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Tank Man, Media Memory and Yellow Duck Patrol

Remembering Tiananmen on Social Media

Tiananmen Square is a compressed and repressed space of memories and histories. It's symbolic of different forms of collective forgetting and remembering for the Chinese state and a monumental space of global spectatorship. In 2013, the commemoration of the 24th anniversary of Tiananmen Massacre of 1989 in Sina Weibo (Chinese Version of Twitter) demonstrated how people negotiated state censorship to remember the event. This social media commemoration was both an act of resistance against the state's imposition of an official memory and equally a means to thwart censorship through creative expression, particularly in the form of the image. The commemoration of Tiananmen online nevertheless highlighted the hegemony of media memory where it was entrapped through the iconic image of the Tank Man. The Tank Man as a meme on social media was both a phantom place memory of Tiananmen as well as a cultural artefact re-imagined through the ludic and visual architecture of web 2.0.

Keywords; Tiananmen, News Icon, Memes, Social Media, Digital Commemorations

Introduction

Tiananmen Square became a global focal point in 1989 when demonstrators led by students occupied the Square for seven weeks to demand democratic reforms in China. The demonstrations were organised to coincide with the state visit of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping for an historical summit in May 1989 and to capitalise on global media presence and spectacle. After 30 years of tensed relationship between China and the Soviet Union, the summit signified a major rapprochement between the two countries. The city of Beijing was wired to relay news to the outer world with the establishment of temporary satellite links in view of this unprecedented meeting. As the days passed, the demonstrations grew with people joining in from all walks of life. A military offensive was mounted against the protesters after the government was unsuccessful in persuading the protestors to leave. As the nation's leaders ordered to suppress the demonstrations, the military entered with tanks and assault rifles, killing unarmed protestors in Beijing on 4th June 1989 (Green 2013) . No death toll has ever been officially released but estimates range from several hundreds to a thousand dead, with the exact numbers remaining a mystery till today. The world recorded the events of the Tiananmen Square Massacre or the June 4th Massacre through media broadcasts and iconic images. With the presence of mass media and its global spectacle, the conflict was expanded to include millions of bystanders to 'witness' the event through images and sound bites (Adams 1996, 426).

This paper explores how social media crafted creative ways to commemorate in 2013 the so-called 'pro-democracy protests of Tiananmen' or the Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement of 1989 as dubbed by the West. As the event is taboo and tightly censored in China even today, Tiananmen Square remains contentious both as a physical site and equally in terms of how it is remembered in popular memory and official Chinese history. Tiananmen

Square is a space of many historical and violent events and for the West the events of 1989 provided a lens to re-imagine a conflicted China breaking out of its communist shackles. The turbulent and graphic images of Tiananmen depicted West's orientalist gaze and its enchantment with a world on the cusp of inevitable change brought on by new political and social challenges. The events of 1989 invited a global media spectacle sustained through the West's preoccupation with a 'democratising China'. Adams (1996,426) contends that Americans formed emotional bonds that help account for the long public memory of the June 4th massacre through the relentless media coverage.

The West's intense coverage of the events leading up to the June 4th Massacre have come under intense scholarly scrutiny for collapsing complex events into image narratives and delimiting political analysis into a trope of pro-democracy struggles (See Wasserstrom 1994; Chinoy 1991; Lee et al. 2011; Kluver 2002). One potent and recurrent image which came to symbolise Tiananmen is the iconic Tank Man; an ordinary faceless unarmed man standing in defiance in front of a battalion of armoured tanks. The 'Tank Man' as the press had baptised him became the defining moment of the historic event, catapulting Tiananmen into global popular imagination through time and space. The events of 1989 even today are often recalled and retrieved through the Tank Man, affirming his indexicality to the event. The power to recall an historic event through a single image is undoubtedly problematic. As Barbie Zelizer (2004, 160) points out, images as vehicles of memory function in patterned ways, concretising and externalising events in an accessible and visible fashion that allows us to recognise the tangible proof they offer of the events being represented. However, images aid the recall of events past so effectively that these often become the primary markers of memory itself (Zelizer 2002, 3). The Tank Man in this sense became irreversibly fused with

the events of Tiananmen, providing access and unequivocally constraining its full comprehension through his global mythic status.

