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Demolition (2.1.4.1.)

In his novel on the 1989 Democracy Movement, 'Beijing Coma' the Chinese writer Ma Jian uses the planned demolition of the area where the main protagonist Dai Wei lives with his mother as a metaphor for the rising threat they are living with. Dai Wei is completely numb, unable to move and without memory or consciousness. It is 10 years after 1989, and we are with Dai Wei, inside his mind, as he slowly and very painfully wakes up, and remembers his life piece by piece; slowly, slowly sampling the fragments of his memories. As he lies there, a vegetable in his mother's living-room, the demolition of the housing-blocks moves closer and closer. In the process, the mother becomes increasingly insane. She completely neglects the warnings from the city officials and turns down every offer of a new apartment. The demolition of the housing blocks parallels the erasing of her identity. It is beautifully juxtaposed with the returning of Dai Wei's memory. As the mind of the mother disintegrates, he slowly regains consciousness.

At the end of the novel the process of regaining memory is completed, when he is finally able to remember the disastrous events on June 4th 1989, the bloodshed and the brutal killings of most of the student leaders, he was then one of. In an extremely dramatic sequence, he remembers the moment, when he is shot through the head and loses consciousness. It is interspersed with the description of how a bulldozer tears down the front of the apartment, he is living in now, ten years later, and the mother finally breaks down totally. Then on the last page, in the miraculous final paragraph, we follow the bio-chemical reflexes inside Dai Wei, suddenly flashing up:

"Your blood is getting warmer. The muscles of your eye sockets quiver. Your eyes will soon fill with tears. Saliva drips onto the soft palate at the back of your mouth. A reflex is triggered, and the palate rises, closing off the nasal passage and allowing the saliva to flow into your pharynx. The muscles of the oesophagus, which have been dormant for so many years, contract, projecting the saliva down into your stomach. A bio-electrical signal darts like a spark of light from the neurons in your motor cortex, down the spinal cord to a muscle fibre at the tip of your finger. You will no longer have to rely on your memories to get through the day. This is not a momentary flash of life before death. This is a new beginning." ¹

In that same moment, when he loses his mother and their home in a kind of second revenge by the system, he is alive again, ready to start anew. But he is reborn completely precariously. Stripped of all connections and belongings. Even his refound memories are now tabooed by the authorities. A naked man with a prohibited identity. Or as the novel ends by asking:

"But once you've climbed out of this fleshy tomb, where is there left for you to go?" ²

Ma Jian creates an immensely complex and emotionally gripping narration of Spring 1989 and the cultural and political climate surrounding it, both backwards and forwards in history; the cultural revolution of the 1960s and the manic contemporary re-building of the Chinese cities.

In the novel, in 1989, Dai Wei is taking care of logistics; in the demonstrations and the occupation of Tiananmen Square, he is the main person responsible for the

spatial distribution of the protesting masses. He organizes the guards that direct the movement of the demonstrations and he organizes the cordons – the living fences of students – that structure the spatial divisions, and the social hierarchies in the occupied square. Later in the present time of the novel, he and his mother are threatened by the unavoidable demolition of their house and the area, where they are living. By linking the struggles and the emotional trauma of De Wei to these spatial structures, Ma Jian creates a convincing portrait of a society, where the sheer pace of rebuilding and recreating the vast Chinese megacities has taken on the characteristics of a collective mass psychosis. At an unprecedented pace, whole areas and local communities are erased and refurbished with anonymous architecture, thereby substituting the personal histories and identities connected to these areas with the new consumerist identities of present-day China. Here, Ma Jian's critique of the present Chinese rulers is as devastating as his portrayal of the dictatorship that the student revolt faced in 1989. It's not only De Wei that has been in coma: It is a whole nation that is performing collective amnesia. This is the double meaning of the title, Beijing Coma.

My idea of commemorating the 1989 Democracy Movement by using ghosts was partly inspired by this novel. Also my choice of sites for the two performances in Ghost Choir Karaoke was inspired by how Ma Jian uses the transformation of the city as the spatial expression of totalitarian rule. In my project, the building site and the karaoke club work as figurations of the neo-capitalist society the seven ghosts of the Arts Choral Group are facing when they return to celebrate yet another May 4th.

Cloning (2.1.4.2.)

”Fellow students, fellow countrymen:

Seventy years ago today, a large group of illustrious students assembled in front of Tiananmen, and a new chapter in the history of China was opened. Today, we are once again assembled here, not only to commemorate that monumental day but more importantly, to carry forward the May Fourth spirit of science and democracy. Today, in front of the symbol of the Chinese nation, Tiananmen, we can proudly proclaim to all the people in our nation that we are worthy of the pioneers of seventy years ago.”

Wuer Kaixi at Tiananmen Square May 4, 1989³

The 1989 Democracy Movement starts as a small student march to Tiananmen Square on April 18th 1989. It's a spontaneous reaction to the death of the former Secretary General of The Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, who died on April 17th.

