Chapter 2

Public Secrecy: Remaking Tank Man, in China

Who was it, the one casually photographed
the young lad standing before the tank
waving his arms
moving the whole world
and yet, save for the tank's muzzle
no one could see his face
His name, too,
no one knows
And then …and then
his trace disappeared
the world that cried for him
didn't want to keep looking for him

From Liu Xiaobo, "Jiyi" (Memory, 1995)

In a now well-known article entitled 'Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books', the mathematician Jean-Baptiste Michel and colleagues showed that, as the volume of published material has swelled year on year, century on century, our capacity to hold individual books (and other cultural forms) in mind has radically shrunk. There is, as they put it, 'a greater focus on the present', with the result that 'We are forgetting our past faster with each passing year' (Michel et al, 2011: 179). If this was true already in a print media environment, the vast data swarm propagated by the internet – by Google books alone – surely means that the half-life of ideas is now dwindling by the second, to a second. In many ways, we might read remix or remake culture as a response, within digitality itself, to the forgetfulness that new media seem to be accelerating. The logic here is simple, and it is the logic of the search engine and the algorithms which deep-dive into it to extract meaning and information. Remakes dramatically enhance the searchability of a cultural artifact, creating a matrix of linked items that Google can crawl, and which acquire visibility to Googlebots by dint of that very linkage. As Stenport and Traylor (2015: 90) have

noted in their study of film and other media adaptations of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*:

> a query for 'girl with the dragon tattoo' across various search engines returns a multitude of mixed media seemingly in no particular order …With such a rapidly expanding collection of materials, none is necessarily the privileged cultural authority. The corpus itself is the authority. In a culture that forgets faster and faster, more referents mean more cultural capital.

In other words, within this algorithmic culture, each new iteration functions as a reminder not just of the original book, but of 'the set of artifacts as a group' (2015: 81-2): remakes beget remakes, allowing them to function rather like Google alerts, popping up – sometimes even in newsfeeds – as reminders of the franchise, as reminders to remembrance.

No doubt it is for this reason that commemorative projects of various kinds now gravitate, like filings to a magnet, towards the remake as a mnemonic tool – and none more so, perhaps, than those which repurpose iconic photographs. In an age of Flickr, Snapchat, Instagram, and whatever new communicative mode the next photographic platform will monetize, the logic of the remake – as a meme, a gif, a cinemagraph, a photoshopped picture, or a photograph recast in different medial material – can at the very least keep an image in play and on occasion may even speed up its transition into an icon. Ai Weiwei's possibly poor-taste repurposing of the 2015 photograph showing a drowned Syrian boy washed up like driftwood on a beach in Turkey (Tan, 2016) is a sure measure of how search culture, and the way it can be 'gamed' for commemorative ends by remakes, is spawning new regimes of remembrance.[1] Of course, Ai Weiwei is only one repurposer among many, and a keyword search for 'Syrian boy beach' not even a year after his death already turns up an astonishing range of photographic remakes. Indeed, in this new-ish

commemorative order, elevation to iconicity seems to require an array of photographic afterlives in Google Images, not merely available at a single click but increasingly experienced by users as an algorithmically generated collage: from political cartoons to street graffiti to artist-led citizen activism to photoshopped versions of the original image which place the Syrian boy in the empty central space of a UN summit. I stopped counting at remake number 20, but not before the image of 'Girl Fleeing Napalm' had crossed my line of sight. Seemingly random, anomalous even, that iconic photograph of the Vietnam War belongs, in fact, quite squarely in the screenshot for the simple reason that its presence demonstrates by inference the arrival of the Syrian boy into iconicity: he can be juxtaposed with the girl in part because search culture is beginning to read them as equivalently memorable.

Photographs of this sort have always propagated and repropagated themselves, of course, as the countless reversionings of Tank Man at the 1989 Tian'anmen protests over the last 25 years, most of them American political cartoons, memes, posters, and YouTube remixes, show clearly enough. These image-works, now digitized, have become via that process of pixelation subject or susceptible to the law of the Googlebot; they are now egregiously searchable, and so can live again beyond the mostly print media venues in which they first came into being. Or at least they can in some places or spaces: figure 1 shows what a search for 'Tian'anmen Square' turns up on Google Images. Even without the far more decisive search term Tank Man, the field of the screen as the user scrolls down is repeatedly dominated by that photograph and its repurposings. Yet type the same search term into Baidu, China's chief search engine, and the results seem to issue forth from a parallel postsocialist universe (figure 2): one in which the bloodshed of 1989 did not happen, or at the very

least has been white-washed – though actually color-graded via Photoshop might be a better description, since the deeply saturated blues and greens and reds have a slightly surreal luster, reminiscent in their propagandizing feel of the revolutionary posters of the Maoist era. In contrast to the densely textured temporality of 'Tian'anmen' on Google, whose passing into history is serially figured by the photographic remakes, the Square on Baidu seems to live in an eternal present, without past, without memory. What does this mean for the role of the remake as what I referred to a moment ago as a reminder of remembrance?

The extent to which Tank Man – as a photograph, as an icon, as the progenitor of a thousand remakes – has become almost farcically deracinated from his origins in central Beijing is a problem which scholars within the field of Chinese studies have not fully got around to confronting in the years after 1989. It fell to the American political scientists Robert Hariman and John Lucaites (2007: 213) finally to point out, and with a certain masterly understatement, that 'the iconic status of the photo was a product of the Western media elite'. They continue (2007: 220):

> From a day when one million people were congregating in the square, this photograph only shows a single person. Instead of noise, sirens, and the smells of food, garbage, and urine, there is silence and a general anesthesia of sensory engagement … (through this reductionism) the photograph transforms the event from an episode in Chinese national history into a parable about the future global order … on the terms most legible and reassuring within a Western narrative of the continued expansion of modern technologies, open markets, and liberal ideals throughout the world …

To the extent that China itself remained in the discussion of Tank Man, he simply 'showed' that the Chinese people wanted out of Communism; he offered to Western audiences what Slavoj Žižek (2002: 46) calls a 'moment of transparent clarity' about China after Mao and revolution. This drive towards 'collapsing complex events into

image narratives and delimiting political analysis into a trope of pro-democracy struggles' has come under fire from scholars (Ibrahim, 2015: 7; Ghosh, 2011:45-6) – rightly so, though we might add that the image narrative, the stasis of the icon, is also continually resisted by the logic of remediation, even if repurposings of Tank Man have tended to describe a narrowly neoliberal ideological arc. None of these critiques, though, concerns themselves with the question of Tank Man's legacy as icon in China.

Effectively airlifted abroad and then often, though not exclusively, pressed into the service of US-led democratic liberalism, Tank Man is a photograph whose afterlives in post-socialist China have been elided and obscured to date, a gap that Hariman and Lucaites note openly enough, even if they do not task themselves with filling it. Anyone familiar with the other side of the story – Tank Man in China post-1989 – would know, of course, that these afterlives are seemingly wraith-like, insofar as they exist at all. Indeed, Tank Man plays the role of Banquo's ghost at the robustly on-message political site which Tian'anmen Square has become since 1989 in China itself. Just as the identity and fate of that man who faced down the tanks remains unknown, so has Tank Man the photograph been vigorously policed out of online visibility for most Chinese netizens. Pico Iyer (1998) may be right that Tank Man has 'Almost certainly … (been) seen in his moment of self-transcendence by more people than ever laid eyes on Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein and James Joyce combined', but not many of those people were born after 1989 in China. As Anne-Marie Brady notes (2009: 10), 'in China the image is virtually unknown', and the view that Tank Man therefore carries 'no political meaning in China' (Lotfalian, 2013: 1380) is sufficiently established to border on truism.

In what follows, I look at how the Tank Man image has been repurposed by Chinese digital artists working mainly inside China – an augmented reality artistic collective, a video installation artist, several internet cartoonists, photo-artists, and others – for mostly, though not exclusively, Chinese audiences in recent years. My intention is so doing is not to try to rebut the shibboleth that ‘Tank Man is meaningless in China’ by listing, litany-style, successive examples of his visual presence in Chinese spaces – though technically speaking, the work of these artists and their audiences do indeed challenge the notion that Tank Man’s image is ‘unknown’ and robbed of all significance. As will become clear, the lifespans of these repurposings are often abruptly cut short and/or their reach is small, making it absurd to suggest that their cumulative effect has been to endow that image with any kind of mass viral visibility, let alone the sort of iconic status that the image possesses outside China. Rather, my argument is that these repurposings, in part *because* of their fugitive, ephemeral character, perform a key role within the context of ongoing state suppression of the June 4 protests as memory. This article is not about internet censorship in China *per se* either, popular and relevant a refrain though this is. Ultimately, the forces of censorship – and secrecy, more generally – in relation to Tank Man are more intriguing when we see them as practices that stimulate a necessary kind of creativity as much as they curtail it.