For the Chinese citizens Tiananmen represents a multitude of memories; it's a space of both forgetting and remembering, a place of processions and monuments, of popular resistance and official memory, a receptacle for violence and order. Its popular construction and official narration is closely guarded in the Chinese state and in 2013, the commemoration of the Tiananmen Massacre remained highly monitored by Chinese officials in the physical site of the Square and the virtual spaces of the Internet. Nevertheless, the Tank Man remained a dominant and recurrent image on social media platforms in remembering Tiananmen beyond China. This invoking of a collective global memory of the complex events of the Tiananmen Massacre through the Tank Man revealed its predicament as a 'media event' entrapped and collapsed through an image economy and endlessly invoked for the collective remembering of Tiananmen through time and space.

Tiananmen as a Monumental Space

As a monumental space, Tiananmen defies a stable or static meaning over time; nevertheless different meanings can exist for both insiders who share a common past or heritage and those who partake in the consumption of the monument as outsiders. According to Henry Lefebvre (1991, 22) the monumental space, as a manifestation of political power 'constitutes a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one'. The monumental space is a social space imbued with the sacred authority of those in power, particularly through the

performance of rituals and circulation of symbolic meanings. As power and space share a complex incestuous relationship, the reconfiguration of social relations or power then entail the production of new space (Lefebvre 1991, 41). Lefebvre argues, the commemorative process raises issues of territorial domination and the control of memory (Lefebvre 1991, 220). The meaning of monuments, like memory itself, is profoundly unstable. It is hardly surprising that, after each of the world wars of the last century, the dialectic between remembering and forgetting has been a dominant theme in the discourses around commemoration and remembrance (Gillis 1994).

Beyond the notion of monumental space and its possibilities for re-appropriation, philosopher Edward S. Casey, conceived the term 'place memory' to encapsulate how memory can connect spontaneously with place selecting features that favour and parallel its own activities' (1997, 186). Casey's approach lies in phenomenologically linking places to selves and exploring the various dimensions of selfhood, from the bodily to the psychological, institutional, and architectural (Casey 1997, 337). While the ability to construct places of meaning or reinforce their "place memory," has traditionally been the privilege of the dominant group (Halevi and Blumen 2011, 386) the monumental space is amenable to contested readings. Historian Dolores Hayden (1997:36) contends that "place memory is the key' in discerning the power of monumental or historic places as these "trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared parts to outsiders'. Doreen Massey (1995, 186) observes that as places are imagined and visualised both through the past and present, 'places are open to a multiplicity of readings' hence place 'identity is always, and always has been, in process of formation; it is in a sense forever unachieved.'

Tiananmen or the Gate of Heavenly Peace, according to Linda Hershkovitz (1993, 399) is one universally recognized monument which overshadows all others in signifying both the hegemonic power of the Chinese state and the history of struggle against it. Tiananmen is a space of conflicted historical memories for the Chinese nation. It is a space of resistance and a space where memory and remembering is ideologically tampered to adhere to the existing power relations. As Wu Hung (1991, 95) points out the 'square has always been the centre of political tension and attention' where the 'Square partakes of every event and consequently changes its meaning.' For instance, the founding of the People's Republic was proclaimed in the square by Mao Zhedong on October 1st 1949 and its anniversary is still observed there.