That the first instances of critique towards the regime takes the shape of mourning an official Communist leader is paradoxical, but it will prove to be one of the typical features of the emerging movement. In the 7 weeks that the uprising lasts, this strategy of 'cloning' the symbolic language of the regime the new movement is criticizing, is utilized in various ways. It is also – in my view – this cloning of Communist symbolic features that confuses the regime and makes it possible for the movement to occupy Tiananmen Square and remain there for an entire 48 days.

Tiananmen Square is the central public space, not only of Beijing, but of the whole of China; it has immense symbolic importance and is the spatial expression of ultimate political power in Communist China. Mao Zedong built the square as an exemplification of the new transparent rule of The People; here power became accessible for all. Entering Tiananmen Square on April 18th, the students immediately re-activates the idealistic terminology of proto-communism, using it as the central weapon of critique in a wave of critical discourse that will explode into grand scale protest marches in the following days.⁴

This re-activation of Communist ideals is not only a question of political rhetorics. To a large extent, its is performed as a re-activation of various formats of communication. Communist discourse is re-activated by re-using - cloning - a range of signature Communist symbols, thereby creating a new, fresh version of Communist aesthetics, directly accessible to the dissatisfied masses.

Big Letter Posters

One of the most prominent features in this re-activation of Communist form are the so-called 'big letter posters'; these hand-written posters with shorter or longer texts were a favorite propaganda medium used by the emerging Chinese Communist Party in the 1930s and 40s. It was a cheap easily-accessible medium that could be hung on walls and buildings throughout society at a fast pace. Mao Zedong liked these posters so much that he encouraged the use of them both in the 1950s campaign against intellectuals and in the cultural revolution in the 1960s. This was the mass media of the people. The right to produce big letter posters was even enshrined in the 1975 constitution. Shortly afterwards, Deng Xiaoping banned this right again, feeling threatened by the possibilities of direct popular critique. But in 1989 the use of big letter posters are blossoming in the Beijing campuses. Numerous poster-walls - so called 'democracy-walls' - are visited everyday by thousands of

students reading very direct critical comments on the regime and calls for demonstrations.⁵ Already in the first spontaneous occupation, starting as some students just remain on Tiananmen Square in the evening of April 18th, a number of Big Letter Posters are mounted on the Monument to the People's Heroes in the middle of the square.

In the morning of April 19th a list of 7 demands are formulated and delivered to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.⁶ Of course the members of the Standing Committee don't respond. Even though the protesters are cloning the Communist slogans, their claims, as stated in the list of 7 demands, are quite universal. These demands closely resemble the demands made by various protest movements during, for instance, the recent 'Arabic spring'.⁷

In the following weeks the new protest movement swells to hundreds of thousands; masses of students engaging in a series of large-scale demonstrations dominated by the new raw mix of Communist aesthetics. The slogans and big letter posters are critical, but subtle in the sense that large parts of the critique are formulated as a resurrection of the ideal Communist values. When an editorial in the People's Daily by Deng Xiaopeng on April 26th criticizes the new movement harshly, accusing them of plotting to overthrow the Communist Party, the student leaders, although being offended in a major way, even reacts by toning down their slogans, underlining a message of 'anti-corruption' and 'pro-party'.⁸

Democracy and science!

As utilized in the script of 'Ghost Choir Karaoke' one of the major examples of cloning is the intriguing appropriation of the nationwide May 4th celebrations of the classic Communist May 4th Movement. These almost mythic riots in front of the Tiananmen Gate in 1919 led to the formation the Chinese Communist Party. When the May 4th demonstration of the new 1989 Democracy Movement arrives at Tiananmen Square, the student leader Wuer Kaixi, chairman of the newly founded Beijing Students' Federation, reads aloud the 'New May Fourth Manifesto' for the around 100.000 participants in the demonstration.⁹ The manifesto paraphrases the 'Manifesto of All Beijing Students' written by student patriots seventy years earlier on May 4th, 1919. In emotionally charged phrases the new manifesto uses the slogan of 'Democracy and Science!' to stage the new movement and their goals as a direct continuation of the struggles initiated by the first Chinese Communists in 1919. The demands of the new movement are presented as an actualization of the historic, paradigmatic shift in the spirit of the Chinese nation:

"Now more than ever, we need to review the experiences and lessons of all student movements since May Fourth, to make science and rationalism a system, a process. Only then can the tasks the May Fourth Movement set before us be accomplished, only then can the spirit of May Fourth be carried forward, and only then can our wish for a strong China be realized."¹⁰

The 'New May Fourth Manifesto' is criticised for being 'vague and weak in ideas' by more radical observers and supporters of the movement. On the contrary, I see it as a brilliant example of how 'cloning' is manifested; by appropriating the rethoric of the Party and using this rethoric to criticise the party by its own measures, a very broad platform for criticism is created. Here it is not only the very radical protesters that want a complete revolutionary change of system who are adressed and included; the manifesto opens the discourse, making it accessible for the much larger segments of

society that somehow still believe in communism, but want it in a 'clean' democratic version, based on the original social and egalitarian ideas, far from the hegemonical and corrupt state dictatorship it has involved into. It is an intricate and complex strategy, equivalent to the post-modern ideas flourishing in the West in the same period.

