KAMRON GUNATILAKA AND THE CRESCENT MOON THEATRE:
CONTEMPORARY THAI THEATRE AS POLITICAL DISSENT

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By

Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn

Dissertation Committee:

Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak, Chairperson
Barbara Watson Andaya
Wimal Dissanayake
Kirstin Pauka
Michael Shapiro
Markus Wessendorf

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Dedicated to:

All the people who fight for liberty and justice
Whose freedom has been chained
Behind steel bars and cyber walls.
The unintended heroes
Whose pale faces have been buried
Under the grenade and the machine gun rubble.
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ABSTRACT

The cultural and political hegemony constructed by Thailand’s centralized administration has exercised considerable influence on cultural expression, including theatre, which has been dominated by government directives and by the aesthetics and ideologies espoused by ruling elites. Nevertheless, certain folk/popular traditional and contemporary performing arts have resisted this domination. As a pioneer in the People’s Theatre during the student-led political uprising in the 1970s, Kamron Gunitilaka (1946 - ), co-founder of the Crescent Moon Theatre Group, has dedicated himself to creating original and innovative theatre works that challenge hegemonic norms. Arguing that theatre is a cultural phenomenon dependent upon its socio-political contexts, this dissertation uses representative works of Kamron to explore the possibilities of theatre as a voice of dissent.

This dissertation articulates the roles of Kamron’s theatre through the trajectories of history, aesthetics, politics and philosophy. First, it relates Kamron’s biography to his theatre profession, and to the democracy movement. Juxtaposing examples of state-imposed aesthetics and hegemonic elite theatre, it traces the history of the People’s Theatre movement and the Crescent Moon Theatre, both of which offer alternative content and aesthetics. Second, it offers an in-depth analysis of Kamron’s representative productions based on specific aesthetic concepts (i.e. Buddhist-Brechtian, Buddhist-Artaudian, and postmodern) in relation to his political and philosophical thought. Third, by analyzing the ideological, philosophical, and political implications in Kamron’s work, this dissertation demonstrates that theatre, as a signifying system, can challenge and criticize the existing hegemony and even call for revolutionary action.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Statement of Purpose of the Dissertation

Many scholars have asserted that theatre is not just a tangible form of performance intended to tell stories, but also a phenomenon deeply embedded in a given culture, always born of a specific sociopolitical context. Each theatrical performance carries social, economic, cultural, and political connotations of its own.¹

Before the 1950s, exposure to Western theatre aesthetics in Thailand was relatively limited, majority of the Western-influenced modern theatre in Thailand during the 20ᵗʰ century was not intended to be used as a voice of dissent. It is evident that in Thailand up until the 1950s, theatre had been used mainly as entertainment or propaganda tool for nationalism, and it had not been used as a political tool to stimulate social change. Arguing that theatre as a signifying aesthetic system is dependent upon its social, political, and cultural contexts, this dissertation aims to illustrate the personal and cultural influences on the politics and aesthetics of Kamron Gunatilaka, a pioneer of contemporary avant-garde theatre in Thailand. At the same time, it will identify Kamron’s diverse aesthetic strategies by framing his own innovations as responses to those of his predecessors and mentors. Finally, this

dissertation will analyze how these aesthetic concepts convey political implications in terms of power relations.

The wide range of Kamron’s oeuvre is connected to his passionate concern with political critique, historical memory, and the collective psyche of Thailand. This dissertation intends to begin the process of establishing a long-overdue cultural and intellectual legitimacy for Kamron’s theatrical work. In order to contextualize Kamron and his theatre creation in Thailand from 1970s to 2006, this dissertation starts by laying out theoretical and historical background relating to the political history of Thai nation and Kamron’s biography, both of which discussed in concomitant with the democracy development. Based on political theories proposed by Marx, Althusser, Gramsci, and Foucault, and drawing upon Buddhist philosophy, this dissertation articulates the roles of Kamron’s theatre through four trajectories, - historical, aesthetics, political, and philosophical.

1.2 Theoretical Background

1.2.1 On the Meanings of Aesthetics

The etymology of the word “aesthetic” is rooted in a Greek term that means “sense perception,” - an indication that an aesthetic judgment must be essentially related to a feeling. Aristotle believed that the pleasure unique to dramatic tragedies consisted in catharsis of the painful emotions of pity and fear. The idea of something explicitly called an aesthetic judgment was formulated in detail by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century to mean a judgment based on feeling of pleasure associated with the recognition of beauty. Although some theorists might disagree with Kant, most theorists agree that aesthetic experiences are associated with a certain emotional
response or sense involvement to certain properties of an experience.\(^2\) Drawing from different aesthetic theories, I use the term aesthetics in this dissertation to refer to a system of judgment based on feelings of appreciation or pleasure unique to the recognition of certain properties relevant to one’s sensory perception, emotion, and intellectual understanding.

1.2.2 Marxism and Marxist Criticism

Marxism is a school of thought based on the writings of Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), both of whom used the capitalist theory and its mode of production to explain social reality in regard to economic, political, and philosophical issues. Marxist theory focuses on the relationship between economic power, class, and the exploitation of the labor class, all of which produce class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the middle and the upper class) and the proletariat (the working class). Marx believed that the labor exploitation/oppression occurred because bourgeois ideology created what has been termed “false consciousness” among the proletariat, whose understanding of their own situation failed to understand the ways they were socially and economically exploited. The ideology of an era is determined by the contemporary socioeconomic system and reflects the interests of the dominant class. Ideology is like a paradigm that governs the people’s way of seeing and thinking. It serves the dominant class by legitimizing their position, power, and economic position and helping to preserve the status quo by making what is artificial and exploitative seem natural. Marxists believe that such ideology must

\(^2\) For example, John Dewey argues that aesthetic experience is more than just feeling an emotion or a sensation; it involves a sense of satisfaction from feeling the coherence and appreciation of something that an ordinary experience lacks; Nelson Goodman argues that aesthetic experiences involve the emotions that also function cognitively; G.W.F. Hegel sees art as a form of knowledge or intellect. See further Gordon Graham, “Theories of Art,” *Philosophy of The Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*. 3\(^{rd}\) ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2005).
be exposed, and that the proletariat class should then rise up against the oppression of
the capitalist system and reclaim their rights and political power.

Literary and theatre criticism have adopted Marxist theory and principles in
the reconstruction of social reality. A Marxist critic would therefore try to expose the
underlying ideologies and the social injustices of which readers/audiences might be
unaware. For example, Marxists deemed modern Western literature as decadent
because it was “subjective, introverted and introspective, and displayed a fragmented
vision of the world” (Cuddon 493). Marxist critics/writers/artists are committed not
only to alerting readers/audiences to social realities (conditions of existence) but also
to arousing them to take action that would lead to social change. Marxists such as
Bertolt Brecht were thus interested in not only in the knowledge that art produced but
also in the possible practical real-life effects stemmed from art (e.g. idea of
revolution or social change).

1.2.3 Background to Modern Western Theatre

Scholars have referred to the various forms of contemporary theatre as
“experimental,” “anti-Aristotelian,” “contemporary alternative,” “postmodern,” (and
the most recent term “postdramatic”).3 In an exploration of the confrontation
between drama based on Aristotle’s dramatic theory and that based on the desire to
break away from such ideas, Peter Szondi proposed that the history of modern
western theatre in post-Enlightenment times (late 19th century – 20th century) could

3 In Post Dramatic Theatre (2006), Hans-Thies Lehmann describes a new theatre that is
“resonating with many aspects of the postmodern condition as an ‘incredulity towards grand
narratives’” (qtd. in Jürs-Munby 13). Via deconstruction, Lehmann illustrates the line of
continuity from the modernists and the “historical avant-garde” to Brecht’s Epic Theatre, to
postmodern fragmentation. He elucidates the connections between “dramatic” and “no longer
dramatic” (which he terms “postdramatic”) forms of theatre that have risen since the 1970s.
be perceived as an attempt to break away from neo-classical confinement and enter into what Szondi calls “Epic I” drama.

For Szondi, drama was “a time-bound concept that stands for a specific literary-historical event – namely, the drama as it arose in Elizabethan England and, above all, as it came into being in seventeenth-century France and was perpetuated in the German classical period” (1987: 4-5).4 The aesthetics for neo-classical theatre sprang from the need of “a newly self-conscious being, who after the collapse of the medieval world view sought to create an artistic reality within which he could fix and mirror himself on the basis of interpersonal relationships alone” (1983:194). Szondi called neo-classical drama “absolute drama” because of its attempt to create a world of total illusion. “Absolute drama” featured elements such as the dominance of dialogue, the creation of the old dramatic world, the exclusion of anything external to the dramatic world (i.e. the theatre makers, the audience members), and adherence to the unities of time, place, and action. According to Szondi, this type of drama, which emphasized plots centering on interpersonal relations, was challenged by a new trend that raised questions regarding socio-political, economic, and philosophical issues. The challenge gave rise to many new experiments in playwriting that tried to reach a compromise between the world of “absolute drama” and the use of drama for wider issues relating to the rapidly changing world.

**Modern Western Theatre and the Historical Avant-Garde Theatre**

Modern Western theatre in the early decades of the twentieth century reflected the intricate intersections of major international trends, including scientific

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4 Neoclassical theatre developed in France in the sixteenth century and had great influence in Italy, England, and Germany. Based on the classical works of ancient Greek and Roman writers such as Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Plautus, French dramatists wrote plays that followed the three-unities of time, action, and place, along with verisimilitude and decorum.
advancement, the industrial revolution, imperialism, the outbreak of revolutions throughout Europe and Asia, new ideologies such as Communism, Socialism, and Capitalism, and the impact of the First and Second World Wars (1914–1918 and 1939–1945). The period from the 1920s through the 1950s was also important in that the Prague structuralists established a systematic approach to the study of art, including theatre.\(^5\) The structuralists proposed that the study of art could not take place in isolation from its particular social system, and that it was necessary to take into consideration the linguistic aspect of a work, and to consider its “sign structure” and relevance to “social context” (Kiebuzinska 22).\(^6\) Consequently, while trying to reach a compromise with some of the characteristics of the Neo-classical theatre as well as exploring new ways of presentation, Western artists produced experimental theatres that resonated with Naturalism, Expressionism, Symbolism, Absurdism, and Marxism.\(^7\)

Some of these modern Western theatre artists tried to break away further from text-based theatre by demonstrating that theatre did not need to rely solely on the primacy of the dramatic text, but could rely on the meaning carried by acting and technical aspects. Consequently, innovations in theatrical paradigm and practice were attempted or achieved by theatre directors such as Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), and Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), all of whom would later become known as


\(^6\) In their approach to the analysis of theatrical art, the structuralists argued that theatre “represents a dynamic interplay of all its components, a unity of forces internally differentiated by intensions and a set of signs and meanings” (ibid. 26).

\(^7\) Examples of modern Western dramatists are Hauptmann, Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Maeterlinck, and Brecht.
“historical avant-garde” directors. Among these directors, I would like to draw attention to Erwin Piscator for his forty-year career as a theatre director whose goal of “political theatre” was developed and expanded from Agitprop productions which aimed to propagandize Marxism to socio-political issues aimed at provoking a revolution in the class struggle. In addition, Piscator wanted to revolutionize the art of theatre itself.

During the early 1920s, the early years of the democratic Weimar Republic (1919-1933) in Germany, many arts including theatre were used as instruments for Marxist propaganda. Piscator believed the audience should be concerned with the play’s socio-economical-political background if they were to comprehend the play itself. This shift from the sphere of interpersonal relationships among characters to the local and global socio-economic-political sphere was a revolutionary step for the art of theatre. His political interests had led Piscator into making documentary drama concerning wide issues such as the history of the German Revolution and its aftermath, and other concerns like inflation, the abortion law, and the wages of immigrant workers. In his documentary drama production, he used edited images of actual political, cultural, economic, social, and sporting events in his short film overtures and juxtaposed film with the appearance of the actual actors on the theatre stage. According to Szondi, Piscator elevated the function of mise-en-scène from being “scenic” (or serving as a setting, a locale for the play) to “historical” (or serving as providing the documentary/objective reality for the play). His theatrical techniques thus “destroyed the absoluteness of the dramatic form and [made] way for the rise of epic theatre” (Theory of the Modern Drama 67).

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8 The term “historical avant-garde” is used by Lehmann to refer to the initial crisis in text-based drama and a series of directors who tried to diverge from it. See Lehmann, 45–52.
Piscator later developed a concept of “epic theatre,” which he defined as an approach which “not only portrays the dramatic action, but also describes what social and political conditions determine the fate” (qtd. in Innes 103). In other words, Piscator’s “epic theatre” was not simply a conglomeration of incidents but was intended to make the audience become aware of the socio-political context that surrounded the incidents. Piscator’s most innovative ideas lay not only in his documentary images, but in the use of slogans derived from long speeches, and images of machinery that symbolized the contemporary environment. Although Piscator was known to demonstrate his “epic theatre” concept in his productions, he did not theorize this principle. He eventually associated his approach with what he called “Total Theatre” – a director’s theatre, where the written script constituted only a relatively minor part of the theatre experience, where lights, scenery, machinery, costumes, and music were combined to foster audience awareness of the dramatic events in relation to specific world events. Piscator’s commitment to making theatre a platform for political themes made him a leading director of political theatre.

**Brechtian Theatre versus Anti-dramatic Theatre**

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a German dramatist, poet, director, and theoretician. Erwin Piscator’s political theatre and the Marxist dialectic influenced Brecht’s playwriting and his theatre productions in many ways. Brecht wanted to

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9 For example, in 1928, Piscator directed *The Good Soldier Schweik*, a play depicting ironic adventures of an imbecile character named Schweik who tried to go to the front to fight for his country. In this production, a moving stage was used to accord with the twenty-five scene episodic narrative which produced montage sequences. This staging technique was clearly anti-dramatic theatre. See further details in Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978) 90-95.

10 For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), dialectic is a process of contradicting process of concept involving thesis, anti-thesis, which leads towards a more absolute synthesis. It is a continual process of unification of opposites moving toward the absolute truth of the spirit world.
create a theatre that would give dialectic view of socio-political reality that would produce the desire for class struggle. Brecht believed that theatre should stimulate a social and moral conscience that would lead the audience to take action toward social change. As a Marxist, Brecht wanted his theatre to awaken the audience from ignorance of oppression in a society to seeing the class system and its operation. In order to achieve the new mode of theatre he needed to create a new way of presentation in contrast to mainstream modern Western theatre that popularized bourgeois realist theatre (which he perceived as ‘dead-end’ because it offered resolutions that belonged to bourgeois reality).

Brecht perceived modern Western theatre and neo-classical drama as “dramatic theatre”, or alternatively “Aristotelian theatre” because of their overt dramatization of interpersonal problems.11 The term “Aristotelian theatre” was used by Brecht specifically to mean “theatre of illusion” which “encourages the audience to try to identify with the characters on stage” (Trapido 38). As a reaction against Aristotelian theatre, Brecht proposed the idea of epic theatre, a concept first used by Erwin Piscator and further developed by Brecht himself. Although the word “epic” in Aristotle’s *Poetics* denoted a literary convention not bound by the concept of time (i.e. an epic narration covers a long scope of time), Brecht used the term to refer to the dialectical quality of a different “epic” theatre where he preferred to make theatre a place that broke down the Aristotelian illusion (i.e. all modern Western plays and

(See further details in Sarup 91). But in Marxism, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) reversed the emphasis of the dialectic process by making the world primary and the spirit secondary. In this dissertation, the term dialectical refers to a less restrained sense of dialectic to describe the “interaction of contradictory or opposite forces” (ibid. 108).

11 In fact, Aristotles did not really create rules employed by the neo-classical dramatists and directors. Brecht arbitrarily used the term Aristotelian simply to indicate the essence of what Szondi calls “absolute drama” where the audience’s identification with the characters and their misfortunes took precedence.
what Szondi referred to as “absolute drama”) while trying to make the audience observe more objectively. In theory, Brechtian theatre and plays are anti-illusionistic and anti-dramatic, and thus anti-Aristotelian. As Brecht put it:

The dramatic theatre’s spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too -Just like me-It’s only natural-It’ll never change-The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are inescapable-That’s great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world-I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought it-That’s not the way-That’s extraordinary, hardly believable-It’s got to stop-The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary-That’s great art; nothing obvious in it-I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh (Brecht on Theatre 71).

In his plays and theoretical essays Brecht emphasized the importance of keeping a balance between didacticism and entertainment (that sometimes also include certain dramatic qualities) by focusing on the following positions of anti-Aristotelian theatre:

1) Since Aristotelian plots tend to focus on the protagonist’s misfortunes or hamartia, they overlook the importance of social classes and political structure that give roots to social problems and oppression,\(^\text{12}\) Therefore, anti-Aristotle plots represent a critique of social relations.

2) While Aristotelian theatre tries to foster audience empathy for characters in order to purge an emotion, anti-Aristotelian theatre uses different theatrical techniques to “alienate” the actors and the audience in order for them to feel the

\(^{12}\) In Poetics, Aristotles referred to the misfortunes of the tragic hero as outcomes of his/her own weaknesses. He called this weaknesses “hamartia” (Gr. “error”) which caused the character to make the wrong decision or judgment and thus led to tragedy.
distinction between the world of the drama and the context of the audience. In doing this, Brecht did not deny the emotional aspect of a performance, for “the essential of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to feelings than to the spectator’s reason. […] At the same time, it could be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre” (23).

Consequently, Brecht proposed “epic theatre” to describe the dramaturgical dimensions of his own work, beginning in 1930 with a series of notes and essays. In them, he identifies his musical *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) as an example of “epic form.” By Aristotle’s definition,” Brecht writes, ”the difference between the dramatic and epic forms was attributed to their different methods of construction” (*Brecht on Theatre* 70). Method of construction here refers to the relation the play establishes between its parts and its whole, and the relations that the actors and spectators have with the performance. Brecht summarized his points in the following table (ibid. 37):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dramatic Theatre</th>
<th>Epic Theatre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicates the spectator in a stage situation</td>
<td>Turns the spectator into an observer but arores his capacity for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wears down his capacity for action</td>
<td>arouses his capacity for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides him with sensations</td>
<td>Forces him to take decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Picture of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spectator is involved in something</td>
<td>He is made to face something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>Argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instinctive feelings are preserved</td>
<td>Brought to the point of recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience</td>
<td>The spectator stands outside, studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The human being is taken for granted</td>
<td>The human being is the object of inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The human is unalterable</td>
<td>The human is alterable and able to alter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes on the finish</td>
<td>Eyes on the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One scene makes another</td>
<td>Each scene for itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Montage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linear development  In curves
Evolutionary determinism  Jumps
Man as a fixed point  Man as a process
Thought determines being  Social being determines thought
Feeling  Reason

From the table above, it is clear that the “epic theatre” is “anti-dramatic” (anti-Aristotlian). The table demonstrates clearly that the two forms of theatre took opposite views in regard to the nature and role of theatre, and the role of the spectator. While the construction of dramatic theatre is based on the belief that theatre is an absolute or self-contained world, the anti-dramatic theatre (epic theatre) is based on the belief that the world is alterable through human action. For Brecht, theatre assumes an important role in forcing the audience to confront something critically. By demonstrating that a character is not merely a product of physical, mental, or psychological conditions, Brechtian theatre highlights wider aspects of the character, whose characteristics are contingent upon class, gender, race, social and political structure. While the goal of Aristotle’s observation of tragedy was focused on the *catharsis* (purge of emotion), the goal of Brechtian theatre was to stimulate the spectator’s intellectual engagement with the experience.13

In order to achieve his goal, Brecht employed “Verfremdungseffekt” (Alienation Effect or Estrangement Effect) which aimed to make the audience become aware of the theatrical illusion and use critical thinking or reason in judging the play’s characters and the messages. Brecht illustrated this concept in his theoretical writing, *The Street Scene* (1938), which is a model example of an eyewitness demonstrating to the bystanders how a traffic accident took place. The

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13 *Catharsis* (Gk. Trans. purgation) Aristotle uses this word in his definition of tragedy in order to indicate that the role of tragedy is to arouse “pity and fear” in the audience in order to accomplish “catharsis of such emotions” (*Poetics* Chapter VI).
demonstrator shows or acts out the behavior of the driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the incident. Brecht sees this kind of enactment as a new type of theatre, “theatre for a scientific age” (121). Brecht proposes “If the scene in the theatre follows the street scene in this respect then the theatre will stop pretending not to be theatre, just as the street-corner demonstration admits it is a demonstration (and does not pretend to be the actual event)” (122). When applied to presentation in the theatre, Brecht suggested that the actor (or theatre’s demonstrator) must apply a technique which will let him reproduce the tone of the subject “with a certain reserve, with detachment” (125, emphasis mine). The goal of the demonstrator is to make the spectators want to join in and take some action such as calling for justice or giving comments from a social point of view. Brecht argued that “the epic theatre is an extremely artistic affair, hardly thinkable without artists and virtuosity, imagination, humour, and fellow-feeling; it cannot be practiced without all these and much else too. It has got to be entertaining; it has got to be instructive” (126-7).

By the 1950s, Brecht was already aware that the term “epic theatre” was being used excessively to refer to technical aspects and structural forms that were different from Aristotelian theatre. Consequently, in order to re-emphasize the significance of “theatre for a scientific age,” in the aim of epic theatre, he proposed a term “dialectical theatre” to highlight contradictions and dialectics in the content and the technical aspect of theatre. In this dissertation, the term “epic theatre” is used to encompass the “dialectical theatre.”

It is important to note here that the Verfremdungseffekt is not simply the breaking of the theatrical illusion but it is more of a “detachment” from the emotional attachment to the characters. Brecht gave many examples of technical means that
could produce the *Verfremdungseffekt* such as an episodic structure of the plot, stylized acting, stylized *mise-en-scène*, third person narration, and the use of music, poems, or songs that would make audience more aware of socio-political issues in the play (Wilett, 38–42 91–93, 143–144).

Despite his efforts in creating a theory for the theatre (as the theatre of the scientific age), and his contributions as a poet, playwright, and director, Brecht’s vision of a theatre that enlightens both the intellect and the senses, and the reality of the theatrical world seem to have been quite remote from each other. Partly, this was due to a misunderstanding of the concept of epic theatre, so that the subtle interplay of personal relationships and the psychological aspect of the characters were drastically undermined. Partly, it was perhaps due to Brecht’s rather lofty expectations of audience response, since he wanted them to exercise their intellectual faculties whereas in reality most audiences prefer to be entertained. Consequently, while many theatre practitioners employ Brecht’s technical means to create the *Verfremdungseffekt*, they might not opt to follow his political aims in the theatre.

**Theatre of Antonin Artaud**

Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) was a French actor who became known as a revolutionary figure for his relentless pursue of the “Theatre of Cruelty” as a metaphysical communion between spectators and actors. After observing a performance of Balinese dance drama in 1931, he wrote his manifestos in 1932 and 1933. In his First Manifesto, he proposed that theatre, as an “expression in space” should allow “the magical means of art and speech to be exercised organically and altogether, like renewed exorcisms” (89). “It ultimately breaks away from the intellectual subjugation of the language, by conveying the sense of a new and deeper
intellectuality which hides itself beneath the gestures and signs, raised to the dignity of particular exorcism” (91).

While most of these “historical avant-garde” artists were anti-dramatic (anti-Aristotelian and anti-catharsis), and believed in provoking rational thought in the audience, Artaud, by contrast, proposed his theory of “Theatre of Cruelty” to reform every aspect of the theatre—from avoiding conventional performance spaces to creating a theatre that presents “a grand physics of speech, gesture, and expression—in order to rescue it from its servitude to psychology and “human interest” (90). Brecht never completely broke out of the dramatic theatre mode, even though he tried to present an anti-dramatic theatre. In The Theatre and its Double, Artaud calls the “Oriental Theatre . . . an ultimate break away from the intellectual subjugation of the language, . . . conveying the sense of a new and deeper intellectuality which hides itself beneath the gestures and signs, raised to the dignity of particular exorcisms” (91). Although artists prior to Artaud were also in some ways influenced by Asian theatre forms, Artaud wanted to revolutionize the Western theatre to the level of the “spiritual ecstasy” of Asian theatre, which he imagined as ritualistic and mythical (ibid.). To summarize, quoting Hans-Thies Lehmann, this period of the “historical avant-garde” movement “was not just a matter of retheatricalization immanent to theatre but at the same time of an opening of the theatrical sphere to others: to cultural, political, magical, philosophical, etc. forms of practice, to gathering, feast and ritual” (51).

**Postmodern Theatre**

For academics in the humanities and social sciences, postmodernism has become a critical sphere that provides both new perspectives and new dilemmas. It is a worldview that has been articulated by many different theorists who also share their
theoretical position with poststructuralism in denying any attempt at absolutism; this includes believing in the absolutism of the historical meta-narrative. Jean-François Lyotard defined postmodernity as the “incredulity toward meta-narratives” (*The Post Modern Condition*, xxiv). What he meant by “meta-narratives” (or grand-narrative) was the totalizing narratives (or stories) in regard to history, belief system, practices, and knowledge. Meta-narratives usually dominate other smaller or competing narratives in order to claim the succession of historical narrative of that field of knowledge and to take over the interpretations of meanings behind the claimed knowledge. Consequently, Lyotard’s suspicion of any form of universal narratives (e.g. in philosophy, arts, literature, history, and science) led him to sanction “little narratives” associated with localized stories, struggles, and creativity instead.14 Simon During observes that the paradigm of modernism, which is based on the ideas of progress, rationality and scientific objectivity that legitimatized Western modernity, are largely unacceptable in the reality of today’s world because “they take no account of cultural differences” (170). When taking such differences into account, postmodern thinkers are confronted with the fragmented nature of narratives and cultures, and find themselves doubting the humanist *worldview* as well as those of Marxism and structuralism.15 Some characteristics of postmodernism, as observed by Madan Sarup, are “continual references to eclecticism, reflexivity, self-referentiality, quotation, artifice, randomness, anarchy, fragmentation, pastiche and allegory”(132).

With increasing plurality and technological connectivity, society’s dominant ethical,

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14 In *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), Lyotard described how the meta-narratives such as Marxism, Capitalism, Hegel’s philosophy and scientific knowledge could no longer be held as universal truth or universal theorizing systems that could be permanent or absolute.

moral, and intellectual standards have also become uncertain. Modern Western dramatist finds themselves confronting demands that can no longer fit either the Aristotelian drama or the modern “epic” drama. As a continuation of “historical avant-garde” movements, “neo-avant-garde” theatre since the 1970s has shared many of these postmodern aesthetics. Examples of these Western contemporary theatre artists include Heiner Müller, Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp, Sarah Kane, Tom Stoppard, Howard Barker, Robert Lapage, Robert Wilson, Elizabeth Lecompte’s Wooster Group, and Martin McDonagh. The postmodern characteristics shared by these dramatists have been described as:

- a fascination for self-reflexive, grand-dramatic modes which reflect upon epistemological certainty, ambiguity, and blanks; a mistrust of totality which results in fragmented formal structures: collages, cut-up forms, paradox, pastiche, parody –signifiers that disperse unidirectional attributions of fixed meanings, intentions, or propositions (Henke and Meddeke13).

While Brecht insisted on using theatre as a counter-hegemonic effort in the battle for socio-economic-political change, postmodernist theorists and theatre artists have moved away from class struggle to favor fragmented stories, or a focus on culturally defined social groups.

The historical development of the Western theatre from neo-classical to postmodern reveals that theatre often challenges the sociopolitical and philosophical assumptions of the period in which it is created. All modes of theatre have, implicitly or explicitly, served as political expression. Viewed through this lens, neither Western nor Asian traditional theatres can escape being read as implicitly political. In Thailand, for instance, an ever-present, elitist cultural hegemony penetrates the practice of traditional theatre, signifying a hierarchical ideology. For this reason
Kamron Gunatilaka, the focus of the present study, has avoided drawing on traditional Thai theatre in his work. It was within the spirit of the Western historical avant-garde as well as the post-modern theatre aesthetics that Kamron strove to find his own means of expression.

Kamron’s works reveal his own journey from dramatic theatre traditions (naturalistic theatre, theatre of the absurd, and story-theatre) in the 1970s towards an increasingly postmodern approach (utilizing modernist techniques from Brechtian, Artaudian, and non-conformist theatre methodologies) in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. His lack of stylistic consistency also makes Kamron a rather unique theatre artist. Despite the apparent fragmentation of styles in his work, elements of anti-elitism, ambiguity, and class critique, which are all associated with Marxists and postmodernists, are always present. This makes them uniquely identifiable in Thailand, where most theatre practitioners avoid radical experimentation with styles and/or dealing with political issues. Kamron’s post-1980s work can be associated with many features of postmodernism, including stylistic eclecticism, intertextuality and non-linear arrangements of plot. As the pioneer of Thailand’s avant-garde theatre, the diverse styles of Kamron’s productions are the antecedents to newer developments in Thailand’s contemporary theatre. Since theatrical performance holds both political and aesthetic implications, an understanding of Kamron’s personal and sociopolitical context is crucial to the analysis of his work. At the same time, he was also influenced by Buddhism, and an appreciation of Kamron’s work also involves an understanding of the Buddhist teachings that so attracted him.

1.2.4 The Buddhist Background
Buddhism refers to teachings of Gotama Buddha, a historical figure who is believed by his followers to have found a spiritual path to end human suffering (dukkha). Buddhist teachings were initially transmitted orally after the death of the historical Buddha about 2,500 years ago. Several centuries after Buddha’s death, a number of canons were assembled, thus leading to the foundation of many different schools. The only complete canon of early Buddhist school surviving its original Indian language is the Pāli canon. The Pāli canon, which is also called the Theravāda canon, became the central corpus for the world’s majority Theravada countries -- Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

In Thailand, the Pāli canon or the Tipitaka (Th. Tripidok), the “Three Baskets,” is regarded as the supreme teachings of Gotama Buddha himself. In the Tipitaka, the Abhidhamma section alone consists of seven books containing lengthy discourses, descriptions, and philosophical discussions. Paul Williams, a scholar on Buddhism, explains that the Abhidhamma involves “…issues of causation, unraveling the dynamic nature of things and explaining how the world nevertheless hangs together. It contains also an attempt to describe the experiential building-blocks which come together to make up our lived world, and how all these relate to issues of moral behavior and following the path to liberation” (32).

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16 For example, Theravāda canon (written in Pāli), Mahāsāṅghika canon, the Sarvāstivāda canon (written in Sanskrit), etc.
17 The “Three Baskets”, which has approximately 84,000 dhamma teachings, is divided into three parts: 1) Monastic Discipline (Vinaya); 2) Buddha Discourses (Sutta)(Sutta is consisted of narratives of events or stories told by Buddha); 3) Supplementary Discourses (Abhidhamma) (Abhidhamma does not have narratives of events but it is a collection of content-based discourses). In Thailand, the whole Tipitaka canon is published as forty-five books.
As someone who researched on the teaching of different Buddhist schools (Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajranayana), and has practiced Theravada Buddhism for more than two decades, I see more commonality in worldviews among different Buddhist schools than differences. Despite differences in cultural and meditational practices among different Buddhist schools, Buddhist masters and scholars have shared many views about the essential principles of Buddhism. [Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1975)(1990), Peter A. Jackson (1988), Donald Swearer (1989), Paul Williams (2000), Tenzin Palmo (2002), Henry C. Warren (2004)]. The key doctrines can be summarized as follows:

**Doctrine of Compassion (**karunā**)**

Compassion as an inner feeling and as an action in real life plays a vital part in Buddhist experience. **Karunā** is the desire to remove harm and suffering in the world. Therefore, it is important in Buddhism that one does not seek enlightenment or any kind of liberation without practicing ethical actions based on compassion in real life.

**Doctrine of Cyclic Consequences (**kamma**) (Skt.kārmā)**

Buddhists believe that life is a display of actions (**kamma** or **kārmā**) stemming from complicated causes and effects as explained in the principle of Dependent Origination. **Kamma** is “the law of cause and effect, which teaches that every intentional action of body, voice, or mind has a corresponding result” (Palmo 250). Because of this principle, all occurrences are consequences of the interconnectedness of countless complicated actions. These causal relations eventually lead to the circle of birth and rebirth, or what is known as **samsara** (**samsāra**), or cyclic existence of all living beings.

**Doctrine of Dhamma as the Absolute Truth**
Buddhists study and follow Gotama Buddha’s teachings (dhamma) (Skt. dharma). Sometimes, the word “dhamma” is also used to mean “phenomena in general” (Palmo 248), or to mean “truth, nature, law of nature, duty, order,…” (Buddhdasa 129). Buddha preached dhamma based on his worldview based on the notion that living a life without an enlightened mind only led to suffering (dukkha).

**Doctrine of Mind (Chit) Practice**

Buddhism deals directly with both the intellectual and the functionality of chit (transcendental consciousness or mind). Although many Western scholars refer to chit as mind, the Buddhist notion of chit invokes a form of energy which operates beyond the biology of the brain, involves both the intellect and the beyond-intellect. Chit is supposed to represent the transcendental quality, and all existences in the universe are the manifestations of different qualities of chit. Since it is believed that chit can evolve from one level of quality to another, Buddhists try to seek ways to elevate their chit to a higher level through mediation and through practicing Buddhist ethics.

This chit training is a strength of Buddhism on the one hand, because it is based on the idea that humans can liberate themselves from dukkha by themselves without depending on supernatural power. It also indicates that humans can obtain such knowledge not just intellectually, but also at a level beyond intellectual grasping. On the other hand, this aspect of Buddhism is also considered the to be the most esoteric because Buddhists believe that the realization of chit can be proven only through one’s own direct meditative experience.18

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18 Although there have been countless records of such esoteric experiences that confirm the existence of chit, it is outside the scope of this dissertation to investigate in these findings.
Since *chit* is used to refer to the mind in both its intellectual and transcendental capacities, Buddhist practitioners believe that every emotion, thought, vision, imagination, and feeling is an expression of *chit*. *Chit* governs all levels of our consciousness, whether mundane or sub-conscious. Therefore, *chit* also controls our perception of worldly existence which intrinsically contains what Buddha called the “Three Characteristics (*tilakkhana*)”, - impermanence (*anicca*), state of anguish or suffering (*dukkha*), and void-ness of self, or reality (*anattā*). In the analysis of Kamron’s theatre work, key influential concepts, notably *tilakkhana*, *suññata*, *anattā*, and Dependent Origination will be used in Chapters 4 – 6.

**Impermanence (*aniccata*)**

In the Buddhist worldview, since nothing in the world can last forever, everything is empty of its inherent and permanent existence. Buddhists thus perceive one’s own self (*attā*), -physically, mentally, and spiritually -- as having a transient nature, always changing and impermanent. The desire for any existence to last causes suffering (*dukkha*).

**The State of Anguish or Suffering (*dukkha*)**

Buddha preached *dhamma* based on a worldview that living a life without an enlightened mind only led to *dukkha*. There is no proper translation for *dukkha* even though it is often rendered as suffering, pain, and misery. The best translation in my point of view is by Tenzin Palmo, who translates the meaning of *dukkha* as “insatisfactory nature of existence” (249). In fact, the Buddhists perceive that the experiences of *dukkha* are manifested in all worldly experiences, regardless of them being happy or unhappy ones. In the Pāli *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* the Buddha states:
Birth is dukkha, dekay is dukkha, disease is dukkha, death is dukkha, to be united with the unpleasant is dukkha, to be separated from the pleasant is dukkha, not to get what one desires is dukkha. In brief the five aggregates [khandha; Skt. skandha] of attachment are dukkha (qtd. in Williams 42). 19

In the Buddhist worldview, every dukkha is caused by attachment or clinging to existence. Therefore, the more one’s chit feels attached towards a certain existence, the more one is likely to suffer from dukkha in real life. The only way to release oneself from dukkha (which always stems from the nature of impermanence) is through the total acceptance of impermanence as the true nature of all things, and by letting go of attachment.

Non-self, Non-existence, Detachment from self (anattā)

The third characteristic of all existence is known as anattā. It is believed that a sophisticated chit practice can eventually lead to spiritual liberation or enlightenment known as nibbāna (skt. nirvana). In nibbāna, one will have no attachment of self (attā); this leads to a realization of anattā as the true nature of all things. This realization of the non-existence of all things is often referred to as the realization of void-ness or emptiness (suññata) in all existence as well. According to the Buddhist master teacher Tenzin Palmo, suññata is the ultimate nature of reality, because there is no inherent permanent existence of a subjective-self and objective-phenomena (253). Therefore the words anattā and suññata are often interchangeable since they share a similar quality of the realization of void-ness. However, in

19 The notion of five aggregates in Buddhism refer to the five components that create a “self (attā),” which is a composition of “psychophysical (nāmarūpa)” elements that make a human being (Dissanayake 124). These five psychophysical elements are the physical (rūpa) or form factor, the mental (rūpa) factors consisted of feelings, perception, formations, and consciousness (Williams 58).
Thailand, the term *anattā* is mostly used to refer to “detachment from self” rather than “no-existence.”

**Doctrine of Four Noble Truths and Eight-fold Paths**

The Four Noble Truths concern the nature of human suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. Many a time that Buddha has been compared to a medical doctor who tries to prescribe “medicine” to help relieve his “patients” from suffering. The first noble truth is a diagnosis of the human condition as being one in which all forms of existence are inevitably subject to suffering. To be free from suffering, Buddha offered us his view on the cause of suffering (*samudaya*), which lies in craving or thirst (*tanhā*) usually caused by underlying delusion (or ignorance) about the fundamental nature of reality. The fundamental nature of reality is tied to the concept of *suññata*. Reality in Buddhism is a transitory state. There is no permanent entity. All phenomena are the result of previous occurrences/ vibrations. The third noble truth shows us that there is an end to suffering (*niruddha*) which is “non-attachment,” or at the supreme level, the state of enlightenment (*nibbāna*). This state of enlightenment can be explained as a state of mind which is free from the roots of attachment which are greed, hatred, and delusion. The fourth noble truth gives the practical guidance (*magga*) about how to reach the state of liberation from suffering. It is seen as the “middle way” (between indulging in desires and self-mortification) which leads to cessation of suffering.

The *magga* is delineated as the Eightfold Path which is divided into three aspects: Wisdom (*paññā*), Morality (*sīla*), and Meditation (*samādhi*). The details of the Eightfold Path start with Right View and Right Intention which constitute the path of Wisdom, while Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood shape the path of morality, and finally Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right
Concentration constitute the Path of Meditation. The Eightfold Path indicates that “there is a basic relationship between one’s understanding, actions and underlying emotional state (or psychological state)” (Toula-Breysse 26) (italic mine).

**Doctrine of Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada)**

Since Buddhism deals with the causes of dukkha and how to end dukkha, one of the important teachings of Buddha concerns the analysis of how dukkha originated even before human existence. The system of “Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada)” demonstrates the causal relations of how things are interrelated in this world, starting from emptiness to birth. In this system of explanation, “ignorance (avijja)” (or the unenlightened mind) is the root cause of the interrelations that cause dukkha and eventually led to a cyclic existence of birth and rebirth. It explains how “ignorance” leads to “attachment” which then leads to dukkha. To end dukkha, therefore, one needs to end the process that leads to “ignorance (avijja)”

Since Buddhists believe that the ultimate reality (intrinsic reality) of all things, including a human body, is emptiness (openness) (suññata), all physical humans are the result of the conglomeration of appropriate causes, and only when these come together can an embodied existence form. The extensive and complicated system, which can be experienced through one’s chit either cognitively and/or spiritually, is summarized in Buddha’s words:

- On ignorance depends karma;
- On karma depends consciousness;
- On consciousness depends name and form;
- On name and form depend the six organs of senses;
- On the six organs of senses depends contact;
- On contact depends sensation;
On sensation depends desire; 
On desire depends attachment; 
On attachment depends existence; 
On existence depends birth; 

On birth depends old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair (qtd. from Warren, Section 9, Chapter 1: 84).

The consequence of birth, which brings humans to this world of existence, is also an existence that produces an aggregation of *dukkha*. In this system of belief, therefore, the way to stop *dukkha* is to end the process of Dependent Origination. For example, the cessation of karma ceases consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness cease name and form; with the cessation of name and form cease the six organs of senses, and so on until the cessation of birth, which also ceases the entire aggregation of *dukkha*.

There are many levels of interpretation of this particular doctrine by different philosophers and monks. Most traditional monks interpreted this doctrine as a circle of birth and rebirth in one human’s life time. However, Buddhadasa Bhikku (1906-1993), a well-known Thai monk and Buddhist reformist, regarded his interpretation of Buddhist canons as doctrinal rather than scriptural. He regarded the circle of Dependent Origination as something that happens constantly inside and outside of the human body. He applied the rule of Dependent Origination to the circle of birth and rebirth from the atomic to the cosmic level. He became a controversial figure because his approach to the interpretation to the Buddhist text was based on a metaphorical rather than literal interpretation.

**State-imposed Buddhism versus Buddhadasa Movement**
It has been a conventional assumption that the Siamese have homogeneously adopted Theravada Buddhism (with a mixture of Hindu rituals), as their major religion since the 15th century. However, the formation of this so-called national religion with its own Siamese-style, state-imposed Buddhism is in fact a product of many reformations and coercions conducted by the rulers during the absolute monarchy era and later by the state during the constitutional monarchy era. Prior to any reformation or reorganization of the state-sanctioned Buddhism, there were many different local Buddhist-animist practices that held interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures. It was during the reign of King Monkut (King Rama IV) (reigned 1851-1868) that a major reform resulted in a division into the Mahanikai order (associated with the local practices) and the Thammayut order (associated with the nobles). The latter was created because the king perceived that the traditional Buddhist practices at that time were not adhering to the purity of Buddhism. He preferred a more orthodox practice close to the original Theravada Buddhist teachings. The royal-initiated reform entailed in many shifts of focus in both the practice and the establishment of administrative structures and regulations, which resulted in the later domination of the state-sanctioned Sangha Law (Law for the Monks) in the 1960s.

The history of the relationship between the Buddhism and the ruling power in Thailand (range from the monarchy, to the military, to the dictatorship, to civilian government), has been a history of the ruling class using the Buddhist values and institutions to support and legitimize their policies or actions. In the premodern Siam, a local lord or king could claim his legitimacy to rule due to his special power granted by his Hindu-Buddhist *karma*. During the absolute monarchy, King Vachirawut (King Rama VI) (reigned 1910-1921) considered that Buddhism as a significant identity that defined Siam as a unified nation. He established Buddhism as
one of the Three Pillars of the Thai identity. Since the state-imposed Buddhism (known as Thammayut practice) started to gain a certain domination over the traditional or local Buddhism (Mahanikai practice) which centered on communal rituals, together with the state-sanctioned Sangha Law, Thai official Buddhism has eventually become a state-controlled institution in the modern time. Under this law, the king holds the supreme right to grant or to revoke the ranking from the high level monks. Since this law allows the state temples to have the legitimacy to operate as a juristic person without having to pay tax, some of the popular state-sanctioned temples have accumulated great wealth and social power.

Since 1970s, there have been a number of Buddhist movements that attempted to challenge the state-sanctioned Buddhism, not by challenging the Sangha Law but by asserting different doctrinal interpretations including the rules of the monks as well as the roles of Buddhism in the contemporary society. The most well-known movements are the Buddhadasa movement (also known as Suanmoke Movement), the Dhammakaya Temple movement, and the Santi Askoe group. Each of these groups were accused by the state-sanctioned order as being anti-establishment of the Theravade Buddhism, and therefore, despite their secular followers, often regarded as illegitimate movements and therefore not supported by the government’s funding and policy. The Buddhadasa movement was initiated by a

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20 The Sangha Law (Law for the Monks) which centralized all the administrative power to govern different aspects the religious affairs under the government, including the selection process of the national sangha administrative body, the legalization of a temple, the legitimacy of the monk ordination and the granting of hierarchical-based rankings to the monks as well as disrobing or punishing those who break the Sangha Law. See more details in Keyes, Charles F. “Buddhist Politics.” *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom* (Boulder, Co:Westview P) 1989.

rebellious monk, Buddhadasa (1906-1993), who initiated an unconventional temple known as Suanmokkh (Garden of Liberation) in a forest in a southern province in 1932, after vigorously studying the Buddhist sutras and practicing meditation in the forest for over a decade. Based on his belief that what Buddha taught had to do with liberating oneself by the actualization of the law of nature, he spent his whole life forming a new understanding of what he called “pristine Buddhism”. He has produced a great number of publications and sermons that remain significant for Thai society today. Buddhadasa was the first reformist who went against the state-imposed Buddhist doctrine and proposed the idea of “dhammic socialism” which related the socialist ideology of harmonious distributions of resources to Buddhism.

By observing how the living beings interrelated to each other harmoniously in nature, Buddhadasa pointed out that “we are here today because Nature has maintained a harmonious socialistic balance through the entire revolutionary process” (Dhammic Socialism 86). Buddhadasa’s idea of dhammic socialism was a very controversial concept in his time due the anti-communist policy of the right wing ruling class. Furthermore, Buddhadasa broke the Theravada tradition of adhering to its original doctrine by being the first Thai monk who openly accepted certain interpretations of the dhamma from the rival sect from other countries, the Mahayana Buddhist teachings popular in Japan, China, and Korea, and using some of the Mahayana and Zen Buddhist concepts (which focused more on the compassion for all beings rather than self-liberation) in his reinterpretations of the Thai Buddhism. For example, instead of focusing on the doctrine of kamma as the most central teaching of the Thai Buddhism, he employed the Mahayana’s concept of suññata (emptiness) as one of his most central teachings. Because Kamron shares with Pridi the interests
in Buddhadasa’s teachings, Buddhadasa’s role as a revolutionary monk as well as his interpretations of Buddha’s teachings become relevant to this dissertation.

1.2.5. Background to the Life and Work of Kamron Gunatilaka

Kamron Gunatilaka was born on June 21, 1946, in Bangkok, Thailand, to an educated middle-class family. His father, a graduate of the English Literature department at Oxford University, worked for the *Bangkok World* newspaper as well as for Thammasat University, while his mother, a housewife, took care of their four children. Before Kamron was born, Thailand was under an extremely nationalistic military government led by Field Marshal Phibun Songkram (abbrv. Phibun), who had allied with Japan and declared war against the US and its allies during the Second World War (1939–1945). However, led by an underground anti-Japan-imperialism and anti-Phibun movement known as “sayree-Thai (Free Thai),”

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22 Kamron’s grandfather, a former royal barrister of Columbo, Sri Lanka, immigrated to Siam around 1892 to start a private law firm, became the second attorney-general of Siam, and was appointed as a member of the Privy Councilors in 1916.
Thailand was able to keep its sovereignty during and after the war. The leader of the Free Thai movement, Pridi Banomyong, was also the leading intellectual of the 1932 revolution, which overthrew the absolute monarchy and negotiated a new mode of civilian government by maintaining the monarchy’s honor as the head of state, thus establishing a constitutional monarchy. In the year that Kamron was born, Pridi overthrew the military government, not by force but through a parliamentary vote that led to the resignation of the prime minister. Forty-one years later, Kamron would create his most significant theatrical piece based on the life of Pridi.23

On November 8, 1947, Pridi’s opposition staged a coup d’état and eventually reinstated the ousted prime minister, Phibun, who led an authoritarian government for the following eight years. The use of military force to topple a government in order to maintain the old social order became a dominant feature of what came to be known as “Thai Style Democracy” (TSD), which would eclipse the democratic process in Thailand for the next six decades. Phibun led Thailand into the height of a new nationalism while implementing a capitalistic economy and modernizing the country using both Western and Japanese models. During Phibun’s second military regime (1948–1957), there were three failed attempts at rebellion from pro-democracy groups, all of which ended in bloodshed and persecution. When Kamron was three

23 Pridi had been an interim PM for only five months when the political opposition accused him of being behind the mysterious death of the young King Rama IX, who was found shot on June 9, 1946. Amidst the tension and chaos, Pridi managed to provide, for the first time in Thailand, a general election that was based on diverse political parties, resulting in the elected civilian government of Thavan Thamrongnavasawat, Pridi’s ally. This government brought about Thailand’s most democratic constitution, which prohibited civil servants, including military personnel from taking political positions. Nevertheless, the fear of Pridi’s radical economic reforms as well as a growing desire to resurrect a conservative right-wing power structure caused civilian royalists and the right-wing military group to join forces in tarnishing the government’s image.
years old, the Wang-Luang Rebels, led by Pridi Banomyong, were involved in a number of armed conflicts with government troops. This fighting also occurred near Kamron’s house, causing his family to flee at one point to an orchard ditch for shelter (PI. July 29, 2007).

Phibun’s regime was followed by two more military regimes. As Kamron turned twelve in 1958, the Sarit military government announced that it would take extreme measures against anyone suspected of being a communist by proclaiming Article 17. This article, which provided the prime minister with absolute power unconstrained by legitimate legal procedures, would be the government’s “weapon” for persecuting dissenters. Over the next twenty years (1958–1978), many socialist thinkers, writers, journalists, artists and politicians were arrested and prosecuted without hearings in the military courts.24 By the time Kamron entered Thammasat University in 1964, Thailand had already begun a sixteen-year period of military oppression that included a series of rebellions and coups d’état. During and after the cold war, Thailand also became an important anti-communist base for US military and political operations in Southeast Asia.

Thammasat University, which was founded by Pridi Banomyong two years after the revolution in 1932, has been well-known for being an important university for its socio-political activities where many significant political uprisings initiated. Initially, in 1934, under Pridi as the first rector, the university was an open university under the name University of Moral and Politics. After Pridi went into his exile in 1947, the words “and Political” was removed from name of the university, and since then Thammasat University was no longer an open university. Nevertheless, it

24 See more details in Yimprasert, Hoksippee Prachattippatai Thai (Sixty Years of Thai Democracy) (Bangkok: Committee of 60 Years Thai Democracy, B.E. 2536) 41–42.
remains a reputation as a university of the people and for the people due to its extensive student-centered activities that aim to create change in the Thai society.

Before Kamron graduated in 1971, he and his friends founded the Crescent Moon literary group, an independent organization that aimed to produce and publish socially engaged literary works. The group’s focus began to expand into theatre after many of its members were cast in Gary Carkin’s Thai-language production of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* at Thammasat University.25 *Death of a Salesman*, a play that presents critical perspectives on American capitalism, provoked questions in Thai society about changes to its own economic system. After successfully completing his first acting role (Kamron played Biff in Carkin’s production), Kamron graduated with a degree in Psychology. Like many idealistic young graduates who chose a path serving the working class, Kamron decided to become a volunteer

25 This was the first time that a professionally mounted Western production that sought a general audience and was directed by a Westerner was produced in Thailand. Prior to *Death of a Salesman*, there had been very few theatre productions outside of government-sponsored propaganda, such as Luang Wichit’s productions, which claimed the main stage at the National Theatre from 1936 to 1957, and from 1964, some annual productions of Western drama at Chulalongkorn University. In order to achieve the professional standard of Western theatre, Gary Carkin, a guest theatre artist from the US, was invited to teach at Thammasat University from 1970 to 1974, where he directed three Thai premières of American dramas. Previously trained in acting and directing at the University of New Hampshire, and at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in, England, Carkin had also studied and worked with Harvey Grossman (a disciple of Gordon Craig and Étienne Decroux) for two years at the Players’ Theatre of New England in the US. Carkin had had some professional acting experience prior to working in Southeast Asia. His main approach to directing was to work on one scene at a time until the scene played well before moving on to the next scene. He believed that “The play is like a dance; each gesture is like a *mudra*. Each movement expresses an intention” (Personal Interview, July 16, 2007). His contribution has long been overlooked by the theatre community in Thailand. Carkin set a standard for modern, realistic play production that utilized mostly Stanislavskian acting, where actors tried to find a “pattern of movement” for their characters.
teacher for a hill tribe in Chiang Mai. After one year of facing the harsh realities of rural life, he decided to accept a teaching position in the Communication Arts Department at Chiang Mai University, where he recruited members of the university’s literary group, Walanchathat, to form a small theatre group. Kamron directed four consecutive theatre-of-the-absurd productions during this period: Fernando Arrabal’s *Picnic on the Battle Field* (1972), Wittayakorn Chingkuls’s *The Banquet (Nganliang;1972)*, Mr. Apaimane (*Nai Apaimanee; 1972)*, and Murray Schisgal’s *The Typist* (1972). This period constitutes Kamron’s literary theatre phase, during which he and his group members were enthusiastic about translating, interpreting, and producing mostly Western plays, as well as, for the first time, writing and producing their own original Thai plays.