Cartooning around

The efforts of recent repurposers of Tank Man to break the Chinese internet, or at least break into it from time to time, give some first indications of this point. One such example is the work of Chinese political cartoonist Badiucao, who has remade Tank Man several times in recent years. Born in Shanghai and now based in

Australia, Badiucao's starkly lined cartoons in black and red – he calls contemporary China a 'giant meat grinder', a 'vortex of blood and iron' (China Digital Times, 2016: 6) – initially found small but dedicated audiences on the Chinese microblogging platform Weibo until clampdowns pushed him onto Twitter, which is only available within China via VPN. Two of Badiucao's repurposings of Tank Man are immediately telling, though for different reasons: 'Daily Patrol' (Richang xunluo) and 'A Piece of Red Cloth' (Yi kuai hongbu) (figures 3 & 4). In 'Daily Patrol', Badiucao shows a young Uyghur girl confronting the tanks, in what appears to be a straightforward gesture of support for Xinjiang separatism. Yet the red heart-shaped balloon she kites aloft also alludes to Banksy's famous mural, 'Girl with the Red Balloon', which was stenciled on select street locations in London c.2002. Banksy, we might recall, also repurposed 'Girl Fleeing Napalm' – flanking the naked child between Ronald McDonald on one side and Mickey Mouse on the other – and this concentrated intertextuality serves to reiterate the point that repurposings of iconic images now relate as much to each other as they do to their original source. The cartoon also manages to invert the global-local relation which has been such a dogged feature of Tank Man's ascendancy into iconicity, and in which his dissident agency is fused with various Western/global commodity signifiers from fast food to internet giants in order to serve free market ideology. Here, by contrast, the cartoon harnesses Banksy to take aim at a redolently Chinese political context.

Provocative in a different way is 'A Piece of Red Cloth', in which the body of the tank is draped with crimson fabric: blood and iron again, as well, of course, as the familiar red of the Chinese Communist Party and its cover-up, literally rendered, of the Tian'anmen protests in the years since. This intimation is, once again, intertextual,

since the cartoon's title recalls the famous song by Chinese rock singer Cui Jian, 'A Piece of Red Cloth', which became something of a protest anthem during the 1989 demonstrations in the Square. As Nimrod Baranovitch notes (2003: 238), the song alludes to how

> Chinese society was blindfolded by the Communist Party during the revolutionary period … (It) describes a violent experience of someone who is not only blindfolded, but whose hands are clasped and whose mouth is blocked by someone else so he cannot see, speak, drink, escape, or even cry. The speaker in the song turns into a subjugated creature …

When he sang the song on stage, Cui Jian would typically blindfold himself with a red cloth, turning his performance into a staging of the complicity that was also necessary for that subjugation. At the same time, the draping of the tank in a large swathe of red also recalls Cui Jian's later album *Balls under the Red Flag* (Hongqi xia de dan), whose cover shows an embryo blindfolded with a red cloth again, but is more upbeat in tone. The threading of Tank Man into this rich seam of intertextuality, in which motifs of voluntary and involuntary blinkering coalesce, gives the cartoon a layered set of significations for those with memories of 1989; even more than 'Daily Patrol', it uses allusion to re-root the icon.

Yet even for those without that personal databank, the cartoon is visually emphatic. Above all, its red cloth suggests the futility of censoring the iconography of Tank Man, even in a China from which the traces of that photograph have officially been wiped clean: by 'concealing' the tank in a cloak of political redness, which leaves the outlines of the combat vehicle comically obvious, Badiucao shows just how perversely memorable the past remains, and that the threat it poses may even be heightened by the action of cloaking. This point emerged strikingly during a performance of Cirque du Soleil at a Beijing theatre in 2013, when the image of Tank

Man was flashed up as part of a montage for four seconds, after having somehow eluded the pre-screening eyes of the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Media outlets outside China noted that the audience gasped in shock (Wong, 2013); but presumably they gasped in recognition, too. Something rather similar occurred in 2009 when American artist and designer Michael Mandiberg, by way of curious experiment, contacted several copyist artists in Dafen Painting Village in Shenzhen and asked them to produce replicas of the Tank Man photograph. Mandiberg displayed the varied results on his blog, titling 'each image with a snippet of dialogue from the negotiations for each painting' (Mandiberg, 2009).

While some went ahead and fulfilled the commission per spec, others fudged, rejected, or simply ignored it. One version paints the tanks but omits the man; the painter tells Mandiberg: 'You can add the person to painting when you get it'. Another queries: 'the man … will be painted or not?'. A third paints the man, but inclines his head and upper body slightly, so that he appears to be bowing to the tanks. The most telling comment comes from the final communication Mandiberg posts. This last artist turns down the commission, stating that painting such images is 'illegal' in China. 'When I was in high school in 1989, I once devote my passion to that event', the email continues, but 'now most Chinese people forgot the history while I (do) not' (Mandiberg, 2009). Yet mass amnesia, with its suggestion of involuntary mnemonic fail, is an imperfect take on the problem. As Badiucao put it in an email interview with me (Badiucao, personal communication, 2016):

> The group who lived through the Tian'anmen killings, particularly those who participated in the events, is now middle-aged and forms the core stratum of contemporary society, the key constituents of the middle-class. They know this history all too well. What's more, the image of Tank Man was broadcast on news networks at the time as a way of displaying the humanity of party bosses and the army, who refrained from crushing Tank Man to a bloody pulp

> (*niancheng roubing*). So although the authorities now tightly control information about June 4th and Tank Man, this is nothing more than the emperor's new clothes: middle-aged people all have a tacit knowledge of what happened; it's a secret closely kept by both sides.

In short, for a large chunk of China's population – those born before the mid-1970s or so – June 4th is what Michael Taussig calls (1999: 5) a 'public secret', that which is 'generally known, but cannot be articulated', and whose faux clandestine character all conspire to maintain. The public secret relies on an 'active not-knowing' or 'knowing what not to know' (Taussig, 1999: 6-7); or as Bourdieu puts it (2000: 192), skewering the complicity even more sharply, it is all about 'the rule of the game which is to act as if one did not know the rule'. For those born later, by contrast, June 4th is passive non-knowledge, which helps to explain the split amongst the Dafen copyists, between those who readily copied the image in its entirety and those who doctored or declined it altogether.[2] Contemporary Chinese society has been fascinated for the last few years by the idea of the so-called 'hidden rules' (*qian guize*) – from how to bribe an official to how to get ahead in the entertainment industry – which determine status, power, and advantage in the PRC; yet the carefully maintained non-legacy of the Tian'anmen protests shows that its partner term, the public secret, is also a crucial structuring force in China's socio-political relations today. On one level, then, one might argue that by repeatedly repurposing an image that everyone who saw it back then has 'agreed' to forget, Badiucao's cartoons are intent on confronting this disavowal in all its collusiveness, motivated by the desire to disrobe it. The circulation history of his cartoons, and those of his partners in political satire, seems, ostensibly at least, to corroborate this claim.

As already indicated, Badiucao is essentially expatriated from China, as is

Rebel Pepper (real name: Wang Liming), another subversive cartoonist who has also repurposed Tank Man several times in his work and who moved under duress to Japan in 2014, and Crazy Crab who now lives in Finland. A few short years ago, all three of these cartoonists still lived, and drew, in China. Along with other notable satirists such as Kuang Biao, they took advantage of the launch of the microblogging platform Weibo to resuscitate the tradition of mordant political art in China, and all worked powerfully with the Tank Man image, reversioning and re-rooting it for Chinese netizens. As media commentator David Bandurski noted as recently as 2012 (quoted in Langfitt, 2012), the advent of the microblog 'dramatically changed the environment for cartoonists. They now have a really good platform to find an audience'. During the brief window between Weibo's launch and the heavy-handed crackdown which prompted Badiucao, Rebel Pepper, and Crazy Crab to evacuate the country, all four cartoonists built up core followings on that site and/or similar platforms. The novelty of Weibo – at this point still a relatively unknown quantity for the state and thus not yet hyper-regulated – combined with the particular medial properties of the political cartoon to create an extended moment for these artists. As Crazy Crab has observed in an interview (Ploum, 2013):

> Cartoons are the nightmares of the censorship system because unlike words, the check can't search through drawings. Therefore, it's more difficult to trace drawn satire. A sharp political cartoon can spread widely before the internet police figures out its real meaning.