Goddess of Democracy

Even the famous 'Goddess of Democracy', a large-scale sculptural monument created by art students on Tiananmen Square in the last days before the crack-down, is a cloning of a classic Communist monument. It is generally interpreted in the West as a copy of the US 'Statue of Liberty', and thereby a clear marker of the supposed inspiration from American style capitalist democracy. On the contrary, it is partly modeled on Russian Communist Vera Mukhina's monumental sculpture, "A Worker and a Collective Farm Woman," which held aloft a torch with two hands on the top of the USSR's pavilion at the 1937 Paris World Fair. In an accurate description of the artistic process of creating the sculpture, the former art student Tsao Hsinyuan explains how the idea of copying the Statue of Liberty is rejected as being too 'pro-American'. Instead the sculpture is constructed with various references, among them "A Worker and a Collective Farm Woman" that is the model for the head of the sculpture.¹¹

The American sociologist George Katsiaficas uses this fact as an argument against Samuel Huntington's idea of a 'third wave':

"Huntington framed his third wave as a tribute to US imperial power and democratic prestige. He tells us that

"...movements for democracy throughout the world were inspired and borrowed from the American example. In Rangoon supporters of democracy carried the American flag; in Johannesburg they reprinted The Federalist; in Prague they sang "We Shall Overcome"; in Warsaw they read Lincoln and quoted Jefferson; in Beijing they erected the Goddess of Democracy..."¹²

Here Huntington makes a critical error, a value judgment that leads him to misconstrue events. He claims the "Goddess of Democracy" in Tiananmen Square was a copy of the US Statue of Liberty. In fact, Chinese art students explicitly rejected the idea of copying the US statue as too "pro-American" and instead modeled theirs on Russian Communist Vera Mukhina's monumental sculpture, "A Worker and a Collective Farm Woman,..."¹³

As Katsiaficas here argues, the copying – the cloning – is not a means in itself, it is crucial what is cloned, since the cloning carries with it the ideals inherent in the original. Here, in the 1989 Democracy Movement, it is crucial to understand how the political agenda of the proto-communist May 4th Movement of 1919 becomes a template for the new democratic movement seventy years later.

Appropriation

My idea here of 'cloning' is of course inspired by the post-modernism that flourished in the West in those years in the 1980s; the way the student activists play with Communist iconography and political history is completely in line with other post-modern phenomena of the period. 'Cloning' is the aesthetic re-use of the imagery

and symbolism of the powers that be, to criticize those same powers. It recalls the various artistic strategies emerging in the period, such as appropriation art, neo-geo or trans-avantgarde. Especially appropriation art uses similar strategies of copying; remaking historic artworks or other kinds of cultural material. The appropriation is not only a way of questioning the authenticity of the artwork and the author, but also a way to criticize linear progression in the writing of art and cultural history. Most importantly, it is a method to re-contextualize meaning.

Even though the cloning - in Beijing in 1989 - is partly aesthetic, it is taken far beyond the sphere of art, into the domain of political discourse. Here, the traditional Communist ideology is re-freshed and made real once again.

Reclaim Communism!

Choosing specific Communist celebrations as frameworks for new demonstrations creates a scenario loaded with potential; there is an immense range of classic Communist images waiting to be re-enacted, images of the people claiming their right to power. Very recognizable images. Every Chinese has been indoctrinated by these images all through their upbringing. The regime has loaded this iconography with pre-defined meaning. Revitalising such imagery is to tap into a whole range of emotions and hopes that is already imprinted on the soul of every citizen. By performing these scenarios - by marching and demonstrating, as if ideal Communism was still an option - the student movement opens up a possibility for everyone to take part, to actualize these images for themselves. The images are recognizable, but it is only by performing them, the movement makes them their own.

Construction Site and Karaoke Club: The Public Square as Resistance Platform (2.1.4.3.)

The two sites in Ghost Choir Karaoke – the construction site and the karaoke club – are chosen as symbolic representations of public space in present-day China. Apart from this rather sardonic contextualization of the performances, the thematic of public space is not discussed directly in the performance, simply because the performance would become too long and too complicated, if it was to include a proper actualization of that theme. Even though the way the 1989 Democracy Movement utilizes public space or claims and re-invents it is highly relevant for this project as a whole. The occupation of Tiananmen Square can be seen as the emblematic mother of all those occupations of main public squares that has dominated the recent wave of global protest movements, starting out with the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo in January/February 2011. I return to Tahrir Square in the last script/performance 'Silent Stand', where the even more recent occupations of Puerta Del Sol in Madrid and the whole series of city square squattings done by the Occupy Movement in the US is also discussed. In this note, I will try to present some of the features of the Tiananmen Square occupation, hoping to establish a kind of prototype of this phenomenon that can be reflected in the discussion of the contemporary occupations of city squares.

