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## Cultural Revolution as Method

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A movement that would ‘touch people to their very souls’ (*Chuji renmin de linghun 触及人们的灵魂*) was how the Party mouthpiece, *People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao 人民日报*), described the Cultural Revolution in 1966.<sup>1</sup> The idea stuck. A revolution that could touch people to their very souls could just as easily have been described as an ‘affective revolution.’ Affect is, after all, the experiential state that involves an active discharge of emotion leading to an augmentation or diminution of one’s bodily capacity to act.<sup>2</sup> When the ‘soul’ is touched, bodily capacities are augmented to such a degree that affect has the potential to be transformed into a revolutionary weapon. Such a weapon is, in the language of Carl Schmitt, a form of political intensity.<sup>3</sup>

Maoism undertook a series of experiments in synaesthetic homologization to bring ‘idea’ and ‘affect’ into correspondence and, through that process, to ‘weaponize’ their union.<sup>4</sup> If Maoist ‘machines’ brought affective energy flows to the surface as a clustering of intensely *felt* political ideas, it did so by channeling them through the ever narrowing vector of the friend/enemy dyadic structure of the political.<sup>5</sup> This enabled the velocity and intensity of the affective flow to be constantly and rapidly increased.

The Cultural Revolution, as the apogee of this experiment in deploying affective revolutionary technology, has come to be regarded as a disaster for China, but if the various attempts to harness affective energy flows and channel them toward a productive intensity were understood as being the basis of a particular and unique mode of being political, then this disaster opens onto a new way of understanding the dynamics propelling the Maoist

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<sup>1</sup> *People’s Daily*, 2 June 1966.

<sup>2</sup> This understanding of affect is drawn largely from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 441.) who refer to it as a discharge of emotion and as a weapon that alters a bodily capacity to act.

<sup>3</sup> Schmitt (Schmitt 1996, 26) points to the nature of the political in the following terms: “The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy” ... he then goes on to point out that this “distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or disassociation.”

<sup>4</sup> Spinoza makes the distinction between the idea and affect in Axiom 3, Section 2 of *Ethics* when he notes that while modes of thinking about, say, love cannot exist without an idea of the thing loved, the idea of love can itself exist separately from the state of being loved. See Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics* (trans R.H.M. Elwes), [Gutenberg project e-book] cited on 30 April 2015 at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm>. Drawing on this, Gilles Deleuze notes that ideas are representational whereas affects are not. See Gilles Deleuze, “Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza’s Concept of Affect” [trans Emilie and Julien Deleuze] [24/01/78] cited on 1 April at <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire.html>. The Maoist ‘trick’ was to weave them into one form.

<sup>5</sup> The friend/enemy distinction is, of course, what Carl Schmitt calls the unique criteria “to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced.” (Schmitt 1996, 26). As I have shown elsewhere, this duality can be traced all the way to China where it would sit at the heart of the Maoist political. On the centrality of this to the Maoist political see Dutton 2005.

political on the ground, and offers an entirely different focus to the ongoing theoretical debate about the Schmittian political.<sup>6</sup>

It suggests that rather than focusing on questions of representation – which was the locus of Schmitt's work – the concept of the political demands that attention needs to be re-directed toward the more ethereal question of politico-affective flows and the technologies that 'guide' them.<sup>7</sup> This re-alignment fundamentally alters the way we might begin to look at Maoist politics. It suggests that each mass-line Maoist political campaign, far from being a smokescreen disguising the 'real' politics taking place behind the scenes was, in fact, the key to understanding the dynamics propelling this mode of politics, for it operated as a key technology for the channeling and harnessing of the affective flow into an overtly political form. It also suggests that work in the cultural and aesthetic realm, far from being merely epiphenomenal propaganda, was actually central to the construction of the political for Maoist China was the site of an experiment designed to calibrate an approach to political transformation through the channeling of the affective flow. Moreover, it also suggests that collectively, these technologies, perhaps even more than the battles taking place between individual 'leading figures' within the conventional political realm or factional struggles taking place within institutional sites, holds the key to understanding the dynamic propelling the Maoist political. If that holds true, then this has ramifications not just for our understanding of the dynamics of Maoist politics, but more generally for the very definition of the political. To unearth this aspect of the political, however, requires an altogether different approach to the question of the political. In short, it requires an approach that could be termed an art of the political.

An art of the political is neither a political science nor simply a mentality of government (governmentality).<sup>8</sup> Rather, it turns on understanding a set of culturally and site-specific process-driven practices and machines that intuitively work within the fluidity of power to produce political outcomes. Directional rather than intentional, an art of the political focuses on those social technologies that attempt to channel, harness and make concrete, the fluidity

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6 For Carl Schmitt, this friend/enemy distinction "to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced." (26) was always concrete, rather than metaphoric or symbolic (27) leading Jacques Derrida to claim that "the political is only available as practical identification." In other words, the political in Schmitt always takes a representational form. By focusing on the transformation of affective energy flows into a political intensity, the political comes to centre upon the non-representational 'fluid' aspects. For Schmitt on the concreteness of the friend/enemy distinction, see Schmitt 1996, 27. On Derrida, see Derrida 1997, 117.