Getting ghostly

As the internet police steadily got to grips with Weibo, though, China's political cartoonists increasingly found themselves resorting to a practice known as 'reincarnating' (*zhuanshi*) to get their work into the ether. *Zhuanshi* is originally a Buddhist term meaning the 'transmigration of souls', but in Chinese internet lingo it

refers to the creation of a new social media account after an earlier one has been shut down by the provider, usually because the user has breached the bounds of political acceptability. Badiucao has reincarnated 30 times, sufficient frustration for him to state that 'the Chinese space for political cartoonists in the mainland has already closed' (China Digital Times, 2016: 7); Kuang Biao has been reborn closer to 50 times and is still in the game. Needless to say, the practice of reincarnation on social media lends itself most readily to the critique of censorship in China, a longstanding red-button issue in the Western media. My interest in *zhuanshi*, though, derives more from its linguistic origins, and specifically from the potent suggestion of the otherworldly, the shape-shifting, the uncanny even, that emanates from the term. To reincarnate successfully on social media requires the user to reincarnate *recognizably*, to adopt a new avatar that allows him or her to be identified by fans while remaining, for a short while at least, elusive to the agents of authority: thus Kuang Biao has recently reincarnated as 'Uncle Biao Fountain Pen Drawings 47'. In other words, just as Tank Man – himself a wraith, as already noted – mutates from photograph to pen-and-ink reversionings of that image, so too do his repurposers morph and migrate in order to slip into the online interstices that can give them a shortlived platform for their work. Remediating Tank Man is, in this sense, a multiply spectral practice; it turns all whom it touches into shadows of themselves.

This spectrality lays its forceful marks on political cartoons of Tank Man. A decisive example of this can be seen in figure 5, a reworking of Tank Man from 2011 by Crazy Crab. Rather like a cinematographer who films in 360 degrees instead of the 180 decreed by classic Hollywood continuity editing, Crazy Crab 'crosses the line' here and provides a disorientating but revelatory inversion of the standard Tank Man

framing: at last we see his face. As Badiucao has noted (personal communication, 2016), what Tank Man 'left the world was a figure seen from behind' (*beiying*, literally a 'back shadow', [3] and an expression with a faint ghostly resonance in Chinese) – and Crazy Crab's inversion reveals yet another spectral morphing. Tank Man has been reincarnated as Chen Guangcheng, the famous civil rights activist and 'barefoot lawyer', who is immediately recognizable to Chinese audiences because of his dark glasses (Chen is blind).[4] The text in the bubble reads 'Dammit! Another case of organizing a mob to disturb traffic', which on one level refers to the trumped-up charge of 'damaging property and organizing a mob to disturb traffic', for which Chen was handed a jail term of four years and three months in 2006. The Chinese term for 'Dammit', though, is *jiangui*, which literally means 'to see a ghost', thus lexically reinforcing the spectral connection between the two disappearing – or forcibly disappeared – dissidents.

There is once again a spectral feel to the cartoon shown in figure 6, also by Crazy Crab. Here, he is spoofing a controversial policy of the regional government in Tibet, which in the run-up to Chinese New Year in 2012 distributed over a million portraits of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao to temples and monasteries all over Tibet, where a strict ban remains in force on the display of portraits of the Dalai Lama (in 2015 the visage of Xi Jinping was added to the roster) (Anonymous, 2015). An aggressive rhetoric of substitution is in play here, in which professed state secularism turns into the usurpation of sacralized space by the icons of Party power, and the attempted 'exorcism' of the Dalai Lama – a much-feared 'ghost' for the CCP – from his spiritual homes. His spirit resurfaces in the cartoon, which picks up this rhetoric of substitution and runs with it, shape-shifting Tank Man into a

Buddhist monk, dwarfed by the goon-like portraits of China's leaders which loom in the place of the tanks. Less battle of the titans than battle of the icons, the cartoon also mocks the authorities whose overkill of more than a million portraits, materially produced and systematically distributed, is still reduced to an almost embarrassing David v. Goliath with Tank Man, the wraith who dwells fitfully but evocatively on the digital margins.

The cartoon in figure 7, by Badiucao and entitled 'The Sacred Vestments of Tank Man', again places Tank Man's spectrality at front and center while at the same time seeming to parlay directly with Crazy Crab's earlier images, in which Tank Man reliveth as latterday opponents of party power. As Badiucao put it to me,

> The flesh may perish, but clothing and personal effects do not, and these items seem to support the spirit after the body has decayed; thanks to them, the spirit can be preserved and transmit itself to later generations … Tank Man was a hero who dressed in this most ordinary of shirts and trousers; perhaps one day others can put on these ordinary clothes and step bravely onto the street.

Tank Man, as a dissident identity, can shuffle off this mortal coil (suggested by the blood stain on his shirt) yet return in different guises, like the reincarnated revenant he is, to the scene of other stand-offs with the state. All of these cartoons also call oblique attention to the idiosyncrasies of June 4 and Tank Man as public secret in China. As already suggested, state management of this legacy has carved out a generational memory crevasse in contemporary China: those old enough to remember the events stand mutely on one side, while those too young or at that time not yet born stand, almost blithely unaware, on the other. The disjuncture is such that when filmmaker Antony Thomas quizzed a quartet of students at Beijing University, the epicenter of the protests, about Tank Man in preparation for his eponymous documentary in 2005, they responded by asking politely if the image showed a

military parade (Gavett, 2012). The cartoons use the figure of the revenant – particularly the ghost of futures past, since Chen Guangcheng *et al*. postdate Tank Man – to foretell a time when different histories will be written, even as the visual reference to the so-called 'fourth generation' of leadership in China (Mao, Deng, Jiang, Hu) acknowledges the successive amnesias imposed by the scions of the current dynasty.

This abundance of spectrality, so much of it self-reflexive, does not entirely square with the idea that these cartoons simply seek to shout out the secret that dare not speak its name in the hope that this cry will end the phony performance of amnesia. In fact, as Jack Bratich has pointed out (2006: 502), the operations of public secrecy undermine 'a fundamental assumption among oppositional forces, namely the belief that the revelation of secrets is inherently a progressive force'. On the contrary, a simple process of denuding only plays into the hands of the public secret, which 'has built-in protection against exposure, because exposure, or at least a certain modality of exposure, is what, in fact, it thrives upon' (Taussig, 1999: 216). Rather than remind people of an event which they have never actually forgotten, oppositional forces would do better to come up with what Taussig elsewhere calls (1998: 246) 'a set of tricks, simulations, deceptions, and art or appearance in a continuous movement of counterfeit and feint strangely contiguous with yet set against those weighing on us'; or as Benjamin put it many years before, 'Truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation that does justice to it' (1977: 31). Although Taussig does not really specify what these moves might be, nor how this revelatory justice might be done, a suggestion comes when he writes that public secrecy first caught his attention in Columbia during the early 1980s, 'when there were so many

situations in which people dared not state the obvious, thus outlining it, so to speak, in the spectral radiance of the unsaid' (1999: 6).

This statement alludes to the relationship between the public secret and the specter, and as such it resonates interestingly with a question posed by Bratich: 'What can be learned from the secret, not just about it?' (2006: 502). If we move beyond the dialectic between concealment and disclosure, and start scrutinizing public secrecy as a force or structure, its 'strangely contiguous' similarities with ghostliness swim into focus. Both hover between presence and absence, and just as we know that ghosts are figments of our fancy, but sense their force anyway – hence the spectral turn in the humanities since the 1990s – so do we know that public secrets exist all too brazenly, but feel compelled to 'see no evil'. Both, then, are entities which hide in plain sight, whose power impinges forcefully on political life even though it is nominally dismissed. What's more, both have an enduring, steadfast character: the public secret has nothing much to fear from revelation, and nor does the specter need to quail before the exorcist, for the simple reason that both are necessary for society's functioning. Just as shared secrets form 'the basis of our social institutions, the workplace, the market, the family, and the state' (Taussig, 1999: 3), so do unburiable vestiges from the past return again and again to remind those institutions of the duty they owe, and yet often betray, to the demands of justice. In this sense, the public secret and the specter are hostile *doppelgänger*s, identical in shape and in many of their operations, yet also profoundly antithetical to one another, moving in gestures of feint and counter-feint in their shadowy parallel spaces. It is for this reason that cultural practices which wish to aggravate the public secret can productively take on the lineaments of the spectral to do so.