The use of Big Letter Posters (as described in commentary 2.1.4.2.) is a crucial element in the establishment of the Tiananmen Occupation. Already in the winter of 1989, the presentations of this kind of posters increases on the university campuses in Beijing. The most famous site for these posters is the so-called democracy-wall on the campus of Beijing University. Here the growing discontent is formulated in long and quite outspoken texts. The posters and the democracy-walls become sites for debate and discussion, where critique of both the university leaders and politics in general emerges. When the former Secretary General of The Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, dies on April 17th, a new kind of texts immediately pop up on the posters; intricate elegies, where mourning for the dead Hu Yaobang is woven together with harsh criticism of the ruling Communist Party.

As described above, this event becomes the decisive moment that engages thousands and other thousands of students and workers all over Beijing. Already the following night a large scale demonstration march to Tiananmen Square. Here the students occupy the area in front of the National People's Congress, and in the morning they try to deliver the list of seven demands (see appendix 2.1.5.2.). Of course the members of the Standing Committee don't respond. The students stay, sitting on the square for the rest of the day, a small core of the protesters even stays on until April 20th. During this first spontaneous occupation, a number of Big Letter Posters are mounted on the Monument to the People's Heroes in the middle of the square. Among them a poster with very direct questions to the main leaders of China:

I'D LIKE TO KNOW (excerpt)

"Comrade Xiaoping, I'd like to know: You realized early on that it doesn't matter if a cat is black or white; as long as it catches mice, it's a good cat. Doesn't it follow that insistence on distinguishing between "red" [politically correct] and "yellow" [liberal or bourgeois Western] thinking shows a lack of careful reflection? Reform in the political arena is an absolute necessity. But if we hear only words and see no actions, how will there be any results? Cars and residences, I want them all - and a computer to boot; so how is it that

your policy of "getting rich together" has turned out to be nothing but the same old empty promises? Democracy and freedom, the people want; how can you claim that we are too childish by this much or that much? Massive disarmament you can achieve, so just what makes it so tough to clean up corruption in the Party?"¹⁴

Trying to get in direct communication with the leading politicians with the list of demands on the one hand, and spontaneously establishing a temporary public space with statements directed towards a general audience of coincidental people passing by on the other hand are already quite strong interferences in the public order; but doing this on Tiananmen Square - the official and traditional site of symbolic representations of ultimate political power, not only in Communist China but in the Chinese Empire per se – is an extremely fearless, political gesture. By raising a critical voice, by speaking up in the same space as the political leaders, the students are claiming their right to be heard, to be taken seriously by the highest levels of society. The choice of site is crucial here. Tiananmen Square is the symbolic site of ultimate political power, and by occupying precisely that site, the students occupy the symbolic power as well.

The immense open square itself was constructed by the Communist regime immediately after the take-over in 1949. Until then, it was the gate to the Forbidden City, where the Emperor resided. The Tiananmen Gate was the symbolic point from which the ultimate power of the Emperor radiated out into the entire Chinese Empire. Mao Zedong constructed the Tiananmen Square as an open, accessible square, large enough for hundreds of thousands of people; a symbolic representation of the transparent spirit of the new regime. The American theatre director and professor in performance studies, Richard Schechner, writes:

“Clearly, the creation of Tiananmen Square was intended to refocus ceremonial - that is, theatrical - power from behind the Forbidden City's walls to the big open space, a more fitting symbol of what the new order promised. Mao, the new emperor, no longer sat on a throne behind the Gate, but was mounted in front, gazing out over the Square and from there to all of China. Power was no longer to radiate from secret forbidden places but be displayed for all people to see and share. The nation itself was renamed The People's Republic of China. And what the students who came to Tiananmen Square in 1978, 1986, and 1989 demanded, more than anything, was what they called 'transparency' - defined as an openness in government operations corresponding to the open square that symbolized the new China. In occupying Tiananmen Square the students were challenging the government, actualizing the students' belief that the government was not living up to its promises. There were precedents for such actions in the dramatic May 4th Movement of 1919 and the more recent democracy movements in 1978 and 1986 - all of which focused on Tiananmen Square.“¹⁵

The next phase of the uprising is about demonstrations; in a series of larger and larger demonstrations the movement escalates into hundreds of thousands. On April 21-22 on the occasion of the funeral of Hu, on April 27th on the occasion of the 26 April editorial, where Deng Xiaoping labels the students as 'small segments of opportunists', on May 4th on the occasion of the May 4th Jubilee, as described in the commentary 'Cloning'. Tiananmen Square is not occupied in connection with any of these demonstrations, but they all march to Tiananmen, claiming it as the

symbolic goal of each march. In this sense Tiananmen Square is constantly inscribed as the central location of the new movement, encircled in a star-like formation by the various university campuses.