7 For Schmitt, the jurist, it was the manifestation of intensity as 'solids', structures or 'things' – be they institutional forms, like state organs, concepts, like friend and enemy or juridical concepts such as sovereignty – that became the focus of the concept of the political. The centrality of the concept of representation to Schmitt's thinking can be gleaned from one of his early works written (in 1923) before he developed the concept of the political. Simona Draghici (Schmitt 1988, 23) in the introduction to that work suggests that the concept of representation was so important to Schmitt that he not only wrote about it but also took on a PhD student to research the question further.

8 This is not to reject the notion of governmentality but merely to note a limit on thinking of this flow as being restricted to matters of government. Rather than a mentality this form of thinking in some ways resembles the broader frame that Edward Said has called a 'style of thought' which he notes informs all writing, thinking and acting on 'the Orient.' Having said this, it should also be acknowledged that the rendition of the political given here draws heavily on the Foucauldian insistence that power is fluid, mobile and relational rather than 'a thing.' On governmentality, see Foucault 1991, 87-104. On the Said notion of a style of thought, see his description of Orientalism in Said 1978, 12. On Foucault's rendition of power as fluid, see Foucault 1978, 94-95.

of the affective realm.<sup>9</sup> An art of the political focuses on the channeling mechanisms that encounter the heterological, intangible, and affective flows and either turns them into political intensities or dissipate them by other means. An art of the political is, then, concerned with those technologies that work either to intensify or to de-intensify the power of an affective energy flow. If commodity markets are the central means by which the flow is de-intensified and dissipated in our world, the Cultural Revolution opens onto the technologies and machinery of class struggle designed to produce and expand the production of political intensity in theirs.

Collectively, these technologies of the Cultural Revolution worked to turn the rational cognitive processes that produced a strong intellectual belief in revolution into goosebumps on the surface of the skin, lumps in the back of the throat, tears in the eyes of the believer, and anger in the heart of the revolutionary.<sup>10</sup> The novelty and invention of this Maoist political apparatus lies precisely in its experimentation with technologies of fusion that brought together and intensified idea and affect. It would lead to thought being pushed into excess, action into 'chaos,' and reason into 'madness' all through the singular focus being placed on fighting the (class) 'enemy.'<sup>11</sup> If that class based focus on tapping into and channeling this affective flow led to people being touched to their very souls, the binary logic being deployed produced the sometime violent intensity that left some very deep scars.

With varying degrees of moral indignation and intensity, China area studies scholarship has been picking away at these scars ever since. Picking at scars led to stories of abuse that resulted in widespread disenchantment and revulsion. As the critiques mounted, they buried any claims to the Cultural Revolution being a socio-political experiment. All it seemed to have done, it seemed to suggest, was scar a generation. Whether that generation is scarred or genuinely touched, is, however, in terms of political theory at least, less significant than the fact that it 'affected' them. That is to say, in marking the soul, it moved the question of class struggle beyond the rational, homogenous realm and into the realm of affect. It was here, in this realm of the heterological, that the socio-political affective revolutionary experiments of the Cultural revolution took place. These experiments were, in a sense, being carried out 'underground' for they were buried within a concept of the political that was itself embedded within a discourse of Maoist revolutionary experiment.

Maoism would never speak of this 'affective' revolutionary experiment directly for it was regarded as little other than a set of techniques or means to an end and that end was the manifest revolutionary experiment extending around the category of class struggle. Yet under this other language game centring on the words, class struggle, a 'style of thought' could be discerned that revealed affective dimensions within a series of symptomatically linked practices, ideas and techniques Maoism either devised or developed.

What was the nationwide, rhythmic, mass campaign if not an expression of a guiding process being imposed upon a pulsating energy force designed to build into a political intensity? How could one understand the Maoist notion of continuous revolution without an intuitive grasp of the fluidity of power and the political? How could one understand micro-level techniques such as typification and the formation of 'models' without an appreciation of how political anthropomorphism led to a condensation and intensification

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9 It could, perhaps, in the language of Deleuze and Guattari, be called a (political) 'becoming.' For details of how this might be the case, see Massumi 1992, 94-95.