Hershkovitz (1993, 395) similarly concedes that the Square's symbolic geography incorporates a tradition of dissent or rebellion through its association with popular movements which have appropriated this space as the geographical focus of oppositional political practice. Much has been written about Tiananmen Square in terms of political history and violent trajectory (See Wu, 1979; Hou, 1984; Dong, 2003) and it is not the intent here to retrace its historical roots. What is clear of Tiananmen Square is that its symbolic geography captures decades of revolution, power struggles, violence and spectacle. The square is an iconography of human struggle, endurance and equally submission and torture. Wu (2001) argues that the contested nature of the square and its political meanings has made it into a 'dangerous space' amenable to multiple and contradictory iterations. The Square often appropriates a symbolic role in the politics of legitimation in Chinese national history over time (Watson 1995) and the demonstrations and the ensuing bloody massacre of 1989 added yet another layer to this violent human history, inscribing new meanings and making it a global stage of spectatorship. As Halevi and Blumen (2011, 386) point out a 'protest demonstration is first and foremost a spatial tactic because it externalises resistance by

removing it from the private sphere and placing it in the public arena'. This leap, they point out, is evident with certain 'monumental spaces where such spaces eventually become identified permanently as sites of protest; the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Bastille in Paris, the Berlin Wall, and Tiananmen Square in Beijing are some of the more notable examples' (2011, 386). Protests at these sites then tap into the pasts of these places, making use of its known place memory.

As Wu (2001) observes Tiananmen as a monumental space is a dangerous one where symbolic power can be appropriated by both the powerful and disenfranchised, and is amenable to multiple readings which are dialectical and contradictory. Dissident groups often make conscious and unconscious use of a specific place's past. The production of the monumental space is problematic, given to popular readings and often the target of dissident groups, civil society and sub-cultures where enforced official memory making can be thwarted. Space and place as cultural artefacts can be re-appropriated to absorb new symbolic meanings. Hershkovitz in theorising the dissident space of Tiananmen draws on De Certeau's (1984) 'space of the other' to articulate how new political meanings can be crafted and implicated in the production of space. Those contesting the powers have to seek alternatives, which are mostly located in the metaphorical sphere. Since they lack the formal power required to produce their own places of meaning, they often manipulate existing ones. The media similarly relies on the metaphorical sphere to produce counter sites and to contest existing power arrangement.

Tiananmen Massacre as a Media(ted) Image

In terms of our modern global mediated memory, the Tiananmen Massacre which occurred on the 4th of June 1989 is an epochal moment of resistance captured through the media lens and commemorated through global spectatorship. The student led movement began in mid-April and ended soon after the crackdown on June 4. Despite being short lived, the event captured global attention and took centre stage in print and broadcast, filling these with evocative and iconic images of protest, hunger strikes, tanks and symbols of resistance including the ‘Goddess of Democracy’. Kluver (2002, 507) contends that the creation of ‘a serialized dramatic narrative had powerful resonance within the US political consciousness’ and assumed the status of a ‘news icon’ (Lee et al. 2011). Chinoy (1999) similarly concedes that Tiananmen and the events of 1989 is still the defining moment in how the West perceives contemporary China.

As mentioned earlier, a photograph of a ‘young man in a white shirt standing motionless before a row of slowly moving tanks’ (Wu 1991: 84) came to personify the event, appearing on the cover of Time magazine on 19th June 1989. Dubbed as the Tank Man photo, the original image was taken by Associated Press photographer Jeff Widener. Variations of the Tank Man have also been shot by other photographers elongating the visual myth of the unknown rebel. As an iconic media image endlessly circulated in global media platforms, it encapsulated a moment of global spectacle and enthrallment with a ‘modernising’ China. Popular news images play a significant role in producing place memory and representing events. In the process they become iconic and recontextualised in popular culture. The symbolic value of such images is problematic, for it can reinsert place while disembedding it and relocating it in popular culture in mythic ways. These mythic images can embody the global imagination of an event or place while obfuscating the history of a place. The image

holds the empty power of place while dislocating these in media portrayals to be re-appropriated as symbolic images which can transcend both space and time.