In 1973, Kamron invited Gary Carkin, who had directed *Death of a Salesman* two years earlier, to conduct a series of theatre workshops for his students in Chiang Mai. For one month, Carkin taught theory and practice based on Jerzy Grotowski’s Poor Theatre and Artuad’s Ritual Theatre. The workshop culminated in one of the most significant productions in Kamron’s career: *The Rural I [Kamron’s translation](Chonnabot Mailek I)—also known as Hok Chak Jak Chonnabot (Six Scenes from the Rura)—was a non-realistic, ritual- and Poor Theatre-based “Story Theatre.” It exposed Kamron to a totally new dimension of non-literary theatre while allowing him to incorporate Thai rural culture and content. Receiving overwhelmingly positive responses from his audiences, Kamron discovered a new ground for his theatrical work: a ritualistic, grass-roots theatre that was not required to conform to the dictates of any government or to any defined tradition. It was a

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26 Kamron was inspired by Komol Keemthong, a university graduate who decided to become a teacher in a rural area and was murdered because he was suspected of inciting communism among the locals (Personal Interview (PI), July 29, 2007).
revolutionary discovery for him. He successfully created a hybrid of Western techniques and Thai folk performance without conforming to existing dominant royal court traditions.

During the “Democracy Blooming” period of 1973–1976, under the disguised name of “Star Ray (Chak Dao),” the Crescent Moon Theatre Group (CMTG) which included members of both Kamron’s Bangkok and Chiang Mai groups, became a part of a vibrant pro-democracy movement by staging agit-prop dramas at demonstration sites. At the same time, they tried to produce their own fully mounted productions. There were exchanges of theatre workshops, productions, and cast members between the two groups.

On October 6, 1976, at Thammasat University, police and the paramilitary attacked thousands of student protestors who were demonstrating against the return of exiled dictator Thanom. The Star Ray theatre group was at its height, producing a number of protest dramas and staged productions, when the October 6 attack occurred. The incident ended in bloodshed and led to a major disruption of the student movement as well as the dissolution of the Star Ray group. Kamron exiled himself to France, married a French visual artist, and became a father.

While managing a Thai restaurant in Paris, Kamron also participated in the leftist student movement known as Union Democratic, facilitating interactions between the Thai students of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), whose People’s Liberation Army were based in the jungle and mountain areas, and various Europe-based international communist associations.²⁷ Meanwhile, he continued to

²⁷ The interactions mostly involved providing international aid, including negotiations with the CPT concerning the well-being of Thai students, negotiations with the Thai government concerning the welfare of arrested political activists, and the provision of funding, medical aid (Doctors without Borders), and other supplies. In directing a performance in Paris, Kamron
train in the theatre by working as a stage technician and participating in workshops taught by Wolfram Mehring, whose Theatre de la Mandragore was among the most avant-garde companies in Paris at the time. Mehring became an important teacher and mentor in Kamron’s life and theatre work.

After 1976, Thailand went through several royally appointed prime ministers and military governments. It was not until the late 1980s that the military government stepped down, allowing general elections. After spending eight years in Paris, and now divorced, Kamron returned to Thailand in 1986. He founded a company to create multimedia productions. He also submitted a proposal to the Pridi Banomyong Foundation and to Thammasat University’s Student Union to direct a play that would commemorate Thailand’s most important revolutionary, Pridi Banomyong. In 1987, Kamron directed *The Revolutionist*, his first production in Thailand since 1976. *The Revolutionist* broke new ground as “the hope for the future of Thai drama” for its minimalistic use of stage scenery and props. It was an intense theatrical experience that offered Thai audiences a blend of Brechtian, Artaudian, and documentary theatre approaches. Kamron went on to make his living by producing documentary films for

gathered Thai students to perform a physical theatre piece, *Cycle (Watta)* using Thai folk music and dance to portray the rituals from birth to death of the rural Thai population (Personal Interview July 15, 2007).

28 Kamron met Mehring when Mehring was invited by the Goethe Institute in Bangkok to give a physical theatre workshop at Chulalongkorn University in 1975. For further details about Wolfram Mehring, see Chapter 4.

29 Prior to joining Mehring’s company, Kamron had only a few opportunities to learn about acting and directing: his performance as Biff in *Death of a Salesman* (1971); his co-direction (with Gary Carkin) of *The Rural I* (1974), an Artaudian/Poor Theatre piece; and his performance as a supporting character in *The Exception and the Rule* (1976), directed by a German director, Dr. Nobert Mayer. These preliminary experiences had exposed Kamron to different styles of theatre but it would be the non-literary theatre of Mehring that most attracted him.

television. During this time, he married Orapin Dararat, a prominent student activist from the 1970s feminist group Plaew Plueng, and they had a son in 1990. His short film, *Samrueng*, about the plight of child prostitutes, won UNICEF’s Danube Award in the same year.

It would be another five years before Kamron had the opportunity to direct *The Revolutionist* (1995) again. That production received high praise from critics and brought him an opportunity to establish a permanent theatre troupe at the performing space of Sang Arun Arts Center (SAAC). At SAAC, Kamron decided to audition and train a group of young actors and actresses as the working members of a revived Crescent Moon Theatre Group (CMTG). Kamron hoped that a rejuvenated CMTG would be operated like a professional repertory company, complete with regular salaries paid to all the permanent actors and staff members. In Bangkok this marked the renaissance of permanent contemporary theatre groups, which had died out in the late 1950s due to their inability to maintain audiences after the arrival of cinema and television.

In the span of one short year, from 1996 to 1997, the CMTG produced six major productions, three of which were directed by Kamron: *My Name is Phann (Goo Chue Phaya Phan)*, *A Mid Winter’s Dream (Kwam Fan Glang Duen Nao)*, and *Madam Mao’s Memories (Madam Mao [sic])*, a solo performance. These three unconventional productions had different styles and different content. Each production marked Kamron’s experiment with a mode of theatre that was anti-traditional, anti-realist and, most importantly, anti-*sakdina*, (i.e. against the traditional

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31 The Sang Arun Art Center was founded in 1986 by a group of philanthropists, the Sang Arun Foundation, who set out to support contemporary works of art. The center was forced to shut down during the economic crisis of 1997.

32 See details about the play and its synopsis in the Appendix.
At the same time, as later chapters will demonstrate, the productions experimented with distinct aesthetic styles reflecting Buddhist-Brechtian, Buddhist-Artaudian, and postmodern/postdramatic ideas.

Unfortunately, Kamron’s wife became ill and then passed away while he was directing Madam Mao. Because he had to assume responsibility for caring for his family, Kamron left the task of directing to his assistant, Nimit Pipthkul, who directed the other three productions produced during this period. Nevertheless, Kamron’s first three productions at SAAC came to be considered the most central landmarks of contemporary Thai theatre since The Revolutionist. Unlike the work of other directors in Thailand, Kamron’s diverse theatrical experiments, although not great in number, have always sought to find new modes of theatrical expression that

33 In traditional Thai society the term sakdina connoted different social rankings (measured by the unit "Na") depending on their position or nature of work, and their distance from the monarchy. See further Chapter 2.

34 Nimit Pipthkul was a freshman in the Thai Language department at Thammasat University when Kamron first staged The Revolutionist in 1988. Having a good background in Thai language usage, he became a key member of the CMTG and assisted Kamron in many of his productions at Sang Arun Art Center from 1996 to 1997. He was chosen by a group of Thai theatre academics to co-direct, with Hideki Noda, The Red Ogre (Nakaoni), which used an all Thai cast, in 1997. After spending several months in Japan, he returned to Thailand in 1998 to mount his own version of The Revolutionist which, by 1999, was commissioned by Thai Studies institutions to tour to Europe and the US to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong’s birth. Other productions Nimit directed after Kamron’s departure to Chiang Mai were High Shore, Heavy Log (Taling Soong Sung Nak) (solo performance), The Lighthouse (Grajome Fai) (solo performance), and Prince Phra Malethaytai. In order for the CMTG to survive, he tried to steer the group to make compromises with their original goals, taking commissioned assignments and merging with Patravadi Theatre. As a result, Nimit fell out of favor with some of the CMTG group members who still believed in the initial CMTG mission. He is now the director of his own company, Monta Performing Arts, which continues to produce commissioned projects as well as organize commercial events.
reflect an ideology grounded in leftist liberalism. Furthermore, Kamron’s experiment with operating a theatre group in a democratic fashion diverged greatly from the director-centered approach of most modern theatrical practices.

Kamron was fifty-one years old when Thailand’s increasing involvement in international financial and trade networks dragged the country into the 1997 Asian financial crisis. As a consequence of that crisis, the SAAC and the CMTG suffered financial hardship and were forced to close down. What had seemed to be the birth of a new kind of theatre movement lasted only briefly. Many members of the CMTG left the group to find other means to survive, while only a few remaining members attempted to continue with their theatre work. Due to internal conflicts, the leadership of the group was changed in 2001, from Nimit to Sineenadh Kethprapai, a female actor-turned-director. Kamron decided to marry his longtime friend, Sarawanee Sukhumwat, and moved from Bangkok back to Chiang Mai with his son. In 1999, his second film, *Smiles*, a satire of the political history of Thailand, was launched in the US and in Europe. Since 2001, Kamron has maintained his role as a principle consultant to the new generation of CMTG members.

After an unexpected coup d'état in September 2006, Kamron returned to Bangkok and to the CMTG to direct a revival of his own production, *A Mid-Winter’s Dream*. Although it was initially intended to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the October 6, 1976 tragedy, the production was inevitably read as a criticism of the most recent coup. Since 2006, Kamron has been working on television documentary projects about terrorism in the southern province of Thailand. As of this writing, he is preparing for a new feature film, *Grass Marsh, Great Forest (Bung Ya Pha Yai)*, based on a well-known novel about childhood memories of Thailand’s rural past. In addition to his occasional involvement in theatre since 1999, Kamron
has been a consultant and a facilitator to many NGOs that work for the grass-roots media sector.

1.2.6 Political Theory Framework: Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault

In an earlier section I drew attention to the modern theater theorists because they had such an influence on Kamron’s work. In attempting to understand the relationship between Kamron’s career and the fraught political context in which I wrote, I have found it particularly useful to refer to the works of theorists like Antonio Gramsci. Influenced by Marxist thinkers such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Georg Lukács, Gramsci has been credited for the development of a political theory that goes beyond his predecessors. While Marxist thinkers generally believe that the oppression of the working class by the ruling class under capitalism will give rise to a social, political, and economic revolution, Gramsci analyzes why this prediction has not always become true. As he points out, the working class could be coerced to collaborate with the ruling class and turn against the revolutionary ideas. Gramsci supplements his analysis by proposing his concept of “hegemony.”

Like Gramsci, Louis Althusser (1918-1990), a French Marxist philosopher, believes that when a society is successfully subjected to a certain ideology or when a subordinate class is subjected to a process of being controlled by State Apparatuses, the subordinate class is then manipulated by obvious systems of repression and/or by less obvious methods of manipulation operating under a certain ideology, which then becomes the norm for the ideological practice of that society. 35 Althusser defines the State Apparatus as “a force of repressive execution and intervention ‘in the interest of

the ruling class’ in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat.” He expands the meanings of this terminology by dividing it into the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (137 -145). The Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) belongs to the public domain, and includes the government, administration of government, the police, the courts, the prisons, the army, etc. (143). The Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) belongs to the private domain, and includes the religious, educational, familial, legal, political, trade-union, communication, cultural institutions, etc. (145). Althusser emphasizes that there is no such thing as “purely repressive apparatus” or “purely ideological apparatus”; while the Repressive State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly by repression (including physical repression such as military attack, or penal system) more than by ideology, the Ideological State Apparatus is not totally incapable of repression either (145).

In Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (abbrv. SPN), Gramsci demonstrates that hegemonic circumstances happen when the ruling class uses social, cultural, and political controls combined with the intellectual, cultural, and moral coercion to gain consent from the subordinate class. Gramsci uses the concept of hegemony to examine the way in which political society (the realm of state power and authority) together with the progressive forces (that might not belong to the state power), creates, maintains, and manipulates the systems of beliefs, values, norms, and attitudes in civil society (the realm of the citizens and civil institutions).

Although the concept of hegemony is generally understood as “a process of struggle, a permanent striving, a ceaseless endeavor to maintain control over the ‘hearts and minds’ of the subordinate classes,” Gramsci emphasizes that the dominant class not only operates with complex forces but also relies its power on the
coerced consent from the subordinate class (R. Miliband, qtd. in Ransome 132). Gramsci defines hegemony as “the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 12). Therefore, from my perspective, hegemony in the Gramscian sense is a result of a domination imposed on the masses who are coerced into giving their consent.

Although Gramsci uses examples of the ruling class domination over the working class to, the term “hegemony” can also denote the opposite direction of predominant force depending on the context (i.e. in the people’s revolution, the hegemony should come from the domination of the people). The true condition of hegemony, as pointed out by Raymond Williams, is when a social group has an “effective self-identification with the hegemonic forms” (*Marxism and Literature* 118). Consequently, the development of hegemony is a constant contestation between different social groups as each struggles to make its ideology accepted by the others in order to dominate and compel assent.

Moving beyond Althusser, Michel Foucault contends that the mechanism of power in a society is not operated only by the State Apparatus, but also by other apparatuses that exist outside, below, and alongside the State Apparatus. While he sees the process of normalization of the people’s behaviors as part of the “disciplinary society,” he also sees resistance. Civil society in Foucault’s modern society is a “disciplinary society” that uses power through different “deployments” to shape people’s behaviors into what Foucault calls “docile bodies.” He contends that the mechanism of power relations in a society is far more complex than the obviously existing RSA or ISA, since there are other apparatuses that exist outside the RSA and ISA(e.g. there are many cultural codes in Thai society that control the
power mechanism). He argues that these complex power relations are not necessarily obvious because the apparatuses can exist in intra-government or para-government spaces as well (*Power and Sex* 119). He states,

The relation of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body […] [Our role is] to investigate what might be most hidden in the relations of power; to anchor them in the economic infrastructures; to trace them not only in their governmental forms but also in the intra-governmental or para-governmental ones; to discover them in their material play” (*Power and Sex* 1988:119).

Foucault perceives power as though it were an entity in itself and humans are merely its vehicles: “Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain … Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization … Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application” (*Power/Knowledge* 98). Foucault’s notion of power is therefore generative, circulative, and everywhere. This explains why he does not separate power within the political society or civil society the way Althusser and Gramsci do.

In addition to the notion of power, Foucault extends Althusser’s and Gramsci’s view of the state as being “repressive” or top-down to include other forms of power relations which in his view are not necessarily always repressively conducted by the state. He points out that power can also manifest itself by production of knowledge and discourses that get internalized by the population and thus guide their behavior without the government’s obvious directives. In this sense, a consensual hegemony occurs.

For the specificity of contemporary neo-liberal form of governance (which is also something that many Thai governments have claimed as their goal), Foucault
coined the term “governmentality” with the premise on the active consent and
subjugation of subjects (citizens), – a concept meant to open up inquiry into
meanings broader than the traditional definition of “governing” or “government,”
both of which refer to the exercise of authority over the public through domination,
and generally connote the maintenance of public order and welfare. Foucault looks at
systematic thoughts and actions that seek to shape, regulate, or manage the way
people conduct themselves (i.e. self-control, self-discipline, management of
household, guidance for family and children, directing of the soul, etc) (Lemke 2). He
states that what “government” is truly all about is “the conduct of [people’s] conduct”
(The Foucault Effect 48). This is because Foucault sees that governing (Fr.gouverner)
is most effective when it colonizes modes of thought (Fr.mentalité) which is
exercised not simply by the state, but also by a network of organizations that seek to
guide the behavior of individuals and their relations to things. Foucault’s own work
traced the history (16th to 19th centuries) of how penal, pedagogic, medical and sexual
regimes and norms simultaneously produced particular sorts of individual and
regulated large parts of populations in France [Foucault (1970), (1972), (1975),
section of this dissertation to the post-1932 history of Thailand in order to show how
the cultural and governmental organizations regulate hegemony, which affects not
only the coercion and consent on the large parts of the Thais.

How to reach change in society?

According to Marxist ideology, the ultimate goal of the working class is to
gain full hegemony over the ruling class through revolution. Gramsci discusses two
distinct tactics that could be employed to reach this goal. The first tactic, known as
“War of Manoeuvre,” concerns the use of force to overthrow the coercive agencies of
the political society including its military. In my view, this “War of Manoeuvre” is called a *coup d'état* if it is accomplished by the ruling military class; it is called a revolution if the masses succeed in overthrowing the ruling class. Although Gramsci sees the necessity of the “War of Manoeuvre,” he also sees the futility of this kind of force if it is done merely as “frontal attack” on the enemy’s “outer parameter” (*SPN* 235). In order to reach complete hegemony, different tactics are necessary. The second tactic, known as “War of Position,” concerns the use of progressive and coercive tactics (i.e. education, propaganda, media) to subvert the existing hegemony and replace it with a new ideology. For Gramsci, replacing the old ideology requires a historical process that awakens the working class consciousness to desire hegemony in the society based on Marxist-derived ideology. The War of Position mainly aims to build a new political consciousness among the masses. The leaders of emergent historical process are termed a “historical bloc” and the historical bloc needs to continue the process of striving to transcend the interest of its subjects to establish a new worldview.

Before reaching the last stage of War of Manoeuvre, Gramsci proposes that the emergent historical bloc needs to wage a War of Position to demystify or deconstruct the distortions of bourgeois ideology by critiquing the existing ideology and by subverting bourgeois social practices. Once the new “positions” have been won and the new hegemony has been established, the War of Manoeuvre can be used to overthrow the bourgeois’ military forces.

For Gramsci, cultural institutions play a very large role in making the masses consensual to cultural and ideological domination. Examples of cultural institutions include theatre, mass media, museums, libraries, temples, churches, and town halls. As pointed out by Michael Hardt, Gramsci also thinks that when civil society does
manage to fill its role in terms of exercising normalization, control by the state (the
government) will no longer need to exist, or it will continue to exist as subordinate
agents of civil society’s hegemony (26).36 Once a dominant ideology or cultural code
becomes normalized in a civil society, this also means that the dominant ideology or
cultural code created by a different power bloc has become a full hegemony.
Nevertheless, in Foucault’s view, the dynamics of power relations have always been
interactive, and will continue to be productive until a society finds its equilibrium.

1.3 Previous Research and Justification

Among the few Thai resources available, I find that Pariluksana Glinchang’s
MA thesis, “The Effect of Brechtian Theatre on Thai Contemporary Theatre: Case
Study of the Crescent Moon Theatre (Ponkrathob khong garn lakhon Brecht ti mi to
lakhon Thai ruam samai: Goranisuksa Gloom Prachan Siew)”, is the most relevant
to my dissertation. This particular thesis explores Brechtian influences on the
Crescent Moon Theatre Group’s major productions,37,discussing how each
production was influenced by Brecht and yet was still able to integrate Thai identities
into its script and staging style. Nevertheless, Pariluak’s thesis, which is rooted in the
academic tradition of Comparative Literature, provides very little analysis of the
relevant sociopolitical contexts of the productions, the various theatrical aesthetics
employed, or Kamron’s life and artistic development.

36 In Michael Hardt’s analysis of Hegel’s concept of “civil society,” the “unorganized atoms of
civil society” are ordered by the competitive institutions of capitalist production and circulation,
through need, work, exchange, and the pursuit of particular self-interests, all of which are tied to
the economic role. Hegel also suggests that Rousseau’s concept of natural society (or the
irrational disordered society) is mediated by civil society before it becomes “political society”
(the State) (25).
37 These were productions of Brecht’s plays in Thai translation including The Exception and the
Rule (1976), The Three Penny Opera (1984), Galileo (1985), The Good Woman of Sezchuan
(1986), Mother Courage and Her Children (1986), and Man is Man (1995).
Two other English-language dissertations have some relevance to the development of contemporary Thai theatre. One has been published as a book entitled *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand* (Rutnin, 1993). Another, which has not been published, is *The Transposition of Traditional Thai Literature into Modern Stage Drama: The Current Development of Thai Theatre* (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001). Each work includes a chapter on the history of contemporary Thai drama, with a brief discussion of the Crescent Moon Theatre.

Considering that Kamron has been considered a leading figure of the Thai avant-garde, his contributions have been greatly overlooked in the critical study of contemporary Thai theatre, both at the national and international levels. The majority of theatre studies in Thailand have focused on the traditional and the elite theatres, but I believe that, to understand Thailand’s post-1970 theatre, one must pay attention to the contemporary work that doesn’t fit into those categories. An in-depth research project on Kamron’s contributions is absolutely essential for any critical study of contemporary theatre in Thailand.

### 1.4 Research and Methodology

I personally witnessed each of Kamron’s 1996, 1997, and 2006 productions and I have seen the original version of *The Revolutionist* (1987) on VCD. When I conducted my preliminary field research and interviews with Kamron in 2003 and 2004, he was engaged in learning about Buddhism, and I thought that Buddhism was the key aspect of his artistic philosophy and innovations. However, when I returned to conduct more extensive field research in 2005–2006, I discovered that Kamron’s works, although limited in number, not only resonate with Buddhist thoughts but also carry important political and philosophical meanings. These political and
philosophical aspects cannot justifiably be ignored in any comprehensive analysis of Kamron’s work. The years 2005 and 2006 also marked the beginning of what was to become the most chaotic period in recent political history of Thailand, which is still ongoing in 2010, when upheavals, protests, demonstrations, and mass-media campaigns all reflecting newly exacerbated social division, conflict and tension. Thai society has become divided into many factions. The continuing and cumulative chaos eventually led to a coup d'état on Sept 19, 2006. I believe that the highly politically charged context of my field research had a strong impact on my dissertation and the subjects of my interviews, including Kamron himself, as well as past and present members of the CMTG, critics, scholars, and audience members.

If Kamron’s ultimate goal is to provoke his audience into taking action that promotes social and political change, then it is imperative that this dissertation not only delineates his contributions in terms of theatre, political, cultural and thematic significations, but that it also brings a greater understanding of the sociopolitical context that informs his contributions. The dissertation will therefore seek to answer the following questions:

1) How has social, political, and cultural hegemony been constructed in the context of Thailand?

2) In what ways does Kamron expose and subvert this hegemony through his theatre productions?

3) What are the political implications and thematic ideas that can be drawn from these productions?

To answer the above three questions, Chapter 1 provides the statement of purpose, background on theory, information about Kamron’s life, and the justification and methodology for the dissertation. Chapter 2 gives considerable
attention to questions concerning the construction of hegemony by providing an analysis of and information on “Thai Nation,” “Thai-ness,” “Thai-Style Democracy,” and “Sakdina Culture.” This context is followed by an overview of Thailand’s People’s Theatre which helps to situate Kamron’s works within the broader framework of Thai contemporary theatre and also helps explains his motivation to use theatre to express political dissent.

Chapter 3 contextualizes the formation of the CMTG and Kamron’s involvement, with an emphasis on socio-political events. It begins with a brief review of the sociopolitical context directly relevant to the history and development of the Crescent Moon Theatre Group from 1966 to 1976. The birth of the CMTG, with Kamron as a founding member was closely connected to the political struggle of university students in the 1970s, an extremely important movement for democracy in Thailand. The chapter also explores the specific incidents that gave rise not only to the student movement, but also to the CMTG. The exposure of the CMTG to Western theatre on several different occasions laid an important artistic and ideological foundation for its future direction.

Chapter 4 continues on to the 1980s and the new beginning of the CMTG with its highly acclaimed production, *The Revolutionist* which is about Pridi Banomyong, the political leader of the 1932 Revolution that changed Thailand’s system of government from an absolute to constitutional monarchy. From 1987–2000, *The Revolutionist* was produced on four occasions (1987, 1997, 1999, 2000). However, in this dissertation, I will focus primarily on Kamron’s 1987 production because it represented his original directorial concept and has served as the model for subsequent re-stagings. In addition to the sociopolitical context relevance to the creation of the production, I explore the formal and stylistic aspects of *The
Revolutionist according to its Buddhist-Brechtian aesthetics, as evident in its mise-en-scène, performance structure, text, and acting style. Through an analysis of power relations as signified in the production, this chapter examines how The Revolutionist serves to counter the standard grand-narrative of Thai political history.

Chapter 5 explores the sociopolitical context of the 1990s in relation to the resurgence of the CMTG after its post-1987 absence. Saeng Aroon Arts Center, a non-profit art organization, collaborated with Kamron to stage six productions under the name of the CMTG during 1995–1996. This proved to be the most productive period for both Kamron and the CMTG. Kamron directed three of the six productions: My Name is Phann (Goo Chue Phaya Phan), A Mid-Winter’s Dream (Kwam Fan Glang Duen Nao), and Madame Mao’s Memories (Madam Mao) (translated play).

Each of these productions reflected Kamron’s ambition to use theatre as a platform from which to challenge historical grand-narratives and national ideology. Since Madame Mao’s Memories is not representative of Kamron’s usual anti-realist, avant-garde approach, it is outside the scope of this dissertation. The other two productions better represent Kamron’s theatre because they share the common characteristics that were developed under the influences of Wolfram Mehring, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and the philosophies of Buddhism. By delineating Kamron’s vision for a new CMTG, his actor training and rehearsal process in this chapter, I focus on the remaking of the CMTG with the first key production, My Name is Phaya Phan (Goo Chue Phaya Phan). In this chapter, I seek to investigate Kamron’s attempt to hybridize Brechtian, Artaudian, and Buddhist ideas into an innovative production set in an imagined primordial culture. I conclude by analyzing the political, social, cultural, and philosophical significations hidden, or implied, in the production.
Chapter 6 examines the events of the 2000s in relation to Kamron’s 2006 restaging of *A Mid-Winter’s Dream*. Kamron intended this production to be a part of the commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of October 6, 1976, but the production resonated with the political unrest of 2005–2006. Although Kamron did not intend to provoke political reaction toward the *coup d’état* that had occurred a month earlier, the production’s story and theme centered on power politics that paralleled the concurrent political chaos. Compared to Kamron’s other productions, *A Mid Winter’s Dream* displays postmodern characteristics in a more obvious fashion. The content and style of this production carry not only a postmodern anti-meta-narrative position but also post-structural strategies for engaging with ambiguity, fragmentation, plurality, uncertainty, and hybridity. By drawing on the philosophical concepts of Jean-François Lyotard and Walter Benjamin, I argue that postmodern theatre allows for the possibility of representing the “un-presentable.”

Chapter 7 is a concluding chapter in which I contextualize the present political tension dividing Thailand into irreconcilable factions. Three historical conditions that led to the present turmoil are discussed. These conditions also reflect and explain Thailand’s hegemonic control of cultural entities for more than seven decades. By pointing out significant power relationships as reflected in the three selected representative productions in Chapters 4 through 6, I summarize the contributions that Kamron has made through his theatre productions, his theatre philosophy, and his attempt at developing a decentralized system of theatre management. I also reveal a potential theoretical theatre framework: “Theatre of Consciousness,” a concept referenced vaguely by Kamron in 2007.

By addressing theatre as a cultural product that inevitably reflects the power relations of its political, social and cultural contexts, I hope with this dissertation to
provide insight into and understanding of contemporary theatre in Thailand that goes beyond the formal, stylistic realm. As an independent thinker who believes in social justice and human rights, I am committed to take a standpoint of a moral evaluation of the meta-narratives of Thai history and politics, and I hope that this study can in some way contribute to an understanding that will lead to change in the structure of the current hegemony.
CHAPTER 2

The Construction of Thai Hegemony and the Theatre as Cultural Signification

For many decades, the month of December in Thailand has been known for festivities that celebrate King Bhumibol’s birthday (December 5, 1927 - present). As a part of the celebration, images of the king, sometimes as large as a high-rise building, appear on commercial buildings, giant billboards, and in front of and on the walls of residential homes. Bangkok twinkles with hundreds and thousands of ornamental lights decorating trees and buildings. All media programs produce special advertisements and make frequent announcements to commemorate the king and his merits to the nation. People are bombarded with messages to join in the celebration by attending various activities ranging from well-wishing candle ceremonies, making religious dedications, to attending public performances. The celebration culminates in music entertainments and spectacular fireworks, with thousands of onlookers cheering with joy and reverence “Long Live the King.” It is unimaginable for most Thais to think or feel otherwise about the present monarchy.

In the year 2006 during my field research, amidst the increasingly tense political atmosphere preceding the national celebration of His Majesty’s 80th birthday, the government declared that the whole year would be devoted to grand celebrations to celebrate the king’s 60th anniversary on the throne.1 The regular festivities of his

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1See an example of a television advertisement about the people’s love for the king at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mbl6uf3y0rI&feature=related> 5 November 2010. This
birthday held every year were expanded to year-round celebrations, where monthly and weekly events were held all over the country. For example, aside from hourly radio and television broadcasts of the commemorations through songs, poetry and stories, there were extravagant exhibitions of the King’s biography, international performances, jazz festivals (the king is a fan), floral festivals, throne ceremonies, religious ceremonies, and the Royal Barge Procession. Thai society was coerced into holding commemorative campaigns and activities throughout the year. The wearing of royal-yellow T-shirts was widely seen, especially on Monday (the king’s birthday), as a symbolic expression of love and loyalty to the king. Certain government offices made it mandatory for every staff member to wear yellow on each Monday for the whole year. In a country that had been heavily divided by politics in 2006, the monarchy seemed like the last hope to resolve the conflict. However, after the coup on September 19, 2006, unlike all other periods of political turmoil in the past, the king did not explicitly intervene to resolve the conflict. Non-stop demonstrations by anti-coup protesters, which continued for the next three years (until the present), led to the military crack-down in May of 2010 that initiated the worst political violence in Thai history.

At the time of my field research, questions regarding both past and present causes leading to the political grid-lock were naturally raised. While my interviews with the Crescent Moon Theatre Group members shed some light on their perceptions of the history of Thai politics, particularly from the point of view of the people’s struggle for democracy, my literature research revealed congruent historical narratives that could be illuminated by Gramsci’s concept of hegemony.

advertisement shows a western tourist who was confused about why the images of the king are everywhere. It also shows how much the Thais revered him.
2.1 The Thai Nation, Thai-ness, and Thai Democracy

Mainstream discourses about the Thai nation and Thai identity have generally been accepted as though they were based on historical and genealogical facts dating back over seven hundred years. Thai school textbooks emphasize the glories of past kings in winning battles against foreign invasion, in conquering other kingdoms, as well as for reigns that brought modernity and unity to the nation. The present king has been hailed by the Thai public as “the Great” for his long commitment to represent a righteous king, for his creation of thousands of projects to help the poor and for his involvement as a supreme mediator in the past political conflicts. But since the 1990s, scholars of fields ranging from history to anthropology, ethnography, economics, and political science have conducted studies on the making of Thai nationhood and Thai-ness using interdisciplinary approaches that have generated a critical academic movement countering the traditional linear historiography (Conners (2003, 2005), Englehart (2003), Jackson (2004), Phongpaichit & Baker (2000), Ninpanitch (B.E.. 2548)(1995), Reynolds (1992), Turton [*Thai Construction of Knowledge*], Winichakul (1994))². These scholars, despite the different focuses of their studies, share certain common views about the construction of Thailand as a nation-state. There is widespread agreement that this took place during the reign of King Rama IV (reigned 1851-1868) who successfully obtained territories either by diplomatic means or by wars with the neighboring areas.³ The construction of Thai-ness became linked to a hegemonic identity that developed concurrently with the official recognition of the Thai-nation as a centralized and unified nation-state. These

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² B.E. = Buddhist Era (A solar-lunar calendar system officially used in Thailand
alternative views subverted the traditional belief that Thailand had always had a great kingdom with clear boundaries and that it had existed as a nation-state for hundreds of years.

Both the Thai nation (formerly known as “Siam” but changed to “Thailand” in 1939) and Thai-ness have been reinterpreted by these scholars in terms of the construction of a geo-body, a nation with mapped boundaries, and the construction of Thai-ness as We-self versus the Other-ness.4 In other words, beginning in the 1870s, the Siamese ruling class and monarchy used their knowledge of modern geography, modern sciences, and modern culture to claim hegemony over other local lordships or chiefs, constructing the notion of a unified, mapped, nation-state. At the same time, the Hindu-Buddhist belief system and practice were systematically disseminated as the dominant cultural mode over local Buddhism and indigenous animism. According to the Hindu-Buddhist paradigm, the man-king is considered equivalent to an incarnation of God Vishnu, one of whose reincarnations was Rama (a divine king in the Hindu epic Ramayana). According to Buddhist belief, to be born a king is a legacy of accumulation of great karma (past deeds), and high virtues in previous lives, which legitimized his moral authority as a ruler. Consequently, all the kings in the present Chakri dynasty have been named “Rama” in addition to their official names.

4 Thongchai Winichakul wrote his Siam Mapped: A History of the Geobody of a Nation (1994) to argue that Siam as a nation-state was created as a product of Western influence. He contests traditional historiography that overlooks how the influence of Western sciences such as “mapping” played major parts in alternating indigenous notions of country, nation, boundary, and identity. In the pre-modern times before the Western map delineated the geo-bodies that define nationhood, boundaries in Siam were not defined by a definite mapped line but by natural markings such as rivers, mountains, trees or man-made demarcations.
After successfully establishing a mapped nation-state, subsequent kings continued to lay the foundation for many aspects of the state apparatus. King Rama V (reigned 1868-1910), King Rama VI (reigned 1910-1925), and King Rama VII (1925-1935), all tried to modernize the country by adopting many western ideas of law, government, commerce, healthcare, education, science and technology (Keyes, Thailand 60). Since imperialist powers in the 20th century often regarded other cultures as being “uncivilized” or even “barbaric” and considered that they needed to be colonized, Siamese rulers had to adopt Westernization to a certain degree in order to be considered a civilized culture equal to the West. To be Westernized to a certain degree became a symbol of modernity for the Siamese elite.

2.2 Sakdina Culture: the Hegemonic Paradigm of Thai Culture

Despite the desire for modernity, the Thai system of thinking seems to center on a common core of cultural knowledge -- the knowledge of “knowing one’s place in the society” which is taught and learned through both formal and informal techniques of governmentality.\(^5\) The notion of “sakdina” is used today to refer to a class-based attitude which affects one’s treatment of others. Someone is referred to as having a sakdina attitude when (s)he feels that it is normal for the subordinates to be treated in a repressive manner. It is not difficult to trace the historical conjecture of the sakdina-based policies of coercion, imposed by the ruling class. In Seditious Histories (2006), Craig J. Reynolds, provides a historical overview of the term sakdina in Thai academic discourse, where it is termed “the political, economic, social and cultural

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\(^5\) See explanation of Foucault’s “governmentality” in Chapter 1.
order that characterized Thai society for some five hundred years” (107). The Sakdina system as a socio-economic system was abolished during the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910), and the meaning of sakdina has been completely transformed to denote different repressive aspects of modern Thai society, such as hierarchy-based or class-based social and cultural practices including verbal usage, clothing codes, social etiquette, and artistic expressions.

This knowledge of “knowing one’s place” starts from knowing one’s own class status that comes with birth, followed by knowing where one’s material wealth, gender (male over female), and race (lighter skin over darker skin) fit in. In school and through media, Thai children are taught how to appropriately use hierarchically coded language and manners. For example, children go through hours of training to learn how to crawl properly on the floor as a gesture of submission to authority and how to *wai* (a gesture of respect by putting two palms together, while bowing the forehead) people of different hierarchies ranging from teachers, parents, monks, government officials, to the royal family. In daily life, every Thai seems to know what coded language and what type of manners they need to use in order to interact with different people. The individuals with lesser social status always use a lower status coded language and are expected to show submission to the ones with higher status. This cultural knowledge, which has usually been taught under the discourse of “social etiquette uniquely to the Thais,” is a reflection of how deep-rooted the sakdina-based

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6 Baker and Phongpaichit further explain that the word *sakdina* was a past economic system of Siam based on “bonds of personal subordination,” e.g., slave to master, commoner to conscription chief, junior noble to patron, tributary lord to king, and king to the emperor of China. In each of these relationships, the subordinates surrendered their produce (of the fields and labor skills) or labor power in return for some measure of protection” (Baker and Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* 24).
attitude has become. At the same time, it is also a manifestation of cultural
governance that has turned the people into what Foucault calls “docile bodies” where
all behaviors are learned through systematic conditioning and training in school, at
home, at workplaces, and through the dissemination of government’s directives. In
other words, the sakdina culture makes individuals determine how they would interact
with each other and amongst themselves based on a cultural quantification of each
person’s worth in the society. Basically, higher status is worth more than lower ones,
and these individuals will be treated with more respect and be accorded more
privileges than their perceived inferiors.

Although the revolution in 1932 during the reign of King Rama VII was meant
to abolish the sakdina system of the absolute monarchy and to constitute a democratic
system of government, sakdina attitude and values remained unchanged in the
bureaucracy as well as in much of Thai culture. Claiming that “[The Thais] want a
democracy that does not have to give way to a new culture of equality,” Nakarin
Mektrairat, a professor of political science, points out that the cultural and
administrative system existing before the 1932 Revolution has never been reformed
and still exercises immense influences decades after 1932. Consequently, despite its
victory in the revolution, the People’s Party has basically lost power to both the
hierarchical bureaucracy system and to the military. where royalists claimed loyalty to
the king (128). Keeping privileges to the higher class, the sakdina culture has
operated fluidly within the capitalistic economic system from the later half of the 20th
century into the 21st century. The development of democracy in Thailand has been
impeded not only by the socio-political structure but also by the imbedded hegemonic
culture of giving privileges to those with high status. This compliance with the
sakdina-rooted culture has allowed modern Thailand to have laws and regulations
that are aligned with old cultural values, despite the fact that the country has had its own constitutions that claim to respect the human rights.

The most visible form of the *sakdina* attitude can be found in the exploitation of the *lèse majesté* law created in 1908. This law, as specified in Thai Criminal Law, Article 112 states, "Whoever defames, insults or expresses any action of discontent against the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years." Although the law was written to protect the monarchy from the most egregious cases of insult, it has often been used by law enforcement officers, royalist civilians, and politicians in a draconian fashion to suppress even the most respectful criticism. Since the charge can be filed by anyone, many of the accused have been charged merely for committing actions that offended the royalist feelings. During the current bipartisan political conflicts that began in 2006, many political activists, intellectuals, and even tourists have been arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for offenses against the *lèse majesté* law. Though intended to protect the honor of the monarchy, this law has in fact been widely used in Thai society to persecute people for political reasons.

In contemporary times, the *sakdina* cultural system disguises itself in the schools, workplaces, governmental offices, and private institutions by blending in with the disciplinary deployments which eventually are manifested as hegemonic social norms.\(^7\) Consequently, changes in the governing system do not necessarily mean that the individuals are free from the former *sakdina* power relations. To the contrary, after decades of disciplinary deployment, the *sakdina* culture has become a “normal” part of civil society.

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\(^7\) See explanation about “disciplinary deployment” in Foucault’s theory in Chapter 1.
2.3 The Three-Pillars as the National Ideology

After the success in building the nation-state in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Siamese kings continued to use diplomacy and political means to protect the sovereignty of the nation. Prior to the revolution in 1932, the Siamese kings had used military forces (War of Manoeuvre) and governmental policies (War of Position) to create both territorial and cultural hegemonies over regional ethnic groups. During this process, Siamese rulers were able to turn Siamese tributaries into the subjects of Siam by making different tribes and ethnic groups learn the Siamese language, culture, tradition and abide by Siamese rules. When Siamese hegemony was threatened by western imperialism in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) (reigned 1910-1925) countered Western power through his creation of “nationalism.” Through his concept of the “Three Pillars” as the key ideology to the Thai consciousness, the king declared that it was the duty of all Thai to love, be loyal to, and defend the three most important institutions of Siam, Nation (chat), Religion (satsana), and King (Phra Mahagasat) (Khanphirom 110). Aside from using the government’s apparatuses, the king disseminated the Three Pillars ideology through his literary works such as songs, poetry, plays, as well as theatrical productions.

After the revolution in 1932, this ideology was further implanted into the Thai consciousness during the governments of Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkram (also known as Phibun) (1938–1944 and 1948–1957) and the subsequent military governments. Facing the threat of the World War II and confronting the desire to become a powerful nation, Phibun was somewhat anti-monarchy and pro-Westernization. A participant in the 1932 revolution, Phibun sought to create a new type of nationalism, one that would make Thailand a civilized country on a par with the world’s super powers. In 1939, he changed the name of Siam to Thailand, and
insisted that the central Thai language be used as the standard Thai language. Since the word “Thai,” which has the same pronunciation as the various ethnic “Tai” groups, means “freedom,” Phibun proposed that all the citizens of Thailand be called “Thai” regardless of their ethnicity. From 1949 to 1942, he issued twelve ratthaniyom (proclamations) to regulate and prohibit any ethnic or religious identities that were not deemed to fit the central government’s standards. Those who failed to follow the new state’s designated cultural edicts were to be fined (Royal Thai Government. Phrarachchabanyat Watthanatham Haeng Chat [National Culture Act] 1942). Based on European standards, these ratthaniyom are the “official guidelines” for how Thais should behave as a civilized and nationalistic people. These guidelines, which were disciplinary techniques disseminated through mass media, including radio and print, included dress codes (the wearing of professional Western outfits, hats, and shoes instead of local-style outfits), social etiquette (how to pay respect to seniors, the National Anthem and the Royal Anthem), food consumption, use of the Bangkok Thai language as the national language, marriage etiquette, and the prohibition of any behaviors or actions deemed by the government to be “inappropriate” (Withayasakpan 105-111). In 1953, as the commander-in-chief of the Minister of Culture, Phibun explicitly used State Apparatuses (legislation, penal system, police intervention) to issue more decrees, regulations, and pronouncements to control cultural aspects of the citizens, therefore imposing a Bangkok-centered identity mixed with modern Western elements on to the Thai people and making the peripheral identities even more subordinate to the Bangkok-centered bureaucracy.

Phibun’s government was overthrown by General Sarit Dhanarajata, whose regime was different from Phibun. Sarit was pro-monarchy and pro-American during the post-World War II period (1957–1963), and used extreme measures to deal with
any dissent. For example, he executed or imprisoned thousands of dissenters without any court trial, and prohibited any mass gathering. Unlike Phibun or the People’s Party, who sought to transform Thailand into a Western-style parliamentary democracy, Sarit based his political model on what Charles Keyes calls the “patriarchal system of pre-modern Siam” (Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom* 76). In this system, Keyes explains, the army provided a paternalistic leadership to govern the people, and this leadership was lent legitimacy by the king. Bureaucracy became the instrument for the implementation of policies that the leadership determined were best for the populace (ibid 77).

In addition to his pro-capitalist policies, Sarit was also known for “turn[ing] to the throne for support and legitimacy” (Keyes 80). Although the institution of the monarchy had declined during Phibun’s time, by the 1960s, Sarit had successfully resurrected the king’s position as the living embodiment of Thai-ness and the foremost symbol of the Thai nation (ibid). Further more, Sarit’s government was very successful in advocating King Rama VI’s nationalistic literary works, songs, and plays, all of which aimed to foster a sense that loyalty to the ideology of the Three Pillars was intrinsic to Thai identity.

Authoritarian control was lessened by the governments that followed Sarit’s death in 1963, but they continued many of his anti-communist, pro-monarchy, and pro-US policies. Thailand would be ruled under military-led governments for the next two decades before electing a civil government based on a system of political parties.

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8 Keyes asserts that from 1959 to 1961, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX, the present king of Thailand) and Queen Sirikit visited many countries all over the world to promote a positive image for Thailand while Sarit restored many traditional rites and ceremonies in order to provide the king with opportunities to be seen in his royal role in the public. Sarit also encouraged the royal couple to make frequent trips to visit the people in different parts of Thailand.
in 1988. The military regimes have left a legacy of nationalistic ideology based on the discourse of a historical nation-state; sanctified by state-imposed Buddhism, the king became the most worshipped embodiment of the “Three Pillars,” imprinted deeply in the hearts and souls of the Thai people.

To this day, the hegemony of the Three Pillars can be easily observed in Thailand in institutions across civil and political society. Consensual respect for the Three Pillars in Gramsci’s sense can be easily observed throughout the daily activities of the Thais. For example, besides constant media and educational advocacies for loyalty to the Three Pillars, all Thais stand still with respect when hearing the national or royal anthems, or they bow or wai when seeing images of the monarchy; Buddhist holidays are major national holidays and most Thais are expected to follow a certain set of religious and cultural practices; legislation severely punishes those who do not demonstrate respect to the Three Pillars. Basically, the adherence to the Three Pillars has become a normal part of the daily life of the Thais who seem to know exactly how to behave in order to demonstrate their allegiances. Yet despite coercion control, consent control, and cultural hegemony, certain groups of people in Thailand have demonstrated their resilience to this hegemony and have strived for democracy.

2.4 Thai Style Democracy (TSD)

Innumerable government propaganda materials as well as the findings of many scholars strongly suggest that loyalty to the Three-Pillars ideology directly shaped what has come to be known as Thai Style Democracy.9 Many political upheavals, including repeated coup d'état, have been rationalized in part by this ideology. King

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9 For example, see any book relating to the history of the Thai nation as well as any of the Thai government’s official Web sites (i.e. 2 October 2010 <http://www.culture.go.th>
Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX) (reigned 1946 – present), the present king of Thailand, is not only a symbol of historical and cultural heritage; for the past sixty-four years since his accession to the throne, he has been highly revered in Thailand as a righteous god-king (deva-racha) who maintains his role as the embodiment of a great king imbued with the morality of kingship. The Hindu-Buddhist cosmology that perceives the king as divine has affirmed the hierarchical system that places him at the apex of the society. Consequently, although Thailand has represented itself to the world as a modern, capitalist democracy, with a constitution that respects the civil rights of its people, a report from the governmental National Identity Office in 1984 articulates a different social structure:

Thai society is a pyramid, essentially unchanged since the Sukhothai era. At the top was the king; next came the bureaucracy created when the king found it impossible to manage the nation’s affairs single-handedly; and at the base were peasants living in unchanging social status, where democracy is practiced in purest form. (qtd. in Baker and Phongpaichit 231)

It is evident that the wide acceptance of this Hindu-Buddhist social hierarchy has continued to exert its dominance over many aspects of Thai society, including its approach to democracy. As Thailand adapts to modernization and economic globalization, the long-held ideology can not avoid facing challenges from a variety of directions.

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10 In the traditional version of history, Thailand is dated back to the Sukhothai period (1249–1438), followed by the Ayutthaya period (1350–1767), Thonburi Period (1767–1782), and Rattanakosin Period (1782–present).

11 Dennis A. Rondinelli and John M. Heffron, scholars of international development and history, define “globalization” as “the movement toward greater interaction, integration, and interdependence among people and organizations across national borders” (Rondinelli and Heffron, 1).
The bloodless *coup d'état* on 19 September 2006 that overthrew the elected civilian government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (known as Thaksin) and abrogated the Constitution of 1997 has resulted not only in divided opinion among Thai intellectuals, but also in many criticisms from the international press. The incoming junta promulgated an interim constitution which allowed them to appoint a Prime Minister, legislature, and drafting committee for the seventeenth permanent constitution of the “Thai democracy with the king as head of the state,” - affirming that the king would remain the highest and the most important figure in Thai Style Democracy (TSD).12 The 2006 coup elicited a great deal of criticism from the international press, with most depicting the events as a regression from democracy to militarism in Thailand.

Nevertheless, the junta formed an interim government consisting mainly of senior technocrats. For those who supported this particular military intervention, its “gentle and bloodless” nature and the notion of “Thai Style Democracy” (TSD) was often referenced in Thai mass media as a means of presenting the junta government as

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12See an example of Thai advertisement on TV regarding the King and the love of his people: 3 January 2010 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rj1kVnRfSg&feature=related>

Under the constitutional monarchy, the king exercises legislative and administrative powers through a bicameral National Assembly comprised of a House of Representatives (elected by popular vote) and a Senate (appointed by the king upon recommendation of the Prime Minister, and some elected by popular vote). The executive power is operated through the cabinet headed by a prime minister, and the judicial power is operated through courts of law. While not directly involved in Thailand's political life, King Bhumibol has had moral influences on carefully selected issues. His role as the most important unifying figure of Thai society has often been described as follows:

“Without His Majesty’s timely intervention during periods of political crisis, Thailand would probably not be what it is today. What is often overlooked, however, is that for decades His Majesty has played a discreet, yet crucial role in advising governments on legislative, constitutional and, at times administrative matters, and always within the boundaries of his legal and constitutional rights.” 3 Jan. 2010.< http://www.bangkokpost.net/king/>
a more righteous, and therefore more legitimate, government than its corrupt but elected, over-thrown predecessor. Therefore, it is not too far from the truth to say that that “Thai Style Democracy” emphasizes the moral character of the leader over the legitimacy derived from the electoral process. In addition to the rationale of “righting the wrong,” the coup leader appeared on television to claim that the coup had been conducted to bring unity to the country and, most importantly, to protect the monarchy from the government of Thaksin, whose loyalty to the king had been called into question.

Between 2007 to 2010, after the general election, protests by the anti-Thaksin group (known as Yellow T-shirts), and the toppling down of two more elected prime ministers (who were perceived as being Thaksin’s proxies), Thailand once again returned to the hands of a royalist government under the Democrat Party (which opposed Thaksin), whose cabinet members have been carefully selected to consist of capitalists, former anti-Thaksin technocrats, and right-wing royalists (including former military personnel). These usurpations of power backed by the military are nothing new under Thai Style Democracy which, for the past sixty-five years, has been closely tied to power negotiations among the ruling elite (right-wing royalists and autocratic bureaucrats), the military (who have often claimed power in order to “protect the monarchy”), capitalists, and liberal socialists [Baker & Phongpaichit

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13 I personally witnessed this political situation in Thailand in 2006–2007. The reasons for the military to stage the coup for the past six decades have always been based on the fact that they wanted to protect the nation from corrupt government. See more information in <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/rmap/newmandala/2006/10/30/"thai-style-democracy"–-"asian-values"-reborn/>.

According to Louis Althusser, the most important objective of the ruling class in a class-based society is to maintain its position of power over the state (Althusser, 141). Therefore, this notion of “power negotiations” in Thai Style Democracy, executed through the mechanism of the military coup, not only reflects what could be considered an unhealthy form of democracy; but also suggests that Thai Style Democracy is almost entirely the product of the right-wing, ruling class’s domination.

Since 2009, after losing three of their elected Prime Ministers, and both their favored elected political parties, pro-Thaksin supporters, the majority of whom are rural poor or from the anti-coup faction, have held massive protests against the current government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejajiva (December 2008 - ). “The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship of Thailand” (the Red T-Shirts) called for the government to dissolve the parliament and hold a new election in order to return the power back to the people. On April 10, 2010, and from May 14 to 19, 2010, Abhisit ordered a military crackdown of the Red T-shirts protesters which led to confrontations between the civilian protester and the army. The crackdown resulted in 91 deaths (including some soldiers) and more than 1,800 people injured. It was the most violent incident of the state apparatus used to suppress resistance to the government since the uprising of May 1992 (when mostly middle-class protesters rose up against the coup government under Prime Minister General Suchinda, who ordered a military crackdown).

Considering the seventeen military coup d’état, and many shifts of governments in the past sixty-eight years, the notion of “democratization” in Thailand
has only been a form of adapting the political system to accommodate the needs of modernization, while in fact continuing to maintain the sakdina-based hegemony.

2.5 Strategic Approaches of the Ruling Elite to Establishing a Cultural Identity of “Thai-ness” via Theatre—Lakhon Luang Wichit as a New Elite Theatre of the Phibun Regime

Like the monarchy-centered official history of Thailand, the written history of theatre in Thailand has been mainly centered on honoring past kings and their contributions more than emphasizing the importance of the diverse performing arts traditions.\(^{15}\) For example, in comparing the royal-centered forms of performing arts to other genres, one can note extensive historical writings based on the royal court theatre traditions such as *khon* (masked dance theatre), and *lakhon nai* (inner court theatre in the eighteenth century), which is far more than the writings on the rest of the commoner traditions.\(^{16}\) As a hegemonic norm, *khon* and *lakhon nai* have constantly been described as “high art” because of their royal heritage, and the popular traditional theatre traditions (folk theatre) have been described as “low art”.\(^{17}\)

The term “popular traditional theatre traditions (folk theatre)” refers to any forms of

\(^{15}\) Almost all of the available publications on traditional theatre forms distributed in Thailand are about the royal court contributions to the development of traditional Thai theatre. For example, the well-known works by Prince Damrong Rachenuphap, Prince Dhani Nivat, and Mattani Mojdara Rutnin. Although Suraphon Virulrak (1979) wrote his dissertation on *likay* (a folk theatre form) and has published articles on folk performances, his major academic books in Thailand have been about the traditional theatre forms under different reigns.

\(^{16}\) See further details in the Glossary of Traditional Thai Theatre in the Appendix

indigenous theatre existing as entertainment for commoners either in Thai cities or countryside. Some of the government-related publications on traditional Thai theatre openly emphasize “higher” and “more refined” status of court-related genres and thus implicitly affirm their dominance over the “lower” status and “less refined” performing art traditions of common people (Rachanuphap 20–8, Eoseewong 39).