In this phase a range of alternative news-journals also appear, the most persistent being the News Herald, published from the campus of Beijing University all through the protests until the last issue on May 31. These journals expand the new space of free speech established by the Big Letter Posters. Whereas the posters have a limited outreach, because they are bound to the site where they are mounted, the new journals are printed in many copies and communicate far beyond the university campuses. A practise of copying the texts on the posters by hand and thereby spreading the message is often used, though. In the democracy-walls, the posters and new journals an intellectual practice emerges, a public debate in text continuing all through the protests. The contributions range from short poems to long theoretical proposals, but in general, there is a sincere, engaged level of commitment that ensures a lively and serious debate. In the various phases of the uprisings, the general mood of the movement is reflected directly in this ongoing debate – its swings from extremely emotional outcries to high-level theoretical considerations on the direction of Chinese politics.

On May 13th, following a period of bewilderment and contrasting forces inside the protest movement, the core of radical activists have gained the upper hand. Disappointed by the lacking will of the government to enter into dialogue and negotiations, they begin a large-scale hunger strike. Approximately two thousand students arrive at Tiananmen Square to commence the hunger strike.

“They settle down in groups, organised by school (university) in front of the Monument to the People’s Heroes on sheets of plastic, clothes and newspapers that provide little insulation from the hard cement of the square”
16

Apparently not prepared for a longer occupation of the square, they nevertheless settle there in a very strong, emotional plea for respect and dialogue with the authorities. They are immediately encircled by thousands of protective supporters who by this gesture establishes the first spatial structure of the occupation: The central core of the protest - the weak hunger strikers - and the protective ring around them.

The new statements of the hunger strikers are far more emotional in language and approach. The movement has become existential, armed with desperate pathos:

“To die, hoping for the widest echo, an eternal echo.
He will be gone, his words good and wise;
the horse will be gone, its neighs sorrowful.
Farewell, colleagues, take care!
He who dies, he who survives, are equally faithful.
Farewell, love, take care!
I cannot bear to leave you, yet it must come to an end.
Farewell, mother and father!
Please forgive me, your child who cannot be loyal [to the country]
and [meet the demands of] filial piety at the same time!
Farewell, people!

Please allow us to use this means, however reluctantly,
to demonstrate your loyalty.
The vows written with our lives will brighten the skies of the Republic!

*The Entire Body of the Beijing University Hunger Strikers Group, May 13,
1989 (handbill, poster)" ¹⁷*

This existential pathos is a prominent feature in the occupation of Tiananmen; with emotional outcry, the organizers try to mobilize support by even larger parts of society, i.e. the parents' generation who are being addressed directly now.

The hunger strike and the occupation coincides with the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev visiting China's leader Deng Xiaoping. Although not intended to interrupt the meeting of the two Communist leaders, the hunger strike in Tiananmen creates constant obstacles and disruptions for the ceremonies and celebrations supposed to greet the Soviet leader. Already on the afternoon of his arrival, the mass of people in Tiananmen supporting the hunger strikers swells to a crowd of half a million. The organizers try to control the masses by a system of cordons of students, protecting the area where the thousands of hunger strikers are lying on the ground, and directing the crowds into certain areas of the square, thereby giving the authorities space to carry on the ceremonial duties of the state visit. But half a million is a huge crowd, and the occupation is more or less stealing the focus of the international press gathered for Gorbachev's visit.

Even though it is highly controversial, also inside the protest movement and among the intellectuals supporting them, the hunger strike and the inherent occupation of the square is a turning point for protests. The popular support for the hunger strikers reaches completely unprecedented numbers, and on the day Gorbachev leaves China, on May 17th, more than a million Chinese march through the streets of Beijing, heading for Tiananmen. Now, the demonstrations and the occupation of the square consist of participants from all strands of society and people from all over China who have come to Beijing to support the new movement. On May 18th this million mass march is repeated and it is obvious that its is no longer a student phenomenon, but a widespread people's protest.

To understand why it is the hunger strike that creates this new momentum for the movement, we must consider the emotional and existential argument it contains. It is no longer an intellectual and rational plea for education and free speech, as the rhetoric was in the first weeks of the protests. The hunger strike addresses everyone on a fundamental human level. The sacrifice it involves has a heavy symbolic weight, and the most radical of all consequences: Death. This message can be understood by everyone, and the risk taken by the hunger strikers, the bravery and the willingness to go all the way, gains respect and support from the masses. It is no longer the students rallying for intellectual freedom, it is the children appealing to their parents, the youth appealing to the elders, the future of a society risking death for the nation.

Another important aspect is the shift from talking to performing; the hunger strike and the occupation of the square are not merely communication, as the demonstrations and poster-campaigns. It is direct action that risks the lives of each participant in a much more severe way; it has direct physical consequences and the emotional impact of the actions becomes serious in an extreme, radical sense. By risking their

bodies the hunger strikers hit an emotional chord that resonates deeply in the masses of the Chinese nation.

These elements of self-sacrifice and martyrdom are something we also see as an important aspect of the recent uprisings in the Middle East – the Arabic spring – where self-immolation and hunger strike have created key shifts in the unfurling of events.

