



Video Art: The Intertextuality and Interpretation of Bangkok Society from the Memories and Perspective of a Chinese-Thai

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Abstract

This creative research has been constructed using The Theory of Intertextuality and the context related to the process of creating artwork, inspired by a Chinese-Thai family member. The study covers the historical events in Bangkok during the years between 1957 and 1974, which was a period of immense social, economic and political change.

It is also the same period which the researcher's mother grew up in and experienced the social conditions of the capital through, what was at the time, entertainment culture such as film, theater, radio soap opera, and Thai music etc, via channels of communication technology and artworks such as the theater, cinema, television, radio and posters etc. At the same time, she was affected by social changes both in respect of status and the identity of the Chinese ethnic group living in Thailand when the government was promoting the concept of Thainess, and in recognition of gender as a female being treated unjustly.

The Researcher has used the procedure under the theory of Intertextuality to interpret the social context, songs and things associated with the his mother's memory to create the work of video art as a medium that can combine both visual and sound contents in compliance with the artistic theories and concepts by means of selective interpretation and past performance to new creative fields (Appropriation Theory) in order to allow the audience to recall memories of society in the past (Social Memory), which affects the presentation of the research.

The presentation will be conducted in a way that the content is being told in respect of social events, by choosing to use the principles of overt and covert signs which are the highest and lowest points during the life of his mother, based on the interview as a factor in the production of video art. The researcher chose to use the local residents and the environment within the SoiCharoennakorn 13 community, which is the current residence of his mother as the operational field for his creative research.

Key words: intertextuality, video art, contemporary art, Chinese-Thai

Introduction

In Thai Society, Chinese immigrants came to trade and settle in Thailand since the early Rattanakosin period, particularly the Chaozhou Chinese, which is the highest number in the country. Most

of whom lived in Bangkok (Skinner referred to in Nattida Sukhummanus: 34). During the period when Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram was the premier, the Chinese economic influence was increasing resulting in more government policies on the

Chinese.

Anti-Communist purge policy and strict penalties were exercised, as a result, Chinese families living in Thailand during this period fell into the state of servitude, and had to adapt to the society of that era in order to survive. Withstanding pressures from all sides, they had to live under the rules and forms of arts and culture determined by the government.

During the era of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat government in May 1957, the National Social and Economic Development Plan was promulgated in the year 1961 and the policy easing the Chinese had helped the Chinese merchants in Thailand to have a better living conditions and more recognized (Thamonwan Tangwongcharoen, 1999: 41)

Chinese kids in this era received a chance to obtain Thai citizenship and educational opportunities but under Thai language and culture. As a result, the next generation of Chinese had to adopt the Thai traditions from school. During this period, Bangkok was the administrative center.

The entry of foreign entertainment industry and culture during the year 1961-1974 caused a change in the lifestyle and culture of Thai people in a way can never be reversed. The Chinese Thais retreated from their ancestors and totally abandoned the traditional Chinese way of life.

As a result of the Anti-Communist purge policy, the research's Chinese-Malaysian father was black-listed and not permitted to cross the border entering Thailand from Malaysia, until the researcher reached the age of 20 years old. The incident instantly turned his mother a single mom, as a subsequent result, responsible for raising the researcher and two other siblings singlehandedly under a lower class condition that tried to climb into the upper middle class.

The sequence of events has inspired the Researcher, both as a research and an artist, an interest on such spaces. The Researcher aims to create an artwork that can build the understanding on the social memory of his mother, and can also merge "The

memory of his mother" and the creativity of the child together using the collection of concepts and theories related to art.

The Researcher also hopes that the event took place within his family will represent a hypothesis to theoretically solve social problems that must be interpreted and unscrambled from the semiotics in order to apply the results of the study as an answer to the problem in other contexts involved.

The Researcher will use "His own mother" in both physical and imaginary as preliminary data for this research, and will use his mother's residential environment in Charoennakorn 13, a community where she lives, as field of research.

The Researcher has created an artwork in the form of video art, which is the art that brings multimedia technology in various applications, in order to reach people in all strata of society. He also hopes that his work can constructively lead into another creative artworks in other fields in the future.