10 How these are 'measured' and thereby become unfelt in our world, is described in Massumi 1995, 83-109.

11 Massumi (1995, 85) notes the way intensity is always organised around an either/or.

of the figure of the (typified) enemy? Together, these and other techniques that aimed to touch the soul worked within what has been referred to as the ‘one big concept’ of Maoism. This term, ‘one big concept,’ comes neither from Mao or Maoism but from the conceptual artist Cai Guoqiang as he reflected upon the power of one Maoist ‘model’ artwork that he re-worked for the Venice Biennale of 1999. That original artwork was called the Rent Collection Courtyard and, when unveiled during the Cultural Revolution, it was said to “reflect a true picture of the soul-stirring (*jingxin dongpo* 惊心动魄) struggle of the old society in the countryside.”<sup>12</sup> It was a monumental work – being 118 meters long and featuring 114 life-sized mud statues – and profoundly political in nature – it was proclaimed a ‘model’ for the plastic arts at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.<sup>13</sup>

Housed in the central courtyard of the Manor House Museum of a former Sichuan landlord, Liu Wencai in the township of Anren it was of interest to Cai, less because of its manifest politics than its material form. The fragile nature of the un-kiln dried mud statues enabled Cai to interrogate processes of creation and destruction as the mud cracked and fell away from the surfaces of his remade Rent Collection statues in Venice. Where the original had been a ‘finished’ set of figurative and realist art-objects designed to tug on the emotions and channel political intensity through a narrative content depicting on-going class struggle, Cai’s Venice Rent Collection Courtyard refocused the work on the more abstract, contemplative question of flow. Cai’s partially-completed, completed and slowly deteriorating mud statues were inspired by a Taoist notion of cyclical birth, life and death flows.<sup>14</sup> His focus on the power of flow was anchored to the impermanency of the statues’ material form. Mud would dry and crack and, as it did, the cyclical flow of the Taoist notion of birth, life and death flow came to the fore. By bringing the question of flow to the surface, Cai’s work helps us understand its function within the original work, but it is his words about the original work that bring us back to the question of the use of affect in the original Maoist work:

When I was a schoolboy and first saw the Rent Collection Courtyard, I was moved by the adult next to me who looked at it and cried because he had really suffered at the hands of his landlord. I felt his pain. The exhibition guides who explained the story of the Rent Collection Courtyard to [our class] also cried as they spoke... and when they cried, the whole class began to cry. They gave us some really inedible food that tasted like straw, and they explained that this was a peasant staple in the old society. We forced down the food and with tears in our eyes looked at the statues as the severe hardships of the old society were explained to us. Now that I look back on this from an artistic point of view, this whole thing is really interesting. It was a work not just about statues, but about the tears of the guide who

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<sup>12</sup> *People’s Daily*, 3 December 1966.

<sup>13</sup> See Erickson 2010, 123.

<sup>14</sup> As Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg says, it involved “questions of authenticity/originality/copying in art works as well as formal copyright, of socialist realism versus postmodernism, of the process of creation and destruction, individual and collective, of timelines, context and site specificity, of local and global, of the concept of aura, and of course again of different expectations, China versus the West.” See Wedell-Wedellsborg, Anne. 2010. “Contextualizing Cai Guo-Qiang.” *Kontur* 20, 9-18. [http://kontur.au.dk/fileadmin/www.kontur.au.dk/Kontur\\_20/Microsoft\\_Word\\_-\\_VAM-WEDELL\\_MOD2.pdf](http://kontur.au.dk/fileadmin/www.kontur.au.dk/Kontur_20/Microsoft_Word_-_VAM-WEDELL_MOD2.pdf)). Accessed on 20 November 2013.

explained things, and the horror of the disgusting food we were being forced to eat,... These things were all part of the same big concept.<sup>15</sup>

The statues, the tears, the food, the horror were existentially felt effects all tied together by the same big concept. It was this one, big, politico-affective concept that Cai's conceptual art replaced with its own particular form of estrangement. Yet, despite the evisceration of the 'narrative string' that had held in place the affective, cathartic and political dimensions of the original work, Cai's re-working still functioned like a palimpsest revealing the shadowy traces of the original focus of the work in the faces of his slowly deteriorating mud statues.<sup>16</sup> By removing the narrative thread, however, Cai's reconstruction enabled the focus to shift to the process of production rather than the finished product or content. In de-centring the original work's (political) content and replacing it with a focus on the act of making, Cai Guoqiang's process-based work could well be accused of being an aestheticisation of the political. Oddly, however, it was precisely because he shifted the focus of his work out of the space of an overt Maoist political aesthetic into the more abstract space of contemporary art that he was able to reveal some of the key techniques of the original work. By shining the spotlight on process – here meaning not just the technical process of sculpting but the panoply of process-based techniques employed by the original Maoist sculptors – the mechanisms devised to channel the affective flow of the political toward a cathartic intensity are revealed. In developing in unison with other techniques of class struggle designed to channel the flow, this work reveals a certain machine-like quality.