A recent example of a work which not only assumes ghostly shape, but also explicitly addresses the relationship between the public secret and the specter is Chen Shaoxiong's *Ink History* (Moshui lishi, 2010), a three-minute video which traverses China's past from the late Qing period until the present day (Chen, 2010). Described by the artist as a combination of ink, animation, and installation, *Ink History* consists of dozens of terse but fluid drawings based on famous photographs of Chinese history, 'scavenged' entirely from the internet, and set in propulsive motion to a soundtrack of political speeches, propaganda songs, and a loudly ticking clock. As such, *Ink History* is perhaps above all else a work of search engine art, yet one which offers an alternative look to the frozen collage of the Google image search, which delivers up static, silent screenshots of countless multi-medial remakes of one and the same iconic shot. Chen Shaoxiong has a professed 'distrust of single-image photographs' (Wang, 2012: 214), even as he is possessed of strong repurposing drive, and what *Ink History* presents, therefore, can be seen as the complementary inverse of 'Syrian boy beach': multiple photographic icons reversioned by the same artist, in a single medium, and made highly audible and judderingly kinetic (staggered zooms in and out are a particular feature). Approaching the web-driven photographic icon against the grain of Google Images and its algorithmic aesthetic, the video couples the expressivity of ink with the flow of animation to liberate history from the frame even as it relies very openly on a photographically composited vision of the past.

Ink History would be arresting for this reason alone, but it also offers a staging of the public secret as art. The video strings together ink reversionings of, *inter alia*, Sun Yat-Sen seated with his wife Soong Ching-Ling, warlord and politician Yuan Shikai, writer Lu Xun, the 'killing contest' of the Nanjing Massacre, the Long March,

Chiang Kai-Shek on the cover of *Time* magazine, Mao Zedong declaring the founding of the People's Republic on October 1st 1949, Mao with Stalin, the well-known propaganda poster 'We Must Liberate Taiwan', model citizen and cultural icon Lei Feng, the denunciation of counter-revolutionaries during the Cultural Revolution, Richard Nixon shaking hands with Zhou Enlai on his arrival in Beijing in 1972, Mao's body lying in state in 1976, the trial of the Gang of Four, Deng Xiaoping greeting Margaret Thatcher, the glittering rise of Pudong, Shanghai's business district, the handover of Hong Kong to the mainland, China's triumphal space program, the Sichuan Earthquake, and the Beijing Olympics. The iconography is overwhelmingly propagandistic, and in many cases overbearingly familiar, particularly for older Chinese people; furthermore, all the images are easily accessibly via Baidu, even when the history shown strays into the controversial.

But then, at 2.29 minutes, Tank Man appears (figure 7). The camera zooms in six times with a staccato thrust over the next two seconds, more times than it performs this move at any other point in the video. The image, which is unmistakably Tank Man at 2.29, becomes by 2.31 noticeably less defined under this zooming, even as this motion jolts the image out of calcified inertness. The camera tries to pin him down by peering closer, but the shapes loosen and the fluidity of the ink strokes asserts itself. The jerkiness of the camera movement, which also jumps slightly back and forth over the space of the image, emphasizes the sense that, for all his iconicity, Tank Man remains elusive, outlined in a 'spectral radiance' (figure 8). All the sketches in *Ink History* feel ghostly. This is the effect of ink-as-animation: the flickering motion as the images segue at speed into each other, the centrality of *chiaroscuro* and shadowing to the sketching process, the sheer repetitiousness of the

repurposings with the logic of the afterlife which those repeatings assert. But the sudden appearance of Tank Man amidst all the hyper-sanctioned state imagery has the shock feel of an apparition. How better to aestheticize the notion of a public secret? Like the inverse of stealth or subliminal propaganda, in which key words or images flash up so swiftly that only the unconscious mind registers them, *Ink History* uses Tank Man to interrupt, for two full seconds, the flow of the excessively familiar with a dip below the radar into the 'taboo'.[5] Yet at the same time, incorporating Tank Man into this photographic roll-call of China's modern history also performs, and at the selfsame moment, the very publicness of his secrecy, the extent to which he is totemic too.

This point finds different form in figure 10, which shows the image of Tank Man which Badiucao had tattooed on his upper arm to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Tian'anmen killings. 'I wanted to use my body to record the memory of Tank Man', he says. Yet just as significant is the fact that the tattoo is based on Badiucao's own ink wash re-rendering of the Tank Man photograph. This shows not just the pertinence of ink again, but more broadly that the karmic vehicle which transports Tank Man's spirit in and out of visibility, even human flesh itself, is the remake. Indeed, what choreographs the *pas de deux* between spectrality and the public secret which steps its way across these different image-works is the process of photographic repurposing itself, an aesthetic act which shares telling structural similarities with both. A reversioned historical photograph is, almost unavoidably, a spectral object, an admixture of ghostly content and ghostly form. It might seem a needless reminder, but photographs of the dead or disappeared always already – and even in these jaded days – possess a certain ghostly power; and so a repurposed

photograph can, without great effort, invoke this abiding and ever-renewing relationship between camera technology and the ghostly: from stealing souls to spirit photography to Barthes' *memento mori*. In terms of form, though, these recent remakes of Tank Man – image-works which are not photography *per se* even though they are spawned directly from it – are a good deal more reminiscent of Derrida than Barthes. In particular, their intermedial, halfway character recalls Derrida's notion of hauntology (1994: 10), a term coined deliberately to pun in its original French on the *ontologie* whose philosophical fixity Derrida disliked. Rejecting the idea that being and non-being are bounded states, hauntology is all about the inbetween, and the specter is its special sign because ghosts dwell in the interstices, the limbo-land between the living and the dead. Repurposed historical photographs serve as aesthetic emblems for this inbetweenness and its spectral possibilities, principally because the act of reversioning physically acts out the transition from one ontological state/medium to another, whilst never staking a final claim in either.

The public secret is also a noticeably interstitial form. It hovers between the visible and the occluded, the known and the unsayable, marked out by the open oxymoron in its name as an entity which derives capital from being neither one thing nor the other. It is tied evenly to each, much as Badiucao's drawn satires of Tank Man belong in equal measure to the mediums of photography and the political cartoon. Indeed, to refine the point made earlier (that cultural forms can usefully deploy the imagery and language of spectrality to take on the public secret in ways that do not shortcircuit back to mere exposure), the particular cultural form that is the repurposed historic photograph stakes its claim here as an aesthetic practice especially well tooled, predestined almost, for the task of revelatory justice. As an aesthetic practice,

seen structurally, photographic repurposing cleaves just closely enough (though not too much so) in its operations to the public secret itself to permit a more provocative kind of illumination. Taking the friction that already exists between presence and absence in photography proper and expanding it into a broader ambivalence over medial form, ownership of the 'image narrative', the frame and what lies beyond it, the repurposed historic photograph mimics at a near remove the core constitutive tensions over information and who controls it which shape public secrecy. Mirroring the public secret as *ploy*, photographic repurposings – in art, in cartoons, in any other aesthetic medium – articulate in visual language not merely the thing we all know anyway, but the process whereby it goes about cloaking itself in garb that we all see through (the tank draped in red cloth): not the public secret *per se*, but how it works.

Dead funny

But where does this leave what is arguably the most famous reiteration of Tank Man to break the Chinese internet in recent years: the image shown in figure 11? Created in 2013 by designer Miller Yu in Hong Kong, from where it went viral in China for a short while until the censors banned all searches for 'big yellow duck', this photoshopped Tank Man seems, if anything, deliberately anti-spectral even as it mocks the public secret. Indeed, if ghost had an antonym, it might well be rubber duck: the *unheimlich* versus the *über*-homely. Discussions of the duck patrol, whether academic or in the media, have focused on this plastic re-tooling of the image as a tactic for dodging the censors: ducking the firewall, to make the obvious pun. In a context where search terms as apparently innocuous as 'today' are blocked on sensitive anniversaries, it is only by taking on the guise of something quintessentially, definitionally bathetic – a plastic yellow duck – that the image of man-versus-tank can

do the virtual rounds, for a while at least. In other words, the price of being seen is the possibility of provoking a more meaningful kind of encounter with the events at Tian'anmen in 1989. Yet this censorship argument feels incomplete, on its own, and not just because toys, comics, and cartoon characters recur everywhere in memes or mutations which base themselves on iconic photographs, as an online search for, say, 'Flags at Iwojima' quickly reveals. For some, no doubt, the shibboleth status of these master-images is a kind of aggravation, a gift to the saboteur, whereas for others there may be a desire to democratize or even tame such photographs using the signifiers of childhood. And, of course, there is the obvious argument about the monetizing of memory. But what if the ducks just make us laugh? If so, how is humor related to the public secret, to spectrality, to the remake?