Objectives

1. To study the social, political, economic, arts and entertainment culture contexts inclusively on Bangkok society during the years between 1957 and 1974.
2. To study the biography of Ms. Nonglak Leerisiri in association with the various contexts of Bangkok society during the years between 1957 and 1974.
3. To create a piece of video art inspired by the concept of intertextuality and the interpretation of Bangkok society through the perspective of a Chinese-Thai family.

Scope of Research

1. To learn the process and meaning of the theories of intertextuality and interpretation; and to analyse data taken from interviews with the researcher's mother, in order to create art work in the form of video art which reflects Bangkok society during the years

between 1957 and 1974 only, not including the humanities, social sciences, sociology, and anthropology studies.

2. The portfolio is created in the form of video art as a Karaoke video in order to exhibit the recorded image and sound data in a form of installation art in the gallery.

Methodology

1. The study relies on the study of the concepts, theories, journals, articles, researches, books, communication information, interviews, field survey data and the work of various artists relevant to the topic of this research, in order to use the derived data for analysing and creating an art work.

2. Framing the relevant concepts, which focus on studying and collecting data, that can be used in practical applications and can support creative ideas, in order to form a concrete artwork with a content created to build an understanding of the topic of this research.

3. Analysis of creative works using the Aesthetic Theory of art that accords and supports the style and the work of art. The aim of this analysis is to offer an exchange of information and ideas between the audience and the researcher.

4. Presentation and development of the printed format of this art work use the viewing result of the visitors and advisors as a research data.

Expected research benefits

1. An understanding of the various social contexts of the Bangkok community during the years between 1957 and 1974.

2. An understanding of the memory Ms Nonglak Leerasiri has of her community associated with the various contexts of Bangkok society.

3. The creation of a piece of video art that communicates the content based on the Intertextuality theory and the interpretation of Bangkok society through the perspective of a Chinese-Thai individual.

Keywords

1. Intertextuality: the process of considering art (consisting of texts and other cultural codes that previously appeared in the arts as well as in a socio-cultural context) as a text, by linking together cultural codes in order to build a new definition based on the interpretation and reading.

2. Contemporary Art: Art created in the present era, with modern culture as its foundation. Contemporary art can also be seen as a reinvention of postmodern art.

3. Video Art refers to the art of using technology as a tool in the creative process. It is created by visual artists and usually involves a live performance or displaying art. It uses the elements of light and sound which are irrelevant to visual art or commercial art.

Conceptual Frameworks

The Concept of Contemporary Art

Contemporary art is a creation that is constantly evolving for the purpose of learning to value the aesthetics of art as well as for reflecting on the lives of people in the era which an artist creates their works.

The Concept of Appropriation Art

The concept of creating new works by bringing out a previously made picture or image e.g. from art history, advertisement or media etc, then mixing it with a new one by repainting, rewriting, or re-photographing, or in other words it is the concept of using a Found Object that has already existed to create a new art work.

The Concept of philosophy, art and politics

Nationalism and political ideals that stresses the importance of nationhood, and that the nation must exist and is crucial to life. Nationalists believe that the nation cannot survive without a political concept (Kamjorn Sunthornpongsri, 2012: 148).

Nowadays, political thought and social movement have embraced the philosophy of art and used various means of art, often in the form of a symbolic

gesture or a politically satirizing parody, as a peace-oriented tool that people can use to display as a symbol of resistance to the injustice of state power (Kamjorn Sunthornpongsri, 2012: 152).

The Concept of creating an artwork out of inspiration from the relationship between a mother and a child.

The greatest love amongst humanity is the love between a mother and a child. It is a great love and a bond that nothing can destroy. This bond exists in every living soul because every human is either a mother or a child, therefore everyone must have the love of a mother or a child in all of us. The relationship between a mother and a child has caused a considerable amount of inspiration to artists and appeared in different types of art since ancient times (Viboon Leesuan, 1994: 115-116).

Theories used

The Theory of Intertextuality

Literary text is meaningful in itself. Readers believe that there are meanings which are yet to be discovered in literature. Reading or interpreting is therefore merely a process of “tracing” the meaning of a literary text. This concept is currently being challenged by a new concept which suggests that literature is a fabrication of the system, code, and various conventions believed to be the traditional form of art. Culture in each society has an effect of creating meaning in literature. As such, the concept itself is called “Intertextuality” which believes that reading will take readers into the mesh of relationships associated with the various chapters. Interpreting or discovering the meaning of what is read must be done through the relationship that one text has on many other texts (Graham Allen cited in Pichet Saengthong, 2012: 264).