This is not the machine art of Vladimir Tatlin designed to cognitively estrange, but the art-machine of Maoism designed to draw in and emotionally inspire and direct.<sup>17</sup> Where Tatlin's work was produced in the age of steel and made to make iron 'stand on its hind legs' and seek an artistic formula,<sup>18</sup> these statues were made of mud and drew upon the telluric techniques of the peasant artisan wed to the didacticism of a theatrically based political narrative. It was artisanship rather than artistry, mud rather than steel and it was the art of emotional identification rather than an art of estrangement or alienation. Moreover, it would penetrate beneath the rationality of the surface narrative in search of an emotional connection that could then re-connect it more intensely to a surface politics.

Working within another machine – the manor house museum – the Rent Collection Courtyard exhibition was designed to lead to one single political effect; the raising of a

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Cai Guoqiang, New York, 24 March 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Faces were important to the sculptors of the Rent Collection Courtyard. Long Taicheng, who worked on the original statues and was then chosen to go to Beijing and work on the reproductions being made there, explains: "When I went to Beijing to reproduce the statues, I had to observe numerous faces. Every day as we took the bus from Hepingli to the Art Museum, we observed many northern boys' faces. In my work, I tried to mix the faces of northern boys with those from the south. I also studied their expressions of anger and resistance. They looked very different from the anger and resistance being displayed on the faces of adults." Interview with Long Taicheng (隆太成), Chongqing, August 21 2011.

<sup>17</sup> It was Victor Shklovsky who spoke of Tatlin's Tower as being an "architecture of estrangement." According to Svetlana Boym, this notion of *ostranenie* or estrangement suggested both a distancing (dislocating, *depaysement*) and making strange. For an elaboration on this, see Boym 2008, 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Once again, these are the words of Shklovsky (2005, 69-70). The association of Tatlin and machine art, however, comes from the Dadaists. It was at the Berlin Dadaist Fair of May 1920 that two of the founders of the Dadaist movement, George Grosz and John Heartfield (Helmut Herzfeld), held up a large placard taken down from the gallery wall with the slogan, "Art is Dead – Long Live Tatlin's Machine Art" written across it. They were then famously photographed holding up the placard. For them, *Machinenkunst* flagged the death of art. For details, see Lynton 2009, 30-67. See also Tafuri 1990, 136.

revolutionary consciousness. These were technologies of political intensification, not estrangement, and they were attempting to weave together multiple and parallel strands and flows into one big concept. The original sculptors worked to intensify the emotional effect of the Rent Collection Courtyard by collecting, editing and weaving together into a single tale, the numerous stories of exploitation peasants suffered at the hands of their landlords.<sup>19</sup> Intensification was not a depiction of real events but of real affects. This would involve re-modelling peasant gestures not on the gestures of 'real life' peasants, but on those of models drawn from actors from a Sichuan Opera troupe. Their gestures signified a stylised and intensified form used for dramatic effect<sup>20</sup> and purposively designed to produce crying, anger and enthusiasm (*jin* 劲) as a response from a viewing public.<sup>21</sup>

This Maoist art work didn't just convey a message in mud, it attempted to emotionally touch audiences. More than that, it also wanted to politically mould the artists sculpting the mud through the process of making and making do. Through a very different process-driven practice to that which informs conceptual art, the original sculptors became imbricated in the transformation process. As Li Shaoyan pointed out: "The process of creation was also a process of thought reform for the artists concerned."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the making of this work involved a much broader set of transformative processes than the transformative sculpting of mud. The ethnographic fieldwork necessary to produce a plot-line that would touch the peasants 'to their souls' demanded that the sculptors themselves be touched. To be touched, the sculptors would have to bury themselves in the peasant life they were depicting. They had to live with the peasants to understand existentially the life they lived and it was this experience that would then have ontological effects upon them and transform their work-styles.

From the peasants, the sculptors not only learned the indigenous techniques of mud statue making but they also learned a pedagogy of frugality and self-reliance. These techniques would be used to alter the practices of these classically trained 'academic' sculptures. Moreover, the demand that this be a collective rather than individual enterprise forced these sculptors not just to reflect upon their craft, but also upon their own work practices within art.

As an art work machine created specifically to channel the flow of the political, the Rent Collection Courtyard was, therefore, to have cognitive effects upon those who worked on the design and production of these statues as well as upon the viewing public. The work required intense thought being given to the emotional effects these material objects would have — "wax statues in the exhibition offer gloomy, frightful figures that evoke real fear"

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<sup>19</sup> Wang 2001, 159 and 163.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Zhao Shutong [one of the original lead sculptors on the project], Chengdu, 19 August 2011. See also Wang 2001, 165.