Edward Casey (2004, 20) contends that ‘sometimes a single photograph itself becomes an icon of public memory; what began as a record of a transient moment gains its own permanence in the annals of public memory’. Such an image becomes understood and interpreted straight away without hesitation, in its basic signification – ‘a victim of this disaster’ (Casey 2004, 20). Previous research has revealed that associating images with written material aids the acquisition of information, affects the selective exposure behaviour of audiences, even influencing their attitudes towards social issues (See Sacchi et al. 2007; Knobloch et al. 2003; Zillmann et al. 2001; Zillmann et al. 1999). Photographs can be important as retrieval cues for the recollection of past events and studies have showed that reviewing photos increases the likelihood of remembering details from previously presented material, and in certain conditions it leads to the creation of false memories (See Schacter et al. 1997; Sacchi et al. 2007).

The Tank Man is an accidental media production which acquired a cult status among a global audience. Hinging on the fascination with the events of 1989 and the monumental space of Tiananmen, he became an enigmatic mythic figure synonymous with the historic event in terms of global recall. Jeff Widener (cf. Calouro 2013) recounts the unplanned fortuitous occurrence of the Tank Man;

‘Basically it’s a lucky shot from being in the wrong place at the right time. After sneaking into the Beijing Hotel with the help of an American college student named Kirk Martsen, I managed to get one fairly sharp frame of Tank Man from the 5th floor balcony of the Beijing

Hotel with an 800mm focal length lens. I had run out of film and Martsen managed to find a single roll of 100 ASA from a tourist. It was a miracle that the picture came out at all. It wasn't tack sharp but good enough to front almost every newspaper in the world the next day. I never dreamed the image would turn into a cult thing.'

The Tank Man had entered the annals of history capitalising on the media spectacle and its prowess as a myth making space, (Ibrahim, 2007) scripting him as an unfinished narrative and an enigmatic entity constantly circulated to signify the event. Time Magazine in its devotion to the Tank Man named him one of the most important people of the century. Pico Iyer's tenth year commemoration of event and tribute to the unknown but universally renowned Tank Man appearing in Time Magazine in 1998 reiterated his global status as an iconic image;

'Almost nobody knew his name. Nobody outside his immediate neighborhood had read his words or heard him speak. Nobody knows what happened to him even one hour after his moment in the world's living rooms. But the man who stood before a column of tanks near Tiananmen Square--June 5, 1989--may have impressed his image on the global memory more vividly, more intimately than even Sun Yat-sen did. Almost certainly he was seen in his moment of self-transcendence by more people than ever laid eyes on Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein and James Joyce combined.' (Pico Iyer, 1998).

Iyer (1998) refers to Daniel Boorstein's book *Image* which locates this phenomenon as a 'Graphic Revolution' where ideals are reduced to the level of images and where technology appropriates the power to dehumanize and demystify. The lone man in front of tanks is an image that transcends the monumental space of Tiananmen reifying him as a cultural symbol of resistance endlessly circulated and consumed without context yet a mnemonic memory of Western media in accessing China.

The Tiananmen Massacre of 1989 imagined through the media archives of images celebrates the role of visual culture in crafting the monumental space. With the advent of photography, print and broadcast media as well as film, these have become important elements in recording and constructing history. The image whether static or in a moving format is a problematic device in recording history and memory. However, modern memory making has accorded media a large role and in tandem image and screen cultures are integral to this (Sturken 1996). Media's role in capturing events and producing memory allows it to conjoin history and popular culture in complex ways. In contemporary consciousness memory is often crafted through media images and equally through iconic news events such as Tiananmen.