Even though all Thai constitutions state that the power of the government belongs to “all the people” who equally share dignity, rights, and liberties regardless of genders and ethnicities, “lower art” is rarely if ever represented as culturally equal. This hierarchical classification can be observed in the explicit choices of “cultural representation” (e.g. as in performances, advertisements) made by the state during any official national or international event where the royal court traditions take the top rank and the top priority over the other genres. This attitude can also be observed by the mass media’s choices of cultural representations during important national celebrations or tourism campaigns.

Like all sakdina subjects in Thailand, elite theatres receive many privileges and support from the state and the ruling class. Before the modernization of theatre during the Phibunsongkram regime, most commoner troupes maintained their own popular traditional theatre traditions such as lakhon nok (folk dance theatre), likay, nora (southern musical dance drama) and nang talung (shadow puppets in the south) without much interference from the state (See Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).
After the 1932 revolution, during the Phibun regime, some of the court performers who could no longer be supported from royal finances were transferred into the government bureaucracy where selected artists took positions as government employees, and thus became the government’s performing artists. Only former royal court performers received this privilege. Although their new positions were not as prestigious as they had previously enjoyed in the royal court, these artists received salaries and job benefits. Under the Department of Fine Arts (DFA), court performers had the obligation to conserve the royal court performing art forms, to teach, and perform for government functions. None of the performers of the popular traditional theatre traditions or their master teachers received this type of privilege at that time.

Jirapon Witayasakpan’s study claims that “those who control hegemonic leadership in the society can claim high aesthetic standards as they themselves define official artistic criteria.” (23). By appointing his own nominee (Luang Wichit) to head
the prestigious Department of Fine Arts, Phibun’s government was able to create a new modern and nationalistic style for the urban audience to counter the royal court style. Under the constitutional monarchy, Phibun’s nationalism was different from that of King Rama VI. Phibun wanted the Thai people to feel that they had a collective identity; for him, the making of the nation was about the collective efforts of all the people regardless of their ethnicity. The outbreak of World War II and Japanese domination in the region also contributed to Phibun’s desire to establish a national culture as an expression of an independent country. Consequently, the National Institute of Culture (NIC) (1942–1953) was founded with the primary goal of using culture to propagate nationalism.\textsuperscript{18}

Luang Wichit Wathakarn (Luang Wichit) (1898–1962) was appointed by Phibun to be the first director of the Department of Fine Arts, and to create and modernize a great many nationalistic songs and theatre productions.\textsuperscript{19} The School of Dance and Music, which was under the auspices of the Department of Fine Arts, was automatically under the supervision of Luang Wichit. Luang Wichit wrote twenty-

\textsuperscript{18} The National Institute of Culture was established with the following objectives:
1) Research, adapt, preserve, and promote existing national culture.
2) Research, adapt, and define which culture should be accepted or adapted.
3) Disseminate national culture appropriate to the contemporary period.
4) Control and instill national culture in the minds of the people.
5) Provide advice and consultation to the government, and implement government policy regarding national culture” (Thamrongsak qtd. in Witayasakpan 117).

\textsuperscript{19} Major General Luang Wichit Wathakan was a dominant figure in the construction of Thai nationalism during the Phibun governments. Luang Wichit held many important positions during his career in the government service. As the Head of the Department of Fine Arts (1934–42), he wrote and directed hundreds of nationalistic songs, poems, and plays. Pisanu Sunthraraks hailed Luang Wichit as an “organic intellectual” who was well-known for his literary productions, many of which have been widely disseminated through radio, books, textbooks, etc. up to the present day. They have been seen as more responsible for cultivating nationalist values than the works of other contemporary historians preceding and following him (Abstract).
four full-length plays and more than twenty scripts for radio and television. His most well-known play was his first, *Luet Suphan* (*Blood of the Suphan People*, 1936).20

The play aimed to arouse patriotism amid the factionalized political atmosphere that had developed under the coup government. Although Luang Wichit’s brand of nationalism appeared to be quite similar to King Rama VI’s, Wichit’s works reflected his goal of creating a nationalist identity that would generate a new type of nationalist ideology in order to demonstrate a reconfigured hegemonic relationship between the nation-state and the people, rather than between the king and his subjects.

In the process of using theatre to disseminate nationalism, Wichit found that the “high art” of court theatre was too slow and the “low art” of popular traditional theatre traditions such as *likay* was too “vulgar” to be used to represent the new middle-class Thai theatre. He had to resort to creating a new form that would suit his ideals of theatre by presenting a patriotic message as well as offering a new aesthetic to the middle-class audience. The theatre form he created married nationalist content to a mixture of elements borrowed from various popular forms (*lakhon ram* [dance-drama], *lakhon-rong* [sungdrama], *lakohn phut* [spoken drama]), along with a quasi-realistic acting style, and the use of Westernized music and scenic techniques. Both the style and the nationalistic content of his plays were so unique for that context and time that his productions were known publicly as *lakhon Luang Wichit* (Luang Wichit

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20 *Luet Suphan* is a sentimental drama about love during a war between Siam and Burma in the Ayudhaya period. It depicts the lives of a group of Thai captives who were mistreated by Burmese soldiers. The hero, the Burmese commander’s son, is a kind and generous Burmese who disagrees with such ill-treatment. He also falls in love with Duang-jan, a Thai girl, and decides to set all the Thai captives free. His action results in his execution. At the end, the escaped Thai villagers fight with courage but are all killed by the Burmese soldiers. The production became a box-office hit and proceeds from ticket sales were enough for Luang Wichit to build the first proper auditorium for the School of Music and Dance (Wichit Wathakarn 54–55).
drama) (Suntraraks, Abstract). By acting as the highest and the only proper authority regarding the standards for traditional arts, the Lakhon Luang Wichit produced by the Department of Fine Arts produced dominated royal court forms. For a while during the Phibun regime, Lakhon Luang Wichit gained great popularity as a “modern” theatre, but unlike the royal court forms, Lakhon Luang Wichit’s aesthetics never became hegemonic. This is due to the fact that Luang Wichit did not issue any directive system to coerce other traditional artists to conform with his ideas, neither did he try to use other State Appratus to impose his aesthetics in a large scale.

2.6. The Contestation of State Hegemonic Culture

2.6.1. Popular Traditional Theatre Traditions (Folk Theatre) versus the State Hegemonic Genres in the 1950s

Soon after the implementation of ratthaniyom during Phibun’s regime, the government-subsidized traditional theatre and dance forms became the standard for the rest of the nation to follow. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the Phibun government laid out policies that caused significant changes in drama, music, dance, and aesthetic concepts. In 1942, a committee was appointed to issue the Royal Decree Prescribing Culture Concerning Theatrical Performances. This 1942 royal decree used Western classifications and aesthetics as guidelines to classify Thai traditional performances. For example, the traditional genres of khon, lakhon nai, and lakhon nok, which were all dance-based theatre forms, were reclassified as “pantomime,” while lakhon rong (sung drama), lakhon dukdamban (sung dance-drama), and lakhon phanthang (musical dance-drama), which were all song-based theatre, were considered “opera.”

21 The classification system was created by Luang Wichit, at the request of Phibun, to use the European theatrical genres as the frame work (Witayasakpan 158).
While it was possible to match the traditional “high performing arts” to the Western-based classification, it was very difficult to match popular traditional performing arts, which were perceived as “lower performing arts” to this system due to their use of improvisation, vernacular language and movement, and “common” nature. Consequently, popular traditional theatre forms such as likay lam tad, nora and nang talung, including a court form nang yai, were prohibited because they could not be classified under the Western standard of classification.

The use of Western performance categories inadvertently created a hierarchy that discriminated against certain popular traditional theatre forms in the Thai performing arts. As Witayasakpan explains:

The new classification system brought confusion to artists, officials, and citizens alike. Without sharing cultural traditions with westerners, Thai artists and audience alike were intimidated by the classification system … Since performances not described in the above-mentioned law were not allowed to be staged in public, [the popular traditional] artists were worried whether their performances fell into any of the described categories (159)

In addition, the DFA required that all performing artists, including folk or popular traditional performing artists, must attend a government training program to obtain a license as professional artists in order to perform in public. The government also required that all the performers conform with the DFA regulations which posted restrictions on the dress codes, language, behavior, and style of the performances, demanding that all these elements required approval in relation to the ratthaniyom standard. In addition, all artists were encouraged to produce works that upheld the principle of the Three Pillars (Witayasakpan 162)
In practice, many regional performers found it difficult to follow the regulations that demanded all performers be licensed, and that they file for permission for each performance. Jiraporn Witayasakpan’s dissertation research, conducted from 1989 to 1991, on the impact of Phibun’s policies on popular traditional artists reveals that the changes were reinforced by the local authorities, notably by allowing or denying access to the media. Through government coercion, many of the popular traditional forms yielded to the official Western-inspired standards such as the use of Western outfits and accessories and the use of Bangkok Thai language instead of dialects. Nevertheless, Witayasakpan discovered that there were folk artists who refused to conform to the government’s decree. Witayasakpan pointed out that there was more resistance in the southern region than in other parts of the country, due to its long history of power contestation as a predominantly Muslim, and due to its being historically culturally-independent region. For example, one nora performer who defied a prohibition against any costume that demonstrated an animal character was arrested and jailed for wearing the tail piece of the traditional nora costume to signify a bird (Witayasakpan 328). In other cases, molum, nang talung, and nora performers were known to make fun of the ratthaniyom policy. Although the hegemony imposed by the government’s control was evident, there was always a subtext of resistance.

2.6.2 The Contemporary Genres versus the State Hegemonic Genres

2.6.2.1 People’s Theatre of Suwat Woradilok during the 1950 - 960s

The term “contemporary theatre” as used in this dissertation refers to a variety of theatre forms that deviate from the traditional genres which include both the royal court theatre and the popular traditional theatre (folk theatre). Contemporary theatre is defined by its diversion from both the royal court and the popular traditional
theatre, in form, style, story, and content. Therefore, the term “contemporary theatre” indicates a certain level of freedom of experimentation and expression. The term “People’s Theatre” as used in this dissertation refers to the theatre that expresses the stories of those who have been marginalized, oppressed, or ignored by hegemonic power structures.

In addition to the internal socio-political change which affected the performing arts in Thailand, contemporary theatre genres also emerged during the rapid transition from the old Siam into a modern nation. From the late 1920s, a new genre of Thai contemporary drama created by commoners, known as lakhon pleng (song drama, or musical), emerged as Western modernity started to establish a presence in Bangkok’s private commercial theatres. Lakhon pleng combined realistic acting, sets, dialogue, Thai traditional instruments and Western instruments such as violin, drum, and piano to accompany Westernized Thai-traditional singing. Lakhon pleng was at its height from a short period of time from 1948 to 1953 but eventually vanished by the late 1950s.22

While the nationalist theatre of Luang Wichit was being promoted by the Phibun government at the National Theatre of the DFA, the commoner’ lakhon pleng theatre of “Phranbun” (pen name of Joungjun Jankhana) and Somphop Chanthraprapha also produced a few of their own commoner nationalistic plays.

22 According to Sudjai Sribenja, the form was created primarily by three major playwrights: Mae Gaew, Mae Bunnak, and Phranbun. These playwrights were commoners who were well-known for their ability to maintain Thai traditional melodies while still sounding “modern” by utilizing western music arrangement techniques. In addition, as the popularity of traditional lakhon rong (sung drama) declined, the commoner commercial musical, lakhon pleng, gained rapid popularity due to its uses of men to play male roles and of women to play female roles (Wirunrak, Natyasilp during the Seventh Reign, 4). For more details about the lakhon pleng troupes and its playwrights, see Sribenja, Sudjai. 10 Dec. 2009 <http://www.maemaiplengthai.com/webboard/redirect.php?tid=81&goto=lastpost>
These few lakhon pleng plays with nationalistic themes corresponded well with the government’s efforts because they touched upon popular sentiments such as the desire for progress and modernity in the Western sense. Although most of the lakhon pleng artists produced mainly nationalistic or sentimental plays, Suwat Woradilok emerged as the first journalist/playwright who used the form to criticize state hegemony during the early 1950s. It was during this time that Suwat conceived the notion of a “People’s Theatre”. Unlike the work of his contemporaries, his People’s Theatre was the first theatre of its kind that took the political position of the oppressed by telling their stories. Because his plays were considered subversive, Suwat was subjected to interrogation by the police. Suwat’s contestation of the state’s theatrical hegemony became most challenging when he decided to unofficially take a group of forty-eight Thai singers and popular traditional dancers to China, a communist country that was considered a threat to Thailand, to perform a friendship-tour spanning over three months in 1957. After his return, he

23 Juangjun Jankhana (1901–1976) is considered the master and innovator of lakhon pleng. His Chantharophat troupe was the most popular theatre troupe during the seventh reign. Twenty-eight of his plays exist today and he might have written more. He was admired for his creativity in writing new lyrics for traditional tones, and for using western music arrangement techniques in his plays. His famous plays included Chan Chao Kha and Rosita, Kwan Jai Joan, and Jo Jo Sung. (3 Nov. 2008.< http://vdo.kku.ac.th/mediacenter/mediacenter-uploads/libs/html/1179/art20.htm>)

Somphop is known for composing fifty three performance scripts in a variety of genres such as lakhon dundamban, lakhon phut salb lam, lakhon phut, and scripts for televised plays. Most of his plays were drawn from historical legends of the kings or foreign tales that emphasized the themes of nationalism and glorified the monarchy. (see further Thongnim Lakon Khun Somphop.)

24 For example, when Luang Wichit ’s nationalist play, The Might of King Khunramkamhan (1954), was being promoted by the government, Suwat wrote and directed The End of Thai Bloodline, with a socialist theme emphasizing the power of the people, as a counter production to Lunag Wichit’s right-wing play. His other plays were also investigated by the police. See more details in Sikasamat, Khajit. Cheewit Muen Lakhon (Life is Like A Play). (Souvenir Book on the seventy-eighth birthday of Suwat Woradilok, B.E. 2544) 127 – 131.
was initially charged with being a communist but was later released by the Phibun
government (Siksamat, *Life is Like a Play*, 130–131).

Only one month after these events, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat led a *coup
d’État* against Phibun’s government and announced a general election. Suwat decided
to be a candidate for the People’s Representative in the general election so that his
socialist party could be part of the new government. While still a political candidate,
he wrote and directed another People’s Theatre production, *The Might of the People*
(1958). This was based on an incident when the military attempted to assert its
authority over Thammasat University, and was a criticism of the attempt of the former
government interfere in university affairs. It depicted the story of a professor and a
group of students who tried to stage a protest, resulting in the arrest of the protesters
and a series of court trials. Suwat was heavily criticized by both the Thammasat
University student organization and by his political opposition for using Thammasat’s
reunion day to put on a play that was apparently connected to his electoral campaign
(Kasetsiri, *Thammasat and Politics* 236). Since this play criticized the *sakdina* system
and emphasized equal rights for commoners, Suwat’s political opposition used the
opportunity to accuse him of committing a *lâse majesté* crime. As a result, he was the
first theatre artist to be imprisoned (for four years) under the *lâse majesté* law; his
wife, Pensri Phumchoosri, was accused of being his accomplice and spent almost two
years in prison.  

### 2.6.2.2 Prelude to the People’s Theatre of the Student Movement

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25 After being released from prison, Suwat continued to be “black-listed” as a communist by the
Sarit government, leading him to use many pen names and write mainly melodramatic novels and
scripts. He did not return to writing novels and memoirs that were socio-politically relevant until
after the October 14, 1973 uprising,
Prior to the emergence of the student-led political movement in the early 1970s, Thailand was under the rigid military regime of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat (1958–1963), and Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-1973). The Sarit regime was known as a “dark age” for political activists because university students could only engage in limited intellectual and leisure activities. University life during this time period was known as the “Wind and Sunshine” era, as described by Charnvit Kasetsiri, a prominent historian:

Between 1957 and 1967, the university was under heavy disciplinary control both internally and externally [by the military government] through wide arrests and surveillance over the student activists. … Eventually, many of the campus activities were limited and students became disinterested in what was going on. This atmosphere had led to a new campus culture known as “The Wind and Sunshine” culture (qtd. in Katsuyuki, no page number).

Towards the end of the “Wind and Sunshine” era in the late 1960s, resistance against the military regime started to emerge in the form of limited and underground publications, while contemporary theatre performances only appeared as in literary works. These publications, not widely popular, were based on socialist idealism. While romantic writings, including works by Western writers like William Blake and Emily Bronte, and Thai right-wing novelists such as Dakmaisod, Yakhob, and Go Surangkanang, gained popularity among members of Thailand’s elite groups, socialist writings were translated or written by many Thai intellectuals to contest government oppression and create an awareness of existing socio-political problems. These socialist writings included works by Western writers such as Emile Zola, Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, Anton Chekhov, and Thomas Hardy, and works by prominent Thai writers such as Senee Saowaphong, Yod Watcharasathien, Isara Amantakul, and
Siva Ronachit (pen-name of Suwat Woradilok). These Thai writers were greatly influenced by the prohibited socialist writings of the earlier period, such as those by Chit Phumisak and Sriburapha. Chit’s 1957 work, *Art for Life; Art for the People* (*Silapa phue Cheewit: Silapa phue Prachachon*), became particularly influential because of his attempt to challenge his readers with his “For Life” principle. In his words,

> Do you exist only for self-indulgent happiness and satisfaction? If you are a humanist, you need to leave selfish fantasy and come back to using your art to serve the people! I do not mean that art therefore is confined to vulgarity. On the contrary, art needs to “wake the people up to see the objective reality of life” and motivate them to find solutions that will change the ugliness in life into the beauty of goodness! You must use your art like weapons that will destroy the people’s enemies, and be like a shining light to guide this long people’s march to the ultimate goodness (74).

In addition to Chit’s *Art for Life*, another influential work from the earlier period was Sriburapha (or Kularb Saipradit)’s *The Response* (*Kam-khan-rub*), written in 1950. The plot centers on a young university student who questions outdated knowledge and instructions that no longer correspond to the real world, and perceives the university as a prison that restricts students from experiencing the reality of life. He decides to leave college and goes into working directly with the underprivileged. *The Response* prompted numerous university students to recognize their own power to either support the existing ruling power or to serve society as a whole. The student-initiated People’s Theatre emerged as a part of the counter hegemony movement that evolved into theatre groups in the following decades. The historical details of the People’s Theatre of the 1970s will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3

History and Formation of the Crescent Moon Theatre Group

(CMTG): 1966 - 1976

3.1 The Birth of the Crescent Moon Literary Group (CMLG)

The late 1960s can be viewed as a global era of rebellious action against oppression, materialism, and conservative social norms. There were widespread, student-initiated mass demonstrations in numerous countries. Thai intellectuals as well as radical university students were naturally influenced by these global uprisings as well as the “For Life” movement that stemmed from the domestic context.

Thailand was under yet another military government led by Prime Minister Thanom Kittikhachon (ruled 1963-1973), whose semi-rigid control was committed to a capitalistic market economy while maintaining the hegemony of the sakdina-based bureaucracy. The growing capitalistic economy brought great benefits to the military, the royalists, and the upper middle-classes while leaving the majority poor with limited economic and political power. Consequently, in the early 1970s, students from various universities formed informal groups scattered across Thailand to take action towards social change. This desire for change was also known as the “rebel’s conscience (jit sam nuk kabot)” (Sawatsri 76). Some of them expressed their “rebel’s conscience” through their free-style publications, distributed directly to students on
their own campuses.  It was in this environment that the Crescent Moon Literary Group (Gloom Wannasil Phrachan Siew, CMLG) was formed in 1966, not as a theatre group, but a small literary group (Veeraprawat Wongpauphan. PI. August 13, 2007). Members of this group were interested in Western and Chinese Literature, and Thai “Literature for Life,” contributing to the development of their liberal humanist attitude in addition to their political activism.

Although Marxism was a major influence on many university students, including some Crescent Moon Literary Group members who were following the “For Life” trend of the time, as a whole they tended toward a more general liberalism and existentialism, expressing a belief in open-ended freedom of choice and individual responsibility. Veeraprawat recalled receiving inspiration for the group’s name from a group of liberal Chinese poets of the 1920s known as The Crescent Moon School. By suggesting this name he hoped that his group would have the courage to produce similar poetry as he was impressed with the courage that the progressive Chinese poets displayed in breaking through out-dated and traditional ways of writing poetry. Veraprawat also talked about the unique informal nature of

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1 For example, Sapha Na Dome (Dome Front Society) (Thammasat University), Phrachansiew (The Crescent Moon), Sapha Gafae (Café Group Society) (Kasetsart University), Val anchathat (Chiang Mai University), Noomnao Saosovei (Charming Youth Society), Nisit Nuksuksa Pattana Chon nabot (Society of University Student Developing the Rural Areas) (Saphan Hua Chang alliance), Silapa Lae Wannahak (Art and Literature) (Srinakarinwirot University) and Rattha Suksa (Political Science Society)(Chulalongkorn University).
the Thai Crescent Moon Literary Group, notably its lack of a membership system, and the diversity of its members which ranged from Thammasat University students and alumni (e.g. Kamron Gunatilaka), to prolific musician/song writer (Surachai Chanthimathorn), writer/editor (Tanya Phonanan), poet (Prasert Chandam), and literary critic/expert (Suchart Sawatsri) (PI. Aug. 13, 2007) among many others.

In 1966, the Crescent Moon Literary Group started to publish its own literary magazine, Phra chan siew (The Crescent Moon), and a series of “One-Baht” books that included progressive literary works. “One-Baht Book” was a generic term for discursive publications that dealt with the Vietnam War, the US involvement in Southeast Asia, and reflections on class-related issues. There was severe punishment for publishing on such sensitive subjects, recalls Sulak Sivaraksa saying that, “despite the fact that there were many US air-force bases in Thailand, no public media dared to report on them; if anyone did so, the media would be subjected to termination and there would be a minimum of twenty-year prison term” (qtd. in original English source in Katsuyuki, no page number).

In their search for alternatives to the popular “Wind and Sunshine” literature, the Crescent Moon Literary Group, used a wide range of Chinese and Western literature ranging from a translated anthology of Mao Ze Dong’s writings and Marxist materials, to existentialist plays and the works of Thomas Hardy, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Jean Paul Sarte, and Albert Camus. Wittayakorn Chiangkul, a Crescent Moon Literary Group member, became the chairperson of the university’s student literary club, while another member, Tanya

2 Baht is the national currency of Thailand.
Phonanan, became the chairperson of Kasetsart University’s club in the same year. Both of them intended to use the Crescent Moon Literary Group’s agenda to “reform” the conservative literary clubs at these universities. They intended to replace “Wind and Sunshine” and bourgeois works with a wide variety of more serious and modern literary works by both Thai and international writers. They expanded the variety and scope of literary subjects from the most frequently published traditional repertoire to include new poetry, short stories, philosophical writings, and literary criticism, all of which followed the motto “literature must reflect life and society”. 3

Around 1970, at the time that no modern commercial theatre existed, some Crescent Moon Literary Group members started to write plays intended to be read but not staged. Initially, they wrote short one-act plays dealing with oppressive social conditions, such as Wittayakorn Chiangkul’s *I Just Want to Go Out Side*, Suchart Sawatsri’s *The Seventh Floor*, Wittayakorn Chiangkul’s *The Banquet* and *Mr. Apaimanee*, and Kamron Gunatilaka and Wittayakorn Chiangkul’s *The Bird that Flies Across the Sky*. Although all of these plays reflect oppression in various forms, none of them was written to promote Marxist ideology. *I Just Want to Go Outside* (*Chan piang yak oukpai kangnok*), a story of three prisoners who try to escape from prison, is a satire of the university’s confinement of the students’ education and learning. The prison represents the control of both the military government and the

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3 Some of these works included Suchart Swatsri’s *The Silence* Nun Bangnara’s *The Old Theatre*, Wittayakorn Chiangkul’s *I have Come to Search for Meanings*, Tanya Phonanan’s *The Road to the Clouds*, and Suwat Srichue’s *The Battle in the Grave* (From the panel discussion with Suchart Sawatsri at the “30th Anniversary of October 6 with The CMTG,” on July 22, 2006).
society of the freedom of learning. *The Seventh Floor (Chan tee jed)* is a play about a man and a woman trapped in an elevator who try to get help from passers-by that include a politician, a right-wing conservative, a soldier, a Vietnamese, a protester, and a madman. None of the passers-by care to help except for the madman, who tells the couple to just step out of the elevator. The elevator confined only those who believed it existed. *The Banquet (Ngan liang)*, tells the story of a painter who hosts an open-house exhibition in order to trick the upper-class party guests into listening to his speeches about their decadence. *Mr. Apaimanee (Nai Apaimanee)* is a play about the conflict between a Father and his two sons, both of whom who betray their father’s wishes by studying what they find to be more useful to society than business and militarism. *The Bird that Flies Across the Sky (Nok tee bin kham fah)* is a discussion among four young wanderers who debate the meaning of their existence, their idealism and the ironies of life. In the end, two of them decide to take action to reach their goals, while the other two decide to simply exist and continue with their lonesome journeys. It is clear that these early plays of the Crescent Moon Literary Group did not call for a revolution or a class struggle but rather they aimed to awaken the social conscience society in the 1970s.

The group’s desire to stage their plays grew stronger in 1971, when many Crescent Moon Literary Group members had the opportunity to participate in the first Thai-language production of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. Prior to *Death of a Salesman*, there had been very few theatre productions outside of government-sponsored propaganda—such as Luang Wichit’s productions, which claimed the
main stage at the National Theatre from 1936 to 1957—and some annual productions of Western drama at Chulalongkorn University, which had begun in 1964.

*Death of a Salesman* was directed by Gary Carkin, a guest theatre artist from the US, who was invited to teach at Thammasat University from 1970 to 1974. Having had professional acting experiences from the US, and previously trained in acting and directing at the University of New Hampshire, and at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in, England, Carkin had also studied and worked with Harvey Grossman (a disciple of Gordon Craig and Étienne Decroux) for two years at the Players’ Theatre of New England in the US, which made him a very well-rounded theatre teacher and practitioner. His production of *Death of a Salesman* was noteworthy not only because it was the first modern production in Thailand to be staged by a professional director from the West, but also because it was the first time that a workshop approach, following a specific directorial method, was used to train Thai students. His legacy of introducing a process-centered methodology to theatre production has long been overlooked by the theatre community in Thailand.

In a seminar about this production, Gary Carkin called his directorial approach for this production the “Craig-Decroux-Stanislavski” approach. With the Craig and Decroux approach, Carkin recalled telling his actors to start with the physical aspect of the acting by finding “pattern of movement or gesture” for their characters, that told a story “kind of like dance,” and use it as a springboard to discover the voice or vocal pattern for each scene unit (PI July 28, 2007). He believed that “the play is like a dance; each gesture is like a mudra. Each movement expresses an intention” (ibid). With the Stanislavski’s approach, the actors would be asked to
analyze the psychology of the characters, the character’s intention in each scene, and
the bit-by-bit unit of character’s action. The overall mood in the scene was built from
the dynamic between the inner psychological aspect and the outer physical aspect of
the character. His main approach to directing was to work on one scene at a time, and
to work until the scene played well before moving on to the next scene.

As a result of Carkin’s methodology, many of the young actors not only
learned about the process of theatre making, but also about the rigor and integrity
integral to that process. Kamron admitted that, prior to the whole process, cast
members had had no prior experience with professional directors, and were not even
aware of the rehearsal system and the training required in order to act in a production
(Seminar Interview, July 28, 2007). Kamron admitted that, like everyone else in the
cast, he thought that acting was something that happened easily. Kamron recalled
himself being extremely nervous, “sweating and shaking,” during the rehearsals
because he had trouble memorizing his lines, and because he had to follow the
demanding rehearsal schedule (ibid). To follow a system of rehearsal and to learn the
craft of acting at the same time were an intensive experience for all the cast and crew
members who, prior to this production, had had no experience with professional
training at all.

Despite the fact that the cast members were amateurs, the production received
phenomenal acclaim from the media, for example:

It is a success achieved against impossible odds, and is therefore beyond
estimation. … This performance hypnotized the entire audience at the small
auditorium of Thammasat University. … Student-actors played Americans so
realistically that the audience was inclined to believe they were their characters (translated and qtd. from Kargin’s copy of a published critique in the *Siam Times*, 1971).

It would be impossible to measure the real extent to which this production impacted both its creative team and its audience. Many of the cast members continued to pursue a life-long commitment to the theatre or media art. After the extinction of private commercial theatres in Bangkok in the late 1950s, the success of *Death of a Salesman*, in terms of both production quality and ticket sales, served as a significant catalyst for the resurgence of modern theatre in Thailand and as an inspiration for many young actors and audiences.

Despite the fact that Arthur Miller had a history of being blacklisted by the US government during the late 1950s, and he was convicted refusing to identify people to The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA) during their anti-communist campaign, it seemed that the Thai public, critics, and the production team did not give any attention to Miller’s political position and activism. There was not a single mentioning of Miller’s left-wing background in the Thai publications, production program, as well as in an academic seminar (2006) about the subject. None of the interviewees including Kamron was aware of this fact. In retrospect, the

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4 The show’s major characters all happened to be played by CMLG members. Krirkat Punpipat (Willy Loman) went on to become a lecturer in Communication Art at Chulalongkorn University and acted in many movies and television series; Kamron Gunatilaka (Biff) continued to direct for theatre and, later, for television documentaries; Veeraprawat Wongpuapun (Happy) became a very successful film and television director; Kanchana Chapanon (Miss Forsythe) became a professional soap opera writer; and Yutana Mukdasanit (Bernard) became an award-winning film director.
US committee's anti-communist investigations were parallel to the government surveillance in Thailand during the late 1960s – 1970s. If more attention had been paid to Miller’s politics by the Thais in 1971, perhaps there would have been a totally different reaction from the Thai government. The fact that even King Bhumibol attended this production signified that the production was taken as a significant cultural event of modern Thailand rather than a political event.

Following *Death of a Salesman*, during 1972-1973, theatre departments at Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University continued to thrive on producing mainly translated Western drama such as plays by Tennessee Williams, Eugene O’Neil, Arthur Miller, and Samuel Beckett. Students from both universities collaboratively produced plays that represented their reaction against the rising political tension of the Cold War era. Student literary groups used Absurdism and Existentialism to incite the audience against what they saw as US-led capitalism and imperialism. Plays by Beckett, Pinter, Albee and others were translated and performed by student drama clubs from both universities. Soon, these groups were producing their first amateurish but original existentialist productions, all of which were presentational in style. For example, Rassamee Paoluengthong, a drama student from Chulalongkorn University directed Thammasat University’s alumni, Suchart Swatsri’s *The Seventh Floor*; another student, Worapanja Pukahut from Chulalongkorn University directed Thammasat University’s Wittayakorn Chiangkul’s *I just Want to Go Outside*.

1972 and 1973 were also very productive years for Crescent Moon Literary Group members because many of them had graduated and were in transition to the
next stages of their lives. During this time, many group members continued to search for what they believed to be their ideal path: a rebellious path that demanded the rejection of mainstream values and the boldness to stand up against dictatorship (PI. Veeraprawat, Tanya, and Viladda 2007).

Kamron Gunatilaka spent about nine months—October, 1971 to May, 1972—working as a volunteer teacher for a hill-tribe school in the Doi Inthanon mountain in Chiang Mai. After that, he returned to work in theatre, directing five consecutive productions at Chiang Mai University and for the Crescent Moon Literary Group (under the name “August 15” [Singha 15”). These absurdist productions all shared a certain anti-war, anti-capitalism, anti-sakdina, and anti-materialism sentiment. They were Fernando Arrabal's *Picnic on the Battle Field* (1972), Wittayakorn Chingkuls’s *The Banquet* (1972), Mr. Apaimane's *Mr. Apaimane* (1972), and Murray Schisgal’s *The Typist* (1972). 5 *Picnic on the Battle Field* (1972) is about a young female soldier who has a picnic with her parents in the battle field like a child’s play. In the end, they all get killed at the end, showing that the war is not to be treated lightly. The brief plot summary for *The Banquet* and *Mr. Apaimane* are described earlier in this chapter. *The Typist* (1972) is about the mundane life of two office workers showing how their routine and mechanical work trapped them in such a way that all their desires were merely fantasies that would never happen. 6 During this period, two other Crescent Moon members in Bangkok also directed absurdist plays under the name of “August

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5 Both *Picnic on the Battle Field* (1972) and *The Banquet* (1972) were also produced as live performances on television Channel 4, Bangkhuprom.

6 See further details about each production in the Appendix.
15” group. Kirkkiet Punpipat directed Eugene Ionesco’s *The Lesson* (1972), and Yutthana Mukdasanit directed *The Typist* (1973). *The Lesson* (1972) was based on an abusive relationship in a distorted society where a professor was abusive with a student and was ultimately stabbed to death. Aiming to satirize or criticize the sociopolitical results of growing capitalism and materialism in Thailand, the two-year proliferation of these Absurdist productions reflected the “rebel conscience” of the period of the time. The success of these performances by members of the Crescent Moon Literary Group had a strong impact on the future direction of the group, which became focused more and more on theatre rather than literature.

At the time the members of Crescent Moon Literary Group were engaging in their profession theatre training and development, the University Student Center of Thailand (USCT), founded in 1970, played an increasingly crucial role in the mobilizing students from various universities to collaborate on political activities in the 1970s. Student clubs from various universities were actively involved in the political agenda of the USCT. They engaged in forming university student political parties, organizations, and independent clubs that took part in criticizing the government’s actions and policies, for example, organizing demonstrations to oppose Japanese and American influences on the Thai economy (Pl. Tanya and Viladda 2007).

The continuous publications of *Seven Institutions* and other magazines by the student literary clubs from various universities helped spur university students to fight for liberty and justice. Amateurish political theatre performed by informal student groups were often a part of rallies and protests. Widespread discontent with
the government led by General Thanom resulted in a series of mass protests that culminated in the October 14, 1973 uprising, resulting in his resignation (ibid).  

Fig. 4. The people’s uprising, marching on Ratchadamnuen Boulevard with the Democracy Monument as a backdrop, prior to the crackdown on October 14, 1973. (Courtesy Matichon Newspaper, 14 October, B.D. 2552, Web. 3 Jan., 2010. <http://www.matichon.co.th/online/2009/10/12555166051255516746l.jpg>

Following the resignation of the military government, Thailand had a brief period known as the “Blooming of Democracy” period (1973–1976), and various student-based literary and drama clubs were designated “Cultural Warriors” of the USCT. During this time, both left and right-wing groups were able to express

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7 Student clubs emerged from many levels of educational institutions, from universities to high schools. Important student organizations included the University Student Center of Thailand (USCT), as well as the National High School Student Center of Thailand, both founded in 1970.
themselves quite freely by publishing materials relevant to their ideologies, and for the first time the socialist political parties were able to occupy elected positions as the people’s representatives in the parliamentary cabinet. The country began to open up to modernization in all areas including social welfare, and education. The USCT became involved in organizing protests and calling for social justice. During this period, student activists joined hands with the farmers and laborers to create a labor rights movement. Hundreds of labor groups who had been suppressed for more than two decades emerged to demand recognition. The massive number of protests reflected the failed economic policies of the previous sixteen years of military regimes, which had resulted in poor economic conditions that increased the gap between rich and poor. The differences in the quality of life between the rich and the poor were immense because the government as well as the private sector centralized economic, political, and cultural power to Bangkok and a few major provinces. As the country struggled to become more industrialized, little attention was given to the oppressive social structure. While factories and businesses were manipulated by a small circle of influential people, employment conditions and the rights of workers were strictly limited and controlled. For example, the minimum wage had remained

8 In the 1975 general election, the socialist parties won thirty-seven seats in the House of Representatives. They were members of the three socialist parties which were Thailand Socialist Party, Socialist Alliance Party, and New Power Party.

9 The number of protests and labor strikes was astounding: five hundred in 1973 (when a one month strike at the Thai Steel Company resulted in victory due to a high level of solidarity from other workers [Ungpakorn 13]), three hundred and fifty-seven in 1974, two hundred and forty-one in 1975, and one hundred and thirty-three in 1976 (Pinthong 43).
only 10 Baht (about 25 cents) per day since the early 1950s (Ungpakorn, *Radicalising Thailand* 13). In addition, there was no guarantee for job security or health care.

During this period of relative freedom of expression, as exemplified by these demonstrations and protests, university students in collaboration with the USCT continued to serve as facilitators and as demonstrators for many different causes. For example, they protested against the Thai government allowing American military bases in Thailand, and they helped laborers in their strikes and in the formation of the National Labor Liaison. It was during this “Blooming of Democracy” era that student drama groups emerged as voices of dissent to the existing “Wind and Sunshine” culture (explained in Chapter 2), and acted as self-styled “Cultural Warriors” for the student movement for social justice and democracy (Kamron Gunatilaka. PI. November 26, 2005). The amateur university drama groups created their own anti-*sakdina* hegemony performances as a part of their mission to help propagate idealistic concepts of liberty, fraternity, and equality to the general public. These protest drama groups employed similar strategies such as the use of improvisation-based scripts, the telling of stories relevant to the plight of the working class (or oppression by the elite or capitalist class), the use of physical action to tell stories, the creation of lightweight productions mobile enough to tour to different locations, and the use of minimal set pieces or stage devices.

The first “student protest drama” group was an amateurish, independent drama group called “Tawan Plueng” (Blazing Sun) group led by Sukhum Laohapoonrungsi. Sukhum was an important student activist who attended
Thammasat University from 1974 to 1976. Asked by the University Student Center of Thailand to help with cultural activities at student protest sites, he founded the Tawan Plueng student drama group without having any prior training in theatre. With only six members, the group was invited along with other music and drama groups as a “regular” entertainment at protests, usually during the intermission of the “hyde-park” or “public speech.” At other times, the Tawan Plueng group collaborated with music groups to provide entertainment for political protests in places such as Sanamluang Park [major public park], factories, and in front of the American Embassy (Phone Interview. Sukhum. July 14, 2007).

In addition to the Tawan Plueng group, other student protest drama groups in this era included the Chak-Dao (Star-Ray) group (with members from the Crescent Moon Literary Group), the Plaew Plueng (Flame) group at Ramkhamhang University, the drama club at Chiangmai University and Suandusit Teacher’s College, and a comedy group known as Talok See Chai (The Four Funny Men) at the Po Chang Technical College. According to Tanya Phonanan, a journalist and a former student activist and a Crescent Moon Literary Group member, Plaew Plueng’s protest dramas were “a lot more serious than those of other groups” and “heavily based on Marxist ideology,” while those of the Crescent Moon Literary Group (and its alter-ego the Chak Dao) were “more light hearted” and inclined towards the “liberal left.” Tanya also described the Crescent Moon Literary Group as being a lot closer to the “existentialists” than “Marxists” (PI. June 28, 2007).

Having strengthened their commitment to activism and honed their theatrical skills, actors and writers participating in the protests looked to mount more polished
theatre pieces that would reflect their ideology and political perceptions in more a more sophisticated manner.

3.2 Transition into a Theatre Group

![Fig.5 Original cast and crew members of *Before Dawn* (1976), Kamron at the center (Courtesy of Kamron Gunatilaka)]

3.2.1 The Transformation of the Crescent Moon Literary Group:

**Kamron’s *The Rural* series**

In the summer of 1973, only 6 months before the October 14 military crackdown of the protesters, Kamron invited Gary Carkin to conduct a series of theatre workshops for his students in Chiang Mai, in preparation for Kamron’s new production about the circle of poverty and the lack of family planning. For one month, Carkin introduced the group to theory and practice based on Jerzy Grotowski’s Poor Theatre, and on Antonin Artaud’s Ritual Theatre. He also helped shape the play to a certain extent. In his one-month workshop, Carkin used a process
that empowered the actors to create scenes that expressed their concerns for the socio-economic problems in their community. This process employed improvisational theatre as well as physical theatre training. After Carkin left, Kamron took over the leadership role as director and continued to build the production which resulted in an experimental theater production called *Six Scenes from the Rural* (later known as *Rural I*; CMTG Seminar, July 28, 2007). Commissioned by Family Planning Association, the small mobile production aimed to use theatre to reflect the detrimental cycle of poverty in rural life stemming from the lack of family planning. The Family Planning Association perceived that the excessive number of offspring led to economic restraints, which led to other problems such as poverty and domestic violence. The plot portrayed a typical poor farmer who spends his life gambling and drinking alcohol to escape from the harsh realities of his family life. Without education and opportunities, he has no idea of family planning. After his wife tells him that she is pregnant with their eleventh child, he becomes very angry and leading to a major quarrel and him physically abusing of his wife. In the end she agrees to not have the baby, but dies during an abortion.

Unlike the full-length Western plays being staged in Bangkok at that time, *Rural I* combined short dramatic skits with anti-realist and ritualistic elements, including symbolic physical movement and the chanting of folk songs and poetry. The set for *Rural I* also differed greatly from those for Bangkok’s Western plays, using only one backdrop on a bare stage. Wearing farmer-style, indigo-color costumes known as *mohom* shirts and *sadaw* pants, the actors performed multiple roles as both chorus members and specific characters. With its simple *mise-en-scène,*
requiring only a lantern for the lighting, the performance was mobile enough for
touring from rural villages such as Thawang Prao and Wiang Pakpao in Chiangmai,
to the university auditorium in Bangkok. (Sompong Chullasapya. PI. December 15,
2005). For the villagers, the performance elements were not as interesting as the
usual folk theatre because there were neither colorful costumes nor intermingling
singing and dancing. Nevertheless, the actors were able to bring the message about
family planning to them (ibid).

When the troupe toured to Bangkok and gave performances at Chulalongkorn
University, it created a major sensation among the elite university audience members,
who had never seen this style of a theatre before. Jiraporn Witayasakpan, a member
of the CMTG from 1974 to 1975, recalled her impression on seeing Rural I in 1973
for the first time when she was still a student at the university:

The play began with a chorus humming in the darkness, each carrying
a candle as they entered and then formed a circle on stage, Kamron as
one of the actors stood in the center and started a powerful utterance
of the “Rice Eating (Perb Kao)” poem, His voice was very powerful,
and the whole experience showed me that down-to-earth theatre could
be created without adhering to Western theatre techniques... I was so
moved by the overall experience that I shed tears in practically every
scene. Then, I realized that I was touched by the sincerity of the story
and the characters, both of which were derived from a deep-rooted
Thai collective consciousness. The play not only reflected the
challenges of rural life, but also had subtext that provoked political
conscience, which was another unique aspect of this play. It was the first time I had seen such a play; there was very little artificiality, the play was utterly truthful to the characters and to the audience. It inspired me to want to go to Chiang Mai University to join forces with the troupe afterwards, and I did (Personal Interview. November 25, 2005)

Under Kamron and Carkin’s collaborative direction, the play became a seed for Kamron’s style of Poor Theatre, emphasizing minimal technical elements and Artaudian ritualistic physicalization. In addition to its unique style, Rural I evoked the reality of poverty and class struggle through its common characters and vernacular language, which signified an anti-sakdina attitude. In the same year, Kamron and his Chiang Mai group devised Rural II, which focused on the plight of poor farmers who not only suffered from natural disasters but also lived under the oppression of unscrupulous landlords, merchants, and governmental authorities.10 During this time, the Goethe Institute’s director, Anton Regenberg, who had been impressed by the Crescent Moon productions, decided to invite Nobert Mayer, a professional German director, to give a workshop for Thai theatre practitioners.11

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10 Further details of the production history and synopsis are given in the Appendix.
11 Anton Regenberg was a very important person in the history of modern theatre development in Thailand during the period 1969–1978. As a director of the Goethe Institute in Bangkok, he organized a great number of cultural events between the two countries. He is the key person who invited both Dr. Nobert Mayer and Wolfram Mehring to conduct workshops and direct productions in Thailand. Without Regenberg’s actions, the physical theatre styles employed by many theatre groups in Thailand today might not have been formed as they are. Nobert Myer is a professional director from Germany and an expert in Brechtian theatre.
Mayer’s workshop dealt specifically with an approach new to Thai practitioners at the time: Brechtian theatre theory and practice. With consultation with Mayer, Kamron and his Chiang Mai group developed *Rural III* (1974), a sequel to *Rural II* where peasants seek a better life in a big city only to become victims of exploitation and deception. *Rural III* functioned differently from the first two productions because it not only reflected the worsened living conditions resulting from labor migration, it also called for the peasants to rise up against those who abused them. An anonymous article describes the production as a hybrid between likay and Western theatre due to the use of the presentational and musical elements of likay as well as the Western theatre-based realistic portrayal of the character’s psychology (*Prachachat*. December 26, 1974: 51).

With Mayer’s guidance, Kamron clearly saw the differences between the representational style of realistic theatre and the presentational style of Thai folk theatre. Upon discovering that the rural audience related to the folk theatre style better, Kamron found that the likay’s convention which allowed the characters to improvise and make commentary also suited Brechtian alienation techniques (PI. November 26, 2005). *Rural III* was the beginning of Kamron’s discovery of using the Thai folk elements to deliver Brechtian intention in using theatre as a tool to instigate the desire for social change.

While Kamoron was touring *Rural III* in Chiang Mai villages in 1974, Veeraprawat Wongpuapun, another founding member of the Crescent Moon Literary Group, wrote and directed a full-length, original play, *The Vindictiveness (Khan)*,
which reflected social problems in a Bangkok slum.\footnote{One of the key founding members of the Crescent Moon Group from 1966 to 1974, Veeraprawat was an actor, director, writer, editor, journalist, and a playwright. He wrote, The Vindictiveness (1974) before he became a screen-writer and award winning screen director. In the 1980s, he focused on directing for television drama and became very successful. He was the first person to write using the name of the Crescent Moon group in 1966. Veeraprawat acted as Happy in Death of a Salesman, as the Professor in The Lesson, and the Artist in The Banquet. See details about The Vindictiveness in the Appendix.} The play was performed at the National Theatre (Small Auditorium), marking another very significant step for the Crescent Moon Literary Group because it showed the potential of the group to become a professional theatre company. Unlike Kamron’s Rural series, which was comprised of one-hour episodic plays dealing with many different types of characters, The Vindictiveness was a naturalistic drama with a climactic plot, dealing with a single family facing complex situations including eviction, poverty, debt, drug addiction, and prostitution. It depicts a story of a family of a woman named Im, a food vendor and mother of four, who lives in a slum in Bangkok with her teenage daughter, Tim. One day, Im’s son, Sak, is released from jail after serving a false conviction on drug possession. Sak discovers that his family is in crisis: his drug-addicted younger brother Gaew, has also come home, but only to beg his mother for money; Tim has been staying out late at night, partying with a prostitute; his mother is in trouble with a loan shark; and his older brother, Han, is a soldier fighting with the communists in Laos. The family suffers more economic pressure when they discover that they will be evicted from their home in a few days and they need to find a new place to live. Meanwhile, some students came into the community and encourage the people to rise up against their landlord. To find money, Sak decides to
become a laborer, and Tim becomes a prostitute. Later, Sak and Gaew decide to rob a man and Sak accidentally kills the victim. Sak is convicted of murder and sentenced to death.

To accord with the naturalistic portrayal of the characters, the *mise-en-scène* included a realistic set of a shack house in a slum as well as realistic costumes and make-up. The scenery was described as follows:

> Down stage right is a one-level wooden house of the poor. There is a bench placed in a narrow patio in front of the house and there is a door leading to a bedroom in the back. The background shows the crowded condition of slum dwellings. There is a small wooden crossway that leads to the back of the slum. There is an electric pole down-stage left.

(Wongpuapun 1).

It was clear by this time (1974) that the leading members of the Crescent Moon Literary group were utilizing theatre productions to reflect the dark social conditions.

Under the “Wind and Sunshine” context where government-directed performances and commercial films avoided dealing with the social reality of Thailand, the theatrical presentations of the Crescent Moon Literary Group had not only become a voice of dissent against the hegemony of the “Wind and Sunshine” era, but their productions of The *Rural* series and *The Vindictiveness* also stood out as highly creative and professional for their time.

### 3.2.2 The Crescent Moon Literary Group as the Chakdao Group:

*The Obnoxious Sammie* (1975)
In 1975, the student-led movement was systematically isolated from the masses by the government’s propaganda campaign that labeled the student movement “communists.” This government manipulation eventually caused middle-class supporters of the students to turn against them. Therefore, it was important for the Crescent Moon Literary Group to continue to maintain their visibility as a liberal group of supporters of the student movement, and not “left-winged” (Group Interview, December 15, 2005). In 1975, the Crescent Moon Literary Group also participated in a physical theatre training workshop led by the professional German director Wolfram Mehring, who had been invited by the Goethe Institute to train Thai theatre artists. The workshop strengthened the physical skills of Crescent Moon Literary Group members and other participants. After the success of the Rural series and the additional actor training from Mehring, Kamron immediately started to recruit new members by offering theatre training to various university activist groups (e.g., Plaew Plueng, Tawan Plueng and Walanchathat); members of some of these groups decided to join with the Crescent Moon Literary Group to create protest drama. Being assigned as “cultural warriors” for the USCT, the Crescent Moon Literary Group decided to disguise themselves under a different group’s name, Chakdao (Star Ray), which aimed to function as a part of the “cultural front” in the student-led protests. During this time, as a theatre trainer and as a director, Kamron had already taken on an important leadership role in the Crescent Moon Literary Group, and he embraced the new direction represented by the Chakdao initiative. The witty and current agit-prop plays of the Chakdao group constituted a new development in Thai protest theatre because they were based on improvisations that
drew on issues including labor strikes, agricultural strikes, transnational companies, the Vietnam War, and political protests. This kind of agit-prop performance had not existed in Thailand prior to 1973, but it soon became so popular that Chakdao group was giving as many as forty performances in a month (Viladda, PI February 16, 2006).

While the Chakdao team was busy serving the student movement as an ad hoc drama group for protest sites, Kamron took on the job of recruiting and training new actor-activists from various university drama clubs in order for these agit-prop groups to expand their performances in more factories, canteens, and on open trucks. Under the same production team, the distinction between the Chakdao group’s performances and the Crescent Moon group’s performances were obvious in terms of function, content, and style.

13 Viladda recalls the following details of Chakdao’s agit-prop theatre:
As a part of the labor strike, our team had to explore the locations, the people involved and the issues at the site before we put on our performance. Most factories were facing very similar problems at that time, such as labor exploitation, unfair wages, or lack of welfare. We looked at the working and living conditions and we usually found very appalling situations […] The workers worked like slaves with no days off. Pregnant women had to work as hard as others. […] In our field research, we tried to capture the stereotypes of the main characters, such as the abusive foreman, the selfish factory owner, etc. In our loose playwriting process which usually happened right before the actual performance, we would lay out a loose structure of a simple plot. Then, we just got on the stage and improvised without any real written script. Our performances were very spontaneous and full of humor. Our audience was made up of thousands of workers, and we had to entertain them. They laughed at our stereotyped characters. At the same time, we wanted them to understand our message [about class struggle]. One very important consequence of our performances was that we made the workers feel that they were not alone. We were with them. (PI. February 16, 2006)
Benefitting from all of this training and experience, the Chakdao group was able to create a new kind of protest play in *The Obnoxious Sammie (Sammie jom yung)*, placing greater emphasis on the aesthetics of the presentation (Viladda, PI February 16, 2006). The play was very different from their previous agit-prop skits because it was significantly more prepared and structured to serve not only as a protest drama but also as an artistic production on the protest stage. *Sammie* marked a leap forward for protest drama in Thailand.

*The Obnoxious Sammie*, inspired by the anti-US sentiment of the time, was performed at protest sites and at educational institutions all over the country. The main goal of the play was to provoke a call for the expulsion of US military forces from Thailand. Since the mid-1960s, with eight major military bases scattered around the country, there had been a massive American military presence in Thailand. While news about military collaborations between the Thai government and the US government was blocked from the Thai public, students and intellectuals living abroad started to send information home, especially about the deployment of Thai soldiers to assist US troops. The startling news about the horrors of the Indochina war and the military presence in rural areas caused university students to worry about the sovereignty of the Thai nation, and bred resentment of atrocities reportedly taking place in the war. Furthermore, the influx of American movies and other entertainment including night-clubs and bars had brought aspects of American culture to Thailand in a rapid manner. In *The Obnoxious Sammie*, the main character, Sammie, an Uncle Sam-inspired character, was portrayed as the cause of many
problems in Thailand, such as labor exploitation, drugs, prostitution, and Western-centered education (see Fig 6).