<sup>21</sup> These are the 'emotions' that the sculptors of the original Rent Collection Courtyard decided to focus on and 'produce' through the artwork they were creating. For further details on the way they attempted to tap into these emotions, see Wang 2001, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Li Shaoyan, who was head of the Sichuan "arts council" (*meixie* 美协) at the time, made these remarks in relation to the weight being placed on the collective nature of the enterprise which, he claimed, helped combat the individualism of the artist (Shaoyan 1965, 6). But he was not the only one. Ma Li, who was the Wenjiang area committee propaganda ministry chief at the time, addressed the sculptors saying that, "... in going through the process of creating this work, you also go through your own type of ideological reform, and toward your world view, and view of humanity, you undergo your own huge revolution." (Wang 2001, 191).

one sculptor would say....“ahh yes, but the reality of the old society was about a hundred times gloomier and more frightful” came the reply.... and so the debate on appearance and its ability to carry a strong political message continued.<sup>23</sup> It required experimenting with various indigenous materials and knowledge forms to ‘place’ the work, not just in a site-specific location, but within a style of thought that was readily intelligible to ordinary rural people.

Using everyday materials and motifs that local people were familiar with meant learning from the masses—“From April 1965 onwards, I understood our role as being to offer support, which meant ‘learn at work and work in learning’ (*gongzuo zhong xuexi, xuexi zhong gongzuo* 工作中学习, 学习中工作),” the western trained lead sculptor of the project, Zhao Shudong, would say.<sup>24</sup> It meant living and working with peasants, developing a sense of self-reliance, and adopting a collectivist and self-critical attitude towards oneself and one’s work. Lastly, it required an attitudinal change such that challenges and hardships encountered in the process of making the work were treated as part of the work. It was an honour bestowed rather than burden carried—“In those days it was really hard... things were really hard but no one had any demands because, from our perspective, we felt really honoured...” junior sculptor on the project, Long Taicheng, said.<sup>25</sup> The process was profoundly experiential and utterly Maoist. Indeed, it was another example of “greater, faster, better, [and] more economical” production (*duokuaihaosheng* 多快好省) being operationalised not in the economy, but this time, in mud.

The sheer scale of the project made it ‘greater’ (*duo* 多). The honour felt by young sculptors like Long Taicheng was harnessed by a Stakhanovite-like work-drive that led them to produce this massive work in just four and a half months (faster *kuai* 快). The use of simple, cheap and indigenous based artisan technologies brought a new economy to the usually expensive art of figurative sculpture, reducing the cost of each statue to just three Chinese dollars per statue (economical *sheng* 省).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, through the fusion of modern political energy with figurative art practices merged with demotic indigenous telluric technologies, the plastic arts themselves would be transformed (better *hao* 好).

“It is a revolution in sculpting,” crowed the official Party organ, the *People’s Daily*. Declared a ‘model work’ by Mao’s wife Jiang Qing,<sup>27</sup> the original Rent Collection Courtyard would be hailed as the harbinger and prototype of a new type of revolutionary practice in the plastic arts. What it shared with the other ‘model,’ or *yangban* (样板) artworks, was that, like them, it was designed to channel and heighten political intensity in a manner that would,

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<sup>23</sup> Wang 2001, 140.

<sup>24</sup> According to Paul Clark (Clark 2008, 206), the statues were made by teachers and students of the Sichuan Academy of the Arts, but that is not entirely true as peasant artisans were involved. Indeed, according to Zhao Shutong, the indigenous element, not the academy, played the primary role. The role of the Academy in the construction of this suite of statues, he asserted, has been overstated by others such as the other leading sculptor on the project, Wang Guangyi. Interview with Zhao Shutong, Chengdu, 19 August 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Long Taicheng, Chongqing, 21 August 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Three Chinese dollars is the figure given in *The People’s Daily*, 6 November 1965. On today’s exchange rates, that is less than US 50 cents per statue.

<sup>27</sup> In February 1966, Jiang Qing identified the Rent Collection Courtyard as a model for other artists to emulate in a speech entitled “Summary of the Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Piao Entrusted Chiang Ch’ing.” (Chung Hua-Min and Arthur C. Miller 1968, 208. For further commentary on this work as a model, see Zhang 2005, 46.



simultaneously, stretch the boundaries of the art-form it worked within, by fusing modern and indigenous telluric technology and knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

Such fusion practices – that brought the telluric into the modern – stretched well beyond the arts to include all those things that were labeled socialist new things. The *New Medical Methods* of Maoism, for example, demonstrated a similar re-alignment and fusion of modern Western medical techniques with traditional Chinese medicinal practices to produce a new model for medical science.<sup>29</sup> Model art, model science, model theatre; this concept of the model, as Børge Bakken demonstrates, is deeply embedded in traditional Chinese cultural practices and spreads into educational and even social control discourses.<sup>30</sup>