The Theory of perception and interpretation

What an artist relays is the emotion relating to certain subject matters that the artist would like the

viewer to recognise. The artist tries to capture his own emotional issues in a story, imagines a form of feeling, then uses different materials to record them. Therefore, to view and perceive is to recognize the emotions as closest to what the artist relays and not to view and try to imagine what it is (Prasert Sinwattana, 1999: 117) .

The Theory of Semiotic

Semiotic is a code which is responsible for determining or directing the meaning of language. Language is a form of code in the format and rule of language, social science and the humanities.

Code is a traditional practice of the society and a culture on a specific matter. Thus, an action, an occurrence, an event or other material in the society has no meaning in itself but depends on the social system that has rules to define them.

Code is normally being omitted or concealed, and most of them are well-known, widespread and broadly accepted until there is no need to search for code anymore, or no one thought to question, suspect, or write them down. As a result, undertaking investigation and research is difficult. Being able to read the various signs in the society therefore depends essentially on the experience and talents of each person.

Intertextual Analysis on the relationship between the Researcher’s mother, music and social context

Biography of Ms Nonglak Leerasiri

Nonglak Leerasiri was born in 1946 (exact date unknown). She is a daughter of Mr Ue Kim Tung and Ms Ung Li Si, both of whom were Chinese from Chaozhou. Her initial hometown was in a town called Khlong Ngae located within Songkhla province. She was married to Cheah Cheng Xiang, a Chinese Malaysian, and had three children together, all of whom are second-generation Chinese ethnicity citizens in Thailand.

During childhood, young Nonglak did not attend school in Thailand, she therefore was not able to read or write Thai, but was able to speak the language fluently, despite being forced to use Chinese to communicate with her father and mother.

She did not socialize nor live a normal childhood like other Thai children, because she was not attending school. For this reason, she absorbed and learned a Chinese dialect, the history of China, religious beliefs and culture through a performance of Chinese opera. Her life was tied to watching films, Chinese opera and other forms of entertainment during the years 1957-1974 creating memories linked to the style of Chinese opera performances in Thailand and other Thai performances.

Due to her love of watching and listening to Chinese opera performances, she decided to move from Songkhla, and purchase a property in Bangkok, and travelled to the capital to learn tailoring and became a tailor.

After her arranged marriage by her mother, she intended to build a happy family and a happy home with her husband according to the normal tradition. However, she encountered the issue of anti-communist policies from the Thai government which caused her to flee to Malaysia. Her husband, the Researcher's father, was prohibited to enter Thailand for 20 years and eventually passed away in Malaysia, resulting in her life not following the path she had hoped for.

Nowadays, Nonglak has divided her social time into two groups: the time spent with her neighbors and time spent with a group of pilgrims. She also spends her leisure time performing physical activities and singing but does not join any clubs in particular because of her diverse interests. She is not fond of dancing but she sings karaoke to refresh her mood. She believes that to live a long value life one needs to have activities. She currently resides in Charoennakorn in Bangkok. She spends her time performing outdoor activities. Her daily routine involves praying, watching television, cooking for herself as she

does not like buying food from outside, sewing, and listening to music.

She has expressed the view that once retired, most elderly people still have the responsibility of raising grandchildren therefore they do not often have private time, and are unable to leave the house often due to their family obligations. But for her, she has no family obligations so she is ready for any activities.

She has also expressed the view that it is essential for people to serve society whenever there is an opportunity but she understands that some families cannot set their family commitments aside. The activities that Nonglak participates in include attending ceremonies, weddings, and other public activities. She is not keen on participating in social activities to minimise her expenses.

The political and entertainment cultural context of Thailand during the period from 1957 to 1974

This is the period of "authoritarian capitalism" under a powerful alliance of 3 groups which are the military, the power of foreign capital, and local capital, governed by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat who discouraged the development of democracy, national security, religion and monarchy to build legitimacy with power.