Like other iconic news events, the social and economic reform movement in Tiananmen was televised to the world. Lee et al. (2011, 336) argue that for 'elite Western media the event was symbolic as it enabled them to make sense of subsequent events inside and out of China'. According to them, the Western media 'extracted and abstracted Tiananmen from its original context to symbolise complex, contradictory, and generalised layers of meanings about the country' (Lee et al. 2011, 336). Lee et al.'s (2011) criticism of media in shaping and in some ways delimiting an event through media constructions emerges through their discussion of the 'news icon'. In pointing out the problematics of iconic news production they invariably invoke the constraints of memory making in modernity, where the persistence of journalistic accounts condense complex events and at times reduces them to a single image which evokes strong emotions. This collapsing of complex events into media imagery illuminates the dominance of certain cultural values and media memory which underpin these. The symbolic role of the dominant image is used to define an event. Equally, it can be employed to make sense of other events. The potency of the image lies in its ability to evoke affect among audiences who have consumed the image and retain it as an important part of their memory of

an event or its depiction. However, it has been equally critiqued for perpetuating dominant ideologies reinforcing the problematics of recording history through the vantage point of media, and in some ways reifying certain events through images where these can be trapped and anchored in them, thus obliterating what came before or muting what may come after.

News icons and dominant media memory can become our collective memory in recalling place, exhibiting a significant degree of stability (Schudson 1992; Edy 2006). Symbols and narratives that circulate in society become a product of memory and provide a mechanism to record and disseminate them (Olick 1999: 335). As Olick (2010) contends, in this context collective memory can be best understood as a sensitising umbrella concept referring to a wide variety of specific mnemonic products and practices. Media images as cultural artefacts can use history “to delimit an era, as a yardstick, for analogies, and for the shorthand explanations or lessons it can provide” (Lang and Lang 1989, 127). Paul Adams argues that ‘telecommunications don’t only rearrange information and ideas but can reconfigure the balance of power in social struggles; it can centralise power but also subvert dominant politics’ (1996, 419).

Dayan and Katz’s (1992) notion of a media event leveraged on how media exploited live broadcasting to assert, celebrate and reproduce social systems and ideologies. Lang and Lang (1984) similarly argued that media events become markers of social and political reality. Tiananmen is undoubtedly a media event in as much as there is a liveness to the telling of the story, it was organised with media coverage in mind and thirdly, it had the element of high drama, and more importantly, there was something compelling in its consumption where another activity or commitment was forgone in viewing it (See Katz 1980). The media event thrives on the expression of emotion, positioning emotionality as its central effect. Media

spectacles as mediated events invoke the dramatic and involve an aesthetic dimension and these have the power to construct political and social realities (Kellner 2003; 2005). In contemporary consciousness, screen cultures provide a stable account of the event, inserting continuity to mediated events on screen (Sturken 1996). The relationship between screen cultures and memory valorise images, inscribing new meanings through global imagination and consumption.

Social Media and Memory Making

Social media lends itself to collective memory due to its interactive architecture, archival and retrieval functions. As a cultural artefact, it encompasses a vast array of activities; its interactivity, instantaneity, connectivity to large groups of people, the ability to link moving images and text, and to form communities of observers through shared interests and national conversations provide a plethora of opportunities to function as counter sites of commemoration and resistance to official memory. Recent literature has illuminated how social media perform, as sites of commemoration and therapeutic recovery in times of trauma through the enactment of new media rituals (Helmets 2001, Ibrahim, 2010). These performative online rituals can inscribe meaning to physical spaces whilst being independent of it. Unlike television which can broadcast 'media events' (Dayan and Katz 1992) to create global collective memories of place, social media can both insert or strip out place, time and context. It has the ability to connect the virtual with the physical while producing spaces in its own right that can reconfigure and challenge power and social relations (Lefebvre 1991). For Henri Lefebvre space is not something that exists but is produced and therefore has a history.

Thus space comes into being through the inter-relation of forces that produce it. As such, space is performative.