What turned model-making from a tradition into a revolutionary practice, however, was not just the ability to set a norm but its capacity to turn that norm into a device to incite feelings of love and hatred. Typification was used both to produce positive love and also generate hatred. Negative models, like the landlord Liu Wencai, who featured in the Rent Collection Courtyard, were built upon an embodiment of multiple negative traits of that class of people revealing, through tales of both his and other landlords, exploitation and excess. Endless stories tipped into the single figure of Liu Wencai erupted into a single political torrent. “When the labouring masses viewed this work, they remembered suffering so much pain that they lost their voices (*tongku shusheng* 痛苦失声) but simultaneously developed a heightened sense of class hatred,” said the Party organ, *People’s Daily*.<sup>31</sup> Even before completion, this artwork seemed to touch raw nerves: “Because we left the courtyard gate open when we were working, a lot of the peasants got a sneak preview and when they were invited in they were intensely aroused (*Qunqing jifen*-群情激奋) and choked back their tears (*qibuchengsheng* 泣不成声). Some even fainting (*hundao zaidi* – 昏倒在地),” said one of the leading sculptors, Wang Guangyi.<sup>32</sup>

To produce this effect, the Rent Collection Courtyard could only work within a very specific cultural milieu in which the one big concept propelled all affective energy streams toward a political conclusion. Indeed, the art-ful-ness of the original Rent Collection Courtyard project lay not in the realm of aesthetic appreciation or estrangement but in the channeling function it performed within a particular overarching political culture. Its artfulness in this

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Clark claims that the model operas made just these sorts of claims and that was what made them ‘models.’ While not untrue, the key thing that makes models exemplary was that each constituted a machine component within what one might call, to steal a line from the Dadaist about Taitlin, a machine-art form. This made Maoist art-forms technologies for the channeling and intensification of the flow into a single political cathartic end. For a more prosaic account of the characteristics that lead to them being technologies of the flow, see Clark 2008, 57-58 and 73-75.

<sup>29</sup> On Maoist innovations in medicine see the Beijing City Hygiene Bureau Small Leadership Group of the Revolutionary Committee of the Beijing Number Two Hospital, February 1969. “*Mao Zedongsixiang tongshui xinyiliaofa ziliaohuibian*” (A Compilation of Materials on Following the Command of Mao Zedong Thought with New Medical Methods). Beijing.

<sup>30</sup> Børge Bakken traces this penchant for the model, the typification and the exemplary back to traditional times, noting that Chinese pedagogy contains a “fundamental assumption.... that people are capable of learning from models.” Bakken 2000, 8. Ouyang Zongshu on Chinese genealogical records illustrates this with reference to the exemplary ancestors being used as models for future generations in the late dynastic period (Ouyang 1992). For further details on how this late dynastic tradition fed into the Maoist pedagogy, see Dutton 2004.

<sup>31</sup> “*Shouzuyuan*” (The Rent Collection Courtyard), *People’s Daily*, 6 November 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Wang Guanyi 1996, 38.

particular cultural setting led to it operating as a catalyst for the harnessing of emotions such that they would intertwine and be channeled into a single and powerful political intensity.

In working within a politics of flow, this art form shared the qualities of other Maoist socialist new things such as its fusion with traditional Chinese medicine. With the Rent Collection Courtyard project, art attempted to touch people by pressing upon key political affective pressure points with the pin point precision of an acupunctural needle. It therefore went well beyond an appreciation of a cognitive based knowledge regime that offered recognition of past oppression but attempted to reproduce, in facsimile, the taste, tears and pain of past suffering *via* a mud based 'condensation' of the rural class struggle.<sup>33</sup> Peasants fainting as they saw their own pasts caught in mud; silent pain developing into class hatred; teardrops welling in a schoolboy's eye as food was ingested but proved as hard to swallow as the crimes of the evil landlord, Liu Wencai; these were just a few of the physical manifestations of a visceral connection being created between cognitive and affective states of being. These affective states were not simply based upon 'revelation' but produced through a manipulation and channelling of the affective energy flow that surfaced as a series of powerful emotions connected ultimately to a political campaign.

Sipping his tea and talking to the artists while they sculpted the work, the local Party chief and patron of the work, Ma Li said: "Concerning the creation of the Rent Collection Courtyard I want to raise a small request. The spirit (*qifen* 气氛) of the overall statues needs to be grasped and grasped accurately for the aim of this work is to lay stress on the overwhelmingly positive aspects and if this healthy trend does not prevail, then a perverse or evil energy flow (*xieqi* 邪气) will."<sup>34</sup> The evil energy flow of the landlord 'enemy' would, therefore, not be the central force driving this political narrative.<sup>35</sup> Rather, the enemy would be used to catapult the peasant into a realisation that there was a need for their energy be directed, guided and organised. Tears would be shed, remembrances of past horrors flood in, and all the feelings of humiliation and misery gathered together pointing, inexorably to one solution: the need for revolutionary organisation. That is, it would point to the need for a friend.<sup>36</sup> To reach that conclusion, the original statues were designed to transcend logical-

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<sup>33</sup> *People's Daily* said that: "We have many young people in this country who have never seen the reality of man's exploitation of man, and man's oppression of man. And even though many people have obviously seen this, it was quite a while ago and the influence of this upon them has grown ever more faint. So the role of these mass clay statues, in reflecting the leadership of Mao Zedong thought, is to awaken people from their light sleep and to get them to rise up getting them to recognise and reflect upon the fact that the old society actually act people up, and from this vantage point strengthened their love of the current new society of socialism. "Shouzuyuan" (The Rent Collection Courtyard). *People's Daily*, 11 November 1965.