This era is the era of the development of complete capitalism under the slogan of "Money is job, job is money, that creates happiness". The foreign capital from the United States supports the totalitarian system and this new form of military dictatorship. The U.S. encouraged the use of this model in Asia and in Latin America to fight against the communists. When authoritarianism and capitalist development were combined, the nature of the development became of the "Command" type, which means capital must be dependent on the state in other words a forced capitalist development determined by the state

"Development" replaced the word nationhood during this era. The capital in a situation like this was monopolised and taken away from society, and spon-

sored by the state to avoid any anti-totalitarian movement, becoming a form of “Conservative” capital.

In the countryside, local agricultural products had been purchased by large capitalists which later on developed into huge capital. The capitalists also entered the bidding process for the state on rural development. This development led to the historic uprising event of 14th October 1973.

In summary, the nature of capitalism in Thailand was merely a matter of borrowing the word *capitalismé* to satisfy the governance power instead of applying the actual theory of “capitalism” as the driving force.

The structure of power resulting from the collaboration of the local authorities, central state and foreign countries would have the most obvious impact.

The stability of the country in each period has helped to promote this work of art immensely (Phiriya Krairuek and Phaonthong Thongjuear, 1982: 30).

The historical context of the song

1. Jam Loey Rak (Prisoner of Love) was first broadcasted in 1963, written by Charlie Intaravijit and composed by Saman Kanjanapalin. This song was recorded and sung by Sawalee Phakaphan in 1969 and is regarded as one of the most popular songs of this National artist.

2. Phu Yai Lee (Headman Lee) is a satiric song sung by Saksri Sriaksorn, famous in 1961 the era of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. Phu Yai Lee was composed by Phiphat Boriboon, leader of the Phiphat Boriboon band, and the husband of Saksri Sriaksorn. This song was recorded in 1964 and was very popular. It was later adapted into several sequels from the original song, including the Watusi rhythm version under the name of Phu Yai Lee Watusi.

3. Baan Sai Thong (Sai Thong House) is written by Charlie Intaravijit and composed by Saman Kanjanapalin to serve as a soundtrack for the theatre play called Baan Sai Thong. The play was written by

K. Surangkanang, directed by General Major Prince Bhanubandhu Yugala, and showed at Sala Chalerm Thai theater in 1951. The song Baan Sai Thong was sung at the play by Sawalee Phakaphan who starred as *Phojjaman Sawangwongé*. This song was recorded and sung by Sawalee Phakaphan in 1966.

Analysis of the intertextuality between the researcher’s mother, songs, social context and Song by “Jam Loey Rak” (Prisoner of Love)

The researcher analysed the texts from the novels and the songs that have a relationship with the other contexts from the same period. He started off by analysing the context from the novels as follows:

1. Vocational college for women is closely linked to the political and economic policies of the government. The novel created a female character that reflected the image of women that meets the needs of society at that time. Nonglak, the researcher’s mother relocated to Bangkok in 1972 to study tailoring at Pornsri school where the instructor graduated from a tailoring course at an Institute in France. That was the start of Nonglak’s career, and she then opened a tailor shop to make a living and raise her children.

2. Not attending Thai school and therefore not receiving a compulsory education or socialising with Thai people had a significant effect on Nonglak’s pronunciation, understanding, and usage of the Thai language. Her education derived outside the classroom through various cultural tools, which did not differ much from the general classes. She learnt efficiently through different areas of everyday life of the people as well as listening to the radio which contributed to her improving her Thai language skills.

3. Thai entertainment culture was based on common cultural interactions. Thai soap operas often told a “Kiss-slap” type of story where a good guy or bad guy in the story abuses women in almost every way possible and the women often would do nothing except for slapping these men on the face. Similarly, extemporaneous singing or antiphonal sing-

ing would involve men probing women flippantly and women would reply sarcastically regarding men's habit of flirting. The story of Ramayana inherited from India became the root of entertainment culture in Thailand. In the past, Thailand received cultural influence from India. As a result the theatre plays often took some part of Indian literature. Jam Loey Rak (Prisoner of Love) tells a story of the main actor abducting the main actress, cruelly treated her at the beginning of the story just like the giant in Ramayana when Sita was abducted. So when Nonglak had to live a normal Thai life blending in with the society, she chose to live the Thai Bangkokian way which is the way of life created by the state. As soon as she generated income from her work, she would have money to buy things that Thai people in Bangkok would buy in order to follow their lifestyle for example she bought a television because most people in Bangkok watched television, she listened to Thai music, wore fashionable clothes etc in order to escape from the pressure. Shopping was a form of therapy as when she could not do what society expected of her, she would hide from the problem by going shopping to ease her mind.