Christine Hine (2000) in developing ethnographic methodologies of the Internet, argues that there is a duality to the Internet. The Internet is not divorced from the real nor is it a space totally consigned to voyeurism or pure fabrication. There is iteration between the virtual world of the Internet and the practices and belief systems of the offline context. The Internet is mediated by the cultural practices and social norms of the physical offline world but it is equally capable of producing cultures in its own right. This duality of the Internet as a space of cultural intervention as well as one which creates cultures in its own right provides for a whole range of possibilities to replicate, mutate and even originate new forms of practices, social norms, commemorations and rituals. The production of cultures in its own right and reconfiguration of power and social relations on the Internet lends to the production of space for memory making and subversive acts of resistance. From this perspective, new media technologies, instead of wiping out place are helping to reconstitute and reorganise spatial relations such that places are remade and reconfigured (cf. Agnew 2011).

Pierre Nora's (1989) 'Sites of Memory' attaches memory to sites which are material as well as immaterial. The Internet as an immaterial space anchors dominant and subversive memories through new forms of rituals and memory making by utilising the technical architecture of Web 2.0, enabling global spectacle while allowing individuals to partake in the moment by uploading, downloading, tweeting, reposting or tagging content in public platforms. While phenomenologists from different fields have stressed the significance of place, emphasising that places cannot be disassociated from bodies which inhabit these, the Internet as a disembodied entity harbours lived experiences that can celebrate place while

being freed from it. Beyond the Cartesian duality between space and non-space, place production is elongated online and has consequences for *place memory* (See Casey 1997; Hayden 1997; Massey 1995) where disembodied articulations online can conjoin lived experiences of those who have experienced and witnessed events in the nation state and others who were part of the spectacle. By facilitating this, online and social media spaces equally can challenge social relations in the terrestrial space enabling articulations and commemorations where these are banned or officially narrated by the nation state. As David Harvey (1990, 227) contends, ‘shifts in the objective qualities of space and time . . . can be, and often are effected through social struggle.’ Conversely, the Internet as a counter sphere for discourse becomes a platform for social struggle (whether this be subversion or protest) and can impact the politics of place memory as well as production of space (in the Lefebvrian sense). The Internet is not disembodied from the real world where place is asserted both through the embodied self and disembodied presence of the virtual world. The conjoining of articulations of those who reside in repressed political contexts with those who live beyond such censure broadens memory making where commemoration practices can be appropriated by communities of spectacle.

Articulations on social media can support the formation of social memory where this is a dynamic process negotiated between the individual and the community, between personal and the wider historical events’ (Tallentire 2001, 198). Social memory as a shared narrative once stripped of context becomes a means to circulate ideals and meanings; unstable at the level of information but stable at the level of shared meanings and remembered images (Fentress and Wickham 1992: ix). Similarly, collective memory as a wider construct which transcends beyond the individual or community refers to a plural remembering brought together by and only in conjoint remembrance of a certain event, no matter where those who remember are

located or how otherwise unrelated they are to each other (Casey 2004: 23). Groups can produce memories which individuals may not have directly experienced themselves (Halbwach 1966). In this sense, social media through its global connectivity can function as a therapeutic vehicle for collective memory making and commemoration, enmeshing the insider and outsider through a networked platform which can conjoin the gaze of mainstream media.

Relocating Place through social media

As Ernest Renan (1990:11) proclaimed, nations are bound and created not just through shared memories but also through “a shared amnesia, a collective forgetfulness.” Yael Zerubavel (1995) similarly observes in his writing on Israel that ‘forgetting’ is an integral part of national memory construction. The Tiananmen Massacre of 1989 as a contentious memory for the Chinese nation is actively guarded over time by banning references to it and by diverting attention of the public to other historical events officially endorsed by the state.