<sup>34</sup> Ma Li quoted in Wang Zhi'an 2001, 191.

<sup>35</sup> This tends to contradict the important point made by Leo Strauss on Schmitt's work which suggests that the enemy is always philosophically central. See Strauss, Leo (1996) 'Notes on Carl Schmitt; the Concept of the Political', (trans. j. Harvey Lomax) in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 83-107

<sup>36</sup> Here, then, we witness a very important theoretical shift taking place. "Of the two elements of the friend-enemy mode of viewing things, the "enemy" element manifestly takes precedence....." Leo Strauss tells us about Schmitt (Strauss 1996, 88). For Ma Li and the Maoists, things are different. For Ma Li, the enemy is a 'tool' by which to promote class struggle. Moreover, from Ma Li's warning about not allowing 'evil energy' to prevail, right through to the sequencing of the Rent Collection Courtyard statues leading to the victory of the 'collective friend' (the revolutionary organisation), the enemy is rendered as the propellant pushing forward the victory of the friend.

cognitive connections and tap into the affective flow to release three key emotions – crying, hatred (*chouhen* 仇恨) and strength or drive (*jin* 劲):

[If] we want the masses, when viewing the Rent Collection Courtyard to think about old China ... then, in emotional terms, we need to induce three emotional changes within them: crying, enmity, and drive.

Crying – This would deeply arouse the masses, allowing for the production of a mass consciousness by moving them with feelings of tragedy.

Enmity – Here we wanted the audience to hate the landlord class, hate reactionaries, and hate the old society.

Drive – After undergoing ‘speak bitterness’ sessions (*yiku sitian* 忆苦思甜) the people would be inspired to a higher class consciousness, transforming their class hatred into a form of powerful resistance.<sup>37</sup>

It was in the penultimate section of the original Rent Collection Courtyard work entitled “resistance” (反抗), that crying and hatred would be transformed into strength and drive. Wang Zhi’an explains how these energy flows were channeled through these emotional states into a single unidirectional torrent:

The final section of the work was themed ‘resistance’ (*fankang* 反抗) and the key point here was enmity (*chouhen* 仇恨) – the enmity of the peasants toward the landlord. Here, there was a self-generating notion of struggle tied to a growing consciousness of that struggle. Hence, [enmity and resistance] were two halves of the same coin; One expressed an abstract ‘hatred’ (*hen* 恨) the other, the peasants growing self-awareness of where that hatred would lead. Here, the idea of hate is expressed as a form of spontaneity (*zifaxing* 自发性) while the growing peasant self-awareness pointed toward organisation.<sup>38</sup>

To understand, concretely, how the channeling of spontaneity and self-awareness could produce revolutionary organisation, the artists packed their bags and went and lived in a former partisan base camp known locally as ‘little Yan’an.’<sup>39</sup> There, they lived a spartan peasant life, sharing the food of the peasant and working alongside the peasant in their labours. “This was all part of the creative process,” lead local sculptor, Li Qisheng, would insist.<sup>40</sup>

This experience of living, working and struggling with the peasants was all part of a Maoist pedagogy and, when combined with the use of mud and indigenous technology and knowledge, produced the telluric conditions for a political transformation that was constantly being contextualised in terms of an idealised view of peasant life as intrinsically revolutionary.

The use of ‘found objects’ in the Rent Collection Courtyard project – things such as desks, an abacus, and a grain thrasher – the employment of site specificity by using the court yard of the Landlord's Manor House as a stage, leaning mud statues on doorways or against structural pillars; all these novel art innovations came, not from conceptual art theory, but out of a profoundly Maoist sense of ‘making do.’ Making mud statues, then, was far more

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<sup>37</sup> Wang 2001, 202.

<sup>38</sup> Wang 2001, 210.

<sup>39</sup> The official name of the place they went to was three folk commune (三岔公社) and it was, originally, the underground base camp, of the west Sichuan Communist Party branch. See Wang for further details (Wang 2001, 163).

<sup>40</sup> Wang 2001, 162-63.

complex and process-based than the final sculpted work might suggest. The entire process, however, was designed to produce a political effect. It was, in fact, part of the 'one big concept' of Maoism to return to Cai's phrase, and that could only be imagined in terms of affective productivity operating within a larger socio-political context particular to that time, place and culture. In that sense, it raises the question of site specificity in two ways.