In a way, this question has been hovering at the edges of my discussion for several pages now, and before any mention of the duck patrol. Humor is a core currency of the political cartoon, obviously animating several of the drawings described here. In a literal sense, this laughter is about poking fun at power-holders and their censoring excesses, a kind of satirical shake-down which is important in its own right; yet it does not capture the full picture, which, once again, has a structural dimension. In this more operational sense, humor can be seen as the final component of an aesthetic practice that seeks to square up to public secrecy, and a good part of the reason why it can do this is because comedy shares odd and little-discussed space with both the spectral and the secret that hides in plain sight. All three – humor, spectrality, public secrecy – are modes which often dwell in liminal spaces and gain their power from so doing, and all three, thanks to that, can find fitting aesthetic representation in works that repurpose historic photographs. The logic of the

reversioned photograph is, after all, that of the double who is almost the same: an object repurposed is one mutated in such a way that we can recognize both its origin and its new incarnation – and as Freud famously noted nearly a century ago, *doppelgänger*s such as these are uncanny; their creepiness emerges from the cracks. Yet what Freud did not choose to acknowledge, even though Shakespeare showed it in play after play, is that doubles can also be funny, which no doubt explains why one of the meanings of the term 'canny' is sly humor. [6] Doubles (and *double entendres*) amuse because they stake out fecund ground for miscommunication, dissembling, and double-cross – all of it, though, transparently obvious to the audience, which gestures clearly towards the relationship between humor and public secrecy. Grave humor, the darkly comic: ultimately, these companions in doubleness and oxymoron do justice to the public secret because they suggest that the joke is sinister and it is also on us – the people – for seeing that the emperor is naked and praising his outfit nonetheless. Or as Crazy Crab puts it in a recent interview (Ploum, 2013):

> the political cartoon is a 'laugh bullet' that can penetrate through lies and fear … When people laugh, they will think too, in a new perspective.

A still more pertinent parallel, perhaps, is that humor is often coded, encrypted even, a term whose etymology gestures powerfully not just to the keeping of secrets (encryption as the creation of a cipher text that requires a key), but also, and further back, to spectrality (the crypt as a concealed and subterranean burial place). Thus to revisit, and flesh out, the point made a moment ago about censorship, when the duck patrol slips beneath the radar it can do so because humor does not simply entertain, but can also 'transmit taboo information' (Attardo, 1994: 330). It is, at times, a tool of secrecy, which uses its doubleness – this time manifested in the gap between the 'raw' forbidden information and its encrypted form – to evade detection and bolster a sense

of belonging within the in-group. This is the argument made by Flamson and Bryant, who argue that a little-observed aspect of humor is its role as a means of 'signaling compatibility within local groups by relying on the detection of "encrypted" information'. Cryptography in humor, they suggests, relies on 'informational complexity to ensure both the secrecy and the authenticity of a message' (2013: 50-52). Or to paraphrase for the case in hand, the duck patrol amuses not just simply because of its subversive absurdity, but because the 'in-group' – those who see it, those who laugh – know that the meme is using secrecy to play the public secret at its own game.[7]

If so, Tank Man and his repurposings may be becoming a joke too far for the authorities in China. Like all *doppelgänger*s, it is precisely because of their fugitive character that these images retain their power to provoke both fear and laughter: no-one audibly gasps in shock at a 4-second glimpse of Tank Man outside China, after all; why would they, when that image has been used to market not just the free world but Chick-Fil-A chicken sandwiches too (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007: 241)? In China, though, Tank Man remains a spectral talisman, presenting an object lesson of the truism that censorship merely serves to sacralize the objects which it bans – and can duly become a laughing stock itself because of it, as the duck patrol shows rather too tartly. One may suppose that the authorities get this point all too well, and they have the choice of two possible responses: to lift the taboo and let the image run free, and headlong into banality; or to attempt an exorcism, a publicly stagemanaged casting out of Tank Man's wayward spirit. That they may be gearing up for the latter is suggested by recent news reports that Visual China Group has purchased the copyright of one of the few original photographs of Tank Man from Bill Gates. As

Xiao Qiang, founder of *China Digital Times*, puts it, we should not be surprised if 'a Chinese media company's decisions and actions were aligned with the policies and practices of the Chinese government' (quoted in McPhate, 2016). Or as Wang Dan, former protestor in the Square, argued more bluntly: 'Once the copyright of that image falls into the hands of the Chinese Communist Party, I fear it will be sealed up for safekeeping' (2016). Just as likely, of course, is that the CCP will exercise any rights it might sooner or later manage to procure over the image to ban its use abroad too, thus avenging itself for the endless critiques of Chinese disregard for intellectual property at the same time as turning the exorcism of Tank Man into a global spectacle.

On the one hand, then, Tank Man exemplifies to a ridiculous degree Wendy Chun's argument that digital media, despite 'its ever-increasing archive in which no piece of data is lost', is in practice 'degenerative, forgetful, eraseable' (2008: 154, 160). But at the same time, the at best sporadic accessibility of Tank Man and his multi-media, quasi-photographic progeny to most netizens in China also runs counter to the logic of the remake and remembrance that I discussed at the beginning of this paper. The rules of ongoing, almost metronomic reiteration that govern the half-lives of a cultural artifact such as *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* – namely, be remade repeatedly or die – do not apply to Tank Man, and it is precisely and only because he is suppressed that he can transcend them. The one-third of China's population who were born after 1989 may indeed have only the haziest awareness of Tank Man, if they are cognizant of him at all, but he lives on in China as the grit in the clam of the public secret for the very reason that his remakes are more or less unsearchable (and because when the ghost does surface, he typically makes people laugh). We see this

process in reverse with the now almost tediously abundant free-market remediations of Tank Man, which have certainly ensured his memorability; but what kind of legacy is this when ‘a Chinese citizen taking a stand in China … becomes the incarnation of something American’ (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007: 237)? In an era of search engine optimization and spamdexing, in which online ubiquity supposedly keeps an item fresh and in mind, Tank Man’s untrackability in China becomes, paradoxically, his special stock. Always ghostly from the moment that he slipped the scene in 1989, Tank Man’s elusiveness has allowed him to become, not a searchable object on Baidu, but something closer to a roving digital quest.

Off the grid; or, Tank Man, where are you?

Obviously, there is no greater testament to Tank Man’s unforgottenness than the purchase, for an undisclosed sum, of the vast image-bank that contains the copyright to one (and only one!) of his original images. Provoked into trying to exorcise a ghost – the equivalent of exposing a public secret, and every bit as pointless – the authorities appear to be using proxy interests to drive him from the internet, just as lateral pressure seems to have forced the recent closure of the June 4th Museum (*Liusi jinianguan*) in Hong Kong (the only site on Chinese soil that commemorates the protests). The museum, 800-square foot in size and located on the fifth floor of an office building in the Tsim Sha Tsui shopping district, was set up by the ‘Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Democratic Movements in China’. At the time of writing, the Alliance was seeking a new location for the museum, and various news outlets reported the frustration of its members at the political motives behind the closure (Ramzy and Wong, 2016). Yet a visit to the museum’s website (http://64museum.blogspot.co.uk) reveals that those in charge may already know

enough about spectrality, subversive humor, and the public secret to find a way to keep remembrance going. Just as relevantly, the website (ironically enough) offers initial signs that Tank Man as a digital quest can be pursued in offline, physical space too.

On a page of the site entitled 'Directions to the Museum' is posted a 3-and-a-half-minute-video, which begins with a shot of a young man brandishing a digital camera, subtitled with the words: 'There is nothing more meaningful than learning and experiencing the truth. Therefore I decided to use a camera to figure the truth out'. The camera then cuts to a Playmobil figure behind a tiny plastic tripod, in what may or may not be a knowing reference to the toy spoofs of Tank Man that circulated briefly in 2014 (in addition to the ducks, Lego and Angry Birds also had their meme moments). What follows is a short film in which different young people, sometimes in slo-mo, sometimes speeded-up, take various routes to the obscurely-located museum guided by smartphone mapping apps and the instructions posted in the subtitles, to the accompaniment of 'Flower of Freedom' (Ziyouhua), a song by Thomas Chow which is sung every year at the June 4th vigil in Hong Kong's Victoria Park (and which is blocked on Weibo). The would-be visitors wave cheerily at the camera, line up 4-abreast to form a human arrow pointing down the street, bump randomly into fellow pilgrims, and check directions at the Seven-Eleven convenience store, generating a feel up until 1.51 minutes which is best described as jaunty – indeed, this section of the film, with its determined, mischievous levity, turns the journey to the museum into precisely that: a jaunt. At 1.51, though, the camera cuts to the interior of the building, and a spectral mood takes over, as a point-of-view shot ushers the viewer into the darkened, tunneled, and shadowy spaces of the museum itself. Inside, black-

and-white photographs and their captions form a ghostly wallpaper (Tank Man, blown up and fuzzy, appears at 1.59), multiple screens flicker with old footage, and a lifesize replica of the Goddess of Democracy, who dominated the square in 1989, looms out of the darkness at 2.37.