During the anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre in 2013, the Chinese government were again vigilant about its people commemorating the event which happened 24 years ago and put the censors on alert. Families of the victims of the massacre were barred from visiting their graves by more than a dozen Chinese police stationed outside the main 'Stone Gate' entrance to the Wanan graveyard where many of the victims are buried (West 2013). Social media site Sina Weibo (similar to Twitter) was monitored intensely and initial searches for ‘Tiananmen incident and ‘six-four incident’ were not blocked, but instead pulled up posts about other historical events, such as a 1976 demonstration in Tiananmen Square mourning the death of Premier Zhou Enlai. Searches of these words (i.e. ‘Tiananmen Incident’ and ‘six-four’ incident) also resulted in this regular message: "According to relevant laws, regulations

and policies, search results for 'six-four incident' cannot be displayed" (Kaiman 2013). On social media platforms the event was dubbed as May 35 or 535 instead of referring it as 4th June to ward off censorship. Nevertheless China's censors went beyond blocking sensitive terms such as 'Tiananmen Square' as well as the numbers '4,6 or 89' but also code words such as 'May 35' or '535'. Other blocked words included phrases such as 'Today', 'that day' or 'Special day', 'tomorrow', 'that year,' etc. (Kaiman 2013). Even the French-language "six-quatre" and Roman numerals "VIIV" were blocked (Floracruz 2013). The word 'candle' and an emoticon of a burning candle to mark an event were blocked on the anniversary of Tiananmen as it was a year before. When Beijing-based AIDS activist and prominent dissident Hu Jia issued a call for mainland Chinese to wear black to mark the anniversary. Searches for "black shirt" were blocked on Sina Weibo (Chin 2013). The heavy handed censorship of the event has led to June 4th being labelled as 'Internet Maintenance day' and also dubbed as 'National Amnesia Day' in China (Huffington Post 2013). Many prominent intellectuals and celebrities on Sina Weibo restrained from posting in an act of quiet protest and resistance.

This heavy-handed censure of any reference to the events of 1989 was noted by citizens on social media. Prominent film-maker Jia Zhanke remarked, "Don't worry about forgetfulness – at least the Sina censors remember," (Kaiman 2013). To circumnavigate censors on Weibo Chinese citizens employed a mix of strategies to commemorate the event. Unable to openly discuss the event or the Internet crackdown, a number of Sina Weibo users posted oblique comments noting the 'arrival of dark clouds' over Beijing and the southern city of Guangzhou. Historian Zhang Lifan quoting from the Shangshu, one the five classic Confucian texts posted, 'Heaven sees what the people see, Heaven hears what the people hear, Today, Heaven's heart feels what's in the people's hearts' (Chin 2013). Another Sina

Weibo user posted, ‘This seems to mean that something happened in the past, but I can’t search for it.’ (Chin 2013).

One of the common strategies to remember the anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre was by embedding many of the posts in pictures to evade automatic detection by censors, Veering from semantic references, netizens resorted to imagery and embedding commentary on memes to commemorate the event and to evade automatic censorship (AWN 2013). These included images of a girl with her hand over the mouth but the most resonant image was photo shopping of Jeff Widener’s Tank Man image with its tanks replaced by four giant rubber ducks, a reference to a well-known art installation in Hong Kong’s Victoria harbour (Kaiman 2013). The balloon sculpture of the Yellow Duck by artist Florentin Hoffman is undoubtedly a local sensation which caused quite the frenzy in Hong Kong as a reference point for locals and tourists alike. The use of satirical images, poetry and art as forms of resistance and protest has been commonly employed throughout history. In the social media platform, the agency to commemorate the Tiananmen Massacre again lapsed into the symbolic image of the Tank Man which revealed the global indexicality of the image to the event.

In the Web 2.0 environment with the convergence of sound, image, videos and semantic words, the Tank Man prevailed; mashed up, re-imagined and absolutely grounded as an iconic global image. When this substitute image was actively and vigorously shared on Weibo, this was quickly barred by the authorities who blocked the photoshopped ‘Tank Man’ image and the words ‘Big Yellow Duck’ (Brook 2013; Florcruz 2013). Besides the duck image, the Tank Man prevailed in other memetic avatars. These included a Lego model of tanks as well as an Angry Birds version. The memes of the Tank Man even though banned in China, were actively circulated and consumed on social media. The suppressing of these

images in China and invoking of a global media memory through the memes of the Tank Man facilitated the commemoration of Tiananmen Massacre of 1989 in other parts of the world.