Analysis and the creation of art

The Analysis and The Invention of Artwork: Jam Loey Rak (Prisoner of Love)

Storyline: The researcher creates a storyline from the song and the movie where the main character is a woman, which is consistent with the story of the Researcher's mother who is a woman as well.

Themes: Norms and Values, Social Criticism, and Reflections on life in the framework of gender. The researcher aims to present the text of his mother as a woman living in the social context of the period between 1957-1974 using the gender concept and media.

The Feminist group under the social system where the father is the leader of the family described the true essence of a woman that the cognitive im-

pairment characteristic of women did not exist by nature but because there was a lack of educational opportunities which is why women fall into an inferior status in both legal and ethical conditions. Women were taught to care for other people in a world full of selfishness, to be kind and generous, to sacrifice in a world of exploitation where everyone only cared about themselves.

Gender ideology has the typical appearance of women as weak, and the image of women staying at home depending on their men. The image of women staying at home depending on their men is the design of the social mechanisms that generate old sexist ideologies and women were presented as sexual objects. Women staying at home were presented as weak and the inferior gender. Soap operas on television were a medium for women as receivers. The story content was based on the context of the society where male gender is superior.

Characters: Reflecting two aspects of Character which are a) on the thoughts and habits without any development; and b) on appearance and behavior with development.

This character appeared on this artwork and was based on the Wanthong character of Thai literature Khun Chang Khun Phaen and the female character from the 1963 version of Jam Loey Rak (Prisoner of Love).

Scenes: The production takes place at Nonglak's residence using the living room on the first floor to simulate 14 Scenes of events of a new storyline.

Communicating through Images and Sound

Images: Researcher uses visual images that look natural, but do not indicate the actual time (e.g. morning, noon, evening, night etc), combined with a placement of 19th century realism painting style, to create a film that reflects society showing the problems that arose in society which his mother and most people in at the time had to face.

Researcher uses images that serve as the

voice of a person who cannot claim anything for themselves as well as the basic mood of his mother. The images contain concepts derived from the passage of his mother's life during the period when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat led the nation.

Criticism must be based on the visible social conditions and not conditions that have been fabricated. Everyone has their own ideas. No one is happy with war, poverty, crime, dictatorship, slavery, racism, and the oppression of minorities. The images reflect these issues to create a mood in the audience and letting them decide by themselves who is right and who is wrong. The image in itself is therefore a means to connect the thoughts and emotions of the audience to the issues.

The Researcher uses dim lighting and a DSLR Canon 7D camera to record the images in order to achieve recognition of the substances contained in all things around us.

The media contains codes hidden in a form of entertainment because this type of media can be sent with specific content to the receivers without the audience questioning when receiving the content through emotional exposure.

After that, the researcher used computer technology in the editing process after filming to add special effects in order to tell the story in a Hollywood style, and with a narrative structure based on soap operas to create a convenient exposure for the audience and at the same time attract interest from the audience.

Sound: The recorded sound consists of 3 layers of the actual sound from within the residence, the outside residence (background noise), and from Nonglak all layered in while the recording was taking place.

The level of sound volume was not controlled and therefore was not stabilized due to the uncontrollable source which reflects the actual dimensions of life within the surrounding where his mother lives to achieve credibility.

Using the sound, the researcher aims to connect his mother and the audience in a form of overlapping nature or a Layer creating a Sound Documentary in accordance to the concept of Textuality and S/Z introduced by Roland Barthes which suggests that the meaning can't come from the author, it must be actively created by the reader through a process of textual analysis (Roland Barthes: Wikipedia, 2015) Soundtrack: The soundtrack was recorded within a residential area in a sound documentary style and consists of the sound of Nonglak singing along to the song Jam Loey Rak (Prisoner of Love, 1963, written by Charlie Intaravijit, composed by Saman Kanjanapalin, sung by Sawalee Phakaphan) as well as the sound from the song itself while it is played on the radio.

