed economies’ operate with state subsidies, other private funds and resources or capital gains from cultural markets.

or sense how, in the day-to-day life of the “palace”, important decisions for their works and lives are taken. Therefore, they often even transport to their world the conspiratorial and “guilty” image of the power that is breathed at the court – of today and yesterday. Or, the more parochial and clientelist niches, are seen as “mafias”, influence *clusters* on which the blame, or the suspicion, may always be pinned. But the power, bendable in many forms, is not beyond any of the partners in play. It is a relationship to be managed to facilitate the skilful and well-negotiated exchange on which the survival of many artistic ideas depends.

From this perspective, power is like an asymmetrical and negotiated exchange that not only goes against its subordination to a unilinear principle of domination but also formalist or substantivist definitions. As Erhard Friedberg writes in an essay on power, the actor and the system⁵¹, no actors ‘store’ power as a substance or as if it were crystallised in structures. “They exercise it, extracting ever-asymmetrical resources that a context of action put at their disposal; in exercising it they give it its reality and effectiveness and only in this way do they express this asymmetry of resources in social action. As with love and trust, power is inseparable from the relationship through which it is exercised and which links actual people to each other, around specific objects. For this reason, it seems that power can only be intransitive.” In other words, it does not circulate and is not transacted like a good or an attribute, beyond the individuals implicated in this relationship in which it is guided (hence, instrumental) by aims, projects and objectives, and is cooperative. That is, with the possibility but not the inevitability of conflict in the inter/dependence that shows “the at least bilateral and most often multilateral nature of power” (Friedberg, 1995: 116, 118).

In recognition of the involvement and “political rationality” in the manoeuvres of all actors in a system, the words of Friedberg de-demonise the perception of power as “an abnormal, pathological or unwholesome phenomenon” (Friedberg, 1995: 118), when it expresses a dimension that is intrinsic to human relations. Furthermore, a relational conceptualisation “requires precisely personalising the relationship and retracing the set of mediations that the exercise of power has suffered in the mesh of a chain of relations (hierarchical, for example)” (Friedberg, 1995:117). Hence, a perspective rejects reifications of power as apparently placed in certain figures or institutions. To this extent, it is a conceptualisation that is necessary for art and power(s), if we consider them in their combination with crucial mediations in the processes of gatekeeping and strategic games, as well as other relationship types, both within artistic spaces and in the interfaces with the political sphere, publics, the market in general and other global environments.

⁵¹ “Power can and should be defined as the ability of an actor to structure more or less durable exchange processes in his or her favour, exploiting the constraints and opportunities in the situation to impose the terms of exchange that promote his or her interests. It is a negotiated exchange of behaviours, structured in such a way that all participants derive something from it, simultaneously allowing one (or some) of them to derive more than the others” (Friedberg, 1995: 120).

Finally, what Friedberg states is close to the figurational perspective of Norbert Elias' sociology that I indeed adopt here, retrieving his key notion of figuration, which is based on interdependencies with a "flexible lattice-work of tensions" due to an "elastic balance of power".⁵² In other words, changes in the "power ratio" of every member that affect the whole and its flow or process in all kinds of formations, groupings and interaction, from the largest to the micro levels of players in a game. And power is a crucial dimension in figurations, a multidimensional, relational, asymmetric and metamorphic concept that can have various scales and referents, be it ourselves as individuals involved in society from the wide perspective, or some of its spaces with specific chessboards and creations. Such as that of art, which I approached here through contemporary figurations, in two senses: figurations of powers as well as symbolic ones, as was seen in a trilogy of examples in the last *Documenta* in Kassel.

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⁵² See Conde (2011), a text that proposes a contemporary dialogue with the legacy of Norbert Elias, with various parts precisely on artistic universes. The author of major works through the 20th century which are still a fundamental point of reference for sociological thinking: *The Civilizing Process* (1939), *The Society of Individuals* (1939), *What is Sociology?* (1970), *The Court Society* (1983), *Involvement and Detachment* (1987) and *Mozart. Portrait of a Genius* (1993), among other titles in a vast bibliography.

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