The global iconic status of the Tank Man illuminated the problematics of commemorating the complex events of 1989 through an image economy. Images are at best arbitrary, composite, conventionalised, and simplified glimpses of the past (Zelizer 2004, 160). With social and collective memory of the event suppressed in China, the West's orientalist spectacle as personified by the Tank Man again reared its head. Social media as part of the wider media economy drew on what is already symbolic and iconic in the public realm and memory to commemorate the event. Edward Casey (2004: 20) posits public memory as radically bivalent in its temporality where it is both attached to a past but acts to ensure a further remembering of the same event. This implicates the Tank Man as a permanent symbol of Tiananmen even for future generations.

The memes of the Tank Man though a creative and playful counter to the vigilance of censorship in China, inevitably inserts Tank Man into a social media economy where visual mash ups and ludic representations can invite new readings and consumption rituals which further remove Tank Man from the event without completely eradicating the associations of Tiananmen. In the image archive of the Internet, the Tank Man will reside with his memetic incarnations endlessly reproduced, circulated, consumed without context and exchanged as a cultural artefact to recapture the imagination of younger generations. If images as verisimilitude of reality remains problematic, memes as playful cultural symbols of resistance remain reliant on the signifying qualities of the original image memory, while inviting new ways to consume, personalise, archive and circulate it on social media. Popularisation of

protest and its appropriation into popular culture in the age of convergence creates new forms of spectacle and participation where political narratives provide an intertextuality to connect offline realities with online media platforms (Ibrahim, 2009).

The Internet, with its ability to thwart boundaries between the real and the unreal, disseminate images, create 'mashups' and simulated environments, goes to another level of subversion and engagement. Images decontextualised from the political event present new forms of aesthetics, game-playing and voyeurism. These new online rituals and the intertextuality between real-world events and the image economy online are significant in understanding the popular psyche. The spoof culture on the Internet and ludic interventions are built on an intertextuality which constantly takes real offline issues and turns them into new forms of instant entertainment, allowing opportunities for spectatorship, subversion and aesthetic reconfigurations which delimit political significance of the event. The memes of the Tank Man undoubtedly were an expression of resistance and subversion against censorship and attempts against collective remembrance. Nevertheless, the playful repartee will be archived on the Internet and will remain an avatar of the Tank Man reigniting its mythic status over time and space for years to come.

In the new media economy, public events become conjoined with private spaces. Protest, memetic reconfigurations, aestheticisation of trauma and consumption of real political events become entwined into new forms of entertainment, engagement and popular imagination, thwarting the political and giving way to an age of relentless image manipulation where nothing is sacred or reverent. The ability to parody politics and to trivialise the political through videos and podcasts thrusts politics into a renewed era of virulent 'popularisation' where politics sustains new forms of entertainment and voyeurism rather than the

communication of ideas or ideals. On the Internet, acts of resistance become decontextualised from their cultural and historical settings and often privilege an image, slogan or phrase which becomes divorced from the political. Nevertheless, with the banning of commemorations in China, the Duck Patrol in its ludic manifestation was undoubtedly a riposte to censorship and the suppression of communal remembrance in China.

Conclusion

The repression of the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 as a social and collective memory by the Chinese state will undoubtedly be re-negotiated on the global platforms of the Internet and social media. As China suppresses expressions of the event on social media sites, the fervour to not forget the event will become evident through the visual economy of new media and its circulatory potential. The commemoration of the event in 2013 through the Tank Man demonstrated how traumatic and censored events can lapse into a dominant media memory and imagery. Reincarnated as a meme, the Tank Man became a ludic response to the vigilant censors, but in the process he narrated the banality of the viral visual culture where images can be stripped from context, re-hashed and endlessly circulated as cultural artefacts bearing the burden of history yet being disenfranchised from it.

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