According to Sompong Jullasap, who performed the original Uncle Sam character, the production style was based on minimal costumes and props, and “physical transformation technique” to create the locations, actions, and characters (PI. December 15, 2005). Sompong explained that in order to communicate the idea that US policy and action were behind the complexities of chaos in Thai society during the Vietnam War era, the ensemble decided to use their physical acting to animate the American symbols such as US air-plane and Uncle Sam figure. In one scene, the

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14 Sompong Jullasap was an important student activist at Chiang Mai University who became a member of the drama club together with Rattana Tayphain and Todsaporn Nagathon, Jiraporn Thongchue (Witayasakpan) joined Kamron’s workshop and participated in many theatre productions in Chiang Mai.
actors used their bodies to pantomime a US air-plane carrying American soldiers to Thailand. This airplane not only delivered the good-willed American soldiers, but it also delivered the demands for narcotic drugs, cheap labor, and leisure. Thai officials and capitalists were portrayed as accomplices to the business of fulfilling these demands. These Thais had opium plantations in the remote mountains, and they used American helicopters to transport drugs. The narcotic business was connected to other incidents in Thai society portrayed as a series of montage scenes showing the booming of prostitution, rural migration, and government corruption. In another pivotal scene, by stacking themselves on top of each other, the actors physically position themselves to form a pyramid. An actor stood on top of the pyramid with his US-flagged top-hat as Uncle Sam while the student characters were at the bottom of the pyramid, and above them stood the teachers, the administrators, the politicians, and the US representative. The scene visually depicted Uncle Sam as the imperialistic master of all the people underneath.

During the play's creation process, an international dispute involving a US marine ship took place, causing the Chakdao theatre group to integrate one more case into the play. The incident, known briefly as “Mayaguez,” occurred on May 12, 1975, when the Cambodian Khmer Rouge Navy seized an American marine ship, the SS Mayaguez, in international waters off Cambodia's coast and held the American crew hostage. Despite an explicit refusal of permission by the Thai government, the US government decided to use the U-Tapao airbase in Thailand to launch a rescue mission in Cambodia. This violation of Thailand’s sovereignty was condemned by the Thai government and prompted mass demonstrations calling for the withdrawal
of all US forces from bases in Thailand. The mass protest resulted in the complete evacuation of US forces in 1976. According to Villada, the Mayaguez incident highlighted the anti-American sentiment in *The Obnoxious Sammie* (PI. February 16, 2006).

As an explicitly political avant-garde production presented under the name of the Chakdao group, *The Obnoxious Sammie* marked another step in the aesthetic development of the Crescent Moon group. Although it could be argued that the Chakdao group placed undue emphasis on the damaging effects of American involvement in Southeast Asia, and overlooked deeply rooted cultural practices that enforced hierarchies and inequalities in Thailand, the success and popularity of *The Obnoxious Sammie* inspired many other independent protest-drama troupes, including the Tawanplueng and Plaewplueng groups. (Viladda, PI. Feb. 16, 2006). As “Cultural Warriors,” members of the Chakdao group were confronted with violent attacks by unidentified right-wing gang members on at least three occasions on the site of their protest-drama performances. Kamron, Todsaporn, and Sompong recalled a grenade attack at the Multi-Tech factory in Samutprakan Province, and there were sniper shootings during a performance in Pitsanulok Province. In these incidents, there were several injuries and one death in the audience (Group Interview, December 15, 2005).

**3.2.3 The Formation of the CMTG Identity as a People’s Theatre**

**Group: The Mother (1975)**
After directing *The Obnoxious Sammie*, Kamron began work on an adaptation of Maxim Gorki’s *The Mother* as a full-length, three-act play. Directed by Kamron, Nida Rutchaibun, and Todsporn Nagathon, the play premiered at Silapakorn University auditorium, September 12–21, 1975. This marked the first time that the name Crescent Moon Theatre Group (CMTG) was formally used instead of Crescent Moon Literary Group (CMLG), and the group’s objectives were laid out in writing for the first time in the play’s program as follows:

1) To present plays that are mobile and self-sufficient.
2) To present plays that reflect the humanity and truth in society.
3) To support other groups with technical equipment and training.
4) To spread knowledge about theatre.

15 Production history and synopsis are given in the Appendix.
The Mother follows a band of revolutionaries who participate in the publishing of an underground newspaper. One of their mothers observes them with anxiety and confusion, until finally joining in the revolutionary movement herself. Like Death of a Salesman and The Vindictiveness, the play was written to be performed in a realistic style. While rehearsing this Marxist production, Kamron was put under secret surveillance by the police, but the troupe continued to rehearse and was finally able to perform the three-hour play. The adaptation of the play seemed to create some problems, as Khien Seekao, a critic, pointed out that the script had some incongruities that resulted from a didactic, propaganda-like approach; while it was difficult for the Thai actors to portray themselves as Russian revolutionaries (Prachachart Daily. August 28, 1975: 10). Nida Rutchaibun recalls that because Kamron retreated from the production after finishing with the script adaptation, she took over the role of the director although she was only an undergraduate sophomore student. Nida remembered that everyone, including the actors, participated in all aspects of the production from set construction and acting, to public relations (PI. March 17, 2006). Although The Mother might not have been artistically successful, the production was very well received by both university audiences and the factory laborers who attended the performances. In addition to attracting new members to the CMTG, it helped emphasize the group’s goal of being a People’s Theatre group.

3.2.4 From Before Dawn (1976) to The Exception and the Rule (1976)
Fig. 8. *Before Dawn* (1976). (Courtesy of the CMTG)

Fig. 9. *Before Dawn*’s set, a house in a low-income area (Courtesy of Kamron Gunatilaka)
The success of *The Mother* gave the CMTG the courage to write and produce their own original play. The result was *Before Dawn*, a “For Life” play about a poor family whose members face the consequences of deteriorating social conditions.

With the Goethe Institute providing free rehearsal space, the CMTG was able to concentrate on the creation of *Before Dawn*, their second fully-mounted (with technical aspects) original play production after *The Vindictiveness*. Although Kamron played a part in the plotting of the new play, there was no primary playwright in *Before Dawn*. The script was the outcome of collective effort by the production team and was directed by CMTG members Nida Rutchaibun, Todsaporn Nagathon, and M.L. Phantawanop Tayvakul. *Before Dawn* was performed at the National Theatre (Small Auditorium) May 18–23, 1976. The following synopsis signifies the desires and content that the CMTG was engrossed with in the year 1976:

*Before Dawn* centers on a low-income family confronting both socio-economic and political dilemmas. In this family, the Father is a low-ranking policeman who is so true to his duty that he fines his own wife for selling food on the street. Their youngest son Phol, who has just returned from a volunteer trip to build a school in a rural area, has brought a folk-banjo as a gift for his elder brother (Dej) who is in a wheel-chair. Because he can no longer walk and talk, Dej is always in a state of reminiscence and nostalgia. A neighbor comes by to inform the family that she is was proud of Phol, who worked tirelessly at the protest site to protest for the poor. Phol often confides in Dej about his empathy towards the poor and the oppressed, and about his desire to help others. The Mother warns her son that she has never seen an activist end on a good note. She begs him not to get involved with
political activities. But whenever Phol has a flashback about the village he visited, he is reminded of how the farmers had to give their landlord half of their produce as compensation for the land rent instead of one-third as specified in the law. He also learns that anyone who challenges the rice buyers is murdered. In the city, he sets out to join a farmer rally calling for land reform by the government. The rally was attended by thousands of poor farmers who walked bare-foot from the countryside to the capital city. After observing the rally his mother comes home, overwhelmed with sympathy for the plight of the poor. Dej overhears on the radio that a bomb has exploded in the rally. The Father who, as a police officer, tries to take control of the street at the rally, discovers that the dead body of a young man, who was killed by the bomb, is actually his son, Phol.

By setting the major protagonist (Phol) as a supporter of the poor’s calling for their rights, the play clearly represented the group’s anti-sakdina agenda, and aimed to stir up social conscience in the audience. The ending was both shocking and moving for the audience who otherwise would have considered student protesters like Phol as merely being subversive to the state. The play also also allowed the audience to see how authority figures such as the low-ranked police figure, was also a father who was trapped in a bureaucracy that did not give him many choices to act differently. In terms of theatrical expression, Nida revealed that in addition to the naturalistic acting and set design, they experimented freely with shadow projection, movement, slide-projection, and slow-motion movement to portray Dej’s flashbacks. All these demonstrated the readiness of the CMTG to make bold technical decisions
in their fully-mounted production (PI. March 17, 2006). The production was very well-received by the audience. Thongbeum Bandan, a critic, wrote:

Before Dawn sheds a new light for all young Thai theatre practitioners who in the past might have been doing mainly western plays, some of which were filled with abstract symbolism. This production is an excellent example of how a contemporary theatre production can be something that stands side-by-side with Thai society. I believe that all types of audiences will be moved by this play no matter who they are. This is because this production provides such excellent performances of such exceptional content. All cast members do an excellent job acting as slum dwellers, including vendors, school children, teenagers, and prostitutes. It is a serious play that has a good sense of humor. Even famous movie stars will be stunned by the actress who plays a street food vendor (Prachachart Daily. May 28, 1976: 10).

Before Dawn’s naturalistic and semi-experimental production reached a new level of sophistication of well-constructed professional production quality.

May 1976 was a very busy month for the CMTG. While they were preparing for Before Dawn, most of the group’s members were also engaged in Nobert Mayer’s workshop on Brechtian theatre. The workshop eventually led to a production of The Exception and the Rule, one of Bertolt Brecht’s lehrstücke plays, which were intended to reflect and teach Marxist ideology. The production, directed by Mayer himself, opened on June 29, 1976, a month after Before Dawn, at the Silp Bhirasri
auditorium before touring to Chiang Mai University and Silpakorn University.\footnote{Production history and synopsis are given in the Appendix. How much should be included in the text? Anything?}

This was the second time that Mayer had conducted a Brechtian theatre workshop in Thailand, the first time having resulted in *Rural III* in 1974 as mentioned earlier. However, this was the first time that a Brechtian director from Germany would direct a Brecht’s play in Thailand.

*The Exception and The Rule* presents the plight of the underprivileged under a capitalistic system, where exceptions are to rules always favor the privileged class. This theme is explored via a plot about a rich merchant who hires a Guide and a Coolie (porter) to take him to the Yahi desert to take part in an oil deal. During the journey, the merchant fires the guide, abuses and eventually kills the coolie because he misinterprets the coolie’s handing him of a water bottle as trying to attack him with a stone, and he defends himself by shooting the coolie. In court, the merchant is acquitted because it is supposedly justified for the merchant to kill the coolie in self defense because he feared for his life.

Knowing that the CMTG already had many special qualities, such as their commitment to a sociopolitical cause and their strong ability in improvisation, Mayer developed a thoughtful, personalized process to introduce Brechtian theatre to the Thai cast and crew (Nagavajara 33). According to Nida, Mayer spent time attending Chakdao performances at the USCT-organized protests and visiting laborers at a factory. In order to help the group to perform in this particular play, Mayer gave lectures on Brechtian theory including Brecht’s background in Marxism and
humanism. To help the actors better understand the oppressed condition laborers, he held an acting workshop at a factory where actors were able to use their direct experience to create more believable characters and scenes (PI. March 17, 2006). The workshop resulted in a series of Thai scenes that emphasized the theme of labor oppression, which the actors desired to put into the production in order to make Brecht’s play more “Thai.” Nida, Mayor’s assistant director, recalled that the actors understood Brecht’s intention very well and they wanted to add some Thai-specific scenes to the play in order to make the play more easily understood by Thai audiences (PI. March 17, 2006). The request from the CMTG cast members was challenging to Mayer who was fully aware of the strict prohibition of any alteration to Brecht’s plays or music. Nevertheless, Mayer finally agreed with Nida that they should adhere to Brecht’s theory and intention rather than to the original script (Nagavajara 2524:36). Consequently, the final court scene of the original play was cut and replaced by a depiction of a Thai labor protest, and the original music was replaced by Thai traditional music. Additional Thai scenes were inserted in between the original scenes. In these Thai scenes, three well-known traditional Thai folktale characters, represented in the likay style, served as narrators and helped make the story easier for Thai audiences to appreciate. These three narrators played

17 According to Chetana Nagavajara, Mayer wrote to Regenberg at the Goethe Institute to insist that adding the Thai scenes in this production was true to Brecht’s theory of lehrstücke. In addition, Chetana found that Brecht himself had said that this kind of play could be effective only when the theatre makers and the audience are involved in the creation process (see Nagavajara, The Exception and the Rule: Brechtian Theatre in Thai Society, 2524: 34–35)

18 The musical director was Bruce Gaston, an American who had become an expert in Thai traditional music.
Srithanonchai, Nang Laweng, and Chanthakorob, which are characters from popular folk-tales, who are known for using their wit and intelligence in overcoming many obstacles of which represent highly capable commoners whose wits and intelligence made them won over many obstacles.¹⁹ These narrators functioned as liaisons between the “Western” and “Thai” scenes by making comments on each “Western scene (from the original version),” and then asking the audience questions about a parallel situation in Thailand. These interludes were followed by Thai scenes that resonated with Brecht’s scenes. There were similar types of character in both the Western and the Thai versions: a capitalist, a manager, and a group of laborers. According to Dhirapat, a cast member, likay conventions of narration, song, dance, pantomime, and comic relief were used in scenes that depicted the condition of life in a Thai factory which echoed the ongoing labor protests. The actors imitated and stylized what they had witnessed during their field research. For example, laborers worked like machines, so they made the workers move with a mechanical rhythm; laborers slept in such crowded rooms that, in the play, they all had to turn over at the same time (PI. February 23, 2006).

While the Western scenes adhered strictly to the original script, the parallel Thai version used likay theatre conventions like having narrators who speak in a certain free verse style and having chorus members who transformed quickly into

¹⁹ All the three characters are from very well-known Thai folktales. Srithanonchai, a mischievous character known to so witty and cunning that he was always successful in playing tricks on his superiors especially the king; Nang Laweng, a very beautiful woman, who was capable at plotting strategies to win battles and romance; Chanthakorob, a capable handsome young man, who was tricked by a bandit and an ogre but his life finally prevails.
different characters. It is important to note here that the “transformation” technique that helped the actors portray different characters had been used in the *Rural* series and in *The Obnoxious Sammie* before. This technique would become an important characteristic of the CMTG’s physical theatre style over time.

Mayer was very pleased with the CMTG actors. In a letter from Mayer to Regenberg on May 20, 1977, written during international workshops he gave for actors from the Philippines and India, he still referred to the CMTG actors as “the best group with no comparison” (qtd. in Nagavajara, 40). However, there were mixed reactions from the audience. A supportive audience member confirmed that, “without the Thai scenes this production would end up merely being a difficult intellectual play” (qtd. in Nagavajara 2524: 38), while a Brechtian theatre expert, Chetana Nagavajara, had the following observation,

> If we take a careful look at the script in the “Thai scenes,” we will discover that they still have an “improvisational” quality. This sense of an improvisational script does not necessarily equate to high literary value. Although Brecht himself carried a rather similar “experimental” mentality in his theatre, his writing skill, which had a highly poetic quality enabled him to write plays with high literary value. The Thai scenes in this production, although very playable for the stage, are still far from the original *Die ausnahme und die regel* ([*The Exception and the Rule*]) in its literary value, and far from any good Thai literature (39).
Nevertheless, Chetana expressed great admiration for the genuine efforts of the production team in creating a total theatre experience for the audience at Silapakorn University:

The dynamic performance, the sense of belonging to a “community” where actors and audience were one, all these factors accounted for an astounding success that would long be remembered. The “conviviality” known to the Elizabethan theatre and eternalized in the “Romantic” theory of the great 19th century German critic Wilhelm Schlegel, became realized with this Thai theatre group. It was a kind of theatrical life that would have been the envy of Meister Wilhelm!

(43-44).

Being the first of Brecht’s plays to be produced in Thailand, the production served as a very significant learning experience for the CMTG members, including Kamron. Nevertheless, despite some arguable weaknesses in the Thai scenes, the fact that the CMTG were able to convince Mayer to interpolate original Thai scenes into this strictly copyrighted script indicated the level of CMTG’s confidence in their understanding of Brechtian theatre, as well as their ability to exercise their power in negotiating with the Western director. After the success of many productions on both professional and protest stages, the CMTG was ready to expand both its artistic and its cultural activities.

3.2.5 The CMTG, the Protest Drama and the October 6, 1976
The “Blooming of Democracy” period which started after October 14, 1973 lasted for only a few years as the political instability continued and led to Thailand having three Prime Ministers within the three years. Against this backdrop of a relatively relaxing period for freedom of expression, a secret military campaign developed with the aim of assassinating key progressive leftist leaders. By maintaining close surveillance, those believed to have communist tendencies were widely executed (Connors 2005: 530). While the right-wing ruling class continued to portray any leftist-prone activity as un-Thai, and even anti-Thai, university students joined force with the USCT and continued many “outreach” activities with communities as their counter-hegemonic action outside the campus (Reynolds 2006: 256). Amid the rising power of the left-wing movement, exiled dictator, Thanom Kittikhachon returned to Thailand as an ordained Buddhist novice on September 19, 1975, whose right-winged coalition was highly unstable, and was replaced in less than a month by a Social Action Party-led coalition which appointed Kukrit Pramoj as Prime Minister. Kukrit eventually had to dissolve the Parliament and held another election where Seni became a Prime Minister again in 1975, and nevertheless formed a shaky coalition government.

In 1975, there were series of harassments, murders and attacks on any communist suspect all over the country. For example, there were murders of more than forty farmers leaders, students leaders and the socialist leaders, blasting the student-led protest such as the protest against the existing US military bases in Thailand, and the attempted fire and destruction at Thammasat University in August 1976 (Suchhera Tanchainan, 93).
1976. This incident prompted discontentment and some protests by the university students, while right-wing agitators harassed the protesters. On September 27, 1976, the bodies of two male trade union workers were found hanging on a gate in Nakhon Pathom province, where they had volunteered to put up protest posters. This escalated into a mass protest at Thammasat University. Students demanded that the government (led by Seni Pramoj as Prime Minister) arrest the ex-dictator, Thanom, and try him in a criminal court for his past crimes. They also demanded that the murder cases of the two male volunteers be judicially resolved.

Two days before the attack, two major newspapers (the Dao Siam and the Bangkok Post) published pictures of a student performance satirizing the recent murder of two activists, who were hung after putting up posters protesting the return of Thanom. On October 4, 1976, the Drama and Dance Club from Thammasat University, led by Sukhum (from Tawan Plueng), presented a mock-dramatization condemning the hanging of the two trade union workers in Nakhon Pathom.
The morning after the performance, the same newspapers—Dao Siam and the Bangkok Post—published pictures of the skit. Dao Siam newspaper and the Tank Corps Radio deliberately used the pictures to accuse the student performers of staging the hanging of someone who looked like the crown prince of Thailand, and thus of violating the lèse majesté law (Ungpakorn, State Crimes 154). This accusation, which was later proved in court to be groundless, was exploited to the full by those who wanted to destroy the student movement, and it was used to ignite anger and retaliation from many right-wing groups (e.g. the police, the military, the
Village Scouts, the Krating Daeng, and the Nawapon). In the context of the 1970s, anyone accused of violating the *lèse majesté* law was automatically perceived to be a communist. The Thai public was made to believe that anyone with a leftist ideology must be evil, a-dhammic (anti-Buddhist), and anti-royal. They were also convinced that most Thai communists, who were also students, had Chinese or Vietnamese ethnicity and therefore lacked true nationalist feeling. In addition, right-winged political parties campaigned to destroy the left-winged student movement. During the April 1976 pre-election campaign, the Chart Thai Party and the Democrat Party announced in their campaigns their aim to destroy the student democracy movement. This left-right polarization, backed by the powerful military and right-winged elite groups, eventually led to many horrifying assaults on students.

The day after the false accusations by the two leading newspapers, the Tank Corps Radio station called for right-wing groups to “kill..kill...kill” thousands of the students who were sitting in protest at Thammasat University. *Dao Siam* issued a

22 These independent groups were supported by the The Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) in order to create a nationalistic and royalist movement, and attack the Left-wing activities. ISOC is a unit of the Thai military devoted to national security issues. It was responsible for suppression of leftist groups during the 1970s and 1980s during which it was implicated in numerous atrocities against activists and civilians.

23 See details in Ungpakorn (2544), Ungpakorn, Chamarik, Anderson, and Chetpattanawanit (2544).

24 General Praman Adireksarn, the leader of the Chart Thai Party had called for a campaign of “the Right to kill the Left” during the general election campaign in April 1976 (Anderson qtd. in Ungpakorn 198).
leaflet with a photo of the performance that was distributed to village scouts, groups of civilians trained in basic combat skills to fight for the monarchy (Ungpakorn, *Radicalising Thailand* 200). The massive propaganda of accusations against the student protesters prompted various right-wing groups to take extreme measures against the students the following day.

With the Tank Corps Radio publicly condemning the protesters as “communists,” and “traitors” to the monarchy, the left-right polarization finally escalated to the point of armed attacks on students and members of the general public who were watching a short dramatic skit by Chak-Dao (CMTG) mocking the return of dictator, Thanom (Krisanaphong Nagathon. PI. December 15, 2005). Three members of the Chakdao group—Sompong, Viladda, and Krisanaphong—were acting on the protest-site stage at Thammasat University’s soccer field, when an explosion first took place, followed by a bloody assault by military and police forces on thousands of protesters. Along with more than three thousand students, several of the Chankdao group members were arrested and placed in detention centers, some for many days.  

Kamron was not present at Thammasat University and therefore escaped the arrest. The incident greatly affected the student movement and caused thousands of students to join the CPT in the jungle. The Chakdao members who joined the CPT were Viladda and Thongkhao. However, most of the CMTG did not join the CPT because they did not perceive themselves as leftist revolutionists (PI. 25)

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25 Viladda was placed in the police academy’s detention center in Samphran, Nakhon Pathom for three days, while Dhirapat Foongdej and Sompong Chullasapya were detained at the Police Academy in Bangkwang. Like thousands of detainees, all Chak Dao members were eventually released on bail.
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Kamron. October 6, 2006). In my opinion, most of the CMTG perceived themselves as agents of democracy with the For Life attitude, but they did not have enough background knowledge in Marxism to desire a revolution that would alter the power structure in Thailand.

After October 6 crackdown, the CMTG/Chakdao simply dispersed and went their own ways. Some tried to continue with theatre-related work, some went abroad and the rest completely deserted the theatre life. The CMTG’s plan to pursue their growth in professional theatre was therefore terminated and the October 6 event marked the end of the first era of the CMTG. The short the “Blooming of Democracy” years had produced a significant number of young theatre activists who speedily created their own small independent People’s Theatre groups. These young activists would later on play important roles in the resurgence of the People’s Theatre in the 1980s. Although Kamron was not the only significant member of the CMTG, his contributions from 1972 to 1976 certainly prepared him for his future as a theatre director.

### 3.3 Kamron Gunatilaka and His Mentor, Wolfram Mehring, in France

After the October 6 incident, Kamron decided to go abroad to France where he married a French graphic designer and lived in Paris from 1976 to 1985. The years in Paris not only gave Kamron an opportunity to have a different life experience, they also allowed him to receive more theatre training and to see a great many theatre works by artists such as Peter Brook (e.g., *Conference of the Birds* and *Mahabharata*) and Ariane Mnouchkine (e.g., *Richard III* and *Mephisto*), and
Wolfram Mehring. In 1980, Kamron joined Mehring’s Theatre de la Mandragore, where a major production of *La Mort de Büchner* made a strong impression on him. Wolfram Mehring is an international German actor and director who studied mime and acting under Robert Minder, Etienne Decroux, and Maximillien Decroux in the 1950s. He also had a wide range of experiences with different types of theatre, such as mime, circus, masked performance, opera, and *noh* and *kabuki*. He and his wife, Janine Grillon, founded the Centre International de Recherches Scéniques in Paris in 1958 and Théâtre de la Mandragore in 1960, a theatre company that emphasized physical expression and voice (both institutions predate Jerzy Grotowski’s famous laboratory theatre). His “Body Expression” approach to actor training has been adopted by many of his disciples from different parts of the world. His productions include *Leonce and Lena* (1960), *Metamorphoses* (1962), *Woyzeck* (1964), *The Exception and the Rule* (1973), *La Mort De Büchner* (1975), *Danton’s Death* (1976), and many works conceived to combat sexism and racism. Compared to other theatre practitioners of his generation, such as Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Joseph Chaikin, Mehring was a truly unique “historical avant-garde” artist and teacher in his own right known for his method of training called the “Complete Actor” using “body and vocal expression.” As a student of Mehring, Kamron was therefore also influenced by the works and philosophy of the historical avant-garde, especially by the shared characteristics of anti-realism in the works of Jacques

26 Sources: Personal e-mail with Prof. Dr. Wulf Konold, who has known Mehring for over 25 years (July 7, 2006); *Paris Theatre* (Une réussite exceptionnelle à Paris, Le Théâtre de la Mandragore 1958–1968). No. 225–226.
Copeau, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Jean-Louis Barrault (Kamron, Pl. July 15, 2007). From the 1960s through the present day, Mehring has given lectures, conducted workshops, and directed over one hundred productions—of physical theatre, classical theatre, and opera—in more than fifty countries in Europe, Asia, North Africa, and the Gulf States. He has never mounted any production in the US and has never written any theatre manifests or textbooks. In addition to eight original plays, his only book is *Masques Brules (Burned Masks)*, a collection of his black and white photographs in different physical poses, accompanied with aphorisms on movement, change, and communication. Like Brecht, Mehring was influenced by Marxism, but he was also greatly influenced by Eastern spiritual practices, especially Zen meditation. Throughout his life-long career in the theatre, Mehring has committed himself to the causes of democracy, human rights, and spiritual liberation. He has held theatre workshops in many third-world countries, often resulting in original productions. Thinking that “theatre should offer a

27 In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann, a scholar of theatre history, classifies many of the new-spirited theatre styles of this period as “neo-avant-garde” theatre, suggesting a relationship to what he calls the “historical avant-garde” of the 1960s (52–57). The “historical avant-garde” was, at least in part, the result of widespread political uprisings, including the 1968 unrest in France, which also inspired the Thai student movement in the 1970s

28 My summary of Mehring’s life and work is drawn from a series of published articles, workshop documents, and a personal phone interview conducted on April 15, 2006 (Rajinder, Paul. “Wofram MehringInterviewed”, Ghosh, Avijit. “Body Talk”, Vinod Advani. “Theatre according Mehring”, Raja, Minakshi. “Translaing feelings into Body Language” “Theatre Workshop of India at the National School of Drama, New Delhi, 2001 (Evaluations by the workshop participants”). Page numbers for the articles are not available, as they were copies of the originals mailed to me by Wolfram Mehring. See in Bibliogrpahy under Rajinder, Ghosh, Adyani, Raja, and Mehring’s personal copy of Students’ Evaluations.
metaphysical experience which is beyond the mirrored images,” he proposed an idea of “Complete Actor.” In order to create a “Complete Actor,” Mehring believes in breaking down the Western mind/body division to arrive at something more fundamental, which is the bridging of human spirituality, intellect, and expression (Rajinder. ENACT 66). He stated, “I am trying to overcome our European separation of the spiritual and the physical, the intellect and the body” (Paris Theatre 45).

To achieve his goal in metaphysical theatre to portray sensitive and spiritual beings, he rejected traditional methods of actor training, which tended to emphasize psychology and the analysis of characters. In order to mold actors in to “Complete Actors” that could function appropriately in his productions, Mehring offered “Body and Voice Expression” workshops. His workshops usually consisted of a series of strenuous physical and vocal exercises intended to prepare the body and voice to function according to his demands. Mehring emphasized the dynamic interaction between the actor’s body and the surrounding space, and the interplay between the body and the voice. He usually began the training by having actors gradually develop a natural awareness and a sense of energetic dynamism in the space and its relation to the body. He stated that his “goals are to discover body, line, inter-corporeal architecture derived from the dynamism between pulsation and energy” (Paris Theatre [Une réussite exceptionnelle à Paris, Le Théâtre de la Mandragore] 47).

According to Jiraporn Witayasakpan, who attended Mehring’s workshop in Chiang Mai, Mehring is very meticulous in his exercises and can explain the purpose of each physical exercise in detail, whether it is meant to develop strength and flexibility, or the sensitivity of each muscle or joint. His mime exercises emphasize the three-
dimensionality of the body. Ultimately, an actor should understand every muscle and how to use it appropriately (PI. Jiraporn. November 25, 2005). Kamron recalls Mehring’s teaching methodology “like that of a guru to his disciples.” because he wanted each actor to find “life’s pulsation” from “the body expression”, an individual language that would interact with the written text (PI. July, 15, 2007). Despite this emphasis on physical expression, Mehring insists that he does not reject the importance of the text. What he wanted to see was not an “interpretation” of the text but “recreation” of it. He stated, “very single actor should act as if he had written and discovered the role for himself” (qtd.in Rajinder Paul, ENACT 66, June 1972).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the development of political theatre in France paralleled the politicization of French students, who criticized the social establishment as well as the government. Mehring believed that political theatre would remain weak as long as it ignored or rejected the politicization of the stage (ibid). He gave an example of the Berliner Ensemble, which was engaged politically as well as artistically, and which had a strong influence on society (ibid). Consequently, many of his productions during this period were anti-elite theatre, and aimed to serve all classes of audience including the working class. This political approach to theatre became very influential to Kamron later in his life.

After receiving training in Mehring’s “Body Expression” workshop for international actors, Kamron and selected workshop members were asked to act in Mehring’s next international touring production, Escalations (1980–81). Kamron

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29 This was a non-verbal, physical theatre piece dealing with the topic of escalating violence. It portrayed a group of young children playing, competing, growing up to become soldiers,
later attended technical theatre workshops, which afforded him the opportunity to participate in the technical aspects of the Centre’s productions.  

In 1977, he saw Mehring’s revived production of *La Mort de Büchner*, a play written and compiled in 1963. The play parallels the final three years of Georg Büchner’s life, and the lives of various characters from Büchner’s plays (such as Woyzeck, Danton, Leonce and Lena). Büchner (1813–1837) was a highly acclaimed German playwright and political activist, who hoped for a revolution that would bring social justice. Undaunted by government opposition, Büchner and his friends launched a student movement and founded a human rights organization that published illegal leaflets exposing government oppression of the poor. At the time of his death at age 23, Büchner had only written three plays, all of which contain revolutionary sociopolitical themes. In *Danton’s Death*, Büchner portrays Georges Danton—a leader of the French Revolution—as a heroic figure whose death represents injustice and oppression during the *Reign of Terror*. In *Woyzeck*, an out-of-work soldier is driven to madness and murder. In *Leonce and Lena*, Prince Leonce flees his decadent kingdom and a deranged father who has lost touch with the people, only to face frustration from permanent boredom.

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30 In 1978, Kamron was on the technical staff for *Les Caprices de Marianne* at Damstadt. In 1979, he attended Mehring’s “The Actor as a Medium” workshop at the *Theatre de la Mandragore* in Paris. He was a performer in *Escalations* which toured to nine different countries. In 1983, he worked as a lighting technician for Termina,l which also toured to many countries. (Personal Interview, July 15, 2007).
Having joined Mehring’s unique company, Kamron was greatly influenced not only by Mehring’s theatre theory and training, but also by his political and philosophical inclinations as a non-conformist. Mehring turned his ideas into practice, always perceiving his body as an instrument through which to attain the essence of life’s physical and spiritual experience. Kamron believed that, ultimately, Mehring’s theatre was meant to serve humanity rather than to serve a certain political ideology (PI. July 15, 2007). The experiences in Paris shaped Kamron’s deeper understanding of theatre as both an art form and a sociopolitical tool. It was this understanding along with a new set of theatre skills that would further distinguish Kamron’s work when he decided to return to Thailand to start a new phase of the CMTG.

Conclusion

Social and political contexts played a key role in the formation of the CMTG, and the composition of its members and eventually led the groups shifting its focus from literature to theatre. A few years before the group decided to focus on theatre making, the members of the Crescent Moon Literary Group, although diverse in their backgrounds and ages, shared a similar worldview based on quasi-Marxism and liberalism. This worldview drove the group members to work for sociopolitical causes bigger than their personal goals. Another contributing factor to Crescent Moon activism was the 1970s “For Life” ideology that gave rise to the “rebel conscience” adopted by many group members. Consequently, the production of
“People’s Theatre,” regardless of its amateurish quality, fit perfectly in the zeitgeist of the 1970s when simple portrayals of social conditions were called for.

In terms of aesthetics, as a theatre group that desired to improve their craft within a short period of time, the CMTG participated intensely in theatre training workshops conducted by mostly Western theatre practitioners who were also driven by social conscience. Informed by both literary-based Western theatre training and by Grotowskian and Brechtian theatre theories and techniques, the CMTG experimented with its own theatre productions via trial and error. From *The Rural* series, to *The Obnoxious Sammie*, *The Mother*, *Before Dawn*, and *Exception and the Rule*, the CMTG grew from a group of experimenting students into a professional theatre company that shook the foundations of elite theatre in Thailand. While adopting the Brechtian techniques brought to them by Nobert Mayer, the group managed to successfully negotiate with the German director to add Thai *likay*-style scenes to the Brecht’s *The Exception and the Rule* exemplifying the strength of, and the group’s commitment to their unconventional use of Thai folk-theatre elements.

From its inception to its disbanding in 1976, CMTG maintained its position as an independent theatre group that used theatre to express the predicament of Thai society and to evoke in the audience a desire for political and social change. By rejecting elite theatre based in either the hegemonic traditional Thai court theatre or modern Western realism, the CMTG created their own original plays by integrating actors’ improvisations into the playwriting process. Highly skilled in improvisational theatre, the CMTG developed a new way of creating original theatre, and, in the
process, signaled a rebellion against the centralized power structures driving the production of mostly Western plays in Thailand’s elite university theatres.

While developing their own theatre techniques and skills, CMTG members also took leadership in using the theatre process and product as tools to mobilize people into political activism. Their extensive outreach theatre training organized to spread knowledge and skills for the making of People’s Theatre, was a reflection of their desire to establish independent theatre groups in provincial areas. The CMTG successfully turned theatre from an entertainment form into a visible tool for political activism in Thailand. Kamron Gunatilaka was one of CMTG’s members that continued to be involved in theatre and political activism after CMTG’s disbanding in 1976. Kamron’s involvement in the French leftist movement after the October 6 bloodshed, as well as his decision to participate in Wolfram Mehring’s theatre training, were clear examples of how an artist is shaped by his or her social, political, and cultural contexts. The following chapter will further demonstrate how Kamron uses theatre as a signifying aesthetic system and as a vehicle for political expression that emerges out of specific sociopolitical and cultural contexts.
Despite having spent eight years in Paris, Kamron did not feel comfortable in French society. Neither his career as a restaurant manager nor his marriage had turned out as he had expected. Kamron and his wife divorced, and he returned to Thailand in 1986. The mid-1980s were a period of political stability under the royalist government of General Prem Tinnasulanond, whose military and diplomatic strategies successfully subdued the weakening Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), and allowed for the defection of CPT members during the early 1980s. Consequently, the government was not intimidated by the remains of the leftist movement, and relaxed enough to allow some freedom of expression.

There is no doubt that Kamron’s experiences in France between 1976 and 1986 strongly influenced his subsequent theatre career in Thailand. Given the importance of sociopolitical concerns in the performances that he had observed, or in which he had participated, it is not surprising that the first production Kamron directed after his return to Thailand was *The Revolutionist*, a play inspired by Pridi Banomyong, the leader of the 1932 Revolution that changed the political system of Thailand from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. Since the Prem government was still far from fulfilling the democratic goals of the 1932 Revolution, Kamron sought an opportunity to remind Thai society of a mission that had yet to be accomplished.

*The Revolutionist* is perhaps the most revived contemporary stage play in Thailand. Between 1987 and 2009, *The Revolutionist* was produced on five occasions
(1987, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000) with the 1999 and 2000 productions directed by Nimit Pipitkul. Although Nimit tried very hard to make the costume and acting aspects more “modernized,” he essentially had to maintain Kamron’s original 1987 Brechtian-influenced staging and toured his production to Amsterdam, Paris and Stockholm. Although all of the play’s five stagings were connected to commemorations of Pridi Banomyong, each event had its own distinguishing features relevant to its performance context, making each iteration of the play more than just an attempt to honor Pridi as a national personality. In many cases, the production emphasized the on-going political struggles between the dominant right-wing conservatives and the suppressed left-wing liberals.

I have chosen to analyze Kamron’s 1987 production because his original directorial concept served as the model for subsequent restagings. In this chapter, I argue that the original production of The Revolutionist functions as a counter-meta-narrative to that of mainstream Thai political history, thereby foregrounding historical memories often silenced by the ruling powers.

1 To make his version of production “different” and to make it more “modern” from Kamron’s original production, he used grey-color attires made from synthetic-elastic fabric (instead of simple black shirt and pants), with male cast members in tight, long-sleeved shirt and pants, and female cast members in tight, long-sleeved grey dresses. He also used more musical instruments and emphasized more “emotional” aspect of acting. Nimit stated, “There was hardly any “emotional acting” in the 1987 production because Kamron often made sure that the actors “cut” or eliminate the sentimentality of the scenes… but when I portrayed the character of Pridi myself in this 1999 production, I was totally into personifying Pridi to the extent that I made my audience cried” (PI. September 26, 2007).

2 In terms of history, meta-narrative is the dominant narrative of history in which the majority of the people have been constructed to believe in. Counter-meta-narrative refers to other narratives different from meta-narrative, a term used interchangeable with grand-narrative by a philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard. According to Peter Brooker, meta-narratives are the narratives that have
governed the pursuit of knowledge and freedom from the period of the Enlightenment, and have therefore become dominant narratives of the modern period.
4.1 The Socio-Political Context of the 1980s and the Rebirth of the CMTG

4.1.1 Thai Style Democracy in the 1980s and the Revised National Ideology

The suppression of left-wing activists in the “War of Maneuvre” (the use of force) during the October 6 event, the 1980s demonstrates the extent to which the right-wing royalists exercised complete control. The appointed government of Prime Minister, General Prem Tinnasulanond (1980–1988), tried to maintain political and social stability through what Gramsci called a “War of Position” (the use of ideological mechanism) using coercive and consensual ideological strategies.

By using the state apparatuses that emphasized nationalism together with the imposed sakdina-based bureaucratic system of administration, the governments were able to respond to communism as well as capitalism. After winning the People’s War in the battle with the People’s Liberation Army of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) during the early 1980s, Prem’s government sought to subdue communism by improving social and economic equity for the poor. These efforts resulted in many rural development projects involving water distribution, roads, schools, irrigation, electrification and soil quality (Baker and Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* 234).

The reduction of the Communist Party of Thailand threat under the Prem government initiated a period of relative stability in Thailand. Nevertheless, this stability was not attributable to policies undertaken by a democratically elected government but to an “appointed,” right-wing, royalist government. Consequently, the Prem government was known as a “quasi-democratic” government (Yimprasert 44–45). During this time, private business, industrial sectors, and the export-led economy helped

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3 See background on Gramsci’s political theory in Chapter 1.
Thailand expand to become the world’s fastest growing economy (*Thailand in the 80s*, 187).  

To mitigate Thailand’s rapid transformation into a more industrialized society, the government established many national institutions that aimed to propagate the Three-Pillar ideology via a diverse array of media outlets. To propagate the hegemonic ideology within Bangkok society, Bangkok’s traditional royal court culture continued to be presented as the highest level of culture, while other regional cultures (considered as non-threatening subordinates) were selectively treated as a part of an “unified Thai-ness” discourse- in fact they were never accepted as equals to the court culture. By strengthening the *lèse-majestè* law, the position of the monarchy was strengthened as the most important pillar of national security and national identity. Consequently, the 1980s emphasis on democracy with the king as head of state, also known as Thai Style Democracy, solidified the security and the power-base of both the monarchy and the conservative factions, which consisted of

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4 Wisarn Pupphavesa stated that “During 1980–1989, Thailand’s manufacturing sector grew at an average annual rate of 8.6 % compared with 4.5% for the agricultural sector. Most of this rapid growth took place after 1985 when the average annual rate of growth was 13.9 % for the manufacturing sector and 4.1 % for the agricultural sector. […] After 1985, manufactured exports grew at an average annual rate of 30.16 % compared with 9.94 % during 1980-1985.” (CAS Discussion Paper No. 39, 2002 : 6)

5 For example, the government established the National Culture Commission (NCC) in 1979, the National Security Council (NSC) and the government established the National Identity Board (NIB)(1980 – present),


7 According to Craig Reynolds, democracy in this period has been defined in a traditionalistic and disciplinary manner where a moral self/nation beyond the marketplace can take place through the identification with the king who symbolically provides the people-body with a quasi-religious solidarity (134).
the military, the capitalists, and the bureaucrats. As the country became politically stabilized, and the industrial sector grew rapidly, the gap between rich and poor widened. New economic conditions in this modernizing Thailand forced many women to move from the countryside to the city, where they entered low-wage occupations connected with prostitution, export industries and tourism. The burgeoning economy benefited mostly the elite and the middle class businessmen (Ungpakorn 60-61). Consequently, under the name of the new strategies for economic development, the Thai Style Democracy produced new trends of social oppression and inequality that would continue for the next three decades.

Against this political and economic backdrop, Kamron proposed his concept for a play that would commemorate Thailand’s most important revolutionary, Pridi Banomyong to the Pridi Banomyong Foundation and Thammasat University’s Student Union.

4.1.2 Pridi Banomyong and the 1980s

Fig.13 Pridi Banomyong

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4.1.2.1 Pridi Banomyong’s Life and Work

In 1987, Kamron Gunatilaka staged the world premiere of *The Revolutionist*, a play about Pridi Banomyong, at Thammasat University as a part of the university’s fundraising to build Pridi Banomyong’s Institute. When the production was revived as *The 1932 Revolutionist* in 1999, under the direction of Nimit Piptkul, the Committee of the Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong explained Pridi’s importance to Thai society as follows:

No leading figure in twentieth-century Thai history has been more thoroughly misunderstood and misrepresented than Pridi. None has done so much for Thai society, but has earned so little in return, in terms of credit and respect, than this man. (*The 1932 Revolutionist*, Introduction).

In his seventeen years of service to his country, from 1932 to the year of his exile in 1949, Pridi improved various aspects of Thai legislation, finances, economy, politics, education and social welfare, all of which became the seeds for further development in these areas. The provisional constitution which he drafted served as the basis for many successive constitutions, and the social security economy that he proposed in 1933 (which was accused of paralleling that of the Soviet Union) was reconsidered by the democratic government in 1990. During his official terms as Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Finance, Pridi introduced many new ideas of reform to empower the working class and to create social and political equity for all Thai citizens. He also founded Thammasat University as the first “open” university that advocated democracy as its mission and philosophy. In this sense, there was a deep personal connection between the Thammasat University’s
student activists (including Kamron) and Pridi’s idealism. As a former instructor at Thammasat University (1993 – 2000), I obviously had better opportunities to learn about Pridi and his contributions to the Thai society than did most of the general public. This experience and my involvement with the many academic activities of this period has in many ways deepened my understanding of Pridi, Kamron, and the student activism at Thammasat University.

Pridi’s contributions to the modernization and democratization of Thailand were countless. For example, he revised many outdated laws and regulations, abrogated inequitable treaties with colonizer nations, and laid out the system for the first central bank. During WWII, as a regent to the then very young King Rama VIII, Pridi was the leader of the underground seri-Thai (Free Thai) movement to fight against the Japanese military occupation of Thailand. Because of the seri-Thai movement, after the war the Allies did not treat Thailand as a defeated country as they did Japan. After being elected Prime Minister in 1946, Pridi immediately began revising a constitution that observed the “Six Principles of the People’s Party.” At the age of forty-five, Pridi was recognized by King Rama VIII as a “senior statesman” for his immense efforts in serving his country.

Despite his democratic foresight, Pridi was the object of a plot by a group of conservative royalists and military officers. After King Rama’s sudden death from a gun shot on June 9, 1946, they accused Pridi of being involved in the king’s assassination. The conservatives staged a coup d’état and took over the government.

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9 The “Six Principles” are “1) To maintain absolute national independence in all aspects such as politically, judicially, and economically; 2) To maintain national cohesion and security; 3) To promote economic wellbeing by creating full employment and by launching a national economic plan; 4) To guarantee equality to all; 5) To grant complete liberty and freedom to the people, provided that this does not contradict the aforementioned principles; and 6) To provide education to the people” (*The Revolutionist* 12).
They abrogated the Constitution of 1946 and established a new constitution that emphasized that the most supreme power in the nation belonged to the king, who exercised his power through the administrative body and the legislative body of the government. Nearly all subsequent constitutions have followed this pattern, no longer speaking predominantly for the power of the people. Pridi’s effort to take back the government by launching a counter-coup on February 26, 1949, ended in failure. He escaped into exile on August 6, 1949. Thailand would be ruled by military-backed royalist governments for the next three decades.

Pridi never returned to Thailand, but continued his long exile in China and Paris until passing away on May 2, 1983. His Constitution of 1946 was never reinstated and the “Six Principles of the People’s Party” became a distant promise that is yet to be realized. Actions by the Prem government in 1983 to honor and recognize Pridi’s work were rather limited, given Pridi’s status as a former Prime Minister and statesman. A few independent efforts led by Thammasat University and the Pridi Banomyong Foundation have been made to rebuild Pridi’s place of honor in Thai society. Both have published Pridi’s writings, as well as books about his life and work. Pridi was not only severely tarnished by his political opposition but also suffered an unjust and permanent 34-year exile abroad.

10 Sulak Sivaraksa, an important Thai intellectual, gave many examples that demonstrated how the Prem government ignored the proper protocol that should have been used to honor Pridi. Not only were no condolences sent to Pridi’s family, and no statement made at his funeral; there was no other official recognition in the parliament. See more details in Sulak Sivaraksa, B.E.2543: 82–83.
11 A statue of Pridi Banomyong was erected at Thammasat University in 1984, while a private foundation was established under the name Pridi Banomyong Foundation in 1983 and the Pridi Banomyong Institute was built in 1995.
4.2 The Revolutionist: Production Background

After returning from France, Kamron was enthusiastic about directing his own productions and wanted to share with Thai society his experience of European theatrical styles. He initiated his new career in Thailand with the seminal production The Revolutionist. Unfortunately, Thailand in the late 1980s was not only unfamiliar with the Brechtian style of contemporary Western theatre, but was governed by a military-backed government that felt threatened by Marxists and their ideologies. Nevertheless, in 1986, the Student council of Thammasat University decided to commission Kamron to write and direct The Revolutionist at the university’s small auditorium (Ho Silapa Watthanatham) as a part of their fundraising for the university’s campaign to support the establishment of the Pridi Banomyong Foundation.

Although the 1980s was a period of political and economic stability, mounting a modern, intellectual, Western-style production was considered an elite activity found only at a few major universities that concentrated on dramatic or Aristotelian plays. Seeking to produce a play with serious anti-elite messages, Kamron received no assistance from the theatre department at Thammasat University. With only a minimal production budget, he embraced Grotowski’s concept of Poor Theatre, deciding to direct the play in the most minimal style possible. He stated, “To follow Jerzy Grotowski’s approach in the Poor Theatre and his Theatre Lab, I decided to use a form that does not emphasize elaborate sets or costumes. […] The essence of theatre lies in the actor’s body, not the ulterior aspects.” (Kue Phu Apiwat 82)

When Kamron held an open audition for anyone interested in participating in his actor-training workshop, almost 100 students applied. Since the script was not yet
written, each of the inexperienced students was accepted. Kamron spent nearly a year on the acting workshop, which he used as a platform to experiment with the script. According to Nimit Pipitkul, an original cast member, Kamron did not really explain to the actors the concept he had for the production. Nor did he explain the concept or theory behind his style of actor training, which was very strenuous for these amateur actors. Nimit in fact remarked that they did not have any clear understanding of what they were doing (PI. Dec. 12, 2005). By the end of the year-long workshop, there were only fifteen actors left, three of whom joined the show’s production team and twelve joined the original cast.\textsuperscript{12}

The 1987 production gave seven initial performances, the success of which led to an additional twelve performances at the Silp Pirasri Hall (a private studio theatre in Bangkok), Chiang Mai University and the University of Pattani. The production was a seminal piece for in a number of respects. Firstly, touring a modern theatre production was very rare during that time. Secondly, while the elite modern theatre groups, including commercial theatre companies and university groups, captured the essence of Westernized modern style productions, \textit{The Revolutionist} uniquely blended styles of both the West and East through localized aesthetics and ideologies. This Thai play utilized a Buddhist-Brechtian style, in which anti-\textit{Sakdina} ideology and aesthetics were embedded in the play’s \textit{mise-en-scène}, text, and acting. These aspects will be analyzed in the following sections.

\textbf{4.3 Buddhist-Brechtian Aesthetics}

\textsuperscript{12} See the Appendix for details.
Like his predecessor, Erwin Piscator, Brecht believed that aesthetic considerations were “entirely subject to political [dispositions]” and that all the elements of theatre [i.e. play, acting, and technical aspects] were to serve the “social function” for the theatre (Brecht, “On Experimental Theatre” 131)). In A Short Organum for the Theatre, Brecht discussed his concept of aesthetics in the epic theatre (or what he called theatre of the scientific age) as “aesthetics of the exact sciences” which aims to give “pleasure (which is an emotion)” as well as “intellect”(180-1) By providing examples of theatre aesthetics from the ancient Greek to the feudal court of Louis XIV, he went on to delineate how the notion of “aesthetics” in different historical contexts consisted of constructions derived from the “system under which people lived in society at the time” (181). He observed that “the theatre in the past was required to deliver different representations of men’s life together: not just representation of different life [i.e. like the lives in the royal court], but also representations of a different sort” (181). Kamron refers to most of the conventional theatre forms in his time such as khon, likay, and the realistic Aristotelian plays as representations of “different sort,” and he described The Revolutionist as a “Brechtian theatre piece that does not aim to arouse emotional reaction, but to stimulate critical thought in the audience” (Khue phu apiwat 81).

Kamron explains that “this epic theatre […] does not seek to create a double-illusion in the audience but [in this case] wants to directly reveal to the audience the story of Pridi Banomyong” (ibid, Foreword). What Kamron meant by “double-illusion” was similar to what Brecht termed Aristotelian theatre, concepts that were based on the idea of “theatre of illusion” as discussed in Chapter 1.

Although Kamron did not totally deny emotional effects, like Brecht, he hoped that these presentational aspects of the production would sufficiently alienate the
audience that they would use more of their cognitive faculties to understand the social and political aspects of Thai history as portrayed through the performance rather than falling into the trap of *catharsis*. (PI Oct. 6, 2006). In order to arrive at this result, I contend that Kamron employed not only the Brechtian aesthetics of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect or estrangement effect) but also the Buddhist aesthetics of *chit-wang* (Th.) (emptied mind) effect.

In *The Revolutionist*, in order to arrive at the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the political history of Pridi Banomyong was conveyed through many means such as the episodic structure of the plot, presentational (non-realistic) *mise-en-scène*, third person narration, presentational acting, and the use of music, verbatim phrases, or songs. Although Kamron briefly mentioned the philosophy of the Crescent Moon Theatre and the application of *annattā*, he has never formalized his aesthetic theory based on any Buddhist philosophy. However, I propose that it is also within these epic theatre elements that one can find elements of Buddhist *chit-wang* in *The Revolutionist*. *Chit-wang* is a Buddhist theory proposed by a revolutionary Thai monk named Buddhadasa who established the term to represent the combination of *suññata* (voidness) and *anattā* (no-self, no-ego) in order to make these abstract concepts more attainable. Buddhadasa explicated *chit-wang* in the following statement:

*Chit-wang*, –Mental emptiness [sic] is the state in which all the objects of the physical world are present (and being perceived) as usual but none of them is being grasped or clung to as “mine.” […]

Thus *chit-wang* is not a vacuous mental state. It is not “void” of content. All objects are there as usual and the thinking process is going on as usual, but

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13 See background in the comparison between Aristotelian theatre and the epic theatre in Chapter 1.
14 See further discussion on both concepts in Chapter 1 under Background on Buddhism.
they are not going the way of grasping and clinging with idea of “I” and “mine” (qtd. in Jackson 133). 