The accommodation of the two thousand hunger-striking students in Tiananmen Square requires certain spatial interventions. First, it is simple protection against the blistering sun – umbrellas and improvised roofs of cardboard and fabrics are erected to create shadow. Later, when the students start fainting and the physical consequences of starving appears, makeshift emergency aid stations are set up, supported by corridors through the crowds, sealed off by the student cordons, making way for ambulances.

These spatial measures soon develop into city-like structures, where the various functions of the occupation are divided and sealed off by an intricate structure of cordons – living fences of students – and a organization of guards protecting the entrance to these sealed off areas. Dai Wei, the main character of the novel 'Beijing Coma'¹⁸ was the head of this 'security organization' on Tiananmen Square, and the novel contains quite detailed descriptions of how the square is divided and protected. These fictional descriptions fit accurately with similar, but real descriptions by Philip J Cunningham in his memoir from Tiananmen Square. A temporary broadcast station with a system of loud-speakers is installed on the square, providing the crowds with on-going reports, interviews, statements and protest music. Of course this communication center immediately becomes one of the most important points in the power hierarchy soon developing among the activists, and it is carefully sealed off by the cordons and guards, allowing only very select activists entrance. In a similar manner, the leading core of activists are protected from the masses in the headquarters, where only the absolute top organizers have entrance. Around these central functions several rings or layers of sealed off areas create a spatial hierarchy that allows certain groups of activists entry to certain areas of various importance.

On May 19th the 'Hunger Strikers Group' declares an end to the hunger strike. Even though this step can be understood as an outstretched hand from the side of the Democracy Movement, it is immediately met by the hard-liners in the government, declaring martial law in Beijing; thereby sharpening the conflict severely. Once again the physiognomy of the uprising changes dramatically. The government announces that the army, The People's Liberation Army, will be called in to reinforce public rule in Beijing. In the following days, as the students keep up their occupation of Tiananmen, the citizens of Beijing organize road-blocks, sit-ins and other emergency measures to keep the army out of the city. As a result, the army is stopped in the suburbs, and Beijing becomes encircled, besieged. A massive campaign to convince the ordinary soldiers to realize their awkward position – the People's Army fighting the People - and change sides is set in. Now large fractions of student activists commit themselves to organize and facilitate key urban functions; traffic, security, patrolling the streets at night with bicycle brigades. A whole brigade of motorcycle gangs, 'The Flying Tigers', are acting as messengers, scouts and a fast communication network. If the daily life of Beijing is in chaos because of the enormous demonstrations and the blockades attempting to keep out the army, the Democratic Movement tries to restore a temporary order inside the besieged city. Thus, the temporary spatial

organization from Tiananmen is extended to the entire city, exemplifying how the Democratic Movement is no longer a students' movement, but a People's uprising mobilizing the majority of the entire Beijing population.

Momentum is crucial in such conflicts. As the situation in Beijing stiffens, as the army is not withdrawn, and as the hard-liners in the government seem to conquer the internal party opposition, the Democratic Movement loses momentum. Internal conflict starts brewing in the headquarters on Tiananmen Square. The leading organization, Beijing Student Federation, that had been the main organ for organizing the protest, is contested by a range of other organizations; as the occupation of Tiananmen is increasingly dominated by students from the provinces and workers, the grip on organizational power shifts from the Beijing students to other, more diverse groups. In the last phase of the uprising, it is an organization called 'Protect Tiananmen Headquarters', led by the young female student Chai Ling, that is taking the lead. There is constant and harsh debate on strategy. Can the occupation prevail? Or is retreat the only option left? As the internal conflict hardens, frustration emerges in the crowds on the square. Is the movement itself strong on democratic values? Does the security divisions and the sealed off headquarters in the square really reflect a democratic spirit? Or does the spatial arrangement, the spawn of check-points and guards, mirror the feudal, hierarchic structures of the system it is supposed to oppose? As a physical epitomization of this process, the camps on Tiananmen start deteriorating, the waste and trash accumulate, sanitation and hygiene falter.

One faction supports the continuation of direct conflict that now has to be envisioned ending in bloodshed. Chai Ling even argues that blood will be the deciding factor in mobilizing the masses:

“..., only when the government descends to the depths of depravity and decides to deal with us by slaughtering us, only when rivers of blood flow in the Square, will the eyes of the country's people truly be opened, and only then will they unite.”¹⁹

Chai Ling's 'logic of blood' has strong elements of martyrization, also inherent in the hunger strike from which she emerged as a leading figure.

Is this spirit of martyrdom that we also see as an even stronger element in the 'Arabic spring', an aspect of the transcendence that appeared as purple flags in the first performance 'A Short Course in Realism from the Perspective of the Police'?

Back in Beijing, another faction argues for withdrawal from Tiananmen, for retreating to the universities with the purpose of preparing for the next phase of the Democracy Movement, by enlarging the discussions, sharpening the political foundation and building up long-term organizations to intervene in Chinese politics and argue for reforms on a broader basis.