First in terms of the broader society, this form of art-incident could only work when the overall veridiction regime was political rather than market based. In other words, the Rent Collection Courtyard was 'site specific' in terms of the revolutionary regime of veridiction that required the production, reproduction and harnessing of poetic-political intensities. Wedding to both cognitive and affective flows within that society, this artwork was designed principally around the channelling of an affective flow into a political torrent.

Second, in terms of the local context, the original mud-statues must be thought of in the broader context of their role in Liu Wencai's Manor House museum. Here, in its original form, the Rent Collection Courtyard art machine was but one (albeit penultimate) technology within a larger machine-assemblage known as the Landlord Manor House Museum. Once again, site specificity takes on a particularly political hue for it was art technologies like the Rent Collection Courtyard project that helped transform Liu Wencai's Manor House into what the Maoists at the time would come to call a classroom of class struggle.<sup>41</sup> Yet even this classroom had a pedagogy that could only operate in the broader context of the Cultural Revolution as one of many machines that would politicise the social landscape.

This is not to suggest that these machines always worked. On the contrary, an economy of flows is constantly and permanently shadowed by leakage. Yet such leakages, in this regime were sometimes turned into a 'positivity' – that is, productive of a channeling political dynamic. With Maoism, the more these machines leaked the more they patterned the nature of the class struggle. Leakages read symptomatically often led to an intensification of the political for they often involved an augmentation of the category of enemy. Through leakages, these machines potentially produced the conditions for their own extended usage. The Rent Collection Courtyard, therefore, is much more than a Maoist timepiece of the Cultural Revolution. It is an artefact or legacy of another mode of being political. It is a window onto that mode of disposing of affective energy flows through intensifying them and it operates along very different vectors to those forms that employ the phantasmagoric to turn intensity into commodity desire. Technologies like the Rent Collection Courtyard are machines centrally concerned with controlling the disposition of affective energy flows. Yet when the channelling of affective flows is no longer tied to the intensity of class struggle, but dispersed and diffused through market fetishisation and commodity desires, what then do these machines tell us?

Just as Cai Guoqiang moved the Rent Collection Courtyard out of figurative and into conceptual art by changing the location, so too markets would transform the Rent Collection Courtyard exhibition from a political into an aesthetic form by a process of mimetic reconfiguration. As the Manor House was re-defined as an important Feudal era, historic

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<sup>41</sup> Wang Zhi'an describes the Manor House as a classroom of class education in his book. (Wang 2001), 19.

relic,<sup>42</sup> rather than a classroom of class struggle, its central courtyard was turned from a political heart into an art gallery. Behind glass, in temperature controlled, softly lit spaces, the Rent Collection Courtyard Statues now stand. Here was politics transformed into aesthetics through a process of mimetic reconfiguration not confined to the artworld. Chinese policing practices,<sup>43</sup> government bureaucracies<sup>44</sup> and the operations of business all underwent similar mimetic reconfiguration<sup>45</sup> but what sets material objects such as the Rent Collection Courtyard apart was its ability to reveal the true power of the commodity form. In transforming the Rent Collection Courtyard – which was itself designed to channel flow into political intensity – into an historic art form, reveals the political power of the phantasmagoric to re-channel the flow away from the political. Herein, perhaps, lies the buried legacy of the Cultural Revolution. A legacy of Maoist artefacts that reveal ever so slightly, the power of affect within the political. As a politics aimed at touching the soul Maoism reveals an affective political flow. More than that, it redirects our attention toward the concept of the political, showing not simply a binary form or even the political power of intensity, but also the power of flow to sculpt market desires and draw the affective flow away from intensities and the political. The legacy of the Cultural Revolution, then, lies in its capacity to change the way we think about the political not because you agree or disagree with it but because it reveals an affective approach which is, therefore, based more on an art rather than a science of the political. It is, perhaps, a most fitting legacy that the art of the political is best revealed by a Cultural Revolution.

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<sup>42</sup> “A typical reflection of the nature and architectural form of landlord class estates in Sichuan in the modern era” which “epitomises the rise and fall of feudal class production in the modern era of China” was how Wang Zhi’an, Wang Fei, and Wang Shao describe it. Wang Zhi’an, Wang Fei and Wang Shao 2003, 103-4.

<sup>43</sup> The redeployment of Maoist movement structures into law and order campaigns is dealt with in Dutton 2002, while the role of the contract in transforming the mass line is addressed in Dutton 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Traits that have been called by Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth Perry a ‘guerrilla policy style’ are said to persist in the reform era. Heilmann and Perry (eds.) 2011, 12.

<sup>45</sup> The operations of the company Hua Wei are founded on notions of self-criticism and self-reliance learned by the companies founders through years of experience in the Maoist army. See Cheng Dongsheng and Liu Lili (2003) *Huawei Zhengxiang [The Truth about Huawei]*, Beijing: Xiandai Zhongguo Chubanshe.