From the above statement, it is clear that Buddhadasa’s notion of *chit-wang* has nothing to do with the ontological “emptiness” but it has to do with one’s psychological as well as intellectual condition. What is “voided” in the mind is simply the self-centered psychological and intellectual attitude of “I” – “mine”, or “ego” (*attā*), with the result known as a non-attachment to the ego or *anattā*. It is with the *anattā* that the super-reality of *suññata* arises (Williams 54-8). According to Mahayana’s scripture, since the mind’s perception of all things are conceptually constructed and cannot be considered as having a permanent/own-existence, it is therefore “empty” (ibid 134-136). To realize that the ultimate reality of all things is *suññata* does not mean that Buddhists take a nihilistic and pessimistic attitude towards life. In fact, in the understanding of *suññata*, one does not deny the temporal existence of all things including the existence of sentient beings who are viewed as fellows that share *dukkha* (suffering) in the cyclic existence of birth and rebirth. The cognitive understanding of *suññata* can help one to focus better on the priority in a lived-world. For example, the perception that one’s own suffering stems from illusions about life (as having the quality of “mine” or fixed identity), can help one put more value on alleviating the suffering of others before thinking about indulging in greed and desire for material things. In other cases, it allows one to distinguish between the constructions of certain superficial values in a society against those that are more compassionate and beneficial for others. Certainly, although all things hold

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15 Jackson noted that he normally would disagree with the translation of *wang* as “empty” or “emptiness” because this misleadingly implies that *chit-wang* is a state of mental activity. However, where others have used the term “empty” in translating Buddhadasa’s work, he retained the term here for the sake of faithfulness to the cited text (Jackson 334).
suññata as their essence, Buddhists do not deny the existence of satisfaction from
material conditions that provide happiness, neither do they deny the material
conditions that can alleviate suffering. However, Buddhists are taught to handle these
satisfactions with a sense of mindfulness and awareness that they are temporal. In his
book, Working with the Emptied Mind (Karn Tham Ngan Duae Chit-Wang),
Buddhadasa explained that, chit-wang is a liberated state of mind filled with mindful
consciousness (sati-pañña) and it possesses the quality of non-attachment (12-13).
Buddhadasa suggested, “To develop non-attachment is at the basis of being able to
act without concern for oneself, to act unselfishly, to work for the sake of the work
itself rather than for oneself” (ibid). Using suññata as the key to Buddhist practice, in
another book Dhammic Socialism, Buddhadasa shifted the focus of Thai Buddhism
from the traditional belief in accumulating merit for oneself to focus on self-
cultivation and self-contemplation with an ultimate goal of improving society as a
whole. Buddhadasa’s reformation of Buddhist practices attracted other monks and
many intellectuals. Among them was Pridi Banomyong, whose views were similar to
those of Buddhadasa, especially his idea of “dhammic socialism” which emphasized
that Buddhism shares with socialism the concepts of commitment to social welfare,
justice, and equality in the society. In addition, Buddhism requires that the ideal ruler
should possess the highest Buddhist virtues, known as dasarajadhamma (ten
dhamma of kingship).16

Buddhadasa’s emphasis on working for the betterment of the society as a goal
in life rather than serving one’s own self-centric attā serves to produce a socially-
based conscience, something that Brecht would to develop among his audiences

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16 These ten virtues are generosity, morality, liberality. Uprightness, gentleness, self-restraint,
non-anger, non-hurtfulness, forebearance, non-opposition (Buddhadasa, Dhammic Socialism 95).
when watching epic theatre.\footnote{This selfless commitment to the betterment of a society is a revolutionary concept in Thai popular Buddhism which used to aim at making merit for personal redemption rather than focusing on society. Despite early negative criticism by the Thai monk association of Buddhadasa’s attempt to adopt the social aspect of Mahayana, many scholars and Thais since the late 1990s have considered Buddhadasa’s socially engaged Buddhism as a great contribution to the Thai society.} Furthermore, both epic theatre and Buddhism share certain common goals as both try to achieve a sense of “detachment” from emotional pitfalls; at the same time, in order to be able to decide what action can be taken, both strive for “objectivity” outside one’s egocentrism in order to see society as it really is.

In this dissertation, therefore, I define Buddhist-Brechtian aesthetics as an aesthetic that aims to produce both the Buddhist chit-wang effect and the Brechtian verfremdungseffekt. In the following sections, I will demonstrated this combined aesthetic quality through the production’s mise-en-scène, plot, performance structure, text and the acting style.

4.3.1 Minimalistic Mise-en-scène

To create a multi-purpose set, Kamron designed a minimalistic set consisting of three movable rectangular slanted platforms or slopes painted in grey, placed on a dark bare stage. These three platforms, which were rearranged to form different shapes, served many functions that ranged from giving simple elevation for the actors’ body position to providing varied possibilities in the stage-picture composition. The set, together with the body movement of the actors were also used as a part of different locations and to symbolize different set pieces such as parliament house, a street environment, a battlefield, and part of a house. The lighting consisted of naked Fresnel lights, without any additional color. All actors regardless of gender, dressed in simple black shirts and pants. Although the costume color and
design varied in later productions, all the designs remained minimalistic with one simple shade of color. The only music was played by a big traditional Thai drum (*Klong Tad*). In a few scenes, minimal accessories, costume pieces, and props were used to indicate characters. The actors also served as the running crew, helping to move the platforms as needed. (See Fig. 14) for an illustration of one set arrangement.

![Fig. 14. The Revolutionist (1987) (Courtesy of the CMTG)](image)

Nonetheless, within the span of eighty minutes, the play depicted Pridi’s life through a plot located in a framework of historical events. Using choreographed patterns of movement and a presentational style of acting, each of the twelve actors played a variety of roles, ranging from anonymous narrators and historical figures to characters from Thai leftist novels. Only the actor playing Pridi (Nititorn Yiamsombat) did not perform multiple roles, since Pridi was in nearly every scene. Actors delivered the narration in a style similar to the emotionless delivery of a radio news reporter. The punctuated rhythms of the drum beats marked scene transitions.
Actors used *tableaux vivant* (frozen poses) to end a scene and suggestive movements and gestures to demonstrate the Brechtian *gestus* (socially coded gestures) of each scene.\(^\text{18}\)

On a bare stage, the *mise-en-scène* seemed dull and almost un-noticeable, but once the actors appeared on stage, there was a sense of creation out of an “emptiness.” As suggested in interviews, Kamron focused primarily on the actors and their actions on the stage rather than technical aspects. He simply mentioned the Poor Theater elements where “the personal and scenic technique of the actor are considered as the core of theatre art” (Grotowski 15-20). However, to me, it was the “minimalistic” aspect of the production that reflected a Buddhist aesthetic of *suññata*. This minimalistic *mise-en-scène* provided a three-dimensional emptiness and simplicity, which for the Buddhist audience can be connected to the feeling of visual and auditory *suññata*. The sense of visual and auditory *suññata* became more prominent when the “story-telling” of historical events happened in the form of a fast montage sequence, only to disappear into its original empty stage. The visual and auditory actions on the stage could be perceived as representing the Buddhist principle of Three Characteristics in having the qualities of impermanence, nonsatisfactory existence, and emptiness.

### 4.3.2 Plot and Anti-dramatic Performance Structure

The play opens with a chorus singing about the forgotten history of the people’s struggle. This song is followed by an actor’s solemn delivery of a soliloquy (from Büchner’s *Woyzeck*) about a Promethean orphan boy who was left alone in a

\(^{18}\) Brecht’s concept of *gestus* is relevant to the Marxist idea of social classes. See further discussion on *gestus* in the text and performance section in this chapter.
world filled with perpetual darkness and one day flew to the sun, the moon, and the stars, only to discover a shriveled sunflower, an old tin can, and wingless insects. The boy then flew back to earth and discovered that it was filled with garbage and stench. The boy’s tale of hope, struggle and discovery, which was performed as a fragmented piece of storytelling, is an analogy for the life of Pridi Banomyong, a commoner who dared to make changes to the world of sakdina. After this prologue, the play consists of a series of more than fifty scenes that chronologically portray key incidents in Pridi’s political life. Beginning in the 1920s, the narration describes the meeting of radical Thai students in Paris—where the seeds of revolution were planted—and ends with Pridi’s death in Paris in 1983. Performed within one hour and forty minutes, the montage scene structure in The Revolutionist can be summarized as follows:

**Table 2. Performance Structure of The Revolutionist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Opening</td>
<td>The play opened with a chorus humming a song, “Creators”, with lyrics about forgotten individuals from Thailand’s buried history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parody from Woyzeck</td>
<td>A woman recited a soliloquy from Woyzeck about a little boy, winged with Promethean hope and faith, who flew to the sun and moon, only to discover a shriveled sunflower and an old tin can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Plotting the Revolution</td>
<td>Pridi was in France and gave a talk about his dream for Siam to espouse liberty, equality, and fraternity to his revolutionary group consisting of young military officers. He talked about his childhood, how he grew up in a farming family and witnessed the plight of the farmers, and how the monarchical government not only neglected the poor but also abused them through the taxing system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Revolution of 1932</td>
<td>Scene changed from France to Siam. Narrators described the events that led to the coup d'état by Pridi’s group under the name of “The People’s Party.” Performers distributed the declaration of the revolution to the spectators while the loudspeaker announced a reading of the declaration to the citizens of Siam. It declared the king’s failure to reign benevolently and judiciously. Prayoon read the final part of the declaration which announced the major principles of the party, which were promises to promote education, security, economic well-being, liberty and freedom to all the people. The king was invited to preside over the country as a constitutional monarch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pridi’s</td>
<td>Pridi talked in a soliloquy about how hostility and fear of change had</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Soliloquy after the Revolution</strong></th>
<th>Stirred up malicious lies about the Party’s plan to abolish all the aristocrats, like the Reign of Terror in France. But Pridi insisted that he had no desire to shift the concentration of power to his group. What he wanted was to abolish inequities in society. He had never thought about killing anyone.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Mae Ploy I</strong></td>
<td>A scene from a famous Thai novel, <em>Four Reigns</em>. A royalist character, Mae Ploy (mother) received news about the revolution and about one of her sons being an accomplice to the Party. She reacted with confusion and shock. The scene portrayed the typical reaction from the Siamese who at that time had very little understanding of democracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Pridi’s Soliloquy</strong></td>
<td>Pridi talked about the rationale for the harsh sounding declaration of the revolution, as the outcome of the revolution was uncertain. But when the situation was stabilized, the People’s Party was reconciled with the king, and asked him to approve the new constitution and to grant amnesty to the revolutionaries. Moreover, the party chose the emblem of the old order, Mano, as the first Prime Minister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. First Step in Democracy</strong></td>
<td>Narrators described the establishment of the constitutional drafting committee, but there was serious conflict between Pridi and Mano. Pridi wanted a draft that would empower the people while Mano wanted to keep the power for the king.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. Who is Mr. Constitution?</strong></td>
<td>A few farmers exchanged a conversation about the identity of Mr. Constitution. They had no understanding about parliamentary democracy. They thought that Mr. Constitution was “the son of the traitors.” One said “the traitors will not be allowed to get what they want.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10. Rightwing against Pridi’s Version of Constitution</strong></td>
<td>Pridi declared that the point of the first constitution was to promote socio-political changes that would contribute to the betterment of the masses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11. Clashing in Cabinet Meeting</strong></td>
<td>Pridi was dissatisfied with Mano’s economic plan because it hardly alleviated the plight of the poor. Pridi proposed numerous reforms to the unfair tax laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12. First Constitution</strong></td>
<td>Mano accepted the People’s Party principles except for the aim to “promote economic wellbeing by creating full employment and by launching a national economic plan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13. Economic Plan Facing Objection</strong></td>
<td>Having been accused of promoting a communist economic plan, Pridi tried to defend his proposals which were a synthesis of capitalist and socialist ideas, aiming to promote land reform as well as a social security system for the poor who made up the majority of the country. The royalist government was against his ideas. Mano was against Pridi’s economic plan and the first constitution issued by the cabinet was full of compromises with the royalist members that increased the power of the monarch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14. The Devil</strong></td>
<td>A short scene from a popular novel, <em>The Devil</em>, - Sai (an educated but lower class man) entered a celebration party at a rich man’s house only to be treated with scorn; Sai declared that he was the ‘ghost of tomorrow’ haunting and frightening those from the old world who were possessed by antiquarian beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15. Commotion</strong></td>
<td>The chorus members shouted out the rumors plotted against Pridi (e.g. that he was a communist who wanted to rob the rich to feed the poor). Mano ordered all members of the parliament to resign from the People’s Party, leading to a weakening of support of Pridi’s plan. Mano’s fear led him to dissolve the parliament. Pridi asked “why the infant Siamese democracy had to be strangled in its crib.” Pahol, a former</td>
</tr>
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</table>
member of the Party, explained that the news of the economic plan had leaked out and created such fear among the rich that it caused a massive capital flow and destabilization of the economy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>16. Pahol’s Soliloquy</th>
<th>In a soliloquy, Pahol, a former member of the People’s Party, confessed his guilt in turning away from supporting Pridi’s economic plan. Like many members of the elite, he reacted to Pridi’s plan out of fear and panic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. First Exile</td>
<td>Facing the pressure of communist charge, Pridi and his wife, Poonsook, were exiled to France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. White Book</td>
<td>While Pridi and his party were dispersed, Mano and an anonymous character (representing King Rama VII) criticized Pridi’s economic plan and claimed that it was Stalinist. Soon, Pridi’s faction (Pahol, Song, Rithe, Prasarth) resigned from the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Secret Meeting</td>
<td>Pahol held a secret meeting with Phibul about reclaiming government power. A voice through a loud speaker announced that Pahol, Phibun, Army, and Navy overthrew the royalist government, and Pahol became Prime Minister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Phibul’s Soliloquy</td>
<td>Phibul uttered his thoughts about how the royalist groups led by Prince Bowaradej’s group were plotting a coup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Pridi’s soliloquy</td>
<td>Pridi narrated his own return from France, and two days after his return, he was appointed a cabinet minister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Bowaradej Rebel</td>
<td>Phibul told Pridi that the Bowaradej group had surrendered and Phibul would like to “root them out.” Pridi begged Phibul not to do so because they were “socialist Buddhist” and “no blood should be spilled on this land.” An anonymous voice from the loudspeaker announced how Pridi refused to take any official position because he was still stigmatized by the accusation of being a communist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Conference</td>
<td>A court conference depicting an investigation about the allegations against Pridi. A committee member, a royalist, announced that Pridi’s economic plan was not communistic. He announced that Pridi should not be tainted any longer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Pridi’s Soliloquy</td>
<td>Pridi explained that once his image was cleared, he decided to accept the position of Interior Minister in the Pahol cabinet. He commented on how power could corrupt people, and recommended immediate decentralization of the state power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Many Missions Accomplished</td>
<td>Narrators announced the list of accomplishment achieved by the Pahol cabinet and Pridi. Pridi announced the founding of the university of Moral and Political Science, followed by a Thammasat University’s song and Thammasat students making pledge to honor the Three Pillars and Constitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. King’s Abdication</td>
<td>A voice from the loudspeaker announced that on March 2, 1935, King Rama VII abdicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Pridi’s Soliloquy</td>
<td>The king’s abdication made Pridi feel awkward. Pridi himself confessed that there was a schism between himself and Phibul, who wanted to place military officers as governors, but Pridi turned him down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. New King</td>
<td>Narrators announced that a young prince who was only ten years old was enthroned as a new king, and Pridi traveled around the globe to renegotiate the unfair treaties that Siam had previously signed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Phibun’s Agenda</td>
<td>Pridi reported Pahol’s resignation and Phibun won the general election. Phibun presented a soliloquy concerning his view about the fragility of Thailand, and that he wanted Thailand to be more like Japan.</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Song: “The Thai Stock”</td>
<td>A propaganda song was sung by the chorus members. The song said that Thais should rise up to protect and preserve the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. World War II and Thailand</td>
<td>Phibun and Pridi, discussed how Thailand could reclaim territories previously annexed by the French in Indochina. Prime Minister Phibun announced “We should accommodate the Japanese.” A narrator announced “Thailand declared war on the US and Great Britain.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Pridi’s Plotting Free Thai Movement</td>
<td>Pridi announced the establishment of an underground movement known as the “Free Thai Movement” to convince the Allies that, despite the government’s policy, the vast majority of the people were anti-Axis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Japan and Thailand</td>
<td>Narrators narrated Pridi’s refusal to cooperate with Japan when he was a Minister of Finance, while his Free Thai movement was launched.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Chronology</td>
<td>Narrators announced a series of events following the resignation of Phibun until the surrender of the Japanese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Pridi’s announcement of achievement</td>
<td>As a Regent to King Rama VIII, Pridi announced that the Thai declaration of war on the Axis did not reflect the true feelings of Thais, thus it was null. Pridi narrated that he was made Senior Statesman, and advisor of state affairs to the king. Although many political parties sprung up, he sensed that among the military there was a resentment towards civilian rule. Pridi was elected Prime Minister on March 24, 1946.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Mae Ploy II</td>
<td>An encounter between Mae Ploy and Pridi. Mae Ploy did not understand what was going on. The writer of the novel appeared in the scene, and said to Mae Ploy that he would not allow these people to prosper and live happily in the kingdom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. King’s Mysterious Death</td>
<td>Narrator announced that King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) was found dead on his bed with a bullet in his head. Rumors about Pridi as having a part in the assassination spread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Dirty Plot Against Pridi</td>
<td>Pridi announced that the accusation was a “blatant lie.” Kukrit read a declaration admitting that his newspaper had incorrectly accused Pridi of involvement in regicide, that Pridi had never actually been accused of the regicide, and that he was never found guilty by the court; Pridi fled the country because of the failed coup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Motorcade of Tanks</td>
<td>Narrators announced that a motorcade of army tanks stormed the residence of Pridi where his wife and children remained after Pridi’s flight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Boat Scene</td>
<td>Pridi’s soliloquy narrating Pridi’s return to Thailand to stage a coup in 1949 to take back the government from the military, but his attempt failed. He said, “We lost, and I set sail for China.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Warrant on Pridi</td>
<td>A government official announced the warrant to arrest Pridi, “the rebel.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Poonsook’s Soliloquy</td>
<td>Poonsook delivered a long soliloquy about the most desperate time in her life, living in Thailand and being regarded as a traitor’s wife, but she never regretted having married Pridi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Pridi’s Soliloquy</td>
<td>Pridi delivered a soliloquy, telling how his heart was heavy with grief and pain, and told her to take care of the children and look ahead and upwards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Pridi’s Exile</td>
<td>Pridi narrated that he resided in China for 21 years since his exile, and eventually went to France in 1970.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Children’s Game and Governments</td>
<td>Thai political merry-go-around with many military governments continued and was depicted by a scene when the chorus played Ree-Ree Khao Sarn, a traditional Thai game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 46. October Uprisings
Narrators describing the two “Octobers” followed by the scene of October 14, 1973 and October 6, 1976.

### 47. Yellow Bird
Chorus sang “The Yellow Bird”, a song about the innocent civilians who were killed in the uprisings.

### 48. Pridi’s soliloquy
Pridi commented that the massacre of people for the sake of maintaining one’s power and position is a heinous crime.

### 49. Echo of a Conscience
Narrators asked the audience whether they could remember the tragic events in October, and whether they could recall how unarmed youth died fighting for freedom.

### 50. Last Struggle
A song about the last struggle for democracy is sung.

### 51. Pridi’s Fight with Accusation
Chorus members shouted to Pridi “Communist Revisionist!” Pridi told them to reread the work of prominent leftist communists, and to stop lying.

### 52. Clock Scene
Through a loud speaker, someone uttered the truth about time, and how the law of impermanence governed all social organizations and systems, just like life itself.

### 53. Final Moment
In the final scene, Pridi was seen writing at his desk, Pridi’s voice was heard through a loud speaker saying that there were things he knew but could not express. He left the judgment to those who cherished truth to decide what the truths really were.

### 54. Last Announcement
Narrators announced Pridi’s death, and compared his life to a candle light that had consumed itself completely to enlighten the world.

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Fig. 15. Disagreement between Pridi (right) and Phibun (left) (2000).
This episodic chronology is structured by narrations, soliloquies, short scenes, songs, poems, and by seemingly unrelated dramatic scenes drawing from sources including popular novels. These scenes from the well-known novels function as a part of the dialectic of the play’s structure as they were a part of the thesis, or antithesis, or synthesis of the play. For example, the scenes that portrayed the revolution in 1932 by the People’s Party (Scene 4 and 5) were followed immediately by a short apparently unrelated scene from *The Four Reigns*, a novel by well-known royalist M. R. Kukrit Pramoj; in Scene 35, after Pridi’s announcement of achievements in the Free Thai movement and his election as the Prime Minister, both Mae Ploy and Kukrit interrupted in play in order to express the thinking of the right wing.

The fragmented structure, with transitions provided by third-person narrators, movement, or soliloquies, reflect the *Verfremdung* characteristics of an anti-dramatic, Brechtian “epic theatre.” By having the narrators describe the time, place, and incident in a style similar to that of reporters on radio news, and by having short dialogues in certain dramatic scenes intersecting with narration and monologues within the same scene to, historical events appeared to be more objectively told and not overly dramatized.

### 4.3.3 Buddhist-Brechtian Text and Performance

In marked contrast to other modern plays staged in Thailand, the text including the performance of *The Revolutionist* rejects conventional dramatic forms (as typically seen in well-made or realistic plays), and is structured instead as a pastiche of stories, employing a variety of stylistic devices based on the life and times of an historical figure. The style of the script resembles Wolfram Mehring’s play, *Georg Büchner* in its depiction of the political life of a leading revolutionist and in
the minimalistic approach to the technical aspects of the production.19 The
Revolutionist also bears stylistic similarities to the Living Newspaper plays of the
1930s in the United States, which juxtaposed third-person journalistic narration with
songs, montages of dramatic scenes, and monologues. The style of Thai language
used in this production varies and depends on the style of each skit. For example,
documentary/journalistic reportage is used for the narration, the formal language of
the Thai elites of the 1950s is used for representations of historical events, and the
poetic prose of popular novels is used for skits alluding to those novels. What makes
the text and the performance of The Revolutionist resemble a Brechtian epic theatre
lies in not only its epic theatre structure as mentioned earlier, but also in its a
dialectical presentation of contrasting points of view, both of which produce a
Marxist critique on social relations. In addition, since the main character, Pridi, was
known to be a devout Buddhist-socialist, Kamron chose to reflect this aspect of Pridi
in the character’s soliloquies as well as in the production’s minimalistic acting. I
contend that the Buddhist-Brechitan style of the text and its presentation, as in this
production, have offered its own aesthetics that are achieved through both the
Verfremdungseffekt, and the Chit-wang effect.

In addition to the Verfremdung created within the play’s structure and the
production’s mise-en-scène, this section will considere the ways in which the
language of the text as well as the acting elements strengthens the
Verfremdungseffekt and the Chit-wang effect. For example, in order to make the
audience members become more aware of the significance of the Revolution in 1932,
Kamron uses many epic theatre devices (i.e. narration, soliloquy, presentational

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scenes, etc.) in a montage-sequence, giving the audience sufficient distance to enable them to think about and understand the difficulties of political transition. At the same time he carefully chooses a particular style of language that reflects the critique of social class. For example, the sequence in the following text from Scene 4 “Revolution of 1932” starts with an anonymous character presenting a short narrative passage about the revolution. The leading revolutionaries enter to inform Pridi of their successes, including a People’s Party member named Pahol, who claims that the revolution went as planned. Then the actor who plays Pahol breaks the “fourth wall” between the 1932 scene and the present time by staring right at the audience as though they were the people in 1932. As Pahol makes an announcement to the audience about the revolution’s success, the remaining actors, representing the revolutionary group of 1932 walk into the audience and distribute copies of the original Declaration of Revolution, which is then read over the loudspeaker. This creates an estrangement in the contemporary audience because they are somehow forced to represent the people in a different time and place. Since Thailand was under a military and royalist government in 1987, and since most Thais have not been exposed to the story of the revolution, the distribution of the declaration must have created a sense of unease in the audience due to its shocking content and its non-hierarchical language defying the dominant sakdina culture. This sequence is followed by Pridi’s soliloquy about difficulties of the revolution stemming from the public’s ignorance of parliamentary democracy, a statement that echoes a certain truth in the context of 1980s.

The published text of this scene (Scene 4, 5, and 6), translated from Thai into English by S.J. (pen-name of Chariwat Santaputra), with the stage directions in brackets drawn from my observations of a video recording of the production, follow:
[All six female narrators stand in the center stage areas; male actors have just made their exits. To present a narration, each narrator takes a few military-like steps to the down stage area and delivers the line without any emotion or interpretation.]

**Narrator 1**: At the dawn of 24 June 1932…

**Narrator 2**: …the revolutionaries deployed their troops…

**Narrator 3**: Some went to arrest leading members of the royal family…

**Narrator 4**: …Some, including tank and armored regiments…

**Narrator 5**: …occupied the Anantasamakom Hall and the Royal Palace.

**Narrator 6**: Cadets and officers from different regiments…

[All the narrators turn around and sit on the floor with their backs to the audience. The revolutionaries, Prayoon, Phibun, and Pridi enter, the first two in black/neutral uniforms, Pridi in white shirt and black trousers.]

**Prayoon**: Khun Luang…

**Pridi**: Khun Prayoon

**Phibun**: Our tanks and armored cars have successfully secured all strategic points.

**Song**: Everything went as planned.

[As they speak, they form their stage positions into two lines. Three soldiers stand in the front; the other three stand in the back.]

**Phibun**: Order…Halt…

**Soldier**: We have Krom Phra Nakornsawanworapinitch in custody at the royal hall of Anantasamakom.

**Phibun**: Order…Salute.

*(Pahol enters)*

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20 *Khun Luang* is Pridi’s official title.
**Pahol**: Brothers and sisters, we have seized control of the government. We will proceed to transform it from absolute to constitutional, democratic monarchy. The People’s Party hereby transmits its first declaration.

*Here, all the actors except for the one portraying Pridi, walk into the audience’s space and distribute the Declaration of Revolution to each member of the audience as the words on the declaration are announced over the loud speaker.]*

**Loudspeaker:**

Fellow citizens, when the present King ascended the throne most citizens had hoped that he would reign benevolently and judiciously. Subsequent events have proven that such hope is illusory and groundless. The King still esteems himself above the law and still indulges in nepotism, appointing his kindred and lackeys to assume important positions. Furthermore, the King has failed to heed his citizens’ cry for justice, allowing government officials to continue to abuse their power, to exploit, to engage in illegal and corrupt practice. The King and his cronies have completely neglected the wellbeing of the masses as witnessed by the dire economic state the country is now in. (…)” (The Revolutionist 40-41).

(…)

**Pridi** [soliloquy]: There are still many people who loathe and fear [socioeconomic and political] changes like they dread evil phantoms or spirits. In other words, the horrendous threats they perceive, and hence the fear they have, are merely a figment of their imagination. They have spread fanciful and malicious lies that the blue blood of aristocrats will carpet the streets of every city and town, […] The main objective of this revolution is to correct the widespread socioeconomic inequalities, to overthrow the yoke of oppression. I have no desire to shift the concentration of power from a
single person to a single group. Remember I am a lawyer. All I ever wanted is to eliminate or minimize inequalities in their various disguises. The hideous thought of slaughtering human lives has never crossed my mind.

Chetana Nagavajara, a Thai scholar and critic, points out that the distribution of the replica of the Declaration of Revolution to the audience was “another masterful device to reify the message of the play in a much more concrete manner than Brecht himself” and that “conscientious members of the audience who did their “homework” in reading the Declaration would readily discover that many of the problems pinpointed by the Revolutionary Party in 1932 were still with them in the 1980’s” (Fervently Meditating 243).  

This sequence is then followed by a short Mae Ploy (Madame Ploy) scene performed in a relatively realistic style (See Fig 16). The relatively “realistic” elements included suggestive accessories such as a sabai (a piece of wrapping that goes over the top of a blouse, normally worn by Siamese ladies in the past) worn by Mae Ploy, and Western attire worn by the male characters. The scene portrays a climactic moment in the novel in which confused aristocratic characters discuss the 1932 Revolution, which has just occurred in Bangkok. The dialogue from this scene (and a description of the characters) follow:

**Mae Ploy** – an aristocrat’s wife who was born and raised under royal patronage, extremely loyal to the monarch;

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Perm (Khun Luang) – Ploy’s brother;

Arne – their eldest son, well educated, an accomplice of the revolution;

Aud – their youngest son, a royalist.

Fig.16 Mae Ploy Scene (1999)

Ploy: What is it, Khun Luang? What is going on?

Perm: A revolt has just erupted.

Ploy: My dear… [Play slowly sits down on the floor showing her disbelief, she sits on the ground in the proper manner of a traditional Thai lady, with legs folded to the side.]

Perm [properly sits cross-legged on the floor]: I saw it with my own eyes. Soldiers are all over the Plaza. And here is a copy of the declaration that they have been handing out since this morning….

Ploy: It is not true (…) The People’s Party, who are they anyway?

Perm: They are the ones that masterminded this revolt.

[...]
Perm: Before, the King was above the law, but from now on he shall be under it.

Ploy: But if His Majesty refuses?

Perm [stands up]: That is it; that is the heart of the problem.

Ploy: What about the other masters, lords, and aristocrats?

Perm: Many have been incarcerated.

Ploy: Why are they [the People’s Party] so harsh, cruel, and heartless? [Ploy bends down with both hands clenched together on the floor.]

[…] [Aud enters]

Ploy: Where is my other dear son, Arne? (…) He likes to disappear for days…staying over at his foreign-educated friends’…

Aud: Well, Brother Arne has a lot of friends, most of them hotshots and notables. They are probably celebrating their victory by now.

[…]

Ploy [Rise up and cross toward Aud]: How dare you taint the reputation of your brother? […] How can your brother be a traitor? How can something so malicious be true? I do not believe a word you said. You, yourself, know that it is untrue. If Arne is a traitor, you can also become a traitor because you are his brother. [Ploy becomes physically weak, nearly fainting.]

Aud: …Mom!

Ploy: [Both Aud and Perm help support her and keep her from falling.] Oh, Arne…Khun Luang, please take me to the chapel.

[The dramatic scene ends in a tableau vivant with Ploy’s facial expression filled with pain and terror. It is followed by Pridi’s soliloquy.]

Pridi: That I would install a Soviet-type regime in Siam is beyond my wildest nightmares. I doggedly believe in the validity of the constitutional monarchy. Admittedly, in retrospect, the first declaration of the People’s
Party may sound a bit too heavy-handed. However, that was made when events were still fluid and tumultuous, when the success of the revolution was by no means certain. A little firmness or resoluteness on the part of the Party was then required to protect the revolution. But when events started to stabilize and when the dust began to settle, the People’s Party began to loosen the noose. For example, the Party has humbly asked the King to approve the new constitution and to grant amnesty to the revolutionaries. Deeds were also made to reconcile all sides—royal family members, revolutionaries, and aristocrats. Moreover, the Party has elected Phraya Manopakornnititada (Mano), an emblem of the old order, as Prime Minister.

(39–50)

The juxtaposition of contrasting scene is one theatrical device often used in *The Revolutionist*. In this case, the juxtaposition of the Mae Ploy scene and Pridi’s soliloquy is meant to alienate the modern Thai audience via its discontinuity with the main plot, forcing them to see the complete ideological contrast between the conservative royalists (and especially the aristocrats) as represented by Mae Ploy, Perm, Aud, and the liberal-left revolutionists (represented by Arne and Pridi). Although there is no news of physical violence, Mae Ploy still sees the revolution as “malicious and heartless.” During the four reigns through which Mae Ploy has lived, the perception that the monarch is the most significant entity of the Three Pillars has been instilled in the hearts and minds of most Thais, who see him as not only the head of the state, but the father of the nation. Therefore, like all the royalists, she sees the group as traitors because they have betrayed the monarchy. On the other hand, revolutionists see themselves as those who want to “eliminate or minimize inequalities in their various disguises.” For Pridi, “the hideous thought of slaughtering human lives” was never the intention of the revolution. This dialectic
juxtaposition of characters presents the point of view of the left-wing revolutionaries who wanted change, as well as the right-wing conservatives who were afraid of change.

Besides the use of montage-like sequences and soliloquies to create the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the specific style of Thai language used in this play suggests another Brechtian concept known as *gestus*. Brecht’s concept of *gestus*, rooted in a Marxist idea of social classes, refers to the specific verbal and non-verbal gests stemmed from a person’s social position. Brecht delineated the term “*gestus*” as follows:

Not all gests are social gests. The attitude of chasing away a fly is not yet a social gest, though the attitude of chasing away a dog may be one, for instance if it expresses a badly dressed man’s continual battle against watchdog….the social gest is…the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances  (qtd. in Mews 202).

According to Brecht, one crucial goal of *Verfremdungseffek* is to “alienate the social gest underlying every incident” (139). He further defined social gest as “the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships prevailing between people between given period” (ibid). From a Marxist point of view, the social gest definitely implies social relationships based on class. For Brecht, *gestus* is found not only in the physical gestures but it is also found in the spoken words when the words convey “particular [social] attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men” (Brecht 104).

In written text of *The Revolutionist*, the different styles of language used by the narrators, right wing aristocrats, left wing revolutionaries, and commoners clearly constitute *gestus*. For example, throughout the play, each revolutionary refers to himself as “*kha-pha-chao*” which is a neutral, classless, genderless pronoun for “I,”
whereas those who have been accused by the bourgeois of being “communists” are referred to as “mun,” which is a derogatory pronoun for “them.” Pridi, as a character, never uses a language style that implies his superiority in terms of class or position. In the Declaration of the Revolution, the traditional high-language used with the monarchy is avoided and replaced by a neutral, classless language. In a certain scenes, social gest was made prominent to demonstrate typical class attitudes that can be seen as the root cause of inequality in Thai society.

Scene 14, an excerpt from a Seni Saowapong’s leftwing novel, The Devil (Pesaj)(1970), depicts an aristocrat’s banquet which Mr. Sai Sema, a farmer’s son, is invited to join—only to discover that it is a scheme intended to humiliate him. Ladies at the banquet, dressed in the exaggerated fashion of European high society, comment on his crude complexion and the smell of his poverty, while the host gives a speech declaring that Sai’s attraction to his daughter is “obscene” and “decadent,” and that “it will lead to the downfall of our society and high culture.” Standing tall at the same level with the aristocratic figure, Sai responds with a long monologue expressing pride in his humble origins, announcing with verbal and non-verbal gestus that he comes from a different era and a different world. With his spine erect, his arms relaxed and wide apart, he declares:

I am the ghost of tomorrow, haunting and frightening those from the old world who are possessed by antiquarian beliefs. Nothing scares them more than seeing their power dwindling and witnessing the exponential multiplication of phantoms like myself. Hence, they tried to exorcise me, the specter of the common man, with their elitist sorcery. But they prove no match for me. Nothing will vaporize this spirit for I am shielded by time. (The 1932 Revolutionist 65-66; See Fig. 17)
A spoken *gestus* can also be found in the third-person narration of the story to suggest an empty social status or classlessness. In *The Revolutionist*, the emotionless, documentary-like narration of the narrators (chorus members), punctuated by the sound of a typewriter, allows the text itself to enter the audience’s stream of thought directly like words on a blank page. The style of the written text, which does not carry any attachment of a particular interpretation or meaning not only has what Brecht calls “a direct relationship with the audience” (Brecht 138), but in my experience, having seen the performance, this non-attachment of the characters also has the quality of *chit-wang*. Using elements of the *chit-wang* condition, the audience is like an observer, or similar to the bystanders in Brecht’s *Street Scene*, while the actors are comparable to the demonstrators acting out the story. In the production of *The Revolutionist*, the actors always seem to suggestively act a character rather than fully become the characters. Sineenadh Keitprapai, a key actor of the CMTG, recalls,
“for at least six months in Kamron’s system of actor’s training, we have to learn how to be “neutral” [or empty of ego (attā)] without being attached to a certain way of expression. Then we had to learn how to act out the story as though we were the story teller, not the characters themselves” (PI. December 4, 2005). Although Kamron never theorizes the acting style in his version of epic theatre, he emphasizes that he would like his actors to be able to completely detach himself/herself from the character and execute the character’s actions with an attitude of anattā or detachment from self (PI. July 29, 2007).22 In my view, it is the ability to act with anattā that in turns produces the kind of acting with a chit-wang effect. The chit-wang effect also shares Brecht’s vision:

The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying. […] Once the idea of total transformation is abandoned the actor speaks his part not as if he were improvising it himself but like a quotation. (“Short Description,” Brecht on Theatre 138).

The acting in The Revolutionist does have the varied degree of “quotation” quality. Brecht himself stated something that is analogous to the concept of anattā: “Using the third person and the past tense allows the actor to adopt the right attitude of detachment” (Brecht 1986: 138). This concept of anattā in The Revolutionist can be visually detected not only by the manner of line delivery, but also in the way the actors move or use their bodies or the non-verbal gestus.

Kamron, thus took Brechtian gestus to another level by combining it with a Buddhist anattā. Throughout the performance, actors use their bodies as merely vehicles, ready to be transformed into any character or even symbolic concepts. For

22 See the background of Buddhist concept of anattā in Chapter 1 under Background on Buddhism.
example, in the transitional scene that depicts the revolution, the actors portraying the revolutionist group form a circle around the Pridi character by putting their arms around each other’s shoulders. Then, the group encircling Pridi moves with a dynamic motion like that of a big ocean wave. As an actor delivers the following passage with no facial expression, the ensemble’s silent, wave-like movement gradually becomes more pronounced:

   **Narrator 1:** In 1927, Pridi returned to Siam and joined the Ministry of Justice where he served as judge and subsequently, as assistant secretary to the Judicial Department. Additionally, he became a lecturer at the Ministry’s law school. […] Also, he helped secretly expand and recruit new members to the civilian wing of the People’s Party […].

   **Narrator 2:** When Prayoon returned to Siam, he broadened and cemented the Party’s military ties. The People’s Party was ultimately able to gain the vital participation of leading military figures, particularly of Phraya Pahol Polpayuhasaena (hereafter called Pahol), […] and Phra Prasathsanapithayayuth (hereafter called Prasath). (37)

When the recitation of names concludes, the revolutionists shout in unison, “coup d’état!” and disperse in various directions on the stage. These actors then quickly transform themselves into new characters to begin another scene. With an energetic crescendo from beginning, to middle, to end, the abstract, wave-like movement is a representation of the birth of the revolution.

Throughout the play, all actors are involved in moving the set pieces and being stage-hands regardless of their roles, while performing many different roles with little change of costume or appearance. The fact that there is not one fixed identity for the actor, and that all identities are in flux also reflects the Buddhist
concept of suññata (emptiness). Visually, it appears as though their bodies are merely a vehicle for the action. Taking into account the dialectical text, the epic theatre style of presentation imbued with verbal and non-verbal gestus, the chit-wang style of acting, I argue that Kamron’s attempt to merge Marxist dialectics and Brechtian verfremdung with Buddhist suññata has made this production a unique example of a Buddhist-Brechtian Thai theatre.

4.4 Power Relations in The Revolutionist

The Revolutionist would have been a play that simply honored and celebrated Pridi Banomyong as a hero had it not been dramaturged, written, and directed with Kamron’s particular understanding of the factionalized power relations in Thai politics over seven decades. Kamron constructed The Revolutionist as an important site of contestation in which different power factions are represented through narration and/or dramatic action. In this section of this chapter, I seek to analyze the power relations between the rightwing royalist faction as the leftwing socialist faction as depicted within the play.

Although the play seems to portray Pridi’s unfortunate fate as a result of the conflicts among the fractionalized conservative royalists, the military, and the People’s Party, it discursively depicts a few events to expose the power struggle among these groups. The first power struggle depicted was based on the drafting of the first constitution. According to the system of Constitutional Monarchy, the king should leave all the administrative roles to the government however, this play illustrates the administrative involvement of King Rama VII, including his presence at the cabinet meeting when the constitution was drafted, and thereby illustrates the power relationship between the monarch and Pridi.
Prior to the 1932 revolution, King Rama VII intended to grant a constitution to the country, but his own Supreme Council did not support his intention. After the revolution, members of the People’s Party, calling themselves “the promoters of democracy,” wanted to prove that their revolution stemmed from a genuine desire to improve the condition of the country via modernization and democracy. Claiming they had no intention of harming the monarch, and attempting to negotiate the power relationship with the monarch and the royalist group, they apologized to the king and requested a royal pardon. Recognizing the sincere intentions of the revolutionist group, the king passed an act of leniency to legitimize the change in the governing system. He also pledged to cooperate with the new government.23

During the 1932 Revolution, in order to stabilize the society and to prevent any resistance, the revolutionist group needed to find ways to make the revolution appear legitimate and accepted by the monarch. On June 27, 1932, two days after the revolution, leaders of the People’s Party were led by Pridi to the royal palace to present the king with a provisional constitution. In the play, Pridi narrates this crucial moment, stating that they have “humbly invited H.M. the king to continue to preside over the country” as “constitutional monarch,” and that “[h]is majesty has penned [the following] message to our military leaders.” In the production, the audience was compelled to imagine the king making his historical remarks, via a loudspeaker, that

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23 In a speech given to the revolutionary group at a ceremony (organized by the revolutionary group as a gesture of reconciliation with the king), as a request for a royal amnesty, the king states, “I am very happy that you thought to come yourselves and make an apology today, which I did not request at all. That you have done so gives you great honour, as you have all shown you have truth in your hearts and are people who are honest and courageous.[…] That you have made this ceremony today shows clearly that whatever you did, you did for the true benefit of the country. You have shown that you are people with sympathy and bravery. You dared to accept responsibility when you felt that you had made mistakes. This will make the people have even more trust in you. This makes me feel very pleased” (qtd. in Banomyong, *Pridi by Pridi*, 143)
positioned him not only as the granter of absolute power to the people, but also as the
preserver of peace and prosperity in his kingdom. The king declared:

For the sake of social peace and stability—shunning—bloodshed and mayhem—I
have voluntarily yielded to the demands of the revolutionaries. Speaking
frankly, I myself have contemplated embarking upon similar reforms; that is
the introduction of a constitutional monarchy to Siam (The Revolutionist 43
[emphasis mine]).

The king also expressed his willingness to yield to the revolutionists by saying “I
have not only not forcefully obstructed [the revolution] but have facilitated the quest
of the revolutionaries.” He implicitly affirmed the extent of his power by
emphasizing that if he had not done so, “the international community would
definitely not have accepted the change of regime in Thailand” (The Revolutionist
43). As the king claimed to have collaborated in the drafting of the constitution and
eventually positioned himself as the “granter” of the constitution to the people, Pridi
emphasized that the main goal of the revolution was to “correct the widespread
socioeconomic inequalities, to overthrow the yoke of oppression.” Pridi’s insistence
that he had “no desire to shift the concentration of power from a single person to a
single group,” also demonstrates that Pridi was not concerned about claiming credit
for the revolution and the provisional constitution. In fact, the draft was eventually
altered a great deal by the constitution committee, which had to obtain approval from
the king. By juxtaposing Pridi’s speech with the king’s speech, the play portrays Pridi
as an egoless idealist and a Buddhist lawyer who, selflessly, wants “to eliminate or
minimize inequalities in their various guises,” asserting that “the hideous thought of
slaughtering human lives” that marked revolutions in other countries had never
crossed his mind (ibid 44). From this moment in the play, Pridi is presented not only
as an idealistic socialist-Buddhist with no desire for absolute power, but also a peace-seeker who was willing to compromise his power with the king. As a practitioner of the Buddhist tenet of non-violence, Pridi proved his sincerity by having his party elect a royalist, Phraya Manopakornnititada (Mano) as the first Prime Minister, hoping that this would mitigate the potential conflicts between the royalist faction and the revolutionist faction.

Mano became the head of the first government and was also the chairperson of the constitution drafting committee. The Permanent Constitution committee compromised with the king. The differences between Pridi’s draft of the provisional constitution and the declared permanent constitution were a result of these negotiations. The provisional constitution, drafted by Pridi, denied the king’s absolute power by stating that “the supreme power in the country belongs to all people,” whereas the king remained “supreme head of state.” The king’s absolute power was therefore considerably diminished by Pridi’s version. Most importantly, the provisional constitution put the king under the law by stating not only that the king as one of the four entities (Monarch, the Assembly of Representatives of the People, the Committee of the People, and the Courts), should execute his power on “behalf of the people,” but also that he was subject to the law and could be put on

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24 Mano (Phraya Manopakornnitithada) announced to the parliament house, “In the process of the drafting of this constitution, the sub-committee has constantly been in close communication with the king. One can say that practically every statement resulted from close collaboration between the king and the sub-committee. Therefore, this version of the constitution has already been seen and approved by the king. The king did not only approve it, he was very satisfied with it” (qtd in Petchlert-anan 118, my translation). Petchlert-anan also elaborates on how King Prachadhipok was actively involved in the changes of wording in the constitution. The king also participated in a ceremony announcing this royally approved constitution (123–126).

25 See Banomyong, Prdi. Section 1 and 2 in “Provisional Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam, 1932”; Pridi by Pridi (Chaing Mai: Silkworm Books, 200) 73.
trial.26 However, the final version of the first permanent constitution, drafted mostly by a committee consisted of some right-wing royalists and the king himself, endowed the king with greater prestige and many prerogatives than Pridi’s version had done. For example, in the new permanent version the provisional constitution’s declaration that “the supreme power in the country belongs to all the people,” was changed to “the supreme power in the country comes from the people” (italics mine).

Consequently, the first permanent constitution implied that the power did not belong to the people, but that the king was entrusted with the people’s power. This meant that the king had the right to exercise power on behalf of the people via consensus from the Assembly, the administrative body (the government), and the judiciary body. In other words, the permanent constitution elevated the power of the monarch above that of the other three bodies. Piyabutra Sangganokgul points out that:

> If this constitution wants to indicate that it was the king himself who granted the constitution, what that actually meant was that the king had held the right of the absolute power over the sovereignty of the people. The issue of “who” should hold the supreme power in the country is a great issue because the power to promulgate a constitution is an absolute power, a power to legitimize all other political entities (50) [Italics mine].

Although many scholars seem to agree that this change was the most feasible compromise between the king and the revolutionists, the power relationships as defined in the permanent constitution would have a dramatic impact on the configuration of democracy in Thailand over the next seven decades (Mokarapong 111–127, Petchlert-anan 102–105; 135–139, Chamarik 131, Banomyong 73).

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26 Although the king could not be prosecuted in the criminal courts, he could be subjected to trial by the Assembly.
In 1980, a grand statue of the last king of the absolute monarchy, King Rama VII (King Prajadhipok), was erected outside the parliament building and engraved with the king’s 1932 statement granting the first permanent constitution of Thailand. No public statue of any of the revolutionists has ever been erected in the same area.

In the meta-narrative of the history of Thailand as it appears in school history textbooks, the Western-educated King Prajadhipok is often considered a king whose honorable intention to “grant” the first constitution to the people of Siam was interrupted by the People’s Party’s “hasty” revolution. In addition, it was the king who actually “granted” the first constitution, thus implying that it was he who granted democracy to modern Thailand. While presenting the story from the meta-narrative perspective, The Revolutionist also tries to present a counter narrative by telling the story from Pridi’s viewpoint.

Throughout The Revolutionist, Pridi’s attempt to bring change to Thai society was often contested by the conservative royalists in government. In the second major power struggle, the play portrays the escalating conflicts between these two groups by depicting the royalist resistance to Pridi’s proposals for economic restructuring, and to his proposal for the abolition of unfair taxes on the poor. Disagreeing with Pridi’s economic plan, Mano convinced other cabinet members, as well as the military faction of the People’s Party, that the plan was “communistic,” ultimately having Pridi denounced as a communist. The defamation caused Mano to dissolve the parliament. Pridi had to take his first exile in France beginning on April 12, 1933, less than a year following the revolution. In 1973, Pridi wrote that his crucial mistake was initially asking Mano to join the government because “Some people might appear democratic for a while. But when the time comes to develop the democratic victory to another stage, they may act according to their old vision and inherited way
of thinking. This may wreck the foundation for preserving the victory won at the first stage \(^{27}\) (\textit{Pridi by Pridi} 241–2).

According to Vichityong Na Pombhejara, on the day Pridi left Bangkok, Mano’s government produced documents from the king which responded in detail to Pridi’s economic plan. The documents expressed the king’s disagreement with Pridi’s plan, calling it “the Soviet model” (80). It was the first time after the revolution that the power of the monarchy was invoked to take action against a person with an alternative political position (ibid). In Kamron’s production, the king’s words were read over loudspeakers: “Again, Communist Russia trod on this infamous road. Property owners were brutally butchered or, if lucky, were robbed of all their wealth. […] this proposed program is exactly the same as the Stalinist Russia’s” (\textit{The Revolutionist}, 72). In the production, the delivery of the king’s critical remarks through the loudspeaker in the theatre auditorium in some ways cushioned the production from outwardly projecting the king as being against Pridi, an action that could arouse antagonism from the royalist audience.

The third power struggle between Pridi and the royalist faction occurs when Pridi is tainted by the accusation of being a communist. The fear of communism was further depicted in Scene 14, “The Devil,” which was inserted between Pridi’s soliloquy lamenting the defaming of his economic plan, and a scene depicting Mano’s attempt to weaken the People’s Party. By representing the voice of the newly emerged democratic citizen, Mr. Sai Sema, who refers to himself as the “ghost of tomorrow,” this episode metaphorically evokes the zeitgeist of the 1930s. Since the political conflicts in the 1930s are still present in Thai memory, the struggle between

\(^{27}\) This was a part of Pridi’s essay “Uphold the Aim for Full Democracy of the Heroes of 14 October” given to the memorial publication based on the October 14, 1973 incident, which was published by Thammasat University’s alumni in the United Kingdom in 1973.
a common man like Mr. Sai Sema and the royalist group automatically mirrors the struggles of the common people and the military/royalist governments that have been on-going for many decades. “The Devil” is also a reminder of how the right wing has always been successful in manipulating public opinion to accept that supporters of democracy were “communists.”

After a *coup d'état* led by Phibun, Pridi’s ally, Pridi was invited to return from France to join the government as the Minister of Interior. Stigmatized by the communist label, he asked that the parliament set up a committee to investigate his economic restructuring proposal. The result was that Pridi was exonerated by the courts of any charges of communism.

The fourth power struggle is depicted by Pridi’s victory and his reclamation of his dignity. Over the course of the following decade, Pridi implemented many changes in the Thai government. As Minister of Interior, for example, he laid the foundation for the country’s basic administrative law and the municipality system. As Minister of Finance, he started the national bank and began a public finance system. As a regent of King Ananda (King Rama VIII), who was still a child, he was able to perform numerous royal duties on the king’s behalf (Na Pombejara 104).

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28 Pridi stated his views on many issues. Na Pombhejara has given many examples of Pridi’s speech. On political institutions: “I never conceived the idea of establishing a Soviet government in Thailand. I believe in parliamentary democracy which I have a part in establishing in this country. Besides, the fact that I have taken part in the passing of the present electoral law should serve as evidence of my firm belief in parliamentary democracy”. On economic institutions: “I repeat that I never believed in the confiscation of private property. (…) Concerning the problem of employment, […] a law should be passed compelling every member in the work force to have occupation or employment. The same law should require the state to provide vocational education. […] Perhaps my idea is what you may call ‘social welfare service’ which aims at finding occupations and jobs for people who need them” (100–101).
The fifth power struggle is reflected in the friction between Pridi and his former colleague, Phibun. During World War II, Phibun and Pridi disagreed over whether to ally with Japan (Pridi was against it). This led to a split between the pro-Pridi and the pro-military factions within the People’s Party. Consequently, Pridi’s faction had to contend with both the royalists and the military factions. Nevertheless, his leadership in the Free Thai (Seri-Thai) movement proved that he was a patriot willing to sacrifice his life to protect the king and Thailand’s sovereignty, regardless of how he had been previously painted by the conservative rightwing faction. The victory of the Free Thai movement also increased Pridi’s popularity. On March 24, 1946, he was elected Prime Minister. In the play, Pridi states, “I can sense an undercurrent of resentment towards civilian rule coming from the military” (*The Revolutionist*, 88).

The sixth power struggle for Pridi followed the regicide of King Ananda three months later, when anti-Pridi factions seized the opportunity to defame Pridi as having a part in the regicide, forcing him to resign his position as Prime Minister on August 21, 1946. In the play, Pridi reacts to this accusation, “It is a blatant lie! Such a monstrous thought has never even occurred in my mind” (*The Revolutionist* 90). Despite the court ruling that Pridi was innocent, this accusation seriously tarnished Pridi’s image.

The military faction, led by Phibun (who had been vanquished by the Free Thai movement) staged a *coup d’état* against the new government. Pridi’s life was also threatened to the point that his residence, where his wife, Poonsuk, and their children were living, was attacked by armed forces. In the play, the scene representing this historic event was brief, but powerful. All actors used their bodies to represent a motorcade of tanks while briefly narrating the attacks. This was followed
by the seventh power struggle as portrayed in a soliloquy by the Pridi character, set during his escape via boat: “I secretly returned to Thailand on February 26, 1949. The Navy supported me in an attempt to overthrow the military government. A brief battle erupted between the military and our forces. We lost, and I set sail for China” *(The Revolutionist* 91-2).

After Pridi’s failure to stage a counter-coup, a government official announced a warrant to arrest him as a rebel. Pridi remained in exile in China for the next twenty-one years, eventually moving to France in 1970. In the play, Pridi can only observe changes in Thailand from a distant land: “Meanwhile, the Thai political merry-go-around never stood still.” The play portrays this “merry-go-around” of power by having the actors play a traditional Thai children’s game, Ree-Ree-Khao-Sarn (Tossing Rice Grains), in which two persons, grabbing each other’s hands, use their arms to form a barricade that rises up for people to pass underneath. The rest of the players, while chanting the game’s rhyme, move like a train by forming a line that each one needs to “dig” under to pass through. At the end of each round, the barricade goes down to capture one person. In the play, when a player is captured, the actors call out the name of a possible next Prime Minister—Names such as Field Marshal Phibunsongkram, Lieutenant General Thanom Kittikachorn and Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. At the end of the game, all actors continue to shout “Again, again, again…,” reflecting the recurring incident of military royalist governments assuming power (See Fig. 18). This sequence is then followed by a short narrative that shifts the plot from Pridi’s life to the political uprising in 1973:
On October 14, 1973, all roads led to Thammasat University. Powerful cries for freedom, justice, constitutional and parliamentary democracy-rights and principles that were brutally trammeled under the fearsome boots of the military for some twenty years reverberated through all the sectors of the population (96).