With the Democracy Movement for the first time undetermined, staying put on Tiananmen, the old guard of the Communist Party on the other hand is getting ready for the final countdown.

Then there is suddenly a fresh energy of new initiatives flowing into Tiananmen. First students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing erect the famous 'Goddess

of Democracy' on May 30th in the middle of the square. The statue attracts new crowds of curious spectators, and becomes an instant hit in the international media. Here it is often misread as a copy of the US 'Statue of Liberty', and seen as a symbol of how the protests are about wanting Western democracy-style reforms.²⁰ Immediately afterwards, plans for a 'Democracy University' are presented as a type of open university installed in Tiananmen Square, where the theoretical discussions and political thinking could be pursued in a liberated context. The idea is supported by a range of well-known intellectuals, university teachers and student leaders – tragically the 'Democracy University' is inaugurated on June 3rd in the morning of the day when the crackdown begins in the afternoon. On June 2nd a new hunger strike is also initiated, this time a small symbolic gesture by 4 cultural 'celebrities' – a rock-singer, a literary critic, a sociology professor and a newspaper editor - trying to stir public solidarity with the more and more desperate situation of the occupants on Tiananmen.

This last round of cultural and intellectual additions adds cultural institutions to the Tiananmen Occupation. Now there is a central monument, a university and even a class of cultural establishment added to the bricolage of the temporal city. Together with the Headquarters, the Broadcast Station, the Emergency Aid Station, the Democracy Walls, the Big Letter Posters, the News Journals, the Security Cordons, the Flying Tigers' motorbike-messengers and the Bicycle Brigades patrolling the city at night, they make up the grid of a new society, a temporary proposal for a democratic China.

How is the occupation and this new society to be understood? In the anarchist tradition it would be called a 'pre-figuration' of the society the movement is fighting for. In this concept the temporary city of Tiananmen Square would be an ideal proposal of how society at large could become, if the revolution was realised. Here it is the symbolic features of the encampment that are important. What kind of political ideas are represented in the occupational set-up, what kind of world view is expressed in the structure of micro-society. The occupation is a proposal, a model for the kind of society the activists want to realize. A kind of utopian model society.

In a discussion on the temporality of contemporary activism, the Danish anthropologist, Stine Krøijer, suggests skipping the 'pre' and terming similar events 'figurations of the future'. Trying to designate the political cosmology of radical activism, she argues that this kind of events are in a sense carved out of ordinary (dead) time – our present (capitalist) time - and establish a slice of the future. Not the near future, accessible by reform and social development, but a far off radically different future, where all the 'unjust and morally wrong' elements of contemporary society are transformed in an apocalyptic revolutionary situation. She calls this future 'active time'. In this argument, an event like the Tiananmen Occupation is not a proposal for something to come – it is already here. The future utopia already exists, directly there, on the square, as a temporal figuration of the future.²¹

In his essay on the 1989 Democracy Movement Richard Schechner discusses Tiananmen Square as street theatre and festival. He is using Bakhtin's 'carnavalesque' and inscribing Tiananmen in a tradition of radical political street theatre

“Doubtless, there has been a mutually fruitful exchange between art performances and symbolic public actions. By the 1960s, these actions

constituted a distinct liminoid-celebratory-political-theatrical-ritual genre with its own dramaturgy, mise-en-scène, role enactments, audience participation, and reception. This theatre is ritual because it is efficacious, intending to produce real effects by means of symbolic causes. It is most theatrical at the cusp where the street show meets the media, where events are staged for the camera.”²²

Schechner sees Tiananmen as a ‘carnival-demonstration’ in this tradition, where an “utopian mimesis whose focused, idealized, heated, magnified and transparent clarity” is acted out. In this ‘direct theatre’

“large public spaces are transformed into theatres where collective reflexivity is performed, and fecund and spectacular excesses displayed. Parades, mass gatherings, street theatre, sex, and partying – everything is exaggerated, ritualized, done for show.”²³

By the carnivalesque a temporal zone outside of ordinary life is established and normative power-structures are suspended. Here in this carnival-zone, a spontaneous and excessively playful re-figuration of hierarchies takes place. The zone has utopian features; it works as ‘rehearsals for the near future’, a ‘spontaneous communitas’. But once the show is over, society returns to normal – or if revolution succeeds, the festival decays into dirty power politics.