Exploiting the space of sameness between humor and spectrality, the video flic-flacs between playful and somber moods in ways that chafe against the public secret in the one part of China where that secret is not maintained – itself another anomalous ripple on its clandestine surface, rather like the idiosyncrasy that June 4th is a banned memory for about two-thirds of the population of China and a black hole, or whitewashed wall, for the youthful rest. The video also repeatedly uses camera technology to do this work of mild abrasion, not just through the filmic medium, but via the digital camera, tripod, smartphones, images-as-wallpaper, and flickering screens. The 'cast' of the video are all young, which on one level simply reflects Hong Kong's status as a blind spot for the June 4th secret, as mentioned above; but on another it also ties in with the idea of Tank Man as a playful digital quest – ghostbusting almost – tracked down by those who never heard his name at school (even in Hong Kong) via digital technologies that are increasingly moving off the web, and into physical space.

This notion of digital questing, and via camera-based platforms, steps up a notch in a recent work by the anonymous artistic collective 4Gentlemen (a pseudonym used by the Lily and Hong Lei art studio). Entitled *Tian'anmen Squared*, it uses the smartphone technologies of augmented reality to allow Tank Man's spirit to return to Beijing and stalk his former haunts (4Gentlemen, 2011). More commonly

associated with military or gaming applications, augmented reality has shaped up in the last few years as a potent tool for conceptual artists. Its highwater mark so far is probably Amir Badaran's *Frenchising Mona Lisa*, an app which allows users to train their phones on any version of Da Vinci's painting and watch as the enigmatic one miraculously removes her featherlight veil and wraps the Tricolore flag around her head as if it were a hijab. French secularism, sartorial hypocrisy (why are some scarves ok and others not?), curatorial control, the whims of iconography, and the shifting status of the artist all coalesce as targets within the frame here. Criticized by some as a self-promoting prankster, Badaran argues for the value of augmented reality as a 'legitimate installation art medium' (Hube, 2014). He seeks, as he puts it, to 'bring AR-as-art into the museum' (Hube, 2014) and his abiding gripe is, indeed, with the Louvre as a stuffily sacrosanct institution which he debunks via invasionary attacks, essentially breaking into the museum to make his mischief. These notions of appropriate space-use, and how to violate it, have been crucial to augmented reality as an art form, as interventionist installations such as Sander Veenhof and Mark Skwarek's 2010 AR exhibition in MoMA showed very clearly. Over thirty artists took part in the 'art invasion' exhibition, showing their works all over the building and effectively annexing the museum space for any visitor who had the app installed.

Needless to say, this idea of spatial pranking has broader implications. Some of these have been mapped, quite literally, by 4Gentlemen, who have used the AR application Layar to invade the space of Tian'anmen Square and its surrounds with *verboten* memories. Once downloaded on to a smartphone, the app uses geolocation software to superimpose a computer-generated icon of Tank Man, sized to the original scale, at the exact GPS co-ordinates on Chang'an Avenue just off the Square in

Beijing where the face-off between man and machine took place. In keeping with the photographic nature of this enterprise, the app also allows users to take pictures of the scene in the viewfinder, with the Tank Man icon overlaid. On one level, then, the *Tian'anmen Squared* project shares space with the work of Baradan, Veenhof, and Skwarek, infiltrating consecrated ground with below-the-radar visual messaging – but with a sharper twist. *Tian'anmen Squared* is not simply iconoclastic (*Frenchising Mona Lisa*) and anti-establishment (squatting in MoMA); it does not merely work on or alongside existing canonical works. Its impulse is also recuperative, since it reinstates at the original flashpoint of its occurrence a virtual icon of memory which state censorship has attempted to wipe from the public 'hard drive'. Tank Man – the wraith, the disappeared, the deleted – thus stages a defiant return to the Square, commandeered back from US liberalist discourse and installed once more in the highly localized site of his political agency, while also mimicking, through his hidden presence in the open air of central Beijing, the very machinations of the public secret.

Like most AR technologies, *Tian'anmen Squared* merges public space with sudden and clandestine computer-generated icons, but here publicness is both more municipal and more prosaic than in *Frenchising Mona Lisa*, which takes the rarified air of the Louvre as its stage. *Tian'anmen Squared*, by contrast, launches from the backdrop of air pollution, traffic noise, and the locale which, more than any other in China, denotes and connotes public space as state power – and is, for that reason, highly surveilled. The app user, surrounded by a mass of vehicles, pedestrians, and sightseers, connects with the forbidden image of Tank Man in a move which echoes Chen Shaoxiong's *Ink History* in its staging of the public secret but heightens the sense of raw theatre through its outdoor performance, and the way it turns user into

actor. The public secret as drama also plays out within the app's visual field. The ambient streetscene is viewed in two planes on the smartphone until the Tank Man graphic – the secret – appears, sleekly contoured, pinpoint-sharp, and rendered along three axes so that its dimensionality 'steps out' from the rest of the pictorial field (figure 12), chromatically and perspectivally compelling despite being invisible to all around, almost grail-like in its sudden onscreen materialization. Ultimately, the effect of *Tian'anmen Squared* is, once again, to combine the spectral and the comedic (or at least the playfully subversive) with this notion of digital quest.

Indeed, although 4Gentlemen call Tank Man reloaded a 'virtual monument', it might be truer to argue, as already suggested, that the project exemplifies Lev Manovich's point that if the 1990s were about the virtual, 'It is quite possible that this decade of the 2000s (and beyond) will turn out to be about the physical – that is physical space filled with electronic and visual information' (2006). Taking Tank Man out of the ether and onto the street is, in this sense, entirely of a piece with other shifts in Chinese digital culture, which, as Michel Hockx has pointed out, is presently trialling the move from the World Wide Web to the freer climes of the app format. Hockx describes how online literary superstar Han Han has created a new app for accessing his work which makes use of 'the functionalities of Internet connectivity (while) entirely bypassing the browser-based media of the World Wide Web' (2015: 106). Although Han Han has explicitly denied that his aim is to avoid censorship, the app format certainly opens up 'new, independent avenues' (Hockx, 2015: 107) for digital expressivity. Rendering Tank Man as an app fits neatly within this rationale, chasing down further the notion mooted in the 'Directions to the Museum' video: namely, that in the face of conspiracies to silence, which now focus near-obsessively

on control of the internet (as shown by the Baidu search results for Tian'anmen), web-inflected physical space may emerge as an agile zone for the performance of what we might now rightly call rituals of revelation. The app, and to a lesser extent the video, are practices which allow users to embody in physical space and corporeal movement the keyboard commands of 'find' and 'search' – though the term 'questing' may indeed be more apposite here, since it captures better the extent to which the pursuit of Tank Man in contemporary China has an almost ceremonial character. Again, the point is not exposure, nor even, necessarily, direct contestation. The quest can be justly called ritualistic or ceremonial because it is through the performance of looking – not via any object thus found, let alone exposed – that the lineaments of the public secret are held up for scrutiny.

In this sense, it is unsurprising that the underlying logic of *Tian'anmen Squared* reiterates the theme of inbetweenness that is immanent to both the public secret and the other artistic forms discussed here which seek to do it revelatory justice. The app is both web-driven and yet browser-free, digital and yet grounded in the materiality of the body as it moves. Above all, it exploits again and again the status of the repurposed photograph as an interstitial object. Using the app generates a complex *mise-en-abîme*, in which the security cameras record the user who scopes the street with his or her smartphone until the graphic of man and tank appears on screen, the vehicle's guns trained telescopically on the user too. At this point, the user may decide, as mentioned earlier, to take a screenshot of man and tank superimposed over the streetscene. In short, the app enables no fewer than 5 separate camera/ photographic operations, an emphatic profusion which begs its own set of questions. On one level, this is just an organic response to the memoryscape all around: just as

power flows from the barrel of a (tank) gun, to paraphrase Mao Zedong, so is history now inescapably filtered through the lens. The augmented reality app of Tank Man performs this shift repeatedly, from original photograph to computer graphic, from computer graphic back to mixed media smartphone photograph, from virtual environment to the Square, and from that physical location back to the screen.

Tank Man redux

What's more, the app, by its very nature, is designed to rove and roam from location to location, as we see in figure 13, which shows Tank Man in Union Square. In so doing, these iterative journeys, from Square to Square and beyond, seem to parlay directly with Ai Weiwei's well-known *Studies of Perspective* series (Toushi yanjiu, 1993-2003), in which the artist photographs himself flicking the bird to various landmarks of authority: the White House, the Eiffel Tower, Red Square, the Basilica in the Piazza San Marco, the Reichstag, the Mona Lisa (again). In naming the series as a whole *Studies of Perspective*, Ai Weiwei's main point of propaganda is to make the middle finger matter more than the monument, to undermine the icons of establishment power with an equally iconic gesture of disrespect. Yet the linchpin, the coruscating core, of the series is *Studies of Perspective: Tian'anmen Square*, and the power of that semi-selfie snapshot, taken only 6 years after the crackdown, derives from its allusive and politically aggravating geometric similarity to Tank Man (figure 14). Ai's insurgent middle finger, at the bottom left of the foreground, stands in for the lone protestor, while the tanks become the Gate of Heavenly Peace, adorned with Mao's huge portrait – which has been obliterated by Ai's finger. In both images, the stand-off occurs across the same bottom-left/top-right diagonal axis, in the midst of emptied public space. But the crushing downwards momentum of Tank Man – in

which the tanks have ‘advanced across most of the pictorial field along the lines and vectors on the street indicating the forward direction of the traffic’ (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007: 217) – is reversed as Ai’s finger protrudes as an aggressive repoussoir, taking the place of the tanks and bearing down, not on the protester, but on the site of state power. The planed patterning of the road markings in the original Tank Man shots, which tamely follow the convoy of vehicles, is undone in Ai’s photo, which scatters these narrow white lines across the visual field.