A song, “Fight on without Retreating,” serves as the transition from this scene to the next, the fight for democracy on October 6, 1976, with characters from all ages representing the voices of the people. The sequence ends with the following lines,

The Younger: On October 6 [1976], the military rained bullets and destruction on us.

The Elder: It is all passé now.

The Younger: No, it is coming back.

“It is coming back” suggests a haunting cycle of political struggle for democracy in Thailand, which continues to result in bloodshed and coups d’état. The goal of the
People’s Party—to guarantee liberty, equality, and freedom to all—was completely distorted.

As a play, The Revolutionist demonstrates that a revolution might change a political system, but it also needs to produce sets of power relations in order to administer the governmental system as well as to control its citizens. Unfortunately, in the case of the People’s Party’s fight for democracy, the new government, led by a former royalist (Mano), just did not have the same interests as the revolutionaries. Consequently, the breach among the factions that took place only 281 days after the revolution would ultimately lead to an unforeseen political struggle for power lasting decades, leaving the difficult journey to democracy incomplete.

By countering the national meta-narrative, The Revolutionist serves as a counter-narrative by bringing to the audience a greater awareness of historical power struggles within the nation’s various power factions. In addition, the play also called for Thai society to remember the goals of the People’s Party, and to continue to fight for social justice and democracy.

4.5 Buddhist Thought in The Revolutionist

The Revolutionist demonstrates the chain of cause and effect in Thailand’s political history from the revolution in 1932 until the present. This chain of causal relations can be compared to a Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada). The doctrine illustrates how “ignorance” leads to “attachment” which is the main cause that leads to dukkha. To end dukkha, therefore, one needs to end the process that leads to “ignorance” (avijja). Like Brecht, Piscator, Meyerhold, Mehring, and many predecessors, Kamron tries to use theatre as a means of removing “ignorance” from society. In this case, it is the ignorance of history, facts,
truth, and aspiration. By uncovering the power struggles between Pridi and his opposition, Kamron wants his audience to see how someone like Pridi and his faction suffered many injustices. These injustices, such as the false accusations, also stemmed from human ignorance, which led to dukkha that in turn drove Pridi’s enemies to maliciously plot against him. To see Pridi’s life from the Buddhist paradigm means to have compassion for his dukkha.

*The Revolutionist* certainly suggests that one of the reasons why Pridi suffered from such malice was also due to his progressive leadership which embraced socialist-Buddhist philosophy, something close to Buddhadasa’s interpretation of Buddhism and thus unacceptable during his time. Defying the right-wing’s tendency to follow capitalism for their own gains, Buddhadasa believed that dhamma (Buddha’s teachings) was essentially concerned with finding a socialistic balanced living where “all the resources are shared without over-consumption”. He also proposed the idea of a Buddhist socialist democracy composed of Buddha’s dhamma and managed by a virtuous leader. He insisted, “such a system should be revived today. We should not blindly follow a liberal democratic form of government essentially based on self-greed” (*Dhammic Socialism* 99) (italics are mine).

Like Buddhadasa, who was known to be a “revolutionist” of Thai Buddhism, Pridi, a politician, was accused of subverting Thai traditional practices. One significant dhammic socialist thought in the play is Pridi’s proposal of a national economic plan, in which he tried to restructure the economic systems relating to tax, land, and property, based on his belief that economic reforms would lessen the dukkha of the poor.

Another explicit Buddhist concept in the play is the notion of non-violence and non-retribution as a precursor to a peaceful society. In Scene 22, “Bowaradej
Rebels,” Pridi begs Phibun not to kill the failed rebel group because “we are socialists and Buddhists” and declares that “no more blood should be spilled on this land.” He also advises Phibun not to be “consumed by rage and fury” and to “forgive and forget” (*The Revolutionist* 75–76).  

Pridi’s reaction corresponds to the Buddhist doctrine of compassion and *kamma*, which emphasize forgiveness and the avoidance of creating any further negative *kamma*, especially the taking of life.

Another important Buddhist concept is that of impermanence (*anicca*), which is reflected in several scenes in the play. The notion of *anicca* (Pali) (Th. *anij-jung*), one of the three intrinsic characteristics of all things, is a significant Theravada Buddhist teaching. It signifies the impossibility of stasis. In other words, the true nature of all things is that they are always in a state of flux, and that any desire for anything to be permanent causes *dukkha*. This concept is reiterated many times in the

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29 This scene depicts Phibun’s desire to execute those behind the failed Boworadej rebellion, the rightwing group who sought to topple the People’s Party government in 1933.
play to imply that nothing can stop the country from moving forward, despite Pridi’s constant defeats in his power struggles with his opponents.

The play also provides insight into the reasons behind the repeated failures of Pridi’s faction. These failures resulted from obstacles such as the “old residual” (old attitude) from the conservative era, the fear of the unknown (i.e. socialist-liberalists), the insecurities of the royalist faction, the military’s desire for attaining political stability by using force, the ignorance of the people, who easily believe rumors, and his own shortsightedness in not being able to predict the nature of the “old residuals.”

During his twenty years of exile in China, Pridi wrote his most important book, entitled *The Impermanence of Thai Society*, wherein his insight about the “residual power of the old order” is explained as one of obstacles to Thai democracy. Characters like Mae Ploy and Kukrit (the royalist) in the play are examples of unchanged “residuals” who refuse to understand “the law of impermanence” and believe “the old state of affairs is permanent”:

**Ploy:** Sir, Khun Luang…what can I do? […] Sir, I do not understand what is going on.

**Pridi:** Mae Ploy, everything is impermanent. *We cannot arrest changes and time. Had I not changed the country’s political system now, somebody else would do so later anyway.*

**Ploy:** Now that Master Kukrit has invented me, how am I supposed to live in a masterless society filled with common people who deride aristocracy? My whole existence will be thrown in cosmic disorder!

**Kukrit (author of the novel):** Mae Ploy…Mae Ploy…settle down. Trust me, I will never allow these people to prosper and live happily in this kingdom. You will see what I am up to. (*The Revolutionist* 88-90 [emphasis mine])
This “Mae Ploy” scene not only illustrates Pridi’s perception of himself as a selfless vehicle of necessary change, but also portrays Pridi as compassionate toward confused royalists, like Mae Ploy, who long for “permanence.” The notion of impermanence becomes more prominent towards the end of the play, when the future of politics in Thailand seems likely to decline into chaos or anarchy. A narrator says:

Will we head towards chaos and anarchy? or towards eternal bliss?

Time is only in our imagination. Nothing is permanent and immutable. Everything is always in constant flux, in various degrees. Changes are inevitable. [...] The same law of impermanence governs all social organizations and systems. The old system gradually drowns under its own weight, and a new one elevates to take its place. Just like life itself. It is impermanent, just like life itself. (The Revolutionist, 101–102).

No other element in the play better exemplifies this law of impermanence than the life of Pridi himself. At the end of the play, after Pridi is shown to collapse and passes away at his desk. A narration resonates with recollections of how Pridi spent his life selflessly:

A candle light blazing in the dark
Drops of melted was falling down,
This one candle which has
Consumed itself completely
To enlighten the world
Is now flickering…
Struggling until the dark end (The Revolutionist 103).
Because of its Buddhist-content, *The Revolutionist* is more than a Brechtian play that aims to stimulate political and social conscience, it also delivers a Buddhist philosophy. The last passage in the play indicates Kamron’s basic message -- living a life without *attā*, truly holding on to integrity and idealism, and serving others is far more important than a self-serving life. Chetana Nagavajara, a prominent critic, asserted that the production is a “historical drama … without [being] nationalistic, chauvinistic or expansionistic hero worship that is the staple of Thai historical dramas” (*Fervently Mediating* 241). Thus, what this production calls for is not only a contemplation of the life of a Buddhist-revolutionist, but also for audience members to use their cognitive faculty and observe their own conscience and philosophy.

**Conclusion**

By 1987 when *The Revolutionist* was first staged in Thailand, the “Three-Pillars” ideology (i.e. nation, Buddhism, and monarchy) had been implanted by right-wing governments as the core of the country’s cultural hegemony. Thailand also embraced capitalism and became an active player in the world market economy. Operating under this paradigm, nearly all mainstream performances, media presentations, and publications disregarded the significance of the left-wing and the liberalist struggle in the past, relegating the history of the revolution and the People’s War of the 1970s to oblivion. Under such context, Kamron’s staging of *The Revolutionist* was an audacious challenge to the right-wing government.

In terms of content, *The Revolutionist*’s use of Brechtian epic theatre devices produces not only a dichotomy of historical narratives, but also many *gestus* that illustrate the *sakdina* culture as an “old residual” in Thailand’s class-based social relations. It is believed that if an audience is exposed to the social reality of an
oppressive society, it will desire change. Nevertheless, while calling for change, Brechtian plays or theories do not usually involve the issue of how the “change” or the “revolution” should be carried out. As has occurred in many countries, the class-based “revolution” can turn out to be another set of inhumane or violent actions. In *The Revolutionist*, however, Pridi’s actions (during and after the revolution) are portrayed as being based on the principle of non-violence. By emphasizing Pridi’s firm belief in the rule of doctrine of compassion and impermanence, the play and the production model a revolutionary goal based on humanistic values.

While Brecht uses epic theatre aesthetics which aim to distance the audience from representational acting that emphasizes emotional responses over critical thinking, Kamron uses the Buddhist sense of aesthetics to distance the audience through the *chit-wang* effect which urges the audience to see the *dhamma* (teachings of Buddha) explicitly and implicitly hidden in the play’s text as well as in the performance. While *epic theatre* can be observed in the plot, structure, and the presentational devices, the Buddhist aesthetics of the *chit-wang* effect can also be observed through similar performance elements emphasizing the minimalistic presentational style that utilizes the *mise-en-scène*, the text, third-person presentational acting, and identity-less actors. In the performance the Buddhist doctrine of Three Characteristics (*tilakkhana*) -- impermanence (*anicca*), state of anguish or suffering (*dukkha*), and void-ness of self (or reality *anattā*) which -- are presented through live visual and auditory expressions. Performed at Thammasat University, which was founded by Pridi Banomyong himself, *The Revolutionist* offered a Buddhist-Brechtian theatre that alienated the Thai audience from its controlling hegemony, infusing a sense of causal relations into historical events that were still very relevant to the current political situation.
CHAPTER 5
Kamron Gunatilaka’s Theatrical Experimentation with the CMTG in 1990s

Two years after Kamron’s return to Thailand, a general election held in 1988 resulted in a civilian government led by Prime Minister Chatchai Choonhavan (1988–1991). For the first time since October 6, 1976, the government aimed to shift the controlling power from the bureaucracy and military to the cabinet, and expanded the economic and business sectors. In keeping with the post-cold war era’s economic boom, Chatchai appointed a cabinet comprised primarily of former businessmen, who were elected politicians rather than former military officers, and set out to reduce the military budget while demanding more transparency in arms purchases (Baker and Phongpaichit 241). The Chatchai government became well-known for its fiscal policies and their boost to economic growth, and many infrastructure-related projects were created, including improvements to roads, ports, and telecommunications. It was within the context of telecommunications development that Kamron found himself useful to the Chatchai government. After the successful premiere of The Revolutionist in 1987, Kamron did not receive commissions to do any more theatre productions for many years. In 1988, he and his wife, Orapin Dararat, founded a media production company known as Communication System Company, which focused mainly on producing documentary work. Kamron was a friend of PM Chatchai’s son, Kraisak Choonhawan, who had been a prominent social and political activist in the 1970s. Kraisak recruited Kamron to be a part of his
father’s media consultant team. This shift from theatre to mass media would become an important aspect of Kamron’s professional life, and he has continued to work in this area until the present day.

Becoming a supporter of the government rather than a protestor against it, of course, altered Kamron’s political position. Kamron and his colleagues were able to elevate the role of the media team to help facilitate meetings and negotiations between the government and NGOs, write speeches for the prime minister, craft government press releases, refine the requirements for government grant proposals, and advocate and win support for his company’s weekly documentary program (Phone Interview. Dec. 24, 2008). Kamron stressed that, unlike previous governments, the Chatchai administration allowed the media consultant team to recommend policies clearly intended to benefit the masses (ibid). Kamron was especially pleased with his advocacy for the legislation of Thailand’s first Social Security Act.

In addition to assignments from the government, Kamron’s media company also produced a number of independent short film projects. Kamron’s first short film, Sam-rueng, was based on the true story of a young laborer from the poor northeastern part of Thailand, who was exploited and tortured to death by his boss. Sam-rueng won the Danube Award from UNICEF in 1990. Aside from producing independent projects, Communication System produced a well-known weekly television documentary program, Thursday’s Travel (Paruhat sunjorn), which was broadcast from 1989 to 1991. According to Kamron, Thursday’s Travel was a one-of-a-kind series with a hidden political agenda. It was financially supported by a few private businesses that were supportive of the Chatchai government. The program focused on sociopolitical and cultural issues that might encourage political awareness in the
audience. It covered a wide range of topics, such as a theatre festival of the *Ramayana* in Asia, the biography of former leftist activist Chit Phumisak, historical events, and problems faced by farmers (ibid).

The brief tenure of the Chatchai government not only opened doors of financial and political support for Kamron to work as an independent filmmaker, they also constituted the only period in which Kamron was able to play a crucial role as a close associate to the head of the government. The Chatchai government was ended by a *coup d'état*, the military leader of which appointed himself prime minister, prompting a mass protest that ended with the coup government’s armed attack on civilians in May of 1992. The incident became known as “Bloody May 1992.”

Over the following four years, Thailand held three general elections that produced three prime ministers from different political parties. Despite government instability, all of the elected prime ministers were from civilian-based parties and took a relatively

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1 Coup leader General Suchinda abolished the 1978 constitution, dissolved the parliament, and charged the Chatchai-elected government with corruption and vote-buying. Later, when the general claimed the PM position for himself, there were large-scale protests for almost a month to expel him. On May 17, 1992, the uprising culminated in a confrontation with the Suchinda government’s tanks and soldiers, who opened fire at the protesters. The violence went on for three nights, resulting in the official number of 40–60 deaths (Baker and Phongpaichit 245). This incident became known as “Bloody May 1992.” Finally, the king summoned both the leaders of the protesters and the PM to the palace and ordered an end to the violence and chaos, which resulted in PM Suchinda’s resignation. As with previous violence committed by the Thai state against its people, no criminal charges or punishments were pursued. A pardon was given to all who were involved.

2 While elections were held, the government remained unstable. Between 1992 and 1997, three different PMs won office through election. One lost his office through a vote of no confidence (Chuan Leekpai of the Democrat Party), one collapsed under the weight of corruption scandals (Banham Silapa-archa of the Chat Thai Party), and one was undone by the financial crisis (Chavalit Yongchaiyudh of the New Aspiration Party). In less than two years (1996–1997) the latter two PMs resigned.
liberal approach to governing, allowing more freedom of the press and other media than many of their predecessors. During this time, Kamron acted in one theatre production, a Thai-language version of Eugene Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*, produced by Theatre 28 in 1994. In June, 1995, *The Revolutionist* was restaged at the opening of the Pridi Banomyong Institute for two performances, and two additional performances were given in July at the Saeng Arun Cultural Center (SACC). The SACC performances brought Kamron to the attention of the SACC committee members, especially Rassamee Paoluengthong, SACC’s director. Rassamee knew Kamron from the 1970s student movement, and was also interested in supporting non-mainstream works of art.³

5.1 The Sociopolitical Context of the 1990s and the Resurgence of the CMTG

5.1.1 The Saeng Aroon (Light of Dawn) Arts Center Foundation

Saeng Arun Art Center (SACC) was founded in 1986 by a group of philanthropists who had been student activists in the 1970s. It was part of the privately funded Saeng Arun Foundation, which aimed to promote cultural and educational activities relating to social and cultural issues. While there were occasional modern theatre productions by various commercial theatre companies, there was no permanent, private, full-time professional theatre company until Kamron approached the SACC with his proposal for a professional modern theatre troupe. After Kamron presented *The Revolutionist* in 1995 at SACC, he took the opportunity to discuss the possibility of starting a collaborative project between the

³ Rassamee Paoluengthong was the director of the Sang Arun Art Center from 1994 to 1995. She had previously served as director and cofounder of Theatre 28, a group that produced translated contemporary Western plays in translation from 1975 into the 1990s. Kamron acted in her 1994 production of Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*. 
SACC and the CMTG with the director of the SACC, Rassamee Paoluengthong. The new generation of the Crescent Moon Theatre grew out of a series of theatre workshops organized by Rassamee, who was also a prominent figure in the modern theatre of Thailand.

In his proposal to the SACC committee, Kamron explained the need for the CMTG to have a rehearsal and performance space that would allow the ensemble to operate year-round with salaried performers and staff members. This was Thailand’s first professionally managed and permanently housed theatre group since the collapse of the commercial private theatres in the 1950s. Never in the history of Thai modern theatre had any private theatre group been able to pay a monthly salary to its actors. Although there were a few other modern theatre groups, such as DASS Entertainment, and Pattravadi Theatre Company, none of them hired a company of actors as permanent staff and operated their theatres full time and all year round. Unfortunately, Kamron’s hope for a long-term professional theatre company was thwarted by the Asian economic crisis of 1996–1997.

Nevertheless, 1995–1996 marked the most productive time in Kamron’s career as a professional theatre director, in part because Thailand was not under a coup government. During this time, the CMTG produced six major productions, three of which were directed by Kamron: My Name is Phan (Goo Chue Phaya Phan; abbrv. MNP), A Mid Winter’s Dream (Kwam Fan Glang Duen Nao), and Madam Mao’s Memories (Madam Mao), a solo performance. When Kamron shifted his role to that of artistic consultant, Nimit Piphitkul directed three other productions: High Shore, Heavy Log (Taling Soong Sung Nak), The Lighthouse (Grajome Fai), both

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4 See details about the plays in the Appendix.
solo performances, and *Prince Malethaytai (Phra Malethaytai)*. Before long, though, the economic crisis forced SACC to close, cutting short the hopeful beginning of the new CMTG.

### 5.1.2 CMTG’s Mission, Goals, and Practices

On November 8, 1995, three months after the *The Revolutionist*, Kamron and six young actors held a meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing a permanent theatre group. In this meeting, Kamron stated:

> Although there has been “horizontal progress” in the use of theatre to produce human resources for industries such as cinema, television, and advertising, modern theatre in Thailand has not progressed vertically [or artistically]. Although we have independent theatre groups like Makhampom and Maya, they are all loose groups that use theatre for educational purposes, and they have not implemented continuous staff training and development in their programs. Directors, too, have been unable to develop their skills. [. . .] As none of the theatre practitioners has a permanent theatre to work in, it is virtually impossible for any serious theatre practitioner to successfully develop. The lack of rehearsal space has been a problem for more than fifteen years now, and the size of the audiences is decreasing rapidly. We were not able to mount a continuous run of *The Revolutionist* because most of our actors were undergraduate students who could not afford the time and commitment to perform continuously. Therefore, we endeavor to create a new way of running theatre as a profession in this society, a permanent theatre, with paid staff. It will no longer be something embarrassing to hold a “job” in the theatre (CMTG Meeting Report No. 1, 1995; Translated by Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn).
While others expressed their feelings—confidence, reluctance, excitement, and agreement—about the idea of forming a permanent group, Kamron continued to explain his theatre idealism as follows:

We will make theatre not just to imitate social behaviors, but to try to go back to being humans. What makes us different from other groups is that we aim to develop the renewed humanity in all of us. We are going back to find human consciousness, with Buddhism a part of our exploration. Our theatre’s priority will not be to arouse human emotions because humans do not think rationally when they are emotional. In order to achieve our goals, we must develop practices that will help us to know and understand ourselves first. We must come to know different dimensions of who we are. In Brechtian theatre, the performers need to do research about the problems that the play is dealing with. They need to encounter those problems in real situations in order to truly comprehend them, and only then can they create the script based on what they understand. They present these problems through theatre while the audience themselves do not have to encounter these problems first-hand. Our theatre must not be boring; it must be an exciting space for communication between the actors and the audience.

(ibid).

The meeting concluded with a decision to continue using the name CMTG, and with a proclamation of the following goals:

1) To build a permanent theatre group consisting of a very well-trained production team and actors who can perform under the demands of different styles. After the first year, the initial members will start their own group and continue to conduct training for, as well as form, other groups.

2) To use theatre as a medium that directly addresses current problems in Thai society.
3) To instill group members with knowledge of theatre philosophy, and with good character, by applying Buddhist philosophy, consciousness and simplicity.

4) To defy globalization though critical thinking and critical decision making (ibid).

After the initial meeting, new members were recruited from workshops that Kamron had given at the SACC, and the group was finally formed with 12 permanent members, all of whom would be trained by Kamron with an eye toward realizing their potential in physical expression. In addition to production, all members were also responsible for the maintenance and development of the company. This ranged from managerial and public relations tasks, to finding private-sector sponsors, to marketing. The plan for their inaugural season (1996) was to produce four original productions: *My Name is Phaya Phan* (*Goo chue Phaya Phan*), *Time* (*Wela*), *A Mid Winter’s Dream* (*Kwam Fan Glang Duen Nao*), and *Vagina* (*Chong kloed*). In a small theatre that seated 150 people, they estimated that if only 60 percent of the tickets were sold, and with some financial support from arts-friendly private companies, they would be able to survive (CMTG’s Meeting Summary, Nov. 22, 1995).

In addition to forming a permanent theatre company, Kamron also envisioned the group to take a leadership role in the formation of the first Federation of Independent Theatre Art (FISTA), which would function as a center of support for the development of the modern theatre in Thailand. However, by the beginning of February 1996, the planned scope of the federation was reduced, and re-envisioned as the Theatre Community (Chumchon Khon Lakhon) project. The Theatre Community

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5 In 1996, they were selling tickets at 200–250 Baht ($8–10) per ticket.
was supposed to serve as a platform for theatre enthusiasts, especially university
students, to propose projects and exchange knowledge and experiences. It was to rely
mostly on the work of volunteers, facilitated by the members of the CMTG. The
group hoped that the Theatre Community, which added to the scope of their work,
would be able to hold theatre-related activities twice a month with the following
objectives:

1) To serve as a center of theatre-related information.

2) To create a community space for its members to hold activities related to
literature, music, dance, and visual art, leading to theatre development. There
needs to be consensus among the members about decision making relating to
the community’s activities.

3) To be a center for educational exchange between practitioners, audiences,
and specialists. The educational activities will lead to the archiving of
knowledge and experiences via prints and multi-media.

4) To provide a space for the members to practice their theatre craft and
develop their skills. This provides an opportunity for collaboration with
other organizations. The SACC and CMTG will be in charge of the
operation possibilities.

5) To promote a positive attitude toward the art of theatre by advocating the
value of theatre as a tool for deeper understanding of self and others.

(CMTG’s primary document).

Although the CMTG had aimed to host many activities for the Theatre
Community in accordance with these objectives, it proved practically impossible for
the Theatre Company to achieve its overly ambitious objectives while the CMTG
was itself struggling to survive rehearsals for its first major theatre production,
participating in various theatre workshops, and touring *The Revolution* to various
locations. The young group was able to organize only one event: a February 14, 1996 performance by a group of university students. The time and effort required to organize this first Theatre Community event not only made the CMTG aware of their own lack of capacity to arrange bi-monthly events as planned, it also impacted the length of time spent developing their first theatre production.

Kamron’s efforts to empower new CMTG members by allowing inexperienced and experienced members to make decisions as a team caused many problems. In allotting only three months for script development and rehearsal, it was obvious that Kamron had greatly miscalculated the time needed for the creation of the season’s first original production. In reality, the group was not able to handle all of the work with such a tight schedule, particularly with the overwhelming number of additional duties and activities assigned to them. Indeed, the preparation of My Name Is Phaya Phan occupied six months of their time, affecting the production schedule for the rest of the season and negatively impacting the entire financial structure and revenue stream required for the survival of the group.  

It is not surprising that the difficulties caused by both financial constraints and the miscalculation of the group’s capacities resulted in the cancellation of two major productions (Time and Vagina), which were replaced by three lower-cost solo performances. By the time these solo performances were in rehearsal, Kamron had already discovered that the CMTG’s debts had increased.

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6 Although Kamron had initially advanced his own personal funds to pay the staff’s salaries, the combination of low ticket sales and a lack of financial sponsorship from the business sector (due to the emerging economic crisis in Thailand) eventually changed both the administrative and production directions of the company.

7 High Bank, Heavy Log (Taling Soong Sung Nak), The Lighthouse (Grajome Fai), and Prince Malethaytai (Phra Malethaytai).
After Kamron’s wife passed away in 1996, while he was directing *Madame Mao’s Memories*, Kamron left the CMTG in order to take care of his son. The SACC itself had to confront severe fallout from Thailand’s financial crisis, ultimately ceasing their activities in 1997 after mounting the CMTG’s final production. Thailand’s first full-time contemporary theatre company, which lasted for just over a year, has remained the only theatre company of its kind till the present day (2010).

Nevertheless, two out of the three productions that Kamron directed in this short period earned a prominent place in the history of modern theatre in Thailand. In 1996, Kamron directed two major productions: *My Name is Phaya Phan* (1996) and *A Mid Winter’s Dream* (1996), and one smaller-scale solo performance, *Madam Mao’s Memories* (1996), all of which reflected his anti-elite aesthetics. Of these three productions, the first two were original plays; *Madam Mao’s Memories* was an English-language play by Los Angeles-based playwright Henry Ong, which was translated into Thai. As *Madame Mao’s Memories* does not represent Kamron’s typical work as a director, and especially because it was directed primarily by his assistant director (Nimit) while Kamron attended to family matters, it is outside the realm of this dissertation. Therefore, this chapter will focus on *My Name is Phaya Phan*, and I will analyze *A Mid Winter’s Dream* in Chapter 6 as there was apparently no substantive difference between the 1996 production and its remounting in 2006, and because I observed the whole production process and production in person during 2006.

### 5.2 *My Name is Phaya Phan: Aesthetics of Buddhist-Artaudian Theatre*
For his first production since the success of *The Revolutionist* eight years earlier, Kamron wanted to create a semi-Artaudian, semi-Buddhist ritualistic production that explored the ancient myth of Siam via fictional, primitive gestural and verbal languages. He began without a script, believing that his workshop approach would eventually lead to a written script rooted in physical action. The process of creating *My Name is Phaya Phan* (*MNP*) therefore involved the organization of an actor training workshop, group improvisation, script writing, and rehearsal. Although *MNP* shared plot elements with Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*, it included a poetic text, theme, and cultural representations that were drastically different from the Greek myth. Nevertheless, *MNP* can be considered an adaptation of both *Oedipus the King* and the Siamese folk tale *Phaya Gong-Phaya Phan*.

As with *The Revolutionist*, Kamron used this production to contest the *sakdina* cultural system, but in *MNP* he also applied a certain degree of Artaudian metaphysical theatre concepts as a means to break out of Thailand’s conventional forms of theatre presentation. Unlike Bertolt Brecht, who advocated political change...
by means of a provoked, rational conscience, Antonin Artaud advocated a drastic change in the archetypal consciousness of humankind. In “The Theatre and the Plague” (which is a part of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty), Artaud rejects the modern humanistic theatre that emphasizes logic and reason, instead he envisions the kind of theatre that presents the “conflicts, struggles, disorders” (what he often refers to as “plague”) by means of irrational, spontaneous, mythical mise en scène that aims to purge what he perceives as “repressed consciousness” in the audience in order that the audience will arrive at a purified state of consciousness (Theatre and Its Double 25-6). To create such theatre, Artaud asserts that everything in the mise en scène (e.g. language, gestures, attitudes, sets, and music) needs to be in the “extreme poetic mode” (45-6). Kamron’s decision to base the production in a primordial Siam and to have a poetic stylization reflects the Artaudian influence.

In addition, by presenting an imagined primordial world using an “uncivilized” modes of theatre production (e.g. costumes, masks, language, movement), Kamron purposely wanted to create a counter-hegemonic perspective of Thai bourgeois theatre (both traditional court theatre and Western text-based theatre), which had been mostly dominated by the state’s agencies as discussed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, his foremost goal remained as to provoke a mystical, or even spiritual, experience in the audience, rather than following the Brechtian epic theatre ideals.

Drawing from the theatre ideas of Antonin Artaud and Wolfram Mehring, as well as Buddhist philosophy, I argue that Kamron’s production of MNP is an important example of Kamron’s innovations that not only advocate “anti-official” or “anti-sakdina” theatre, but also present an archetype of an enlightened hero in Thailand through the style that Kamron had called “ritualistic theatre.”

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8 See background on Antonin Artaud in Chapter 1.
5.2.1 Actor’s Training: Body as a Vehicle for Consciousness

In any attempt to avoid the traditional theatre styles of the bourgeois class, the question of what style of physical presentation to use in a production becomes especially important. Since the story of Phaya Gong - Phaya Phan is very well-known in Thailand, and has been performed in the popular traditional theatre such as likay, Kamron faced a challenge of how much of the “Thai” style of dance movement should be utilized, if at all. In the Thai traditional theatre (both the court and the popular genres), Thai classical dance form takes the dominant performance mode where the traditional Thai classical dance training (used as a basic foundation in all the traditional genres) has strictly followed the standardization of the government’s Fine Arts Department. Kamron decided to avoid using the heavily coded dance gestures and movements from any of the Thai traditional theatre styles since he perceived that “the aesthetics of most of the traditional folk performances including the ritual-based performances [in Thailand] have pretty much been destroyed by the court theatre imposed standardization [on the “lower class” performances]. But even the aesthetics of the court theatre itself has been destroyed by capitalism and consumerism” (PI. August 12, 2003). Moreover, Kamron aspired to use the opportunity of MNP, being the first production of the new generation of the CMTG, to plant what he felt as the most important foundation for his ensemble, that is, the physical theatre foundation and the skills of how to create an original production. Therefore, constructing physical and verbal theatre conventions based on both the imagined and the evidential, primordial culture of pre-Siam became the inspiration

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9 Kamron was not against the Thai dance theatre training or theatre forms themselves, but he was more against what the traditional forms were being represented in terms of their relations to the state’s ideology and state’s imposed cultural codes.
for, and the essence of, the script/production-creation process of MNP. Since Kamron always places the emphasis of his theatre on the actor more than any other aspects, his initial goal was to make actor training an important prerequisite to the creation of this production.

By introducing the actors to several resources on theatre theory and practice—especially Eugenio Barba’s Theatre Anthropology, Antonin Artaud’s The Theatre and Its Double, and Jerzy Grotowski’s Towards a Poor Theatre—as well as by providing them with Mehring-derived physical and spiritual training, Kamron believed that he could create a system that would release his actors from their physical habits and allow them to inhabit “neutralized bodies” free of self-consciousness and physical and psychological blockage. The actors would thus achieve a “body expression” with economy of movement, vigorous energy, clarity of gesture, and ritualistic feeling.

Kamron’s strategies involved an extensive and eclectic selection of physical exercises derived from Mehring’s Body Expression, Grotowski’s via negativa, and Barba’s principles of movement and extra-daily expression, although it does not appear that Kamron strictly followed any particular method. Sineenadh Keitprapai, a cast member of MNP, explains that the main goal of the physical exercises assigned by Kamron was to discover a “neutral” body, mind, and consciousness that could be used kinesthetically on stage (PI, Dec. 4, 2005). She remembers that Kamron emphasized the grounded-ness of the feet, where balance, opposing forces, and energy can be created. Although this part of the training echoes Suzuki Tadashi’s training method, such similarities fade upon closer examination. Soontorn Meesri, another cast member, recalls that Kamron intentionally planted the “roots” of physical theatre with a sense of Buddhist spirituality as an important component of
the training by “emphasizing from the beginning of the training the relationships between breathing and physical expression, breathing and vocal expression, and balancing the between the cognitive aspect and the spiritual aspect of our being through breathing and movement” (PL. February 2, 2006). Suntorn thinks that the training has given him and other cast members an empirical experience of the subtle “transformation” in their awareness of body and mind, making the case become more fully aware of their own “beings” (ibid).

To find the “neutral” body capable of such risks involved an extensive physical training wherein certain exercises and techniques were found to share characteristics with Grotowski’s *via negativa*, which aims to release the actors from personal habits, resistances, and inhibitions. Other exercises found in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, adopted by Kamron’s actor’s training are such as the Hatha-yoga poses (e.g., The Cats, Saluting the Sun, head-stand, shoulder-stand, etc.), and vocal exercises that allow the actor to recognize different places for sound resonators in the body (e.g. head, mouth, occipital, chest, and belly). Once the actors are free from personal habits and inhibitions, Kamron’s next step is to guide the actors to find their own dynamic of Body Expression, - a reminiscent of Mehring’s method which seeks to find “life’s pulsation from the body experience, not from the written text” (Kamron. PL. December 15, 2005). In my view, Body Expression seems to originate from a concept parallel to Barba’s “pre-expressivity” (i.e., neutral physicalization without cultural codes). Mehring’s goal is for an actor to find a natural “pulsation” that will engage the actor in using his whole physical body in the most dynamic ways. For Kamron, it means to have an alert mind and body that can make every single body expression seems like the experience has happened for the first time; and that it should be imbued with vibration and sensuality of the experience itself. He
often uses an exercise that requires gradual exploration of the dynamic interaction between the actor’s body and the surrounding space. In one of his exercises, “contact,” an actor uses her eyes as the beginning point of contact by looking at something (e.g. a flower) that causes a certain pulsation of sensation in her body; after becoming aware of the sensation, she allows her body and voice to react to that pulsation (e.g. moving toward the flower, and having a physical and vocal reaction to the flower). What follow are series of exercises that explore the “pulsations” created from various different “contacts” (i.e. visual, auditory, or physical). The goal is to teach the actor to observe her own mind, and to observe how her body moves with a “dynamism” imbued with concentrated energy and dimensions. The ability to express this “dynamism” physically and also vocally seems to have been the core of Kamron’s Body Expression training, as Sineenadh Keitprapai recalls:

In dynamism, there are always two conflicting forces that often want to go in the opposite directions. For example, if my eyes and chest want to go forward, my legs and arms might want to go backward. In addition, we use our eye-contact to help create this dynamism in an individual actor, as well as in groups. After we made an eye-contact with someone or something, we allow a sensation to arise in our body before we express the dynamism. We experiment a lot using different points in our body to create the conflicting forces (PI, Dec. 2005).

Teerawat Mulvilai, a cast member in *MNP*, elaborates on the concept of “dynamism” as it applies to the audience:

The workshop in 1996 helped me to understand the essence of physical theatre, especially with the idea of “dynamism,” which refers to not only dynamism within the ensemble and the individual movement and vocalization, but it also to the dynamism that influences the audience when
they witness the clash of different “forces” [physical and verbal] by the characters on stage (PI, December 4, 2005).

In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Barba’s trans-cultural analysis of many forms of Eastern performance reveals what he calls the “pre-expressive” stage, which prefigures the *extra-daily* (stylized and codified gesture or movement) stage. Barba writes that the first step in discovering the principles of stylized movement is understanding that patterns of physical behavior derived from daily activities [*pre-expressivity*] can be replaced by *extra-daily* techniques, invented techniques which override the habitual conditioning of the body (Barba and Savarese 9).10 In the workshop for *MNP*, Kamron had the actors create many abstract, free-form movements that could be related to both Mehring’s Body Expression and Barba’s pre-expressivity. Barba also offers examples of how different actors in different forms of Eastern theatre are physically trained and then analyzes the principles shared by these forms, including *jingju*, *kabuki*, *noh*, *kathakali*, Thai classical dance and Balinese dance. He elucidates the concept of the extra-daily technique shared by these forms in the following words:

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10 According to Barba, a transcultural analysis of performance reveals that the performer’s work is “the result of the fusion of three aspects which reflect three different levels of organization:

1) The performers’ personalities, *their* sensibilities, *their* artistic intelligence, *their* social personae: those characteristics which make them unique and once-only.

2) The particularities of the traditions and socio-historical contexts through which the once-only personality of a performer is manifest.

3) The use of physiology according to extra-daily body techniques. The recurrent and transcultural principles on which these techniques are based are defined by TA as the field of pre-expressivity.

The first aspect is individual. The second is common to those who belong to the same performance genre. Only the third concerns all performers from every era and culture: it can be called the performance’s ‘biological’ level” (ibid, Foreword).
The performer’s *extra-daily* technique, that is, *presence*, derives from an *alteration of balance* and *basic posture*, from the play of *opposing tensions* which dilate the body’s *dynamics*. The body is rebuilt for the scenic fiction. This ‘art body’ - and therefore, ‘unnatural body’ is neither male nor female. At the *pre-expressive* level, sex is of little import. Typical male energy and typical female energy do not exist. There exists only an energy specific to a given individual. The performer’s task is to discover the individual propensities of his or her energy and to protect its potentialities, its uniqueness (ibid 81, italics mine.)

By using Body Expression to explore the “pre-expressive” stage of behavior, Kamron’s major goal for the acting style of *MNP* was to arrive at the *extra-daily* stage where an organic style of acting would emerge.

Through out the whole process of actor’s training, Kamron paid great attention to the actors’ ability to express the “dynamism” with a sense of what he called “ritual,” wherein each motion was connected to the vibrations of breath and energy, carrying a progression from beginning to middle to end with varying tempo and weight. Although in anthropology and social sciences the word “ritual” is often associated with sacred activities such as those practiced in rites or in religious practices (where ritual forms are performed as gateway to the super natural world, and to integrate individuals into the communities), Kamron’s usage of the word connotes a different meaning. From my observation of Kamron’s actor’s training workshops (2006), the term “ritual” was used to refer not only to a cyclic pattern of a behavior that confers a meditative flow of concentration and energy, but was also aimed to transport the audience to a quasi-sacred space and time existing between the actors and the audience, - a different realm of consciousness than the mundane reality. In my observation, this ritualistic, meditative pattern of behavior or
movement when conducted with great dynamism can bring a unique sense of aesthetics, -a Buddhist notion of alert stillness or vibrated tranquility, a notion that I have learned as a practicing Buddhist myself.

In an article “Self and Body in Theravada Buddhism,” Wimal Dissanayake points out that in Buddhism there is no separation between the concept of self and body, he states, “the belief that there is an unchanging and stable self is totally fallacious and misleading” and that Buddha avoided the separation of the human being into mind and matter because “the human being is a psychophysical entity (nāmarūpa)” (123-4). By examining The Dhammapada (the most popular poem in Theravada Buddhist culture, in which dense images of both physical motions of travelers and spiritual liberation were described), Dissanayake illustrates how the two “root metaphors” of “motion and tranquility” run as the essential message through out the poem. Dissanayake also relates the theme of “motion and tranquility” to the Buddhist concept of “body and mind [chit or consciousness]”(140). He states, “The Dhammapada repeatedly points out that the body needs to be controlled as a way of achieving salvation [of the mind]. So, it [the body] becomes a challenge, -an object of contemplation and conquest” (142) (my comments in brackets).

Drawing on the Buddhist concept of body (or its movement) as the location of spiritual contemplation (or chit’s achieving tranquility), Kamron’s aim of using the ritualistic movement as a path for the actor’s contemplation serves both as a Buddhist meditational practice as well as an aesthetic expression. In one of his exercises, called “Seaweed Flowing”, actors were required to keep both their feet on the floor; when they heard a “clapping” sound, they needed to move as though their hips were pulled towards that sound, while the rest of their bodies first moved
in the opposite direction, but eventually flowed fluidly in reaction to the tension until all parts of the body became still again. As they were enacting this “seaweed” movement in a slow motion, they needed to integrate the rhythm of their breath, inhaling to start the motion and then gradually exhaling until the movement stopped. To me, as an audience watching the “seaweed flowing” movement was an experience close to watching a Japanese butoh where meditative energy can sometimes transport the audience to what seems to resemble a different realm of consciousness.

In another exercise, Kamron asked his actors to go out to the garden to touch some leaves. He told the actors to intuitively feel the leaves on a tree without using conceptualization. When they returned, he wanted them to remember their intuitive understanding of the leaves, an experience he believed that words could not adequately describe. The exercise was to teach the actor to be mindful of body sensation and how it affects one’s thoughts and emotions. Kamron believes in the human body as a mystic entity where sensation, emotion, feeling, and spiritual realization intersect, as he iterates:

An actor always starts his acting with his eye or physical contact that catalyzes “sensation” in the mind, which in turn responds with a certain reaction to this “contact.” This reaction can lead to a deeper emotional response as well as physical movement. It is when the actor achieves an understanding of this reaction by taking a mental distance from it that s/he can arrive at a certain level of spiritual enlightenment (PI. July 29, 2007).

In reality, however, an actor cannot fully maintain this high state of consciousness at all times; the best s/he can aspire to is to maintain the ritualistic aspect of Body
Expression which would help him or her stay in deep concentration (Kamron. PI. Dec. 15, 2005). In this process, Kamron stresses that the progression of each ritualized movement from beginning, to middle to end, turns an empty space into a sanctified performance space where an actor operates with an awareness of its boundaries. For example, in one Body Expression exercise, an actor walked up to the performance area to pick up a baton, which was pre-set on the stage, and then entered the stage while creating a free-form movement combining breath, gesture, concentration, intention, and rhythm; after he finished, he placed the baton down and exited the stage in his normal manner. Kamron comments:

this is about the ability to step in and out of the character. […] It is important that an actor turn each movement into a ritualized one by taking his time to do it, with a high degree of concentration and clarity. He must make clear in his physical action “where” the performance starts and “where” it ends. Then he must be able to step out of the character and be himself again after the ritual is completed (PI July 29, 2007).

The ability to use the body as a vehicle to ritualistic acting is Kamron’s ultimate goal for the production of MNP.

Once the actor’s body was trained to have the dynamism of the ritualistic quality, the next stage in the MNP production process was scriptwriting and the search for the extra-daily acting style.

5.2.2 Scriptwriting as a Communal Process

After gathering information about prehistoric tribes by searching for information from library resources, visiting archaeological sites, including the museum of archeological artifacts, the actors brainstormed for ideas and then
democratically made choices about the fictional world of the play, including the lifestyle, belief system, social structure, culture, and language (Sineenadh Keitrapai. PL. Dec. 4, 2005). As a result, the world of MNP, as it appeared in the production which I attended, is built around two fictional Neolithic tribes, one from the plateau (Phaya Phan’s Phao Din tribe) and one from the high mountain (Phaya Gong’s Phao Phuphalad tribe). The simple fictional names of the tribes do not resemble any of the names in the original tale. The word “Phao Din” which means “the tribe of the ground/soil” holds an opposite image from “Phao Phuphalad” which means “the tribe of the high-sloped mountains.” The word “Din (trans. ground, earth)” in Thailand has also been used to signify the commoners when compared to “Phupha(trans. Mountain)” or “Fa (tran. Sky)” which signifies the upper-class. Both tribes are agrarian societies that know how to make tools, accessories and weapons (e.g., spears, shafts, sticks, sword, and arrows) from metal, animal parts and wickerwork. Soldiers and high-ranking shamans wear tall, decorated wicker masks. Their political system is based on the rule of chiefs who earn their positions via the conquest of other tribes’ resources and land. The highest social rank after the chiefs, who are called Phaya (lord), are the chief’s wives, hunters, and warriors; these all rely on the guidance of the elder shamans, who conduct prophecy and ritual offerings. To protect them from disasters and to assure crop fertility, the Phuphalad tribe worship gods, whereas the Pao Din tribe worship ghosts and ancestral spirits. Via shamans (named Ai An Fah and Lua Ta Pi), both tribes hold ritual offering ceremonies for weddings, births, deaths, farming, hunting, and wars. The languages of the two tribes are similar enough that they can understand each other.

Unlike the language in The Revolutionist, which was mostly taken from historical sources, the linguistic style and vocabulary of MNP were invented by the
ensemble. This invented language shifted the linguistic base from standard Thai to an invented tribal and quasi-Thai-Laotian language. In their search for a style of tribal language that could elevate the story from a simple Siamese folktale narrative to a script with poetic verses, Kamron and the cast studied the roots of Thai and Laotian words, and in order to understand how to create dramatic imageries, the cast studied Greek and Shakespearean verses (Kamron, PI, Nov. 26, 2005). One goal for the invented tribal language was that it included poetic images that would reinforce the impression of a primordial culture. Consequently, they had to invent some new words to fit in the style of blank verses. These invented words were taken from simple, raw, archaic-sounding Thai or Laotian words which were turned into new meanings. For example, lek khom (เหล็กคม) (lit. trans. sharp iron) means “sword,” and reet (รีต) (no lit. trans, rooted from ja-reet (จารีต)trans. custom) means “custom.” New words were also created specifically for the play. Tueng (เถิง)(archaic trans.enthroned), for example, has two meanings: “chief” and “celebrate;” suek (เศิก)(archaic trans. fighting as in wars) means “enemy;” tasai (ตาใส)(trans. innocent eyes) means “child;” and sendao (เส้นดาว)(trans. path of star) means “astrology.” The simple construction of blank verse is not lengthy but filled with poetic and metaphoric imageries. For example, in the celebration scene depicting Phaya Phan’s conquest of Phao Phuphalad, the chorus made up of the women of the defeated repeatedly chanted and danced along the two verses in unison, “tueng suk - tuk clai (เถิง สุข - ทุกข์ คลาย)(enthroned the happy – ended the suffering);” “suek rai - tai long (เศิก ร้าย - ตาย ลง)(vile enemy – died defeated). In other scenes, long speeches were composed by randomly rhymed verses, with each verse made up of four to six tonal-
specific words. For example, after the celebration scene, the chorus mocked Phaya Phan as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai text</th>
<th>Translation (by me)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yum-teen hai gug-gong tued phu-chana</td>
<td>Stomping on your feet, the winners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>เย็ดตีนให้กึกก้องเด็ดผู้ชนะ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yieb pai bon sop phu-phai</td>
<td>Stepping on the corpses of the defeated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>เหยียบไปบนAPTERผู้พ่าย</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya wan gob-auo sin-Sadom</td>
<td>Don’t be reluctant…take their treasures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>อย่าหวั่น กอบเอาสินสมก</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya prun…atta tueb-yai tem-fa</td>
<td>Don’t be afraid…atta is now as big as the sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>อย่าพรุน... อัตตา เดิปใหญ่เต็มฟ้า</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yam luk-thnu phung khao ha</td>
<td>When the arrow is shot out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ยามลูกธนูพุ่งเข้าหา</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me rue ja plad-pao</td>
<td>How could it not hit the goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>มีถ้า จะพลาดเป้า</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Atta</em> ying yai kha-yai ying tuk</td>
<td>The larger the <em>atta</em>, the larger the suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>อัตตายิ่งใหญ่ ขยายยิ่งทุกข์</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yum teen hai gug-gong tued phu-chana</td>
<td>Stomping on your feet, the winners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ย่าดีนให้กึกก้องเด็ดผู้ชนะ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the actors had a good sense of the style of versed language, they were able to compose their own verses. In the process, Kamron often divided the ensemble
into small groups to improvise a scene; then he asked each actor to compose the
verses based on improvisations of a similar scene. The final stage of selection of the
writing then was made democratically (often by voting), with guidance from
Kamron. Kamron also wrote portions of the verse himself. These different scenes
were tested and revised until they became workable for the production, with Kamron
making final editorial and directorial decisions (Sineenadh Keitprapai. PI Dec. 4,
2005, & Nimit Pipitkul, PI, Sept 26, 2007). This communal writing process was
reminiscent of the people’s theatre as embodied by the CMTG’s Star Ray incarnation
in the 1970s, when all actors were co-creators of the script and the production.
However, a fully mounted production such as MNP is on a much different scale and
scope than the protest dramas of the 1970s. For the new generation of the CMTG in
the 1990s, Kamron has invested in the ensemble meaningful innovations of the
production process from pre-production, actor’s training, playwriting, technical
creation, to production, where a very simple pre-historic Siamese folktale known to
the commoners was transformed to take on the magnitude of poetic myth as well as
the magnitude of the ancient Greek theatre.

5.2.3 Plot and Performance Structure

The collection of Phaya Gong-Phaya Phan tales in Thailand’s Fine Arts
Department includes four extant versions, all of which share the story of parricide
that ends with a son (Phaya Phan) building a large stupa as a symbol of his
repentance for killing both his own father (Phaya Gong) and his stepmother (Yai
Hom). Variants include details like whether Phaya Phan took Phaya Gong’s queen

11 The four versions have been printed in Krom Sinlapakorn. Rueng Phra Pathom Jedi. Memorial
Book for the funeral of Khun Mae Worn Satrphan, April, 16, 1963.
as his own wife. For example, in the Phong Sawadarn Nue’s version (ca. A.D. 1109), when Phaya Phan approaches the queen in her bedroom, he receives warnings from a god disguised as a cat, and later as a horse, who hints that the queen is Phan’s own mother. He later finds out the truth about his birth from her. In a rage, he kills Yai Hom, who had adopted him after he was deserted by his birth mother, and who had raised him without telling him the truth. As an act of repentance for killing his own father and stepmother, he builds a large *stupa* in memorial of the dead, and he continues to rule as chief. This enormous *stupa*, known to the Thais as Phra Pathom Jedi, has gone through many significant renovations in the past 100 years; other material evidence of the tale such as a roads, ancient dunes, and sculptures also remain as sacred objects in the Nakhon Pathom province to this day.

![Fig. 21 Phra Pathom Jedi, the largest *stupa* in Thailand. An old postcard picture.](image)

In three of the four Thai versions, Phaya Phann had no sexual relations with his mother. In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus’s attempt to seek the truth about his birth
comes after he has already had four children with queen Jocasta, who is actually his own birth mother. The realization of the truth results from his quest to discover the cause of a great famine, and is revealed not by Jocasta, but by a series of clues provided by a prophet, messengers, and a herdsman.

The plot of MNP begins with a blind old man standing alone in the darkness as he explains to the audience that both silence and darkness have helped him to see the truth of how things are. He explains that he was driven by his atta (self-centered ego) when he was younger. The rest of the play is structured as a sequence of flashbacks, which begin when Phaya Phan and his troops, after invading many towns, has reached Phupha Lad, which is Phaya Gong’s kingdom. Phaya Phan brutally beheads Phaya Gong and declares victory. During his inauguration ceremony, a sacred pillar is struck down by thunder and an earthquake. Lua Ta Phi and Ai Aan Fah, both prophets, interpret the omens to mean that there is an evil person who has committed hideous crimes and still dwells in the kingdom. Phan declares that he will find this person and punish him with blindness and exile. In the midst of the celebration of his victory, Phan claims Mae Lah, the queen of Phupha Lad, as his wife. In their bed, both have the same nightmare of being strangled by a phantom snake and drowning in a sea of blood. When Mae Lah awakes, she tells Phan that she wants a son because she has lost one in the past. When Phan takes off his headband, Mae Lah sees the scar on his forehead and realizes that he is the infant son whom Phaya Gong had ordered crushed to death when he was born, due to a prophecy that the boy would kill his own father and marry his own mother. Before she says anything, Ai Aan Fah is shocked by the sight of the scar and confesses that he did not carry out the king’s order to kill the baby, revealing the truth to Phaya Phan. Phaya Phan is furious, and strangles Ai Aan Fah to death, only to discover that his birth
mother, Mae Lah has already hung herself. Desiring to know more about his identity, Phan returns to his home town to see the mother who raised him, Mae Hom, whom he forces to tell the truth. She tells him that she rescued him as an infant from being neglected in the woods and has loved him like her own child. After he tells her of what has happened to Phaya Gong’s tribe, she has an emotional breakdown and blames herself for making him suffer. Seeing her being traumatized, he still stabs her to death out of his own suffering from knowing the truth (see Fig. 22 and 23).

![Fig. 22. Phaya Phan and Mae Lah’s love scene. (Courtesy of CMTG)](image1)
![Fig. 23. Phaya Phan’s mercy-killing of Mae Hom. (Courtesy of CMTG)](image2)

Realizing how sinful he is, Phaya Phan stabs his own eyes and wanders into the wilderness. The aged Phaya Phan remains in darkness and solitude, speaking to himself and to the audience about his experience in exile. It is revealed to the audience that the old man at the opening of the play was actually Phaya Phan who has had a spiritual rebirth by accepting his karmic consequences and letting go of his atta. He has “killed” the old Phaya Phan via his spiritual liberation.