“The carnival (...) can act out a powerful critique of the status quo, but it cannot itself be what replaces the status quo.”²⁴

My own interpretation is a kind of synthesis of these ideas. The occupation of Tiananmen Square is a performance and enactment of an ideal society. It is not so much ‘another society’ – in the logic of cloning proposed above, what the Democracy Movement is fighting for is not a revolution or a completely different society. They are, on the contrary, constantly referring back to the foundation of Chinese Communism and demanding a realization of the ideals of Communism; the transparent democracy and egalitarian freedom for ‘all of the people’. All through the many Big Letter Posters and other statements run a very strong focus on reform. In this sense, the Democracy Movement is not revolutionary, it is rather reformist, but in a very radical sense; reform from inside the depraved system is totally unrealistic, and the Movement argues for a return to the idealistic, transparent forms that the system was once supposed to be. The Tiananmen Occupation provides a platform for an enactment of that ideal system, a scenario where these forms can be performed as symbolic gestures. They are performed exactly ‘at the cusp where the street show meets the media’, and in the crucial moments, the performances are loaded with an emotional attack, a precise critique or an intellectual clarity that engages millions of citizens. The various elements that make up the new city of Tiananmen all have this double feature – they are at once very real, but temporal functions in the temporary settlement, AND at the same time, they are symbolic and often moral signifiers for how society is supposed to be. On Tiananmen the Democracy Movement performs an image of how society should be/could be, but this image is performed in reality, in a really dangerous, real situation, with extreme potential consequences for the participants. This ‘performing in the real’ - the incredible courage involved, the extreme risk taken, the sheer physical presence – is what creates the emblematic image that Tiananmen Square 1989 becomes, not just in China, but all over the world. An icon of liberation. Of course the famous image of

'tank-man', a lone, unarmed activist in his white shirt, trying to stop a brigade of armed tanks, simply by standing still in front of the first one, is an almost too obvious, example of such a moment – an act becoming image by being performed in the real – but the Democracy Movement is full of similar examples. Courageous activists becoming The People by performing ideal and moral acts of political disobedience.

In the evening of June 3rd it all ends. The 'river of blood' flows through the streets of Beijing. The crackdown on the Democracy Movement has been called a massacre. Estimates vary, but at least 500 and maybe several thousand citizens are killed by the People's Liberation Army. Especially the 27th Army is said to be extremely brutal in the manner they clear Tiananmen Square and the nearby Changan Avenue, in an operation lasting all through the night into the early hours of June 4th. In the following months, thousands of activists are arrested, many disappearing and a few escaping China. The rest is silence. Autocratic rule is reinforced, the old guard of the Communist Party rejects all reform and the 1989 Democracy Movement becomes an absolute political taboo.

Notes:

¹ Ma Jian: *Beijing Coma* (London: Vintage 2009), p.666

² Ma Jian: *Beijing Coma* (London: Vintage 2009), p.666

³ *NEW MAY FOURTH MANIFESTO* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 135-137 (included here as Appendix 2.1.5.3.)

⁴ more on the history of Tiananmen Square in commentary 2.1.4.3: Construction Site and Karaoke Club: The Public Square as Resistance Platform

⁵ see Han Minzhu and Hua Sheng: *Editors' Foreword* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. xxi

⁶ see appendix 2.1.5.2.

⁷ Aspects of the 'arabic spring' are treated in the last performance here, 'Silent Stand'.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Daily_editorial_of_26_April

⁹ *NEW MAY FOURTH MANIFESTO* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 135-137 (included here as Appendix 2.1.5.3.)

¹⁰ *NEW MAY FOURTH MANIFESTO* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 135-137 (included here as Appendix 2.1.5.3.)

¹¹ Tsao Hsinyuan: *The birth of the Goddess of Democracy* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) pp. 343-8.

¹² Samuel P Huntington: *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press 1993), p.286

¹³ George Katsiaficas: *Rethinking Huntington's Third Wave* (<http://www.eroseffect.com/articles/huntington.pdf> 2010), p.4

¹⁴ *I'D LIKE TO KNOW* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 13-15

¹⁵ Richard Schechner: *THE STREET IS THE STAGE* in Jan Cohen-Cruz, editor, *Radical Street Performance: an international anthology* (New York: Routledge 1998) p. 200

¹⁶ Han Minzhu and Hua Sheng: *The Hunger Strike May 13-19* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 119

¹⁷ *Hunger Strikers Statement* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 201

¹⁸ see commentary 2.1.4.1.: Demolition

¹⁹ excerpt from an interview with Chai Ling, in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 327

²⁰ See commentary 2.1.4.2.: Cloning

²¹ Stine Krøijer: *'Other worlds are possible: a political cosmology of capitalism'* in *FIGURATIONS OF*

THE FUTURE Forms and temporality of left radical politics in northern Europe, PhD thesis (Copenhagen: Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen 2011), p. 45-70

²² Richard Schechner: *THE STREET IS THE STAGE* in Jan Cohen-Cruz, editor, *Radical Street Performance: an international anthology* (New York: Routledge 1998) p. 199 + p. 204-206.

²³ Richard Schechner: *THE STREET IS THE STAGE* in Jan Cohen-Cruz, editor, *Radical Street Performance: an international anthology* (New York: Routledge 1998) p. 199 + p. 204-206.

²⁴ Richard Schechner: *THE STREET IS THE STAGE* in Jan Cohen-Cruz, editor, *Radical Street Performance: an international anthology* (New York: Routledge 1998) p. 199 + p. 204-206.