Studies of Perspective: Tian’anmen Square is Tank Man redux, then, with a vengeance. If so, it is ultimately predictive about the remixing of icons in digital times, and in China most particularly. Already with Ai’s photograph – a gelatin silver print, and thus an analog object *par excellence* – we witness a process at work that revs up noticeably under digitality. Even as echoes of Tank Man ricochet left and right across Ai’s photo, *Tian’anmen Square* also testifies to the partial dissolution of that source image, or rather to its capacity to absorb intrusive adaptation whilst retaining its strong recognition quotient. As an über-image, Tank Man may twist and bend, yet the centre can still hold, in much the same way that an aesthetic remediation of the black-and-white photograph of the gate at Auschwitz, emblazoned with the infamous words ‘Arbeit macht frei,’ could be composed of matchsticks and still refer unmissably back to its photographic point of origin. Under digitality – within the universe of memes – remakes and remixes of photographic icons have proliferated, for the obvious reason that the speed, profusion, and plasticity of the online environment vastly multiply the opportunities for reversioning. In a non-censored web, though, these repeated remediations tend, in practice, to belong quite tightly within the same genus: they are clear scions of their photographic patriarch, as we see

with ‘Syrian beach boy’, whose remakes – for all their quantity – are remarkably alike. Their purpose, after all, is in large part to keep memory refreshed, so it scarcely behoves such remediations to stray too far from the master image. This ‘family resemblance’, to borrow Wittgenstein’s term, typically breaks down when Tank Man is remediated in Chinese online spaces, for the simple reason that secrecy, not forgetfulness, is the core antagonist against which the remix is battling – and battling secrecy, as discussed earlier, requires clandestine tactics.

4Gentlemen speak directly to this genealogical disintegration in a video work about June 4th, entitled *Forbidden City* (Zijincheng, 2008), which melds digital animation with traditional Chinese paper cuts. The piece opens with an image of a old-fashioned tea-shop window, hung with a red paper-cut decoration of the character *fu*, meaning prosperity and happiness. A flower has been cut out in each corner of the decoration, a face-value reference to the ‘Four Gentlemen’ of Chinese artistic and botanical tradition (plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum) – and an encrypted allusion to the so-called ‘Four Gentlemen’ of the Tian’anmen Square protests: a quartet of activists, including Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo, who went on hunger strike in June 1989 (and after whom the conceptual art collective are, in fact, named). As a *guqin* plays on the soundtrack, the paper cut disintegrates into falling petals, until only five tiny red marks remain. The camera then closes in on these shapes, revealing them to be the lone protester, three tanks, and the Forbidden City itself. For the next two minutes, the tanks and the protester – the component parts of the original Tank Man photograph – abandon their assigned places to move disjointedly and at random across the screen, until the inevitable hard collision between man and machine occurs and a spectral swirl of blood is superimposed across

the visual field (figure 15). It drifts like a fractal for several seconds before floating away, just as the falling petals reassemble into the character *fu*, the swirl of blood melts into steam from a teacup, and the scene returns to the tea shop as if the bloodshed had never happened. Narratively, the animation rehearses the same interplay between spectrality and 'see no evil' which I have traced throughout this paper, at the time as metaphorizing the idea that China's rise since the 1990s is predicated on precisely this silent collusion with a violent order – or as Jiang Zemin put it in his famous motto for the post-Tian'anmen era, "Keep your mouth shut and get rich" (*mensheng fadacai*). Meanwhile on the meta-plane, via its dismemberment of the Tank Man photograph, the video acts out the process of reductionist redux, the stripping down to barest bones that icons must undergo if they are to maintain some kind of visibility in suppressive environments.

In a recent article, Ying Qian lays out the toolkit of tactics that activist documentarians in China use to 'out' secrets, in particular the regime of opacity that the state and local government have created in the wake of the Sichuan earthquake to conceal bad practice in the construction of public school buildings that led to the deaths of thousands of children. Qian uses the term 're-tweet' to describe how Ai Weiwei and fellow artist/activist Ai Xiaoming serially reference each other's work as means of getting information out and then keeping it in play. As she puts it, Twitter has 'influenced the cinematic form', inducing a quickfire intertextual responsiveness that can parry attempts at containment (Qian, 2014: 304). More important than the specifically Twitter-esque form of this referencing, though, are its seriality and the way it creates a (visual) in-language, whose powers are enhanced by the fact that the internet police want to suppress it. Precisely because these are prohibited speech acts,

their audiences listen out all the more carefully for them, whatever their guise. For Tank Man watchers, this sense of being on the *qui vive* is never stronger than when the anniversary of June 4th looms – as a feature in the *South China Morning Post* which went online on June 4th 2013 shows. The article consists of a live feed, which updated readers throughout the day by 're-tweeting' the various photos, memes, and 'veiled references' to the events of 1989 that were circulating in virtual climes. Halfway down the page, a photograph of Ai Weiwei appears (figure 16). The image is familiar, since it riffs on one of the artist's best known works: *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, in which Ai was photographed in a slo-mo triptych smashing an ancient ceramic vase. Here, though, the vase has been Photoshopped out in favour of a tank, in a deft piece of serial-style visual shorthand that connotes both Tank Man and Ai Weiwei's single-finger salute to the Chinese state in *Studies of Perspective*.

Rather like the inventive ways in which netizens have exploited the many homophones in the Chinese language to reference keywords banned by the censors, remediations of Tank Man murmur to each other through coded spectral 're-tweets' which, like the dubiously-named parlour game 'Chinese whispers', morph as the message moves step by step along the chain. This process can be seen in another photographic series, *Mirrors* (Jingzi), by Li Wei, in which the disembodied head of the artist is made to float in ambient space – thanks not to Photoshop, but to Li's use of a specially designed mirror with a hole in the center, which reflects the surrounding scene in reverse (figure 17). Picking up – mirroring – Ai Weiwei's refrain in *Studies of Perspective*, the series moves transnationally from site to iconic site, but reaches its climactic point at the Square in a photo-work called 'Reversing Tiananmen'. Li's head, facing the camera against the backdrop of the Square, in which the familiar

shapes of vehicles, road markings, and street lights are discernible, hovers in the lower left quadrant of the image like a decapitated Tank Man who has finally turned round to show himself. On a narrative level, the image once again rebukes the conspiracy of silence: 'the ghostly head is the only "real" object … (while) the tidy square, which reveals no trace of the violence committed there, turns out to be the illusion, a mere reflection' (Berry, 2008: 305). But its own visual language is no less in thrall to secrecy as it loops back to Tank Man via a self-referential aesthetic code that covers its tracks.

In short, the remediations of Tank Man I have discussed here exemplify the digital icon at large within censored space, and in protean and phantasmagorical form. On China's web, where he is so fugitive and ephemeral – spectral, by any other name – repurposings of his image can stray further than ever from the original photographs and yet remain instantly, effortlessly identifiable to those in the know. Indeed, to be unlike Tank Man, and yet to be recognized *as him* nonetheless, lies at the core of his necessary ghostliness in a society split by secrecy, just as devising his off-kilter reincarnations is what propels the creativity of his re-makers. Appropriately, Tank Man's ability to disassociate himself from his primary incarnation, and to be re-born in cognate guises, gives his spectrality a mobile, lingering character that is in some ways more poignant in its haunting than its high-fidelity remediations. In this sense, Tank Man may be more iconic in the nooks and crannies of digital China, the place that has supposedly 'forgotten' him, than anywhere else. Rather than 'the elephant in the room' – the familiar metaphor for a public secret known to everyone, and for that reason never manifest as anything other than an elephant – Tank Man is the shape-shifting symbol of what we might call the partially public secret: entirely invisible to

some, yet always conspicuous to others, even when sometimes he barely resembles himself – or may not be there at all. A photo-performance by Beijing-based artist Song Dong, entitled 'Breathing' (Haqi, 1996), offers an example of this latter point. The artist lay for 40 minutes in winter on the cold concrete of Tiananmen Square, exhaling onto the pavement until a thin layer of ice had formed. The trace left behind was ghostly, of course; but it also breathed life back into Tank Man, whose passing was intimated by Song Dong's supine position. The point here is not the risk of over-interpretation, of seeing Tank Man where he does not exist, but rather the long shadow cast by his forbidden specter, which actively stimulates ghost-hunting.