Like *Oedipus the King*, *MNP*’s plot starts quite late in its story line. While *Oedipus the King* opens with a plague that covers the city of Thebes, years after Oedipus became king and married Jocasta, *MNP* opens with the end of the story, with Phaya Phan already in exile. While *MNP* is structured around flashbacks told in five
consecutive scenes, *Oedipus the King* starts near the climactic moment of the story, when the incident of a plague in Thebes has caused Oedipus to hunt down the murderer of the former king in order for justice and balance to be restored. The differences in how these plays begin reflect their underlying themes. In *Oedipus the King*, we see that the prophecy about parricide and incest unfolds inexorably, while in *MNP* we see that the outcome of each event is a consequence of a decision or action. While *Oedipus* is a story of predestination, *MNP* is a story of a self-centered man and his journey to learn about himself and how to cope with the destructive consequences of his actions. While Oedipus is seen as a heroic character who does not stop himself from searching for the truth despite his awareness of the possible consequences, Phaya Phan’s quest to find the truth about his identity is not as important as what happens to him after he loses everything and goes into exile as a blind man. The plot does not reveal the process of Phaya Phan’s spiritual and cognitive liberation, but does indicate that living in harmony with nature helps him with the process. Oedipus is a tragic hero because he is willing to sacrifice everything he has in order to find the truth for the sake of himself and his people, while Phaya Phan is a different type of hero not only because he is able to face his own crimes, but also because he rises above his egotistical attachment and becomes a spiritually liberated man of *anattā*.

### 5.2.4 Performance Style: Primordial and Ritualistic

Similar to the scriptwriting process, *MNP*’s performance style was a conglomeration of communal creative efforts that attempted to create a ritualistic and mythical theatre that represented a primordial world of Phaya Phan. In borrowing Artaud’s idea of Theatre of Cruelty that aims to deal with universal human
destructive drives (what Artaud refers as “plague”) which also correspond with the Buddhist concept of kilesa (defilements), Kamron searched for a performance style that could demonstrate the primordial human’s psyche. According to Artaud, these human destructive drives arouse ambivalent desires and reactions as well as the purging of these desires through various actions. In the case of *MNP*, these desires mainly involve Phaya Phan’s greed, lust, and hunger for power, all of which lead him to commit sinful actions as depicted in the plot. The production’s small black-box theatre and the requirements of the story resulted in a minimalistic mise-en-scène that transformed the empty space into a fictional Neolithic (pre-historic) world more through the bodies of the performers than through elaborate stagecraft. Because the story called for a variety of locations, including a battlefield, the chief’s dwelling, a ceremonial square, wilderness, and a peasant’s cottage, the production relied totally on the actors’ physical actions and verbal communication to evoke in the mind of the audience these locations. The simple set, painted black, consisted of high and low step-platforms placed in the upstage area. The performance style—based on the “extreme poetic mode” of invented language, extra-daily gestures and percussive musical sounds, and the use of invented Neolithic tribal masks, hand-made musical instruments, costumes and props—was meant to evoke the primordial, ritualistic, and mystic atmosphere, - a reminiscence of Artaudian theatre which emphasizes the poetic and mystic qualities.

At the opening of the production, eight chorus members portraying the tribal spirits, dressed in half-masks made from animal bones, stone beads and metal, costumes made from brownish cloth for body wrappings, and dark capes, entered from either side of the stage, carrying their long wooden spears, humming and stomping their wooden spears on the floor as they chanted welcoming lyrics to a
storyteller. The hand-made, archaic-looking masks resembled Neolithic cave paintings and indigenous Phitakhon masks found in the northeastern part of Thailand. Similar to the Phitalkhon masks’ unique features, each mask in MNP had a high top which was made from huad, a cone-shaped basket woven from bamboo and used in the northeastern region for steaming sticky rice. Connected to this head-dress of sorts was a half-mask carved from a coconut sheath.

12 Phitakhon (Ghost Parade) is the first part of a three-day Animist-Buddhist festival, held during the sixth or seventh lunar month, in a northeastern province, Loei province. This festival is generally known as Boon Luang (Great Merit Making), which is considered as a very important festival for Buddhists in northeastern Thailand. This festival celebrates the last life of Buddha when he was born as a prince named Vessandorn.
As the tribal spirits slowly disappeared into the darkness, a blind, old and unmasked Phaya Phan, wrapped in ragged bits of cloth and carrying a cane, appeared in a pool of white light at center stage and uttered:

My eyes were shut a long time ago
The flame in my heart has burnt out and cooled […]
Leaving only a quiet and long breathing
My eyes still remember that
Once when I was Phaya Phan […]
My hands grasped, and tore every flower
from its branch, from its trunk, from its woods, […]
My hands were washed with blood from the petals
And from the dead killed with my blades…
With the seeing eyes, I created the world of sufferings
With the blinded eyes, I see the darkness of my sins even more clearly […]
The past crumbles…the atta [ego] dissolves into the wind
My heart and soul open wide…
Brightly, Clearly…

With this opening soliloquy, Phaya Phan summarizes the main theme of the play, centered on the story of an egocentric man (a man who is full of atta) whose sufferings and self-realization lead him to seek spiritual liberation. The rest of the performance unfolds as flashbacks from Phaya Phan’s memory, demonstrated by characters acting in stylized primordial movement, versed speeches, songs, chants, usage of primordial-looking props, and primitive-sounding music. The accompanying music and sound effects were created by flutes and percussive instruments such as drums, gongs, bells, cymbals, rattles, and anklets, as well as the actors stomping and slapping against their own bodies. According to archaeologist Bruce Knauft,
drumming is a “prelinguistic and primordial metaphor” (qtd. in Moore 72). Rodney Needham’s ethnographic studies of many different rites also reveal that percussive sounds are used to “communicate with spiritual powers” on a wide range of occasions that concern rites of passage, including “healing, prophylaxis, hunting, warfare, and funerals,” thus signifying the primordial stage of civilization (1967: 611). In MNP, the use of drumming and other percussive instruments was in many scenes depicting battle, post-battle funeral, and the totem-inauguration. The most prominent use of animistic ritual ceremony was portrayed in the post-war totem-inauguration, conducted for blessings to the winning tribe. According to Ai Aan Fah (Phaya Gong’s shaman), a sacrificial ritual ceremony incorporating incantation and killing of a young virgin would be conducted to inaugurate a new regime, in the tradition of Phaya Gong. After denying Ai Aan Fah’s suggestion, Phaya Phan’s tribe holds a different ritual ceremony incorporating a funeral for the dead and a totem-pole procession lined with masked dancers, chanters, and musicians, and followed by the shaman’s (Lau Ta Pi) incantation invoking the earth’s protective spirit to complete the ceremony. To portray the totem ceremony, a group of tribal men carry the totem-pole on to the stage in a ritualistic manner by walking and moving in unison. To signify the installation of the totem-pole into the earth, while screwing the totem-pole, they used a unison, rhythmic body twisting movement accompanied by the stomping, rattling, and chanting of the chorus. The post-war ritual as portrayed in this totem-inauguration ceremony reflects the animistic aspect of the tribal culture. The totem-pole ceremony scene ends with a speech from the chorus, echoing how the human’s excuse to make wars have caused endless miseries.

The chorus not only performed a key function by echoing or commenting on each event, it served to transition from scene to scene, to set the mood of a given
sequence and, often, to represent characters needed for a particular scene. For example, in the first flashback scene, depicting the battle between Phaya Phan’s invading troops and Phaya Gong’s defending troops, the chorus sang narration while pantomiming the battle at the same time. As the battle scene played out, a secondary scene, depicting the birth of Phaya Phan, unfolded on a highly elevated platform situated upstage, creating an antiphonic effect of alternating line delivery between the two groups, similar to a cinematic montage:13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus’s singing (Warrior fighting and singing):</th>
<th>Scene of Phaya Phan’s Birth:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change, and transition…</td>
<td>Phaya Gong: Ai An Fah, read the stars and signs for me. Mae Lah, do not be sad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People fall and die</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanished in the flame</td>
<td>An Fah: Clouded gloomy sky, stars do not shine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving only black dust on the soil</td>
<td>Mae Lah: I gave birth to our son. Why take him from my heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rain drops return in abundance</td>
<td>(Luatapi and Phaya Phan in the battle exchange their words on merciless killing of the enemies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing birds, budding leaves</td>
<td>(Phaya Phan in the battle field challenges Phaya Gong to fight with him)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear sky, new day arrives</td>
<td>An Fah: The sky opens, the sky commands, the sky creates fate….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracing on the same track</td>
<td>(The fight scene between Phaya Gong and Phaya Phan. It ends with Phaya Phan beheading Phaya Gong.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 It is very difficult to transfer this invented archaic verse language into English. This rendering is only an approximation of the original text.
Days turn into years

Years turn into eons

From dust born new lives

Repeating the cycle of life to eternity

( *MNP* p. 5. Translated by Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn)

With the chorus singing the narration as an accompaniment to the play’s main action, the above scene functions on three levels simultaneously. First, it advances the plot by presenting the war scene. Second, it provides expository information. And finally, it provides a philosophical underpinning, about the cycle of life. The use of stylized movement and music, together with the chorus’s speaking, singing, chanting, or humming, before, in-between, or within scenes occurred throughout the production. Examples included stylized fight movements used in the battle scene, the totem pole inauguration previously mentioned, a love scene between Phaya Phan and Mae Lah, their nightmare, Mae Lah’s telling of Phaya Phan’s birth, and Phaya Phan’s realization of his sins.

Among these scenes, the nightmare sequence portraying the death of Phaya Phan and his newly married wife (Mae Lah), was most reminiscent of Artaud’s visual concept of “manikins, enormous masks, and objects of strange proportions” used to “enforce the concrete aspect of every image and every expression—with the corollary that all objects requiring a stereotyped physical representation will be discarded or disguised” (*Theatre and Its Double*, 97). This sequence, which lasted about five minutes, presented monstrous, horrific images, with apparitions of both Phan and Mae Lah (represented by extremely large masked-puppets), entangled by
an enormous phantom snake, drowned in an ocean of blood (represented by a large piece of red cloth spread to cover the stage floor) (See Fig. 26).

This nightmare scene of deaths shares essential features in common with a number of texts as cited by Artaud as examples of his Theatre of Cruelty: Shelly’s *The Cenci*, Ford’s *Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, Seneca’s *Thyestes*. These plays share elements of some extreme act of violence, deemed by Artaud to be revelatory of the human’s repressed desire for destruction and assault on social orders. By exposing the audience to images of violence or repressed behaviors, Artaudian theatre aims to “invite the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies” so that the audiences are impelled to see the reality of human’s repressed moral disorders “as they are” (*Theatre and Its Double* 31). In the case of the nightmare scene in *MNP*, the audience is exposed to the delirium consequence of incest and parricide.

![Fig. 26 The “Nightmare” sequence. (Courtesy of CMTG)](image-url)
This sequence—accompanied by electronic music, strobe lighting, a red flood light, and live sound effects provided by the wailing, crying, and screaming of the chorus members—was not only intended as an assault on the spectators’ senses but also aimed to trigger a purging of their collective “plague” or the repressed moral disorders in order to purify their minds.

In Buddhism, the mind or *chit*, which is a consciousness that registers human’s *kamma* (also known as *kārmā*), always produces its own consequences of that registration in different means such as in real life events or in dreams. In terms of Buddhist interpretation, this nightmare sequence in this production therefore represents the karmic consciousness occurred in Phaya Phan’s *chit*, where all his crimes and sins register.

In terms of acting, to arrive at the *extra-daily* style, after experimenting with different styles of movement based on the folk performance forms, Kamron and the cast arrive at the mixture of realistic acting, imagined movement, and the indigenous Forn Jerng (with Tob Ma Pab marital art style), a martial art-dance form that belongsto the northern region (also known as Lanna) of Thailand, as their stylistic base. Forn Jerng is known for its slow and graceful movement that emphasizes stylized feet patterns moving within different imaginary squares. Tob Ma Phab martial art, part of the Forn Jerng repertoire as seen today, emphasizes low body position, with knees bending low, and body bending forward, the open arms moving in circular patterns while slapping the torso as a change of rhythm (See Fig 27, Fig.28). One of the cast members, Teerawat Mulvilai, who was known to be a Forn Jerng (with Tob Ma Pab style) performer, was able to give the basic training to the cast. In the

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14 See an example of For Jerng with Tob Ma Pab. Wev. 2 October 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EQ4OGqP2dM&feature=related>
performance, all actors appeared to assume imagined bodies of the pre-historic tribal people by appearing to be very masculine and strong, they moved with the quasi-
extra-daily (stylized and codified) style of choreographed movements reminiscent of the indigenous Forn Jerg (with Tob Ma Phab style).

In the performance, the large and expressive invented tribal gestures were emphasized by the body-weight on the feet, which were grounded on the floor with knees bent. When combined with the open-ness of the hand choreography and body movement based partially on the Forn Jerng with the Tob Ma Phab style of movement, these gestures carried a sense of what Kamron called “ritualistic acting” as described earlier in this chapter. For example, in the battle scene between the two tribes, accompanied by natural sounds made from stomping of the feet, beating of the spears on the ground, rattling of hand-made instruments, the actors as tribal warriors
moved in coordinated rhythm using the Forn Jerng’s dynamism in their feet, body, and arm movements. In the battle scene, each slow pattern of the rhythmic-based movement of the fight ended with a *tableau vivant* (frozen posture) before another pattern of fight movement started (see Fig. 29). With only 5 pairs of warriors, each *tableau vivant* gave an impression of a violent fight by hundreds of men as Phaya Phan’s tribe men advanced and attacked Phaya Gong’s tribe. In the post-battle scene, during a celebration of the Phya Phan’s tribe men, one warrior did a solo dance that resembled the Tob Ma Phab movement.

![Fig. 29. The battle scene in MNP. (Courtesy of CMTG).](image)

Except for the major role of Phaya Phan (who had to be on-stage most of the time), all actors portrayed multiple roles. By changing a few costume elements (such
as with or without the masks, or by using a different props), the actors were able to portray different characters. Their smooth transitions from role to role with a “ritualistic” precision of “dynamism” style, and their seemingly non-attachment to any of the roles, conveyed Kamron’s attempt to demonstrate the Buddhist idea of actors as anattā (no-self). It was also within the ritualistic stylized acting that a sense of animist-Buddhist aesthetics was conveyed.

For the production as a whole, the elements of Artaudian Theater of Cruelty were expressed in the invented pre-historic visual and auditory imageries represented in the mise en scène while the mixture of indigenous animistic, and Buddhist elements were conveyed through the plot, theme, and acting style. The invented performance conventions aimed to produce multi-layered effects in audience, including the Artaudian purgation and cleansing of the repressed psychology and the invocation of karmic consciousness (a sense that all events in the world are connected through the karmic actions), all integrated to convey a sense of what I call “Buddhist-Artaudian aesthetics”.

5.3 Political Implications and Buddhist Thoughts in My Name is Phaya Phan

Within the context of mainstream bourgeois theatre of 1990s Thailand—wherein a local theatre presentation of the Phaya Gong-Phaya Phan tale is usually embellished with glittery ornate costumes, elevated-hierarchical language, and modes of stylization based in traditional Thai dance theatre—MNP stood in sharp contrast to anything audiences were accustomed to seeing. Set in a prehistoric period and a fictional tribal world, MNP takes liberties in the invention of a language and culture which could easily be considered “primitive” in comparison to any traditional theatre of Siam and especially to the refined and sophisticated court theatre. For the Thais,
the word “primitive” connotes something barbaric or uncivilized. The fact that the production of MNP included elements that are rather culturally offensive in the context of present-day Thailand has lent it a subversive power in relation to the existing cultural hegemony. The fact that the hero of the play punishes himself and resigns from being the ruler also is at contrast with the historical rulers in Thailand. Consequently, MNP stands outside the stylistic spectrum of both traditional Thai theatre and contemporary Western-style theatre in Thailand, in which “primordial,” “prehistoric,” and “primitive” are equated to “barbaric.” Moreover, the production style has no proper place in the theatre of bourgeois Thai audiences since its presentational form reflects the idea of anti-sakdina and counter-hegemonic of the historical Thai rulers.

In a similar fashion to the “primitive” visual presentation, the invented language style also escaped the hierarchical rules and restrictions typical of the Thai language. Via its depiction of imagined primitiveness, the language ignored the traditional Siamese system of hierarchies and social classes. As a matter of fact, the language used in MNP, although archaic, can be considered subversive of the hierarchical function of the Thai language. For example, Phaya Phan refers to himself as “Goo” (Eng.trans. “I”); although “Goo” is an archaic Thai word, it is also considered a non-hierarchical, impolite word with working class connotations in contemporary Thai society. In addition to the use of “primitive” language and visual elements, the “primitive” stylization such as the use of feet stomping, the denial of Thai classical dance elements (which were associated closely with the government’s control of aesthetics), and the display of a sex scene between Mae La and Phaya Phan, all add to the whole production a sense of dissent to the existing hegemonic culture.
In the Western hero myths, including *Oedipus the King* and in *MNP*, protagonists must draw on their courage in order to overcome their own fears and weaknesses as well as external obstacles. Ultimately they have to be submitted to the will of the gods, which make them larger than life and effectively turn them into mythical heroes or archetypes. As a character from a simple folk-tale, Phaya Phan in Kamron’s *MNP* serves to satisfy a desire for spiritual rebirth achieved through one’s own inner spiritual search, without regard to any notion of fate or a god’s will. The repeated use of the word “atta (self, ego)” in *MNP* indicates the centrality of *dhamma* (Buddha’s teaching) to the play. Although Buddhism does not deny the physical existence of all things, it does essentially claim that there is no true, intrinsic, permanent and unchanging self. Therefore, the more one is attached to one’s illusions about *atta*, the more easily one’s thoughts and emotions are influenced and thus led to suffering. Phya Phan’s illusion about his own greatness let him to commit one crime after another. For example, when the totem broke down in the totem-inauguration scene, believing that it was a bad omen, Phaya Pham takes a vow to find the person whose karma has caused a disruption in his totem-inauguration ceremony. Filled with *atta*, Phaya Phan declares,

I will stab his eyes with a sharp rod…causing him great miseries..

He will copulate with darkness..

Without food, he will crawl with pain and anguish in the woods..

Remember my words…I will not take them back!

After he discovers that it is himself who has committed the sins, Phaya Phan keeps his vow by stabbing his eyes and going into exile to become a vagabond in the forest. During his exile, not only does he see his destructive behaviors in the incest and in the parricide, he also sees all the other sins committed in his life especially
those committed through the wars. The play implies that, through living in solitude, Phaya Phan becomes enlightened by his understanding about one’s attachment to atta and its consequences in kamma (kārmā). The story of MNP directly reflects the Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada) by displaying a web of causal relations which result in immense suffering of all the characters.\(^\text{15}\) The causal relations starts by Phaya Gong’s decision to have his infant son killed, which initiates negative kārmā. Phaya Phan is rescued and raised by Mae Hom, who spoils him and plants the seeds of his attachment to greed and power. Phaya Phan’s major flaw is his enormous atta, which causes him to have more and more cravings (tanhā, Buddhist term for desires stemmed from a deluded chit), beginning with his desire to conquer many new lands via violent wars—which in turn leads him to kill Phaya Gong—and his desire for many women, including Mae Lah. These tanhā not only lead him to commit horrific deeds, but also to become more attached to power, thus creating a chain of causes and effects as in Dependent Origination.

At the end of the play, Phaya Phan is a spiritually liberated blind man who “sees” the causal relations in his own life, and this he comprehends how to end the suffering. The play suggests that the only way to release oneself from suffering is to truly release oneself from the attachment to “atta” (which causes delusion) and become anattā (no-self, no-ego) and therefore allowing the consciousness to enter a state of “suññata (voidness).”

In terms of power relations between MNP and the state’s sanctioned Buddhism, this play implied that wisdom and enlightenment can be discovered by a common man without having to be subjugated to the state’s version of Buddhist

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\(^{15}\) See background of this doctrine in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4. Kārmā is “the law of cause and effect, which teaches that every intentional action of body, voice, or mind has a corresponding result” (Palmo 250)
doctrine. Before the establishment of the state’s sanctioned Buddhism during the reign of King Rama IV (reigned 1851–1868) and after, Thailand used to have freedom of interpretation and practice of Theravada Buddhism. The state’s sanction of Buddhism, which entails in a systematic control of all the regulations and legitimization of Buddhist temples and Buddhist practices in Thailand, has made other styles of Buddhist practice marginalized and in some cases illegitimate. MNP offers a dissent to the state Buddhism by implying that the essence of Buddhism lies in the liberation of one’s consciousness to reach “suññata” in stead of having to subscribe to the official teaching, practice, and regulations of Buddhism issued by the state. In the play, although it contains a Buddhist theme about atta and anattā, Phaya Phan never invokes the official Buddha, neither does he refer to any concept as being a Buddhist. Phaya Phan saves his own life by facing his kārmā and achieving anatta, making him an archetype of a Buddhist hero without submitting to any material convention of the sakdina-based hegemony.

In addition to being a self-liberated archetype, Phaya Phan, a royal-turned-vagabond, demonstrates that only when the leader of a society is capable of facing one’s own crimes (with a total sense of anattā), can a redemption and justice be reached. Since Thailand has been facing numerous political crisis that led to the state’s committing violent crimes against its own civilians, the production of MNP inadvertently challenges the Thai audience to question their own leaders especially the ruling class of their conscience and responsibilities for the crimes committed in the past. Under the lens of Gramscian “War of Position” (as stated in Chapter 1), MNP has subverted many hegemonic cultural ideals as a counter attack.

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16 See background on Buddhism and politics in Thailand in Chapter 1.
Conclusion.

In creating the first production of the resurgent CMTG, the production team of MNP took on an enormous responsibility in attempting to reach the aims of their theatre group. Their trials and errors in the early stages of their activities resulted in many valuable lessons concerning time and resource management. Nevertheless, the lengthy production process resulted in many skills and conventions that would come to define the CMTG’s uniqueness, such as the group’s emphasis on physical training and collaborative scriptwriting and production processes. By infusing Brechtian, Artaudian, and Buddhist ideas into MNP’s production style, Kamron instilled in the group a complex and dynamic system of theatre creation.

As a production, MNP encouraged a multi-faceted discourse with contemporary Thai society by exposing the audience to aesthetic and possibly political challenges. As the primordial world of MNP took over the symbolic locus of the Siamese ancestors, the old hierarchies of contemporary Thai life were momentarily suspended and, in the case of language and custom, even destroyed. The pleasure of seeing the images and hearing the language of this production lay not only in its genuinely poetic harmony, but also in the transcendent power of Phaya Phan’s dissolution of atta against the polity of power. The production not only achieved an anti-sakdina, and an opposition to the state-imposed Buddhism ethos, but also managed to turn a simple Thai folktale into an animistic myth with a Buddhist-Artaudian aesthetics.
CHAPTER 6

Kamron Gunatilaka and the Postmodern Theatre in the 2000s

Over the six decades of Thailand’s struggle for democracy, three bloody political uprisings (1973, 1976, 1992) have left their marks on Thai history. In none of these cases did the state launch any thorough investigation or take responsibility for the victims. Among the major uprisings, the events associated with October 6, 1976 are considered among the most painful, although they are often labeled as “the victory of the state in subverting the communists”. Within the context of Thailand’s decades-long political instability, any form of power that takes a position other than adherence to the Three-Pillars ideology can be considered subversive to national security. This chapter argues that Kamron’s 2006 revival of *A Mid Winter’s Dream* (*MWD*) is significant for Thai contemporary theatre not only because of its aesthetic innovations, but also because of it functions as a resistance to the state’s attempt to repress the historical memory of the October 6, 1976.

6.1 The Sociopolitical Context of the 2000s and the New CMTG

Prior to the 2006 *coup d’etat*, the meta-narrative of the political history of Thailand had focused primarily on the democratization process, dividing the involved parties into elite royalists, the military, and civilians. This meta-narrative ignored the role of the monarch himself, who was commonly perceived as “above politics.” With

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1 See details in Winichkul, Thongchai, 2007: 2–9.
a new series of political conflicts from 2005 until 2006 however, the role of the monarchy and the monarchists has been examined in greater detail by Thai and international academics and media [see Tejapira (2006a, 2006b), Winichakul (2008), Reynolds (2006), Connors (2005)]. Thongchai Winichakul attributes the “a lack of conceptualized narrative that explains how the monarchy remains a critical element in Thai democratization” to the strict enforcement of the lése majesté law (2008:13). Consequently, the subject of the monarchy has been avoided in most academic and artistic work, thus hindering analysis of Thai political history.

After the political and economic crisis of the 1990s, the need for change culminated in the first People’s Constitution of 1997, which opened up opportunities for reform in many areas, including bureaucracy, politics, academia, society, media, and economics. As Thailand tried to cope with the dominance of Western culture by becoming more culturally de-centered and emphasizing “localism,” it also sought to capitalize on globalization and liberal democracy (Connors, “Ministering Culture” 534–5).2 The People’s Constitution of 1997 granted the Prime Minister greater control over the legislative body and the cabinet, thus allowing the Prime Minster more flexibility and power to execute his agenda. Receiving the majority of cabinet votes in 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra became the first Prime Minister empowered by the

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2 Michael Kelly Conners explains, “there was a renewed emphasis on cultivating a Thai self/nation to withstand the impact of impending foreign domination. […] Organizations such as ‘Save the Nation’ and others associated with localist thought (thongthiniyom) emerged calling for a return to Thai ways and Thai thinking […] but they also drew on broader international discourses about culture and development, including ‘localism’ and ‘cultures of peace’ promoted by UNESCO and other development agencies” (535). See further details in Connors, Michael Kelly. “Ministering Culture: Hegemony” Critical Asian Studies. 37:4 (2005): 523-551.
constitution to initiate many reforms, including a major bureaucratic reform that reduced the power of the sakdina-style administration. Thaksin’s CEO style of governing, which aimed to create a more competitive capitalist economy for Thailand, eventually led to strong criticism of his regime as an elected capitalist absolutism. Thaksin’s immense popularity among the underprivileged made him extremely powerful and in some ways a threat to those in the royalist military faction who preferred a more conservative government. Thaksin’s opposition accused him of plotting to undermine the monarchy, of involvement in numerous large-scale corruption scandals, and of actions that undermined the rule of law and the constitution. These accusations led to nearly a year of anti-Thaksin protests, which greatly divided Thai society and culminated in the 2006 coup d’état. It was not the first time that an elected government accused of corruption had been ousted by a coup. This occasion, however, seemed particularly anti-democratic because those responsible for the coup blatantly invoked the justification of protecting the monarchy to overthrow the most popularly elected civilian-led regime in the history of Thailand. Unlike the October 6 event when there was only one group of protesters,

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3 Thaksin Shinawatra (1949–) is a telecommunications billionaire who founded the Thai Rak Thai (Thai Love Thai) political party in 1998 and won almost half of all the seats in the parliament in 2001. He was the first civilian elected by voters to two consecutive terms as Prime Minister (2002, 2005), and also the first PM to lead an elected government through a full term in an office. His political party was credited for providing free health-care services to the poor, and for a micro-credit program that distributed capital to every village to start their own small businesses.

4 See Kasian Tejapira’s “The Disintegration of Octoberist Ideology” (2006 & 2007) for more details about the Thaksin’s regime.

5 This observation is from my own witnessing of the nationally televised announcement by the coup group.
who were all against the coup government, the 2005 uprisings consisted of two opposing factions -- the anti-elected-government (who were thus opposed to Prime Minister Thaksin) and the pro-elected-government. The complication arose when the majority of the educated middle-class, the elites, the bureaucrats, together with the military, disapproved of Thaksin’s populism and absolutism. They therefore intervened to topple Thaksin’s government despite the fact that he was legitimately elected. As the tension between the anti-Thaksin group and the pro-Thaksin group escalated, the military seized the opportunity to stage a coup d’état to prevent what they had thought would become civil violence. The complexity of the political turmoil in 2006 meant many former left-wing activists from the October 6 generation had turned to support the coup instead of supporting the masses that elected Thaksin. It was in this context that MWD was constructed and performed. Kamron’s production of MWD, which includes strong criticism of political control by the ruling class, cannot be understood in all its complexities without taking into consideration Thailand’s struggle for democracy.

6.1.1 The CMTG and Kamron’s Production in 2006

After Kamron married Sarawanee Sukhumwat in 1997, he relocated with his son to Chiang Mai, a northern city far from Bangkok, leaving the CMTG to a generation of young and relatively inexperienced actors and directors. Eventually control of the CMTG remained with Sineenadh Keitprapai, while the rest of the ensemble was forced to secure employment elsewhere. Although Kamron remained the senior member and the only master teacher of the group, the golden age of the Saeng Arun Art Center was over.
Nonetheless, in 2006 Kamron was able to make a return as a director, despite the fact that he had not directed since *Madame Mao* ten years earlier. The revival of *A Mid Winter’s Dreams (MWD)* in 2006 was staged at the Pridi Banomyong Institute from October 20–22, and 27–29, 2006 in honor of the thirtieth anniversary of October 6, 1976. The play’s program featured a director’s note similar to the one in the 1996 production, and a handful of the original cast members returned. Although Kamron had hoped that the anniversary of October 6 would bring some kind of justice for victims of the event, Thai society had by then shifted its focus to ongoing tensions between the elected capitalist government and anti-government protest groups. On September 11, 2006, one month prior to the opening night, an unexpected coup took place in Bangkok, reaffirming that the royalist military remained an important player in the power politics of Thailand. Although *MWD* aimed specifically to commemorate the events of October 6, 1976, the questions and implications raised by the production proved astonishingly relevant to the 2006 political situation.

As described in Chapters 2, 3 and 5, the “Blooming Period” for Thai democracy from 1973–1976 ended with a division between the left-wing liberalist revolutionary faction, and the right-wing royalist elite faction. With the spread of communism in neighboring countries, Thailand’s right-wing faction used nationalistic propaganda to spark fear and hatred of communism among the Thai public, while left-wing factions sought land and labor reforms. At dawn on October 6, 1976, soldiers attacked protesters with rocket-propelled grenades and anti-tank missiles, followed later by other forces using firearms. Reports of the October 6 massacre were quickly silenced. Thai history textbooks mention this episode briefly, without explaining its real causes or actual consequences. Although discussions of October 6 have taken
place in public and in the media, they have never been able to clearly explain the complexity of the day’s events..

However, in 1996, things began to change, as the Thai government allowed more freedom of expression. A non-governmental committee to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of October 6 commissioned a performance of *MWD* and also requested survivors and eye-witnesses to submit their accounts verbally or in writing. The committee also gathered letters, photographs, and other evidence for publication.

Thongchai Winichakul, who was imprisoned along with eighteen other student leaders of the protests, and who is now a leading historian, maintains that despite the committee’s efforts, “resistance and reluctance to settle the meaning of the event remain strong; the truth of that morning is unlikely to be written in the near future” (ibid. 245–6). In his article, “Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past,” he explains that the discourse surrounding the events of October 6 has been intentionally and continuously suppressed by subsequent right-wing governments, and that the public’s desire for reconciliation following the takeover of the repressive regime of 1976 has also helped perpetuate this silence. Most importantly, as a member of the commemoration committee, Thongchai asserts that the committee feared being accused of subverting social harmony. “[A]ny efforts to clear up the mystery, from this standpoint, are [considered] subversive attempts to undermine social unity. […] The truth about October 1976 therefore remains a sensitive issue for the Thai state” (ibid. 247). As all charges against the student leaders were lifted after two years of interrogation and imprisonment, and as no charges have been made against any state figures or against the attackers/murderers, it is difficult for anyone to make a
conclusive judgment as to who might have participated in the scheme that led to the massacre.  

The aftermath of October 6 yielded further traumatic experiences for student activists and their families. These were not only personal traumas for those who witnessed and experienced the October massacre, but also a collective trauma as the pain and suffering of participants, observers and others were never properly acknowledged and understood by the Thai public. From this perspective, no justice has been served in response to the most brutal event in the modern history of Thailand.

As a radical political activist in the 1970s, Kamron was directly affected by the trauma of October 6. Nearly twenty years later, he encountered political violence again in the massacre of protesters by the coup government in 1992’s “Bloody May” (see Chapter 5). Consequently, despite its ostensible bloodlessness, the 2006 coup felt like a recurring scenario for Kamron and for many Thais, making the 2006 production of MWD even more relevant to its historical moment. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of the aftermath of the coup in 2006 was drastically different from the past, since most of the anti-Thaksin factions (including some of the former October 1976 activists and educated elites) supported the coup, while the pro-Thaksin factions perceived the coup as a form of dictatorship against democracy. It was under such ambivalence that Kamron made a return to theatre as a director.

From August 18 to October 18, 2006, I observed Kamron’s workshops and rehearsals for a revival of A Mid Winter’s Dream. On October 7, 2006, he led a full-

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day Body Expression workshop for the CMTG actors at Tadu Gallery, Bangkok Thailand. He held similar workshops for the MNP actors in 1996 and for high-school students in Chiang Mai earlier in 2006. Kamron’s workshops for actors always follow a similar structure, which includes preparation for the “un-conditioning” of the actors’ physical and vocal habits, techniques including relaxation; meditation and breathing exercises; free-form expression of movement and voice via the exploration of different body parts; the exploration of weight, time, and flow; the relationship of movement to the space around and within the actors’ bodies; and the development of an awareness of the “presence” of each body position and the energy vibrating from the dantien (Ch. term used in taiji. Trans. pelvic base-point). Unlike MNP rehearsals, Kamron did not spend months in preparing the actor’s body in order to attain a particular style of acting. One possible reason was that the cast members for MWD had already been trained by his disciple, Sineenadh, and they had previously performed occasionally with her B-Floor physical theatre group. Kamron’s workshop was therefore a recapturing of the key points of the Body Expression. In my impression, the training as such was not very intense and was largely integrated into the rehearsal process.

6.2 A Mid Winter’s Dream (MWD): Plot and Performance Structure⁷

In explaining his rationale for directing this production again, Kamron asserted:

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⁷ See Table 3. Performance Structure of Mid Winter’s Dream (MWD) following this section.
I want to remind Thai society that those who committed the crimes still need to make their confessions. There is a great deal of evidence such as photographs, eye-witness accounts, and the facts relating to what happened before and after the October 6, 1976. Therefore, the truth behind what actually happened, such as the revelation of the people who were involved as masterminds behind the scene, can be found. The unanswered questions need to be answered. (PI, Oct. 6, 2006)

Although the main plot of *MWD* focuses on October 6, 1976, the play itself draws historical analogies between October 6 and the 1932 Revolution, as well as October 14 (1973); all three events reflect the left-wing ideology of what Kamron calls the “idealists.” As he states, “I use many scenes from different Western plays to reflect the struggles of the idealists, who actually exist not only in the Thai context but also in other countries” (PI, Nov. 26, 2005). What he means by “idealists” are people like himself, those who share with him the idealism of a “state-lessness, where everyone is equal,” in other words, anarchists (ibid).

In the actual presentation of the production, original skits served as transitions between selected scenes from four translated Western plays: Dale Wasserman’s musical *Man of La Mancha*, Albert Camus's *Les Justes* (*The Just Assassins*), Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, and Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*. The structure of the production, based on the chronology of Thailand’s political uprisings from the 1932 Revolution to October 6, 1976, is a mosaic of sounds, images, unrelated dramatic skits, and scenes from the four plays. Each of these is intricately pieced together to relay multiple layers of meaning and intertextuality. The fifteen actors play multiple roles, ranging from members of a theatre ensemble to roles from the
translated plays that require quasi-realistic characterizations to other roles required for each of the transitional skits. For the purpose of analysis, I will term the excerpt from each pre-existing play as an act, and the rest of the segments that are interspersed around these acts will be addressed as collage sequences (or intervals). For example:

Act I, built around *Man of La Mancha*, opened with the music of a Schubert violin concerto (the same concerto as in *Death and the Maiden*). The character Mad Man, dressed in a mental patient’s outfit, was lying on his back on the top of a tall platform upstage and started to go into full-body convulsions, bouncing up and down as though he were being shocked by an electrical current.

Fig. 30 “Mad Man” and his convulsion in the opening scene.

(Note: all photographs in this chapter are from the courtesy of CMTG)

As the sound of the violin concerto increased in volume and elevated pitch, with his legs raised high up and his hands reaching out into the air and his eyes and mouth opened wide, the Mad Man let out a silent cry as though he were going through
a terrifying nightmare. Then, two men entered from either side of the stage, one dressed in a traditional Thai costume (a right-wing Elite Man) representing the deep-rooted conservative royalist group, and the other dressed in a white Western suit with black pants representing the left-wing revolutionary group (liberal Revolutionary Man). Both crossed to center stage, where some very large chess pieces had been placed, and started to play a game of chess. After the Elite Man moved a knight to protect his king, a little girl pulling a toy-train entered and innocently crossed the stage as “Itsy Bitsy Spider” played from a music box. The Revolutionary Man checked mate on the chess board as a slide showing the date of the revolution, “June 24, 1932” was projected onto an upstage screen. The girl kept playing with the toy train, but she stumbled and fell. The Revolutionary pulled the child up. The child thanked him and told him that she would look at the ground so she would not fall again. The man told her that if she really wanted to reach the “star,” she needed to look up to it and aim for it with confidence and endurance. He uttered, “the aim of reaching the ‘star’ is to serve other people, not to serve only oneself.”

After watching all of these actions as if they were merely dream images, the Mad Man murmured the words “train...moving forward...,” as he stood in front of the giant screen, where a black and white film image of a moving steam engine was projected. After watching all of these actions as if they were merely dream images, the Mad Man murmured the words “train...moving forward...,” as he stood in front of the giant screen, where a black and white film image of a moving steam engine was projected.
There was a quick blackout, and a round of applause from the upstage area was heard. The lights faded in, a group of theatre actors were seen on the upstage platform, dressed in black and bowing to an unseen imaginary audience upstage. They turned around as though no longer in character, and complained that no one cared to see such a serious play anymore. The “Director” entered, and the ensemble complained to him about the predicament of performing this kind of theatre. The Director challenged them by saying, “Do you think that making light-hearted, easy theatre will make humanity’s problems disappear? As long as there is exploitation and oppression in society, we need to confront these problems.”
Complaints from the ensemble that the Director was too idealistic were interrupted by a Spanish tune from *Man of La Mancha*. The Director transformed himself into Miguel de Cervantes, the sixteenth-century Spanish writer who penned *Don Quixote*, a tale about an extravagantly idealistic knight. A court scene from *Man of La Mancha* was presented as a performance by the Ensemble. This scene depicted an accused writer named Cervantes, who proposed to the Inquisition that a play about a noble knight, *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, be presented as his defense. This introductory scene was followed by short scenes from *Don Quixote of La Mancha* (*Man of La Mancha*'s play-within-a-play), including Quixote singing “Man of La Mancha” and “The Impossible Dream,” both expressing his idealism and a determination to right what is wrong while, on the giant white screen, black and white news footage of student demonstrations from October 14, 1973 was simultaneously shown (See Fig. 24).

After the song, the Ensemble froze in a *tableau vivant* (frozen action). The Elite Man and the Revolutionary entered and engaged in a conversation relating to the progress of the train ride. Then, Cervantes un-froze his position and continued to perform his final monologue, defending his idealism, which resulted in a death sentence from the court. As the soldiers took Cervantes away, the Mad Man entered, staring into the air, declaring “the drama is over; the crazy knight is dead; I am the real thing.”

The rest of the production followed a similarly discursive structure of montage sequences consisting of the two symbolic men commenting on historical events, black and white documentary images projected onto the screen, a dramatic scene from an extant play, a little girl pulling a toy train, and the Mad Man’s interruption, with the
ensemble’s singing and game playing often used as transitions or intervals between the scenes from other plays. This discursive structure was a hybrid of different Western theatre styles (from realistic to non-realistic), as well as techniques from film and digital media.

For example, Act II, built around Les Justes (The Just Assassins), followed a brief montage sequence showing disciplinary deployments (i.e. how schools and other institutions train the people to submit to certain codes of conduct deemed to be a part of state coercion) in everyday life by comparing it to the military training (“Disciplinary I” sequence) and culminating in a protest calling for human rights and democracy. The first scene from Les Justes presented a group of young Russian
revolutionaries who debated among themselves about whether to adhere to their humanistic ideals or to use violent means to fulfill their revolutionary objectives (i.e., kill innocent civilians).

![Fig. 33 “Disciplinary I” -a teacher is disciplining the students.]

This scene was followed by the sound of a military helicopter, film footage of the October 14, 1973 event, a protest song sung by the actors locking arms and
marching, a dialogue between the two men, a movement sequence representing an October 14th victory celebration, and a monologue from the Director emphasizing that theatre creation is about loving and believing in one’s idealism. The scene selection from Les Justes was a scene portraying the emotional conflicts between two revolutionary insurgents who debated the power of love and its function in the revolution.

Act III, built around The Crucible, was presented after a series of collaged sequences portraying the disciplinary deployments from the school classroom to college campus and military camp as models that turned the Thais into “docile bodies” submissive to the sakdina-based system of oppression (Disciplinary sequence II). This was followed by another sequence portraying a group of soldiers who became bloodthirsty creatures (“Monster” sequence). Then, a scene from The Crucible portraying the accusations directed at the alleged witches of Salem was presented. Following this was another movement sequence (“Killing the Communist” sequence) juxtaposed with projected images. This sequence was intended to draw parallels between the “witches” of Salem and Thai protesters accused of communism in 1976.
Fig. 35 and Fig. 36 Scenes from the Crucible, finding and persecuting the “witches” in Salem.

Act IV, built around *Death and the Maiden*, was presented after another montage sequence, which ended with a black and white slide image of a naked female corpse from the October 6 event projected on the screen. This disturbing image was
followed by an excerpt from *Death and the Maiden* in which the main female character, Paulina, a former political prisoner who had been raped and tortured during a dictatorial regime fifteen years earlier, debated with her husband about what to do with a captive in her house—a man whom she believed to be the doctor who had once tortured her.

After the scene from *Death and the Maiden*, the performers came out of character and performed again as their real selves. The actress who had played Paulina cried out, “Can I have a small place to stand up for myself in this society?” as the rest of the Ensemble tried to comfort her. The Director entered and praised her acting as very sincere and truthful. As he continued to speak about their aim of using theatre as a tool to continue to search for truth, the actors formed a circle. They sang “*The Star’s Rays of Faith* (Saeng dao hang sattha),” a well-known song-for-life from the 1970s about the glory of those who struggle against all obstacles to help others. As
the company prepared for its curtain call, the King’s Anthem was played and his image was projected on to the screen. Immediately, all the real audience members stood up automatically (as all Thais normally do at a movie theatre or at the beginning or ending of any public event), to pay respect to the king’s image and anthem. Instead of ending the performance as would normally be expected, a black and white image of October 14, 1973 showing thousands of people gathering at the Democracy Monument was projected onto the screen. John Lennon’s song “Imagine” was played and the names of those who lost their lives in the protests appeared, slowly scrolling, in alphabetical order, across the top of the slide image, leaving the audience members to ponder many questions provoked by the performance.

Fig.38 Train moving towards the Man Man who seems to be crushed into the darkness
### Table 3. Performance Structure of *Mid Winter’s Dream* (MWD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act/Scene</th>
<th>Stage Action</th>
<th>Mise-en-scène</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>The character Mad Man has convulsions and hallucinations. From this moment on, visions of an idealistic theatre group (the Ensemble), the rehearsal of four Western plays, and political chaos in the past kept coming back to him in bits and pieces. Schubert violin concerto is played from loud speaker.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chess game between the Elite Man and the Revolutionary Man, ends with the Revolutionary Man’s check-mate, winning the game, and the Elite Man moved a knight to protect his king. A girl pulling a “toy-train” across the stage, stumbles and fell.</td>
<td>Caption on the screen, “June 24, 1932” Revolution in 1932 by the People’s Party, a left-wing revolutionary group that changed the government system from Absolute Monarchy to Constitutional Monarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theatre ensemble complain to the Director about the unpopularity of their productions.</td>
<td>Spanish tune from <em>Man of La Mancha</em> interrupts the ensemble, and transitions into the next scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Man of La Mancha</em></td>
<td>The Director transforms into Miguel de Cervantes, while the theatre ensemble perform a court scene from <em>Man of La Mancha</em> is presented.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Don Quixote of La Mancha</em></td>
<td>Short play-within-a-play from Don Quixote is presented. Song “The Impossible Dream” is sung by Cervantes, who also Presents a final monologue about his determination to continue to dream, before the court’s order for his execution.</td>
<td>Film footage of the first student uprising, with caption “October 14, 1973”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mad Man enters, staring into the air, declaring “the drama is over; the crazy knight is dead; I am the real thing.”</td>
<td>End with a blackout on stage. Sound of a heavy storm follows and a red pool of floodlight is projected on the long stage. Music from a music-box starts playing while the ensemble starts to emerge from the floor as young children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act/Scene</td>
<td>Stage Action</td>
<td>Mise-en-scène</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Disciplinary</td>
<td>After the children sing and play the Thai version of “Itsy Bitsy Spider” song, the clock strikes 8 times. As the National Anthem is played on the radio, all the children transform into adults standing up straight to pledge their allegiance to the Three Pillars. They transform into soldiers in training. The young girl from the beginning scene enters asking for her lost toy-train. The Revolutionary Man tells her he will give her a new one, and the Mad Man tells her not to take it.</td>
<td>Under the dimmed red light, the screen shows a black and white image of a train moving towards the Man Man who seems to be crushed into the darkness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I”</td>
<td>Short skit demonstrating the student’s protest calling for human rights, liberty, and equality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. <em>Les Justes</em></td>
<td>A scene from <em>Les Justes</em> presenting a tense meeting among the revolutionary activists who are supposed to destroy the enemy with a bomb even though there are children with the target.</td>
<td>Four chairs are placed on the cross-walk area, as the four actors transform into characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part 1</td>
<td>Director enters and interrupts the scene, he explains to the actors the interpretation of the scene.</td>
<td>After the Director’s speech, there is a transition into October 14 as the ensemble react by getting down on the stage floor. The chairs are removed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensemble rise up from the floor and sing a marching song (“Fight ! Don’t Step Back”) used during the October 14.</td>
<td>Film footage of the October 14, 1973 event showing hundreds and thousands of students marching on the Ratchadamnuen Boulevard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Revolutionary Man defends for the protesters by saying “To protest against corrupted leaders is not communist. To express oneself with honest feelings is not communist.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensemble cheer. Director acts as a civilian asking for the people of Bangkok to come out and clean up the city after the victory. Actors walk into the audience to ask for their cooperation to help clean up the city</td>
<td>Film showing a documentary footage of King Rama IX announcing on black and white television screen that all violence should stop. Slide projection reads “The king appointed a new prime minister, and the three dictators had to leave the country and go into exile.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act/Scene</td>
<td>Stage Action</td>
<td>Mise-en-scène</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elite Man</td>
<td>Elite Man tells the Revolutionary Man that soon what has been a hidden agenda under this seemingly peaceful resolution will be exposed.</td>
<td>Slide images of the joy of the people celebrating their victory in ousting the dictators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensemble</td>
<td>An actor from the Ensemble performs a mime show to celebrate the “victory.” After he finishes performing, he opens his hat to ask for money from the audience. Not receiving any money, he mimes shooting himself in the head.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Director enters and comments on the violent ending of the mime show. He states “only love can create a new world, not hatred or violence.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Les Justes, part II</td>
<td>A romantic scene between two revolutionary activists who were also torn between their commitment to their revolutionary idealism and their personal need for love.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Disciplinary” sequence II</td>
<td>Short skits demonstrating typical disciplinary deployments that emphasize the sakdina-based cultural codes in Thai daily life, from the schooling and college system to the military system. At the end of this sequence, a military man announces that all should be disciplined, and that Thailand needs to get rid of the communists who are threats to the national security. His speech ends with all the soldiers shouting “Hail Hitler”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Monster sequence”</td>
<td>Ensemble turned themselves into the “monsters”</td>
<td>Film footage of the military coup making an announcement of the coup. The sound of the announcement is slowly altered into electronically distorted sounds. Lights dim, as slide projects “6 October 2519” (which is October 6, 1976) “At Thammasat University,” “Many were wounded and killed,” and “But it [the truth] has not been revealed.” Light changes into dark blue flooding the stage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Act/Scene

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Action</th>
<th>Mise-en-scène</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mad Man comments “Here they come!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. <em>The Crucible</em></strong></td>
<td>Act III, built around <em>The Crucible</em>, portraying a group of village girls accusing Tutuba, a black slave, as being connected to the devil. Once Tituba confesses, the girls turn to other village women and start accusing them of being witches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Killing the Communist”</td>
<td>After the characters from <em>The Crucible</em> take turns pointing fingers at the “witches,” they turn around to face the audience, and “transform” themselves into the roles of “killers” and pantomime shooting into the audience who are assumed to be “communists”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolutionary Man enters, claiming that his hands have been painted as “Red” or communist, while he sees the red hands of the Elite Man are painted with blood of the people.</td>
<td>Ensemble transform into characters from <em>Death and the Maiden</em>. Paulina has an intense dialogue with her husband about the torture that happened to her twenty years ago, and what she wants from the captive whom she thinks is the same person that tortured and raped her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actress transforms from Paulina to a member of the ensemble, cries out “Can I have a small place to stand up for myself in this society?” Director insists that the group will continue to search for truth. Ensemble forms a circle and sings a song about hope. King’s anthem is played while the king’s image is projected on the screen. This is followed by John Lennon’s song “Imagine”.</td>
<td>Projection of the king’s image; projection of the October 6 protest, scrolled with the names of those who were killed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 Postmodern Aesthetics

6.3.1 Postmodern *Mise-en-scène* and the Use of Dialectical Images

Although Kamron made some small adjustments to the script, there were no major differences between the *mise-en-scènes* of the 1996 and 2006 productions of *MWD*. The only significant difference was that the performing space was changed from the small Saeng Arun Arts Center’s black box theatre to Pridi Banomyong’s auditorium, which has a proscenium stage and a bare cement floor. Kamron maintained a set and costume design that was similar to the 1996 production, with only minor adjustments. He transformed both performing spaces in a similar fashion by constructing an I-shaped stage with two elevated platforms, bridged by a long catwalk connecting the two ends of the auditorium. The audience members were seated at a lower level on both sides of the catwalk. On the north side of the stage, a giant white screen was located behind a platform placed at the upstage area. This screen was used not only for visual projections but also for various lighting and shadow effects. On the south end of the second stage were two large black blocks linked by an arched roof to form an entrance/exit tunnel. The main stage on the north side had minimal set pieces consisting of four small boxes which were used as chairs in Act II.

The entire performance relied on the stylized physicality of the actors who were dressed in simple black (or dark brown) t-shirts and pants and although taking a great many roles during the course of the production, transformed themselves via minimal, suggestive costume and prop pieces. For example, in a scene from *Man of

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8 Some lines were added in the script in order to make certain scenes more comprehensible to the audience.
La Mancha, an actor put on the jacket of a sixteenth-century Spanish knight and was handed a sword, one costume element and one prop to suggest his transformation into Don Quixote. All the characters in Le Justes wore white, long-sleeved shirts over their neutral costumes to portray the Russian revolutionary group. Using these elements of *mise-en-scène*, this production sought to present the suppressed historical memory, the collective amnesia, of significant historical events in contemporary Thai society.

![Image](image-url)

**Fig. 39** A scene between Don Quixote and Aldonza from *Man of La Mancha*, with an image of the Statue of Liberty projected on the screen upstage.

The fact that this production attempted to subvert the meta-narrative of Thai political history by offering fragmented narratives reflects a postmodern position as proposed by François Lyotard (who defined postmodernity as the “incredulity toward meta-narratives”) (*The Post Modern Condition*, xxiv). Through postmodern
ambiguity, Kamron wants this production to speak to the Thai people, so that they
demand more of themselves and of all the parties involved in the October 6 event, and insist on further investigation. The production also tries to point to specific areas (i.e. the truth about the monarchy and the military power) that are considered “unpresentable” in the context of Thai society even though the investigation in these areas might bring justice to the victims. In his definition, Lyotard refers to the term “unpresentable” as “[ideas] for which there is no possible presentation and which therefore provide no knowledge of reality (experience) (The Postmodern Explained 11). These politically sensitive areas about the October 6 are “unpresentable” in Thailand not only because the nature of the atrocities (for Buddhist society is considered a serious sin) is beyond full scale investigation, or because the attempt will be subversive to the right-wing establishment, or because it seems that there may be so much buried evidence that the crimes cannot be uncovered; it is also because of the fact that a thorough investigation will pose a challenge to the Three Pillars ideology itself. According to Lyotard, avant-garde art has the power to invoke the “unpresentable” in “the presentation itself,” because this type of art “inquiries into new presentations –not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unpresentable […]” (Libidinal Economy 14-15). It is exactly in this location of the “unpresentable” that the production of MWD took place.