Discussion

From a study of the Researcher's mother as a Chinese Thai during the period between 1957 and 1974, the Researcher found that his mother was domiciled in the South of Thailand, had experienced Thai culture and the process of switching from a Chinese to Thai mentality.

But due to the problems of discrimination, lack of educational opportunities, and the Chinese family tradition of keeping their daughter in the house and teaching women to always have gratitude, many of the newer Chinese generation in Thailand tried to create themselves a new identity by consuming Thai culture through entertainment mediums.

This eventually led to the dilemma where they paid more attention to Thai nationalism than they did to retaining their Chinese identity, but at the same time being unable to deny their Chinese identity whilst still admiring Thai traditions. This causes the problem of a person with two nations who cannot blend in with a traditional Chinese family but still have to live in society as a half Thai.

Social studies in Thailand during the years 1957-1974 shows that this is a period of military dictator-

ship. The influence of a conservative bureaucracy headed by a grant from the US Economic Development department caused the transition of society from an agrarian society to an industrial society, creating a bourgeois capitalist regime outside the bureaucracy, stratification, and restriction of rights by gender. The absorption of the local culture by the state, the nationalist policies, and the entry of global capital such as the United States had affected the lives of Thai people especially those with disadvantages or limited opportunities. Bangkok became the Single most developed city in the country.

During the 1957-1974 period, Bangkok was the centre of cultural production and the middle class was formed with the influence of modern Western cultures blending with the culture from the upper class creating a new social identity which is also a social tool that extracts the middle class from the lower class. This also created different forms of entertainment culture such as the radio play, dance, folk music, children's film, television, entertainment venues, cinemas, etc. resulting in cultural characteristics set up from Bangkok which became a standard form of culture at the national level and led to the emergence of cultural hybrids.

Outcomes

This research is based on The Concept of creating an artwork out of inspiration from the relationship between a mother and her child and the Theory of Intertextuality. The outcomes of this study are as follows:

The entertainment culture in the era that the researcher studied has the nature of addictive entertainment. It is in a form of series or episodes, and had often limited accessibility whereas nowadays the information is widely accessible through space and time. With this in mind, combined with the concept of Appropriation art, the researcher has taken the structure of entertainment culture during the period of 1957-1974 through the modern era interpretation to create

a new artwork.

Conclusions

1. This artwork can contribute <<to further understanding of several aspects of Bangkok social context during the period covered by this study. The artwork is created as a link to, and as a representation of what actually happened during different periods of Bangkok using the Researcher's mother both as the content and a presenter at the same time

2. To build an understanding of the social life history of Nonglak Leerasiri in relation to various contexts of Bangkok society. This Video Art is created on the idea of contemporary art that reflects the stories that still exist at the present time as well as bringing out the value of social content during the period covered by the research.

3. To create an artwork, Video Art : The Intertextuality and the interpretation of Bangkok Society from the Memory and through the Perspective of a Chinese-Thai, not for a commercial purpose but for the purpose of reflecting the life history of Nonglak (Researcher's mother) and past Bangkok society through the form of video.

Findings

The Researcher has concluded the following findings from his research and through the production of his artwork:

1. The Researcher adopted the film making planning process for his work because making a video is similar to making a movie, except on a smaller scale. The intention is to be artistic rather than commercial. Symbols shown on images are used instead of spoken words. Afterwards, the researcher uses special software to edit the video, mixing it with sound to fit the storyline or the idea. The researcher hopes that when the audience view this Video Art, the video will encourage the audience to think and express their feeling on this artwork.

2. The Researcher uses his mother as the main

content of his artwork by analysing the content of an interview taken with his mother on her biography combined with the images of Bangkok in the past, then added the songs he intended to use to link the contexts and construct this artwork hoping that it will generate the outcome he anticipated. In the end, the outcome was exactly as he expected.

3. This research is art and was made with the intention of creating an artwork. The Researcher uses the perspective of art as a tool together with various relevant theories to create and relay the content until the end result was reached.

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Recommendations

1. By presenting the research content through a form of video art, using the valuable context from the past to create a new artwork especially the context of the life of the Researcher's mother, can create other forms of artwork that contribute to the understanding and the impact on people and society in Thailand in the present and in the future.

2. After creating 3 music videos, the Researcher discovered other creative approaches to develop the thought process and new spaces for those interested in contemporary art in Thailand.