It has become commonplace – *de rigeur*, almost – to describe China's relationship with its troubled modern past as 'amnesiac', whether the history in question is June 4th, the Cultural Revolution, or the many other episodes of violence and trauma that blighted lives under Maoism and beyond. But for those who passed through the vortex, forgetfulness is surely a chimera, a pipe dream even. Memory, with its associated vocabulary cluster, is often far less useful as a set of interpretive tools in this environment than the discourses of secrecy, since it is China's status as a dedicated and effective cryptocracy, rather than as the 'People's Republic of Amnesia' (to quote the title of a recent study by Louisa Lim), which explains why so much of the past lies shrouded from public view. No one pretends that this 'amnesia' is memory loss, a natural process of attrition; it is well understood as the result of a sustained official blockade on commemoration – what writer Yan Lianke has called 'a state-sponsored sport' (2013). For this reason, in fact, the term 'amnesia' often has a satirical flourish, a tendency that reaches an apotheosis in Ma Jian's novel *Beijing Coma* (Beijing zhiwuren, 2008), which uses the trope of catatonic stupor to

metaphorize the mnemonic landscape. Yet the term remains a misnomer, even when deployed in satire, since China, rather than being a nation of amnesiacs, is divided between those who cannot forget but stay mostly silent, and those who have never, or barely, learned about the events which are seared across the cortex of their elders, and so have nothing to unremember.

Rather like the term ‘ethnic cleansing’, which has come to denote the entirely filthy practices of forced emigration, deportation, and genocide, ‘amnesia’ in the Chinese context has become the euphemistic descriptor for a relationship with the past which is the very opposite of forgetful. Indeed, we might wonder at the prevalence of the term ‘amnesia’ in discussions of the memory embargo in China, not least because of its associations with mind control, brain-washing and the notion of a passive populace, devoid of agency. Already objectionable in its recall of Cold War paranoia about the Yellow Peril, the top-down enforcement suggested by the idea of memory wipe also elides the extent to which China’s citizens participate in the silence about June 4th; keeping secrets, as Simmel pointed out long ago, is a highly social, group-based business (1906: 464). By calling secrecy ‘amnesia’, it might be argued that the discourse of forgetfulness is simply using euphemism for the purpose for which it was designed: namely, the covering up of unpleasant truth. But to allow not just the past but societal secrecy itself to remain veiled by semantics – to misname it ‘amnesia’, in other words – is to become more deeply complicit with the project of concealment. Small wonder that artist Sheng Qi repeatedly uses the motif of dripping in his 2007 series on Tian’anmen, including this remediation of Tank Man (figure 18): this is not merely brainwashing but a washing away of the responsibility that the custodians of the past should bear. And the focus on forgetting has also meant that

what Belinda Kong evocatively calls the 'hermeneutics of evasion' – the covert strategies of 'metaphor or metonymy, catachresis or ellipses' which artist-activists use to engage the cryprocratic apparatus on its own terms – have not received as much attention as they deserve (2012: 27).

Memorability, as discussed at the beginning of this paper, is increasingly achieved through the repetitive labor of the highly networked remake on the 'free' web – a state which is not really possible for Tank Man on the Chinese internet, even if it were desired. Yet what the repurposings I have explored here show, first of all, is that remakes can do more than simply keep memories serially 'refreshed', in both technical and affective terms; and, secondly, that there might be more productive states than being merely memorable or searchable online. In particular, remediations of Tank Man suggest that the spectral/playful mode which these image-works capture so keenly has the capacity to rub up more frictively against the operations of partial public secrecy than any regular reminders. Indeed, memorability in this context starts to look rather like exposure, a faux-threat against which open secrets have their own 'built-in protection'. In this sense, the concluding point to make here is not that these various repurposings of Tank Man prove that one day the dynasty will change, his secret will be busted open, and democracy will come to China (whether China wants it or not). Public secrecy is everywhere, as are its offshoots in the strategic silences which prevail in communities, in the family, in our most intimate relationships. They are hardly a post-socialist, propaganda-state phenomenon. If these remixes of Tank Man show anything, it is that we need to live intuitively and creatively with the well-known but papered-over facts that permit a given social order to continue in the absence of a collective will to candor. These remakes are not incitements to truth, but

rather complementary objects which via their very structure call attention to the sinister yet ridiculous character of that failure. They represent the distortions – to repurpose is, after all, on some level to distort – which an antagonistic complicity with public secrecy requires.

Artist Sheng Qi may offer the last word here. After the protests, he chose to remember the pain of June 4th in a uniquely radical way: he sliced off his little finger and buried it in a flower pot. In the years since, he has repeatedly used this mutilated hand in his work, most notably in a series called – what else? – *Memories* (Jiyi, 2000), in which tiny black-and-white family photographs nestle poignantly in its traumatized palm. Yet Sheng has never told his young son why he has no finger: 'Whenever his son asks him what happened, he jokes that he lost his finger on a bus. His son knows that he's lying, Sheng Qi admits, but he has decided not to tell him the truth' (Lim, 2014: 96). When asked why, Sheng responds, 'I want to protect him'.

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[1] In a recent study of witness videos of the Syrian war, Rik Smit, Ansgard Heinrich and Marcel Broersma call such strategies 'structuring future memory'. They argue that 'curating practices on YouTube – giving titles, tagging, and describing content – are essentially political practices that structure content and anticipate search behavior', since they bear directly on whether a given video will be picked up by algorithms and end up in the search bar (2015: 5).

[2] As Louisa Lim points out, the suppression of June 4th is now starting to bite back at the authorities, as younger media workers 'have even failed to recognize Tiananmen-related material and thus have neglected to censor it' (2014: 96).

[3] The Other of faceless Tank Man is, needless to say, full-frontal Mao, whose portrait, also reversioned repeatedly over the years in response to changes in both the political and physical weather, has dominated the vast visual field of Tiananmen since 1949. The openness, benevolence, and hyper-public positioning of Mao's countenance serve to mask, however, the fact that the very design of the gates and walls of Tiananmen has always manifested 'the political tenet that power could be maintained only by keeping it secret …What was displayed, then, was the "concealment" of power' (Wu Hung, 2005: 57-8). Mao's face symbolically 'fronted' state secrecy (even after the Tiananmen site had been extensively remodeled), which is no doubt why his portrait was vandalized by three young men a few days before the Tank Man photographs were taken in 1989. As Taussig elaborates at length, defacement is a major strategy against secrecy as a mode of domination.

[4] Crazy Crab has a longstanding commitment to supporting Chen Guangcheng in his work. For an analysis of his vibrant online works about Chen, see Mina (2014).

[5] Wang Shuo, China's most successful novelist of the late 1980s and 1990s, does something similar when he sneaks an ekphrastic reference to Tank Man (a 'column of enemy tanks … rumbled towards (the protagonist) at a snail's pace') into his otherwise bawdy and irreverent novel *Please Don't Call me Human* (*Qianwan bie ba wo dang ren*), written just weeks after the crackdown.

[6] In one of the few discussions to explore the link between humor and the uncanny, Robert Pfaller argues, citing Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), that the double is crucial to their space of structural sameness (2006: 206).

[7] In this sense, the duck patrol bears interestingly on Ethan Zuckerman's 'Cute Cat Theory' of digital activism. Zuckerman argues that "With web 2.0, we've embraced the idea that people are going to share pictures of their cats, and now we build sophisticated tools to make that easier to do. As a result, we're creating a wealth of tech that's extremely helpful for activists. There are twin revolutions going on – the ease of creating content and the ease of sharing it with local and global audiences'. Inevitably, images – harder to detect and delete, quicker to go viral – have a special valence here, as the duck patrol seems to show clearly enough. Yet as An Xiao Mina has argued in response to Zuckerman, in the case of political memes in China – where contentious speech acts must avail themselves of comic disguise – 'the cute cats (or duck patrols) *are* the activist message'. A further example of cutesy humor with a razor edge is the recent 'toad worship' subculture (*moha wenhua*) which has grown up around former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin. The former leader's faintly amphibian

look, enhanced by the so-called ‘frog spectacles’ that he wears, has spawned online chatter that appears affectionate, but has a sharply critical undertone in the social media feeds of some Chinese netizens. This critique either targets Jiang himself, or, more commonly, takes oblique aim at current leader Xi Jinping.