

(Dis)Continuity: i. Idealization, ii. Illusion, iii. Natural Rule.

Author: CEO of Phinobpithao Institute

Speaking about the ambiguous and paradoxical idea of intangible/tangible discontinuity/continuity, we will need to specifically discuss idealization, illusion and the natural rule as demonstrated in this exhibition. If Ajarn Wantanee Siripattananuntakul had not clarified that her latest exhibition has combined two bodies of work – “366 Days of Wantanee Siripattananuntakul” done in 2000 (as we were concerned by the Y2K problem or the Millennium Bug) and the other one recently developed in situ at The Art Center of Chulalongkorn University, we might misunderstand it for featuring all new pieces made in 2012. Here, Wantanee’s present and past tenses of artistic vocabulary are completely isolated within one site, yet the two installations are interrelated in the context of place, reality and even a suspended time!

Some of the sensitive issues Wantanee is faced with include urbanization, being an artist, being a lecturer and her own daily life. All these are part of her present – a thin line that supposedly divides the past and the future – while time keeps on ticking.

i. IDEALISATION:

“366 Days of Wantanee” in 2000 utilized a methodology of real time documentary in which the artist filmed people, her surroundings and conversations in her normal daily life without having any special/staged events. The work presented a frozen time. Throughout the 366 days, she wore ordinary T-shirts, each specially printed with a date of the year 2000, as if they were a mobile calendar. According to the artist, matters of the past and memories existing in art theory and discourse can be easily recognized as concrete archives due to their physical body, nostalgia, touching and perception – all are instruments that provoke a sense of chronicling. “Art is an excellent medium of nostalgia and a time machine that bring us to the past”, Wantanee has said. A challenging question that pops up today had made the artist confused with the past, the present and the future in relation to the matter of time and its real dimension and the matter of hope. At this exhibition, all the T-shirts – from January 1st to December 31st – are laid down on a platform as a screen for a projection of Wantanee’s personal footage made in 2000. Meanwhile, there are four sensors capturing the movement of the audience within a specific area to create interactivity with sound. The definition of

time is perhaps a concept of measurement and duration of events – past, present and future – without any special, intangible interpretations. In contrast, one's mind and soul might be so bound to time and keeps thinking of other times, other realities, or hopes, like we can witness here in the case of the artist. This exhibition seems to portray Wantanee's naivety, faithfulness, self-confidence and secrets through the video footage, which is an idealization of this and that time from the past.

ii. ILLUSION:

What will the future bring? The artist plays with the future in a world of capitalism by borrowing money that is a future credit. Wantanee has worked for a public university as a permanent lecturer for a couple years. With common respect for this profession, a teacher as a constant giver can bring about trust and incredible honor from the general public. The trust and the honor do exist. Yet, before creating this show, Wantanee had to borrow 250,000 baht from a cooperative of a university in order to make the exhibition possible. She also mentioned that there was no guarantee of the show's success. One thing for sure, she will have a tough time managing her limited salary and do extra work. It will be hard for her. One time, the artist commented on the unreasonable figure of her salary as a teacher that only makes sense in a world of unreality. She said no one could make a living in this world unless he or she is a commercial creator/researcher who gets funding from local and international institutes.

The absolutely white room is a simulation of a condition of the future in which flashing light is projected at the audience, temporarily blinding them and allowing each person to imagine what they will see next. A 5-meter LED panel is erected in the middle of the room, counting the number of visitors and projecting the figure of 250,000 (the amount of money borrowed from a university's cooperative) being divided by the number of people coming in to see the work. It's funny to think about this as the average number of visitors at The Art Center for each exhibition is something between 500 and a thousand people. That means the artist has to pay 500 baht or less for each visitor. The artist's investment will be a great success if the majority of the public acknowledges the problem about the wages and figure out a way to help future generations and Wantanee's situation in the future.

iii. NATURAL RULE:

Local norms do not change easily without reinforcement and understanding for one another. Like Wantanee has told me, the imbalance between income and expenses has never made sense in this country. It's a serious issue, becoming a topic of arguments for all levels of people, even the unemployed. One big question is: Who benefits from the unreasonable salary of teachers? It goes without saying that the word 'teacher' has been related to the word 'debt' for four decades. In fact, part of the country's NPLs is debts created by teachers from different parts of Thailand. The artist pinpoints that a strong sense of capitalism helps increase consumerism dramatically. It's worrying that children of Generation Z will become a bigger consumerist thanks to the ideological legacy from Generation X. Different parts of the world have been talking about the problems of capitalism, but there's never been a solution.

To cope with the natural rule in our lives, people in the Third World should be self-sufficient and live within their means. They should avoid comparing themselves to people of other professions, whose incomes seem to make more sense. Perhaps, we should look at the context of our region and simply try to solve the problem of inequality among occupations that have yet to be based on reality. The author has heard numerous botherations concerning the livelihoods of farmers, teachers, creators, cultural workers and people with only a Bachelor's degree. They work very hard to drive this country forward and they continue to live in an unrealistic time and world.

One may have questions about this article. It does not attempt to explain the artist's concept to a third party. It's indeed an improvisation based on casual conversations between the author and Wantanee. At times, continuity is never continuous.