Due to the reasons mentioned, I think that Kamron was compelled to use various strategies to address the “unpresentable” through complicated performance structure and presentation strategies which included the use of the play text and the mise-en-scène aspects. The mise-en-scène includes the utilization of the schizophrenic montage of seemingly unrelated sequences of slide projections, light
and sound effects, documentary images, songs, chanting, line delivery, and physical
movement all interspersed throughout the multi-layered scenes and short skits,
providing a postmodern aesthetics, which Christoph Henke and Martin Middeke in
their article “Drama and/after Postmodernism” describe as “ambiguity, fragmentation,
plurality, uncertainty, hybridity, and […] the non-representable sublime and visceral
(rather than cerebral)” (16). (See Table 3 for the total structure of the performance).

As the play text provides layers of meanings, the mise-en-scène provides
postmodern aesthetics. For example, in the “Monster” sequence that depicted the
assaults of the unarmed students on October 6, 1976, the postmodern mise-en-
scène was depicted through a montage sequence consisting of image projection, light,
sounds and actions on stage. The 2006 performance started with an authentic sound
recording of a fuzzy radio announcement from October 6, 1976: “Declaration from
National Administrative Reform Council: We have taken over the governing power of
the state on October 6 at 18:00…” As the announcement continued to play, the light
changed color from general bright light to a dim red, and then dark red and blue, and
the speed and vocalization of the sound gradually became distorted into a drone,
embellished with howling electronic sound effects to the point where it became
incomprehensible. The sound effect also slowly changed into distorted monster-like
growls while the actors progressively transformed their bodies and voices into those
of ferocious “monsters.” As the monstrous roars built and the actors’ physicalizations
twisted and impersonated the imaged monstrous characters, black and white
documentary footage of October 6 was projected on the screen. Underscored with
hollow electronic sound effects and a humming chorus of “ahhh…,” the film footage
showed a fast montage of soldiers with machine guns firing into the student
demonstrators at Thammasat University, wounded bodies scattered around, the
lynching of a male student by an unknown paramilitary mob, the beating of the
lynched body by the mob, the burning alive of wounded students or those already
dead, the kicking of the heads of these burning bodies, and thousands of students with
their shirts removed crouching on the ground while soldiers with rifles stood nearby.
During this montage, the following words were also projected: “At Thammasat
University,” “Many were wounded and killed,” and “But it [the truth] has not been
revealed.” The film montage ended with a projection of blue flood light on the
screen. Unexpectedly, a character (Mad Man) appeared from the middle of the screen.
He then climbed on top of the high platform upstage and declared, “They are here!”
while the performance transitioning into an unrelated and fragmented dramatic scenes
from The Crucible.

The presentation of the “Monster” sequence was in a sharp contrast to the
previous scene, a romantic exchange between two lovers in Les Justes, in which they
spent a quiet moment together. Unlike the “Monster” sequence, the mise-en-scène
elements in the romantic scene were carefully organized to give a sense of pleasure.
The juxtaposition of both scenes produced in the audience a mixed sense of pleasure,
confusion, and pain that crisscrossed the boundary of time from the Mad Man’s vision
of the 1970s to the audience’s present time. These flashing images of the October 6
event (which worked like snapshots) together with the sound and action on the stage
were reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s concept of “dialectic image” where

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9 In the 1996 production, these statements were not projected on the screen. This is an example of
Kamron’s attempt to make the 2006 production more comprehensible to audience members who
might be ignorant of this part of the history.
“snapshots” of historical events, when carefully presented, can “connect the past with the present by supplying the ‘pulse,’ the rhythm and the motion of historical process […]” (Buck-Morss 82). According to Susan Buck-Morss, Benjamin’s *dialectical images* aim to produce “political electricity” in a “lighting flash of truth,” that will hopefully lead to a “political awakening in the viewer” (ibid). In other words, the political awakening happens when the highly charged *dialectical images* quickly forms a “force field” in which “the conflict between its fore- and after-history plays itself out” (Benjamin, qtd. in Buck-Morss 219). The flashing images projected on the giant screen in *MWD* created a similar “force field,” revealing the unresolved conflicts between the aggressors and the victims. At the same time, the many fast montage sequences presented throughout the production as a whole could also function as a large montage of *dialectical images* since they provided a great many moments of political electricity in what has been described as a “lighting flash of truth” (Buck-Morss 219). In this sense, the postmodern aesthetics as derived from the mosaic arrangement of the *mise-en-scène* are strengthened by the *dialectical images*. In addition to the postmodern *mise-en-scène*, the production of *MWD* also employed the play’s text as well as dynamic acting to achieve its goal.

### 6.3.2 Theatrical Allusion and Intertextuality

In theatrical allusion, the audience needs to interpret discursive “clues” given via the screen images, stage action, text, and other effects in order to read the allusions and draw possible connections between them. Examples of these allusions are given in the following table, which is based on the actual performance (2006) of Act I:
Table 4. (from Act I, after a scene about Don Quixote from *Man of La Mancha* is presented):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character/Action</th>
<th>Audio-Visual Effects</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Possible allusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A man in a traditional Thai outfit (Elite Man)(E) and a man in a suit (Revolutionary Man)(R), stand on opposite sides of the stage, turning their backs to the screen. | A black and white slide image of October 14, 1973 is projected on the giant screen showing a sea of people flooding Ratchadamnuen Boulevard, where the Monument of Democracy can be seen as the landmark. This provides a context for the text. | E: Sixty years have passed, how far has the train travelled?  
R: It’s a pity. When I had the power to make things happen, I lacked the experience to take enough precautions.  
E: But this time it is the real thing. I will urge all classes in society to go against the military.  
L: (extends his hand out to shake hand with the Elite Man) For liberty, fraternity, and equality!  
E: (denies shaking hand and sarcastically says) Equality that makes us all truly equal? [you mean] just like how equal the fingers can be? | The fact that these two gentlemen keep on appearing on the stage to make comments regarding change in society, without interacting with any other actors on the stage, makes them symbolic representations of the elite group and the revolutionary group. This dialogue alludes to the power struggle between elite right-wing autocrats and the revolutionary group who have been influenced by or connected to Pridi’s People’s Party. R’s line “It’s a pity. When I had the power to make things happen, I lacked the experience to take enough precautions,” is a famous quote taken from Pridi..  
The train can be seen to allude to the Thai Style Democracy (as explained in Chapter 2). But these two men might also represent obscurity in Thai politics, especially for audience members with little background understanding. The text, “But this time,” as spoken by the Elite Man may allude to... |
October 14 (1973), when demonstrators called for the resignation of the military government and asked for a constitution based on democratic principles. The Elite Man appears willing to take sides with “all classes in the society” to counter the dictatorship.

The Revolutionary Man appears willing to join hands with the Elite Man based on democratic principles. But when the Elite Man refuses the handshake, the implication is that he is insincere. The power relations between these two men is also comparable to, and may be read as alluding to, many other historical events in Thailand from the 1970s until the present.¹⁰

| Cervantes’s final monologue, given to the court, before being taken to his execution. | “That was Don Quixote. I am Miguel De Cervantes. I am a playwright, director, and actor. I have lived for nearly 60 years, and I have seen life as it is. Pain, misery, hunger...cruelty beyond belief. I have been a soldier and seen my | For the 2006 production, Cervantes’s age was changed from 50 to 60, which is Kamron’s real age. This monologue can be read as an allusion to Kamron’s idealism as a leftist activist who had fought to end the suffering of the oppressed. It is not |

¹⁰ See Chapter 2 for the historical context that explains the different political factions in Thailand since 1932.
| “Disciplinary Sequence I” | The National Anthem includes lyrics such as, “[…Thailand] is a nation state where every inch of land we’ve maintained intact as a whole. [This is because] We Thais have united as one in solidarity. We love peace. But we are not cowards in wars. We will not let anyone abuse our independence. We will sacrifice our flesh and blood for our nation. Hail! the Thai nation! Hail! to victory! Cheers!” (trans. by Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn). | difficult to see that Cervantes shares with Kamron the “60 years of living” filled with “pain, misery, hunger, and cruelty”; “madness” based on “too much sanity” and “seeing life as it really is” (not the way one is made to believe). Perhaps, on the verge of death, Cervantes is asking a question similar to one Kamron wants to ask, on behalf of all those who have suffered from their ideological struggle: why did they have to live at all if life could be so cruel and insane? |
| “Disciplinary Sequence I” | Actors pretend to be toddlers crawling and moving along with a lullaby song. They become school children, unified by the national anthem, they stand up straight and sing along with respect. They slowly “transform” into soldiers in training, who march and use machine guns. | Example of disciplinary methods used regularly in Thailand to create a ‘homogenous’ society. |
Fig. 40 At the end of *Man of La Mancha*, the Elite Man and the Revolutionary Man (standing upstage on the elevated platform) discuss the progress of democracy, while an image of the October 14, 1973 uprising is projected on the screen.

Fig. 41 The solidarity of the student’s political movement during the 1970s.
Aside from the specific detailed allusions in the examples given above, this production can also be perceived more generally as having two levels of allusions, the biography of Kamron and the biography of the nation, as Chetana Nagavajara, a prominent Thai critic, observed during a post-show discussion:

On one level, it seems that *MWD* is trying to write the director’s biography. On another level, if we perceive this production as auto-biographical, then it is not just a personal biography but a biography of a nation. The second level is played out with depth and sophistication. But it is such a surprising co-incidence that the four selected plays which run parallel with the director’s life also run parallel with the history of this nation” (Post-Performance Discussion, Oct. 20, 2006).

In addition to the possible immediate allusions made by symbolic characters, images, action, and text, the fact that the text from *MWD* is mostly a pastiche of other literary sources made “intertextuality” an important component in the production. The term “intertextuality” used in this dissertation refers to the appropriation of familiar songs, words, and translated plays, used to provide as clues for Thai audience members to formulate their personal interpretations. By weaving meanings across seemingly unrelated texts and by combining them with the audio-visual effects including the coded actions of actors, the audience members are expected to arrive at their understanding of the clues through their own associations and allusions. For example, Kamron made an intertextual use of the emotionally painful sentence “I am an historical ruin” from a famous remark by a former student leader Seksan Prasertkul, who defected from the Communist Party of Thailand and turned himself in to the state. In this play, it is not only that the Director recognizes himself as an “historical ruin,” but this statement can also be interpreted as encompassing all the
people whose lives have been ruined by the particular historical episode of October 6, including Kamron himself. Another example of “intertextuality” can be observed in the symbolic use of the toy train. The Mad Man’s statement, “I am crushed by a toy train” is a quote taken from a short story (“Train”)—from Suchart Sawatsri’s collection, *The Silence* (*Kwam ngiab*)—about a mentally distraught man who thought that he was killed by a toy train after the confusion of the “People’s War.” Therefore, the word “train” not only means “democracy” (or Thai Style Democracy) but it also has a significant historical meaning in reference to the very thing that caused deaths and disasters for the October 6 generation. In a sequence following *Death and the Maiden*, after an actress from the “ensemble” expressed her feeling of being marginalized in the society (because of making this type of theatre), the other actors formed a circle and sang “*The Star’s Rays of Faith* (*Saeng dao hang sattha*),” a song originally sung during the October 6 uprising, but used in this play to convey multiple meanings: their own hope and aspiration to continue to walk the double paths of the “truth seekers” and “theatre performers;” and to continue to search for justice for the victims by asking for a “sincere confession” as asked by Paulina in *Death and the Maiden*. Since the song was immediately followed by the king’s anthem and the king’s image, the request for justice seemed to be directed to the king himself. Since there is no further explanation during the playing of the king’s anthem, this allusion has many possibilities for interpretation (some of which cannot be stated in this dissertation). The theatre allusions and intertextuality as used in this production have opened up opportunities for the audience to create plural meanings and interpretations. Supplemented by the *dialectic images*, the audience is forced to confront its own pulses to understand, or to seek truth and justice from a suppressed history.
6.3.3 Dynamic Acting

As in Kamron’s other productions, the actors in *MWD* employed a unique mode of physical expression drawing on Kamronian, Stanislavskian, Brechtian and Artaudian methods. While the acting in *MNP* emphasized a ritualistic quality, the acting in *MWD* emphasized the dynamic approach that could accommodate many different demands of eclectic styles. For example, the selected scenes from the four Western plays demanded quasi-realistic Stanislavskian acting, while other scenes demanded a more Brechtian or Artaudian quality of acting. The lack of realistic setting and the traverse stage with audience members on both sides made it almost an obligation for the production to adopt a certain degree of stylized acting. Because the actors needed to be viewed by the audience sitting on both sides of the long catwalk bridge, they had to move frequently from one position to another, using the available space effectively and inventively. The mostly bare, I-shaped stage not only brought the action closer to the audience but also provided a greater variety of acting areas (the open stage and the high platform in the northern side, the long catwalk connecting two sides of the stage, and the “tunnel” on the southern side).

Consequently, the set not only accommodated the audience but also allowed for the type of acting which is based on the actors’ arrangement in, and relationship to, the performance space. The essential concern for Kamron was finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each style of acting, and embodying the decision in physical arrangements.

For example, in the second scene from *Les Justes*, as Kaliayev tries to convince Dora that it is possible to take revolutionary action by going beyond hatred and by loving fellow humans, Dora implies to Kaliayev that they themselves also need to be loved. In the production, when Dora was yearning for a personal love, the
actress playing Dora stood up and crossed over the bridge. As she delivered lines about the conflict between living with ideological love and living with a personal love, Kaliayev crossed from the southern end of the stage and they both stopped midway on the bridge to make eye contact. During Dora’s delivery of her monologue about her dream, she stared up into the open space, opened her arms, twirled herself around and crossed over the vast space very slowly, making a circular pattern on the stage. Almost simultaneously, Kaliayev performed a mirrored movement slowly across the stage. Together, they made an almost unnoticeable spiral pattern until they met in the middle of the bridge. Her back against Kaliayev’s, Dora looked up high, saying “oh, if only we could forget, even for an hour, the ugliness and misery of this world we live in, and let ourselves go—at last! One little hour or so of thinking of ourselves, just you and me, for a change.” Then they turned to face each other, exchanging a moment of closeness before Dora said, “Can we be like that for a little while?” As they were about to kiss, he withdrew, and turned his back to her, saying, “but this is just delusion!” Despite all the movement described here, the acting in this scene had the qualities of realistic characterization and line delivery. Without question, the aesthetics were aided by the fluidly choreographed movement sequence. With no realistic set pieces or scenery, this quasi-realistic acting, based in a fluid movement style in a bare space, brought a sense of intimacy to the audience.
Besides the quasi-realistic technique mentioned, other techniques employed in the “Body Expression” style of this production were mime, and physical transformation, accompanied by music/audio and visual effects, in the Brechtian or Artaudian method. For example, Kamron had the actors interact with the audience directly, momentarily breaking the “illusion” of the stage presentation. In a scene from *Man of La Mancha*, Cervantes’s last monologue was delivered not only to the “court” and the other “prisoners” in the play, but also to the audience members, as he asked whether there was a place for a “crazy” person like him in this life. In a transitional scene in which a “temple fair” was played out, the “mime player” directly asked audience members for money (although no one actually paid him). The most Brechtian moment in this production, however, was in the scene following *The Crucible*, when the
Ensemble members who had been portraying the “accusers of Salem’s witches” transitioned again into neutral characters. Then, they began to change into an angry crowd by chanting “Kill them! Kill them!” at the “witches”. They took turns pointing fingers at the next “witch” (analogous representations of the real victims of the October killings). After a few turns, the accusers slowly turned around to face the audience. They pointed fingers at targeted audience members and shouted “you, you, you!” while calling them by professions such as farmer, seamstress, academic, electrician, doctor, musician, and student. A moment of silence followed, the actors “transformed” themselves into the roles of “killers” and mimed shooting into the audience in slow motion while mimicking the sound of gunfire. As the “massacre” of the audience started in slow motion and in complete silence, with the actors’ intense pantomiming of the killing and mimicking the sound of each gun-shot, the screen was illuminated with quick-paced images of gruesome photographs of the tortured and killed from the October 6 event. This moment not only presented an unexpected attack on the audience, it also momentarily put the audience in the position of “the accused,” disrupting their position as passive observers. This short acting sequence, done in slow poetic movement, attempted to assault the audience’s senses by connecting them within the imagination to the killed, and thus reflecting an Artaudian sense of repressed disorder and violence. Through the presentation of violence, the “massacre” sequence attempted to shake the audience’s conscience by revealing the hypocrisy of the meta-narrative that tries to hide and make forgotten the atrocities committed by the state. The fact that the actors were able to “transform” themselves very quickly into a great number of roles with specific styles of acting for each role reflects their dynamic acceptance of change, physically, emotionally, and mentally. It is this type quality of performance that I call “dynamic acting.”
6.4 Political Implications in *A Mid Winter’s Dream*

At dawn on October 6, 1996, a simple but solemn symbolic Buddhist funeral was held inside Thammasat University for the forty known individuals who had lost their lives during the October 6, 1976 massacre. One of the attendees, Thongchai Winichakul, who had participated in the October 6 protests as a student activist, admitted that,

> At that moment, the reality struck me very hard. Most of them never got cremated properly after their deaths, let alone [received] any other forms of respect for humanity. It took twenty years to have them cremated properly in public, from the place where their lives were unjustly cut short. In a Buddhist
country where compassion and kindness are said to be abundant, twenty years was such a cruelly...long time. (2001:1) (Quoted from the original paper in English by Winichakul).

For Thongchai, and for many other survivors, the symbolic funeral was a significant gesture, representing a chance to grieve openly and collectively after two decades of living on their own with the traumatic memories. Nevertheless, he insisted that “the breaking of the silence does not mean that the limits of free expression were lifted. Neither were the painful and ambivalent memories completely resolved. Nor was the state held accountable for its crime” (ibid).

More than a decade after the symbolic funeral, Nicholas Bennett, a human rights activist, estimated that some three hundred people were killed in the October 6, 1976, massacre (Bangkok Post, February 14, 2008). Bennett’s article was published three days after Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej claimed on CNN that, “on the October 6, 1976 event. Just one died; no other deaths; one unlucky guy being beaten and being burnt in Sanam Luang. Only one guy died that day” (Bangkok Post, February 11, 2008). This claim by the Prime Minister, who had been Minister of the Interior at the time of the massacre, illustrates a strategy typical of right-wing Thais trying to suppress the facts about the massacre, which in turn produces a suppressed memory or an intentional amnesia about the incident. The greater problem is that he is not the only one. In the audience’s written responses for the MWD performance in one of the performances, more than half of the 120 audience members who had turned in the performance evaluation forms wrote that they had known very little about the October 6, 1976 incident prior to attending the performance.11

11 The CMTG provides a performance evaluation form to every audience member before entering the auditorium, and it is collected at the exit. However, only on Oct. 20, 2006, in addition to
It is under the constraints of what I perceive as collective amnesia and limited freedom of expression that Kamron was driven to create a production intended to bring the memories and questions back to his audiences. Within its postmodern aesthetics, the production of MWD is laden with political allusions and risky political references, making the performance a site for contestations of power relations between the right-wing elite faction and the left-wing revolutionary faction, an opposition that has a long presence in the political history of Thailand. Through the evocation of many historical moments, Kamron challenged the dominant historical meta-narrative by emphasizing the singularity of the October 6 event because it lacked any real closure. In the process, the notion of history as known to most to the Thai public became a site of dispute.

MWD tried to communicate the power relations in Thai politics through the power contestations between the left and right political factions, and through the Mad Man’s landscape of memory, hallucination, and imagination. The tug of war between the right-wing faction and the left-wing faction were replayed repeatedly both in the mind of the Mad Man and in the reality of the political power struggle in Thailand. In the analysis of power relations in the following section, I intend to demonstrate, through the character of the Mad Man, the consequence of a disciplinary society for its subjects. Those who failed to be disciplined, such as the political activists and the “ensemble group” in this play, often became labeled as rebels, enemies, or outcasts from society.  

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12 Susan Heckman delineates that Foucault sees the subject (human) as “constituted through discursive formation”, which contains a certain perspective on itself and its surroundings (47). According to C.G. Prado, Foucault sees a “constituted subject” as a body that has been
During a post-performance discussion, an audience member stated, “I know that massacres of the civilian protesters happen in many other countries as well. But I could not help wondering why, after so many years, Thai society is still not able to come to terms with this incident?” (Oct. 20, 2006). Although this audience member did not mention the Mad Man, I think it is highly possible that the Mad Man is a symbolic representation of the victims who have not been able to “come to terms” with the painful experience. The Mad Man, who looks tense and frightened, hardly ever speaks, and never talks about his life. His speechlessness makes his presence almost like an absence. Invisible to other characters on the stage, his ambiguous presence functions like a ghost trying to atone for the repressed past. Throughout the play, he delivers only a few obscure and fragmented lines, each of which could be an allusion to political uprisings, past and present. For example, his first and only line in Act I is “The reality. The Dreams.” The rest of the performance then follows without any verbal explanation of what he referred to as “reality” and “dreams” (which are more like nightmares). Towards the end of Act I (Man of La Mancha), the Mad Man gazed intensely at the screen showing the moving image of Sakesan Prasertkul, a former student leader, who was making a speech at a political demonstration. His gaze appeared as though he was present at each event. After the documentary screening, he remarked as though he remembered who he was by saying, “The play [Man of La Mancha] is over. The crazy knight is now dead. But I am the real thing.” Later, he reacted in terror every time he saw the film footage of the “moving train.”

When the Little Girl later lost her toy-train, he warned her in a panicked voice not to

disciplined through the disciplinary mechanism of a society to attain a certain set of attitude and behaviors, therefore the constituted subject “became a habit-invested body that is both a subject in being a subject to the institutional and state authority, and in being a subject of experience [...]” (79-81).
accept a new train. In the last Act, as he lay down next to those who had been “shot” during the “Killing the Communists Sequence,” he uttered in terror, “I have been crushed to death by the toy-train some time between October 14 and October 6.” His last statement reaffirms that he was a democracy activist from the 1970s political uprisings. Trapped in the past, and in hallucination, the Mad Man, a forgotten left-wing revolutionary activist from the past, is constituted in Thai society as a crazy subject, waiting for justice to be served.

Ultimately, $MWD$ was able to demonstrate that the right-wing faction, represented by elite-class characters and operating under the rubric of the Three-Pillar ideology, has used both the “Repressive State Apparatus” (i.e. armed forces, surveillance, and imprisonment) and the “Ideological State Apparatus” (i.e. schooling, and media) to suppress its left-wing opposition. However, the left-wing faction seems to be able to regenerate and continues to fight for democracy. The “Monsters” sequence and the “Killing the Communists” sequence described in the previous section, which utilized all of the methods mentioned, clearly illustrated how the Repressive State Apparatus was used to suppress the student uprising of October 6, whereas a montage of “Disciplinary” sequence (showing how disciplinary measures are imposed on the Thais since childhood) illustrated the ways in which the Ideological State Apparatus was used to control the “hearts and minds” of the subordinate class and to constitute them as Foucault’s “disciplined subjects” of the state.\footnote{See these concepts by Althusser and Foucault in Chapter 1.}

Among the symbolic representations, the Elite Man and the Revolutionary Man represent the most obvious dichotomy of power relations between the right-wing ruling elites and the left-wing revolutionary masses. For example, in the beginning of
Act I, although the Revolutionary Man seems to be the one who “check mates” the Elite Man in the chess game (signifying the 1932 Revolution), the Elite Man utters triumphantly, “Ah…a steam engine train…a modernity under ‘my control’ to move forward into the future….” In this statement, the train can be taken as a symbol of democracy. However, this “train” of democracy, in actuality was a product of power negotiations between King Rama VII and the People’s Party (who relied on the pro-democracy military to stage a revolution). Decades since the revolution, it seems that the democracy of the revolutionist party has become merely a “train” controlled by “tracks” that are laid mainly by the elite class (see the analysis in Table 4). These long decades of “train running” ended with the little girl crying in the end of Act I, “Who stole my train?” This question can be seen as alluding to the seventeen coups of the past eight decades, which have stolen “democracy” from the people. The Revolutionary Man told her, “Child, don’t cry. We will get everyone to make a new train for you.” When the Mad Man recognized the offer of a new “train,” he reacted by saying to the girl, “No! Stop! Don’t take it!” as though the “train” was something horrifying. In this sense, the train functions like one of Benjamin’s dialectical images because it simultaneously represents progress and destruction, and it could also trigger a moment of political awakening. In MWD, the Mad Man’s fear can be explained by the victimization of those who have been perceived as “threats” to society. This fear, and the reaction to those who think “differently,” are illustrated by a “witch-hunt” scene from The Crucible and by the “Killing the Communists” sequence. Following these scenes, the two allegorical men reappear on the stage with the following dialogue:

**Revolutionary Man:** I am all red now…they painted me as a “communist”.

**Elite Man:** My hands are red too. Am I then also a “communist”?
Revolutionary Man: No. Your hands are red from being covered in blood!

Elite Man: Too bad! But the destruction must continue so that new things can emerge.

Revolutionary Man (to the imaginary audience): We must dig into the ashes of destruction and bring out the truth. The truth will become the foundation for our future.

Otherwise, these losses will gain nothing.

It is clear that the dialogue above can be taken to allude not only to the October 6 massacre, but also to the killings of protesters in 1992. At the end of the conversation, however, the Revolutionary Man still illustrates the power of hope, asserting that uncovering the “truth” about what happened in the past can bring about a true reconstruction of democracy. Similar power relations between the elite and the revolutionary can be found in the “witch-hunt” accusation in *The Crucible* where pointing fingers at those who are different becomes a way to prevent oneself from being accused. The witch-hunt scene runs parallel to the Thai sociopolitical context from the 1950s through the 1970s, when there were power struggles and wars between the military governments and the Communist Party of Thailand, and when the ruling class perceived the student political movement as “pro-communist.”

While *The Crucible* illustrates the elite class’s “willingness to kill,” *Les Justes* (*The Just Assassins*) illustrates a moral dilemma for revolutionary activists when they have the opportunity to commit a violent crime that might further their agenda. In *Les Justes*, a group of young Russian revolutionaries who are supposed to kill the “target,” even though children are included, have to face a moral dilemma about the honor of killing. The tension between personal integrity and revolutionary goals has been a more or less ongoing dilemma for dissenters who have tried to topple coup governments throughout modern Thai history. The scene from *Les Justes* poses an important question to anyone who advocates the use of violence to gain a revolutionary victory: “do the means justify the end?” The scene implies that if the
revolutionaries lost their compassion for humanity and simply followed orders without using their moral conscience, the revolution itself would not be honorable, and perhaps it would not be welcomed by the people.

Another paradox confronting the revolutionary activists of October 6 was the result of becoming silenced victims. This dilemma is evoked by a scene from *Death and the Maiden* in which a silenced victim has a chance to take revenge on her past victimizer. The dramatic scene involves a former torture victim, Paulina, and her captured hostage, a doctor whom, she believes, raped and tortured her during an interrogation twenty years earlier. After pondering many ways to take her revenge, she finally realizes that what she truly wants from him is his confession and sincere repentance. In the end, she makes him confess his crimes and sign the confession letter. When the truth is revealed to the Human Rights Commission and the traumatic story is recognized as a part of recorded history, she can once again move on with her life with dignity. Through Paulina’s voice, Kamron asks for justice on behalf of all the silenced victims of October 6. Kamron admits that he meant this production to be a “symbolic petition” to the king of Thailand to help resolve the dilemma by “taking a step toward healing the victims who have been ignored and neglected, by unleashing the truth and making it be known publicly,” so that “the traumatic experience of the victims can be addressed” (PI, Oct. 6, 2006). By doing this, if he were to be misunderstood by the authority, he risked being charged under the *lèse majesté* law.

Functioning like the montage sequences mentioned earlier, the four scenes from four Western plays presented in *MWD* not only allude to historical events, but also functioned as “dialectical images” themselves. Like all the sounds, images, and actions presented as fragments on the stage, these scenes were also located in the context of contemporary times. They thus provoked members of the audience to
ponder the power relations that played out in their imagination with regard to the forgotten parts of history as well as the on-going political conflicts.

6.5 Political Implications in the Audience’s Responses

In addition to observing the only post-performance discussion session on Oct 20, 2006, (which 53 out of 66 audience members attended), I studied all of the 200 very short written responses by the audience members that were turned in by audience members from all the eight performances in 2006 (not all audience members turned in their responses). Since the Pridi Banomyong Institute was a non-governmental organization that held activities with social and political themes, it was not a public space commonly known or popular to all types of Bangkok audiences. As a matter of fact, after observing all the eight performances, I noticed that most of the audience members who chose to attend were of a rather specific type. Being a non-commercial, non-popular theatre, the production of MWD seemed to appeal mostly to curious college students, supporters (fans) of the CMTG (who are mostly theater connoisseurs), and the educated middle-class.

From my study of the audience’s responses, it seemed that their interpretations of the production were based not only on their own experience, background, knowledge about Thai history and Western literature, and experiences with theatre, but also depended upon their understanding of the nature of political and cultural hegemony in Thai society. Audience members with the knowledge of political history and awareness of the power relationships between different political factions were able to make connections between most of the theatrical metaphors and their historical and political connotations, with or without the understanding of the four Western plays, although this was not easy. However, they seemed to be able to see the
relationships between the symbolic codes (as presented by the production elements) and the thematic interpretations. For example, one audience member among this group, who had been a left-wing political activist in the 1970s and thus understood the traumas of the October activists, stated during a post-production discussion session:

I think this production is very complicated for the general audience to understand. First of all, you need to understand the modern history of Thailand. Secondly, you need to understand the four western plays employed. Thirdly, you need to be familiar with Kamron’s style or the CMTG’s style of theatre. Nevertheless, I admit that the production is an effective stimulation to make us ponder the historical memory of the October events, but I also doubt how much the new generation can comprehend it. A sad feeling came upon me when it was over. […] I am thankful that the October tragedy is not forgotten (Kanjana Boonnak, Oct. 20, 2006).

Another group seemed to interpret the theatrical signs from their own perceptions of the October historical events, regardless of their direct experience with the events. For example, a male audience member in his late 20s configured the meanings behind different signs in the production in a manner that was close to the director’s intention. He remarked,

I can interpret most of the signs in this production. At first, I did not understand the connotations behind the chess game. But when the Knight was used to check mate his opponent, I immediately understand what the director was trying to imply about the political event.14 So, when the king’s anthem

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14 He avoided saying directly that the “knight” signifies the right-wing military faction, who often used the excuse of protecting the monarchy to commit many coups d’état to claim the ruling power from the elected government. Some historians questioned and investigated the often collaborative relationship between the coup groups and the monarchy.
started towards the end, I felt like I did not want to stand up. But only a crazy person in this society would not stand at the king’s anthem. So, many of our intellectuals all seemed like mad people because their thoughts were against the mainstream. Like, Jit Phumisak, they were killed for being born in the wrong country and at the wrong time”\(^{15}\) (Oct. 20, 2006).

The above statement implies that not “all” of the new generation are ignorant of the suppressed historical event. Although this particular individual does not represent the majority of the new generation, his insights reflect a genuine understanding of the complexity of power relations in Thai political history. In Thailand, although school history textbooks avoid analysis of the people’s movement in politics, books and articles concerned with specific political history are available in libraries and bookstores. The audience members who had no background knowledge about the people’s movement in the past seemed to draw their interpretations from the mainstream hegemonic ideology; for them, the October activists were “communists” that they equated with an “evil force against the monarchy.” For example, one of the comments written by a male university student was, “I like this production very much. It helped me to make comparisons between the coups in the past and the coup that just happened recently. It helped me to become even more patriotic since the coup has come out to protect our king and our nation from evils.” With a similar understanding about the coup, but drawing upon an independent meaning-making process, another college student reconstructed his own interpretation by paying attention to the semantic features. In his words:

I don’t think that I need to know those four plays before seeing this production because what matters to me is the content each play offers. I also pay more

\(^{15}\) Jit Phumisak is a famous leftist intellectual, poet, historian, and political activist who was murdered by a soldier.
attention to how the actors communicate their content to me. For example, the last play [Death and the Maiden] illustrates the dark side of human nature, where violence prevails. I make connections between this theme and what has just happened politically in our country.

In some cases, the audience admitted that they were “very lost” and could not make logical connections based on the production. One female spectator remarked,

I am from a new generation where these historical events are irrelevant to my life. When these historical events occurred, I was not yet born. I also have no understanding about what the symbols in this production were referring to, especially those four plays that were inserted. I am completely lost and this production makes no sense to me. What are they trying to tell me about history?

The above response not only reflects the failed attempt of the production to convey its political messages to a certain type of audience, but it also demonstrates how successful the hegemonic control of the ruling class in the manipulation of the mind of the populace has been. As for the written responses, most were brief comments. The spectators basically stated whether they “liked” or “disliked” the performance, but rarely gave detailed reasons. Most of those who liked the performance gave reasons such as “creative production,” “powerful acting with complicated script,” “great metaphoric scenes used to compare with the past history,” and “inspired me to learn more about history.” Those who disliked the performance mostly criticized the complexity of the production and their own inability to relate to the historical events presented.

The very diverse responses from the audience members given as examples here demonstrate the possibility of a plurality of interpretations offered by the
production. Since I did not directly conduct a quantitative study of the audience responses, my analysis is based on observation rather than statistics. Overall, a real understanding of this production seemed to operate within an inherently closed system kept for those audience members who could truly decode its meanings, contingent metaphors and intertextuality. Some members of the audience who took the liberty of interpretation into their own hands without taking the director’s intention into consideration sought to decode and produce meanings independently. Yet regardless of how close the audience’s interpretation gets to the director’s intention, each interpretation reflects the ideology operating in the interpreter’s mind.

In this sense, the production might have attained its goal only for those who already knew about the repressed truth, and it might not have successfully converted the “politically and culturally suppressed” audience members into a new awakening. Nevertheless, from the majority of the audience’s responses, it seems that the production had a clear impact on the audience by provoking them to find out more about the historical events and to contemplate the reasons why this type of tragedy has been a recurring event in Thailand. However, only a minority of the audience seemed to desire what the production was calling for, “justice for the victims.”

### 6.6 Buddhist Thoughts in MWD

Unlike Kamron’s previous productions, *MWD* does not carry explicit Buddhist thoughts. Nevertheless, through the play’s intertextuality, a very important Buddhist doctrine is implicitly expressed. In the opening scene of *MWD*, following a short exchange of dialogue takes place between the Elite Man and the Revolutionary Man:

**Elite Man:** Ah…train…steam engine…modernity under my control. It is to move according to the guided rail way.
**Revolutionary Man**: When a great amount of water boils and changes into steam, immense energy is then created to push the wheels of the train forward. No one can stop it…

This image of an “unstoppable steam engine” corresponds to Pridi’s writing about the “inevitable change in a society” in an article called “The Impermanence of Thai Society” (1958). In this article, Pridi explains how the invention of a steam engine triggered other changes (e.g. division between capitalist class and labor class) in the West and eventually moved Western societies towards modernity. He explains that the steam engine is an example of the Marxist “jump” from quantity to quality. In other words, he mentions of how enough material “quantity” (e.g. water vapor, labor forces, modes of production) can be turned into “quality” (e.g. energy, social system, economic system) that moves things and society forward. Giving examples of the development of human society from primordialism to capitalism, Pridi bases his notion of the “inevitable change in a society” on both Friedrich Engels’ social theory of “Dialectic Materialism” and the Buddhist concept of “impermanence (aniccata)” (84). Like Engels, Pridi believes that everything that happens in the world are reducible to the interaction of forces which are always contradictory in nature, and this is how things evolve to a more progressive situation. Pridi asserts that social change can happen in two ways, either slowly towards an equilibrium with nature, or quickly from “quantity” to “quality”. The latter can only occur if there is enough accumulated material quantity (e.g. a revolution created by the large quantity of the masses can abruptly change the quality of a political system) (72-3). Pridi sees that Thailand’s change into a democratic society is inevitable not only because no absolute power can be permanent, but also because he believes that the mode of production is closely relevant to the political system governing the people. He points out that, “[I]f
the politics change too slowly and do not meet the materialistic demands of the people, the law of nature will force the two to merge. But if that does not happen soon enough by nature, it will need to happen via the revolution” (ibid. 53). Relating these arguments to the Buddhist concept of impermanence, Pridi sees all social changes including wars and destruction as being a part of causal relations which are not only inevitable, but will eventually also lead to progress.

In *MWD*, the Revolutionary Man has taken Pridi’s concept and image of the “unstoppable steam engine train” to predict the inevitable future of social change. The intertextuality used by the Revolutionary Man can carry a considerable depth of meanings for those audience members who are familiar with Pridi’s thoughts. Those who do not understand the intertextual connotations might arrive a similar point by asking questions concerning the symbolic meanings of the steam engine train. By asserting a place for the “unpresentable” in contemporary society, *MWD* has in some way thus served as a part of the “unstoppable train” that moves towards “inevitable change in a society.”

**Conclusion**

Through the Mad Man’s world, projected through a series of montage sequences consisting of short skits, games, songs, documentary images and film footages (as short montage of *dialectical images*), accompanied by music and sound effects, lighting effects, the actors’ physicalizations through dynamic acting, and the dramatization of scenes from four Western plays, *MWD* eventually functions as a large montage of *dialectical images* of historical power struggles (between the right-wing faction and the left-wing faction, between the ruler and the subjects). As a theatre production, *MWD* encompasses most, if not all, of the characteristics of
postmodern theatre with Kamron’s poetic sensibility. Through its postmodern aesthetics, *MWD* brought to the Thai audience a sensitive revelation of the suppressed memories in the country’s political history, and at the same time reminded them that justice has not yet been achieved for the victims.

As another significant production of Kamron’s work, *MWD*’s use of postmodern *mise-en-scène*, theatrical allusion, intertextuality, and dynamic acting introduced postmodern aesthetics and postmodern theatre innovations to the contemporary theatre in Thailand. With the hope of provoking a political awakening in the audience as well as of reminding them of the Buddhist teaching of “impermanence,” Kamron has pioneered the use of theatre to present the “unpresentable” through postmodern aesthetics where pleasure and pain coexist in the audience’s reception of the performance. Regardless of the audience’s interpretations and comprehension of the signs as presented in the production, *MWD* serves as a psychological agent for Thai society that tries to transcend the event and continues to allow it to have a place in both social history and private memory.
CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Modern theatre in contemporary Asia is situated amidst rapid change, where notions of national boundaries and nationalistic discourses have become increasingly blurred, and have constantly been contested by the forces of globalization and modernity. In Thailand, this rapid transformation has resulted in ongoing clashes of conflicting ideologies, cultural beliefs, and power-blocs. As a nation state, Thailand is structured as a military-backed capitalistic democracy and constitutional monarchy; the citizens of Thailand, regardless of their class, gender, or ethnicity, have been subjugated to the sakdina-rooted cultural system and the Three-Pillars ideology which result in a hegemony dominated by an elite, ruling class who control economic, social, educational and political structures.

Although debates concerning the effects of globalization on the history and culture of Thailand have produced diverse opinions (Baker and Phongpaichit (2005) 199–229, Yayori (2000) 1–9, Reynolds (2006) 277–303, 285–30), the development of globalization among Thai intellectuals on the notion of globalization. For example, Thawit Sukhapanich proposed that because Thailand had been in contact with other countries for centuries, it was not unusual for Thai society to adopt globalization; Thianchai Wongchaisuwan thought that modernization had failed to deliver the benefits it promised; Somchai Phahaphawiwat thought that Thai culture was being internationalized and global culture was being domesticated; Thirayut Bunmi was wary of globalization and despite its benefits, he argued that Thailand must enter a post-Western phase in order to survive (285-303).
of modern and contemporary theatre in Thailand has been closely influenced by the domestic and international political and economic contexts. Between the two world wars, threats to political, economic, and cultural sovereignty, along with other challenges faced by Thailand, have played immense roles in the formation of Thailand’s political structure, thereby forcing Thailand to counter these trends by asserting her own power and identity through nationalism within its self-proclaimed Thai Style Democracy. The successful deployment of the Three Pillars ideology in the hearts and souls of the people through what can be categorized as Ideological and Repressive State Apparatus has helped Thailand to stand as an independent country with a national cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the adverse consequences are that over time the Three-Pillars ideology, has become a hegemony (in Gramscian sense) and essentialized through governmentality to the extent that it has created a norm of cultural governance that leads to both state censorship and self censorship. This ideology has been most exploited by the lèse majesté law where most charges made against individuals were relevant to their political dissent. The question that arises in the 21st century, is whether Thai Style Democracy is truly a suitable form of democracy for Thailand. This question manifests itself in the ongoing political conflicts that have divided the country into the anti-Thaksin and the anti-unelected government factions, the latter including pro-Thaksin group. Meanwhile, as telecommunications are breaking down old barriers (e.g., a hierarchical belief system, and the hegemonic control of knowledge and information), and as globalization has brought about Thailand’s obligations to global market economy, health, social welfare, and human rights policies, the Three Pillars ideology including the sakdina-derived cultural system have been increasingly challenged, from within and from
without. The notion of “Thai-ness” as a national identity has been contested not only by the process of globalization, but also by cultural output of local, fragmented groups ranging from folk/popular traditional theatre, to contemporary theatre, to the renaissance of People’s Theatre where the theatre of Kamron Gunatilaka plays a big part.

Based on a great number of academic analyses on development of Thai democracy, I concluded that since the 1932 Revolution, there have been three primary aspects of the Thai society that led to the current turmoil. Firstly, there has been unbalanced distribution of economic, social, educational, and political opportunities between different classes. Secondly, there has been a lack of participatory democracy at almost all sectors of the society, ranging from schools to larger institutions. This dissertation focuses primarily on the third aspect which concerns the deep-rooted conflict between the old sakdina-based ideology, and the new, modern, rapidly globalized Thailand.

Chapter 2 in this dissertation was devoted to providing a background that explains the interconnectedness between the sakdina culture and politics, and how Thai Style Democracy and Thai-ness have been constructed to sustain sovereignty as well as the hegemony, and why modernity and grass-roots people’s movements became a countering force to the state domination. In addition to my own chapter, the

2 Thailand is a member of the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),

work of many political science academics has demonstrated how the institution of monarchy was constructed as an ideologically-embedded institution. The attachment of the Thai people to the monarchy as the supreme and divine power, according to these speculations, although providing Thai society with a sense of identity, unity, and stability in the past, seems to have had a certain adverse effect on Thai politics in modern times. For example, loyalty to the institution of the monarchy was often claimed by the military to lend legitimacy to their *coups d'état*, thus hindering the development of democracy in the long run. Nakarin Mektrairat, a scholar of Political Science, maintains that the fixation on the meta-narratives which make up the monarchy-centered history of Thailand, was based on the traditional Buddhist belief in a fixed kingship, as well as the more Thai-specific Three-Pillar ideology, without realistic regard to changes in economics, society, and culture, domestically and globally (*Thought, Knowledge and Power* 38).

The cultural and political hegemony has had considerable influences on cultural entities, including theatre, which have been dominated by government directives and by the aesthetics and ideologies represented by elite or commercial theatre. Consequently, it is through the folk/popular traditional, and the contemporary performing arts that socio-political issues can be probed and debated. Under the system of Thai Style Democracy, the dichotomy of power in the society has shifted from the monarchy versus the commoners, as in the past, to the government versus the commoners or the privileged class versus the under-privileged class. In the realm of theatre arts, the work of Kamron Gunatilaka from the 1970s to 2006 has also been influenced by the socio-political and cultural contexts in terms of its philosophies and aesthetic practices.
Although there are many other possible interpretations of Kamron’s work, political implications are in fact the most dominant characteristic. In this dissertation, I have analyzed the interlaced relationships between the aesthetic concepts and the ideological, philosophical, and political implications of his works. In the course of the history of contemporary Thai theatre, Kamron has consistently offered new aesthetic means to challenge the hegemonic bourgeois theatre. Kamron’s aesthetic concepts were often inspired by ideological, philosophical, and political ideas rooted in Marxist ideology and Buddhist-based philosophy. From his early directing works in the 1970s at Chiang Mai University, Kamron stood out from his contemporaries by using field research as one of his methodologies to understand the reality of his surrounding context. His Rural series, which represented a distinct portrayal of the cycle of poverty experienced by many peasants in rural Thailand, was based on his field research in rural areas. It laid a solid foundation for Kamron to situate his theatre in the line of Grotowski’s Poor Theatre while incorporating certain aspects of the rural Thai performance traditions, as well as Brechtian-based style and goals. These essential elements proved to be the key characteristics of all Kamron’s theatre productions in the next three decades. Although Kamron directed thirteen theatre productions from 1970 to 2006, most of his productions before 1983 were at the experimental stage, and many were amateurish compared to his later work. I chose to focus my analysis on only three of his productions because I believe them to be Kamron’s most significant, most representative works in terms of their scale, audience reception, style, and content. Despite stylistic differences, they shared certain common characteristics that could eventually be called “Kamronian theatre” for the contemporary Thai stage.
First of all, they were all intended to challenge certain existing grand-narratives or meta-narratives of Thai society. *The Revolutionist* challenged the notion of monarchy-granted democracy; *My Name is Phaya Phan* (*MNP*) implicitly challenged the state-imposed version of Buddhism; *A Mid-Winter’s Dream* (*MWD*) challenged the grand-narratives or meta-narratives surrounding major political uprisings, especially the October 6, 1976 massacre. In *MWD*, Kamron was able to articulate an alternative historical narrative, one that recognized crimes committed by the state against political protesters.

Secondly, intentionally or unintentionally, each of the three plays challenges the power relations in the *sakdina*-based social structure that constitutes the class system in Thai society. This is evident in the choice to make each protagonist be (or believe himself to be) a common person rather than a royal hero; the protagonists’ selfless or egoless philosophies; the use of class-free (whether vernacular or stylized) language; and a *mise-en-scène* that defied mainstream elite traditional theatre as well as commercial theatre. In *The Revolutionist*, Pridi is presented as an egoless public intellectual, a common man who wants to bring social justice through economic reform. In *MNP*, Phaya Phan is not aware of his royal blood until the end. As a tribal bandit-turned-warrior, he fights in battles and rules the defeated kingdom. After he discovers the truth about the crimes he has committed, he denounces his power and kingship, and becomes a man of the lowest class in his tribal society. In *MWD*, all the protagonists from the four Western plays (*Man of Lamancha*, *The Just Assassins*, *The Crucible*, *Dead and the Maiden*) seek revolutionary causes, aiming to bring truth and justice to those who have been oppressed.

Thirdly, these representative productions can be considered pioneering *avant-garde* Thai theatre for their creative and original presentational styles as well as for
their content. Although he has directed a very limited number of productions, Kamron’s post-1980s works exhibit complexity, creativity, and innovation. As Kamron does not have a consistent preoccupation with a particular style or tradition, his productions always seem to be in a flux of experimentation. This dissertation demonstrates Kamron’s significant, even pioneering, contributions to Thai theatre aesthetics.

*The Revolutionist* not only became the sole existing documentary play about Pridi and Thai political power struggle, but also the cornerstone of a Buddhist-Brechtian theatre aesthetics, where both the Buddhist notion of *chit-wang* and the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* were employed. Kamron’s successful demonstration of Budhist-Brechtian aesthetics in both production text and acting style genuinely made him an avant-garde theatre director in Thailand the 1980s.

In the 1990s, while continuing to pursue Brechtian social-based principles, he began to experiment with Artaudian aesthetics. An original production adapted from a simple Thai folktale and an ancient Greek tragedy, *MNP* transformed both original sources into a fictional, pre-Siam world. In this primitive, tribal setting, Kamron was able to use Buddhist-Artaudian aesthetics that allowed for the creation of an anti-*sakdina* production in which a collaborative and democratic process of script writing took place. *MNP* also successfully defined Kamron’s uniqueness in directing or facilitating a creation of an imagined primordial world of *MNP* that allowed the subversion of the contemporary hegemonic language, and cultural codes.

In some ways, *The Revolutionist* and *MNP* shared analogous characteristics with the “historical avant-garde” of Western theatre. Like his predecessors in the “historical avant-garde theatre,” instead of revolting against the Enlightenment worldview of the West, Kamron attempted to revolt against the dominant trend of
extravagant, text-based productions in the contemporary Thai theatre, and instead experimented with ways to foreground the non-literary aspects of theatre. At the same time, in his search for physical modes of presentation, he also utilized elements of local folk performing cultures familiar to most native Thais. This resulted in the singing, dancing, and rhymed verse in his productions.

In 1996 and 2006, Kamron staged his most recent major experimental production, *A Mid Winter’s Dream* (*MWD*), a play that departed from the linear structure of his earlier work. *MWD* was “neo-avant-garde theatre” that shared a certain postmodern aesthetic strategies with Western counterparts such as Heiner Müller, Robert Lapage, and Caryl Churchill, as well as Japanese counterparts such as Sato Makoto. The shared characteristics of its self-reflexive, and meta-dramatic mode which resulted in fragmented structure, collages, and disperse of fixed meanings, Kamron illustrated that postmodern theatre can serve as a site of resistance to the Aristotelian theatre.

All in all, Kamron’s *MWD* was an original work, one with which Kamron attempted to provoke his audience with what Walter Benjamin called “dialectical images.” Through the utilization of intertextuality, theatrical allusion, physicalization, the production presented the “unpresentable” events in Thai history and provoked contemporary audiences to rethink history and take actions that can lead to change. Kamron’s work demonstrated that theatre can be an apparatus to counter the existing hegemony.

**Kamron’s Other Contributions to Theatre and Society at Large**

Besides pioneering neo-avant-garde theatre aesthetics, Kamron’s work has also made sociopolitical, professional, and academic contributions to contemporary...
Thai theatre and culture. For example, an examination of his oeuvre reveals a recurring call-to-action, whether implicit or explicit, for state authorities to take more responsibility in the investigation and revelation of historical truths that have often been suppressed to suit the official narrative of Thai history. This thematic motif is particularly evident in *The Obnoxious Sammie*, *The Revolutionist*, and *A Mid Winter’s Dream*. By using a different experimental style in each production, Kamron has demonstrated that it is possible to place political dissent, “unpresentable” sorrow and pain, and critical questions in the realm of theatrical experience (while similar actions in real life could put him in an extremely difficult position with the authorities). Another contribution of Kamron’s work was his attempt to apply democratic principles to the operation of the CMTG as a professional theatre group. As explain in Chapter 5, by empowering young actors to participate democratically in administrative decisions, script-writing process, and all other aspects of the productions at the Saeng Arun Art Center, Kamron not only demonstrated that it was possible to reduce the authority of the playwright and director, he also introduced a new mode of directing, playwriting, and theatre management into Thai society which, at that time, was dominated mainly by the director-centered model. Although the CMTG (as a permanent independent theatre group) closed down in 1997, Kamron’s vision and legacy at SAAC have been important inspirations for ensuing generations of theatre artists, including the current members of the CMTG. These unique characteristics make Kamron an idiosyncratic, exemplary figure in Thailand’s modern theatre. On the academic, or theoretical front, inquiries about his theory of theatre

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4 This notion was drawn from my own previous academic research and observations of the modern theatre productions in Thailand during the 1990s. The theatre society in Thailand during that time was extremely small, and it was not that difficult to make observations.
prompted Kamron to articulate his preliminary concept of “Theatre of Consciousness” (PI. July 29, 2007).

In contrast to the intellectual Brechtian approach, Kamron’s actor training emphasizes silencing of the “rational mind” and allowing the “intuitive mind” to produce an extraordinary consciousness. He believes that the process of theatre creation should also be a process of resurrecting human qualities that have been lost due to modern lifestyles.⁵ His adapted version of Mehring’s Body Expression method of actor training—which emphasizes the interconnectedness between body awareness, movement, thoughts, and sensations—shares similarities with the work of theatre practitioners including not just Mehring, but also Jerzy Grotowski, Michael Chekhov, Eugenio Barba, and Tadashi Suzuki. Nevertheless, his ultimate aspiration for actors is that they also experience a spiritual awakening.

During workshops and rehearsals, Kamron often reminds his actors to allow their intuitive consciousness to rise a creative ideas and impulses. Drawing from the actor training process and his thoughts on spirituality and acting during different interviews, his nascent theory of a “Theatre of Consciousness” can roughly be described as a performance of physical actions driven by a meditative consciousness, which not only becomes open to creativity, but also allows new intellectual and spiritual awareness to take place. For the interconnectedness of spirituality, physicality, and the environment, he draws upon Theravada Buddhist meditation for actor’s training. He remarked,

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⁵ To Kamron, most people in general are not using their body, voice, mind and spirit to their full potential. Therefore, acting is “a tool to the resurrection of the long lost total human” (PI. July 29, 2007).
The art of acting, if developed to its fullest potential, is actually very close to the notion of spiritual enlightenment. It is not our job as theatre practitioners to promote Buddhism or any other religion. However, there are similar processes in actor’s training and Buddhist meditation practice. Thus it is possible that an actor can develop his craft to the spiritual level by being aware that he is constantly creating a sacred space on the stage” (PI. August 12, 2003).

In Theravada Buddhist meditation, the meditator repeatedly practices deep concentration (samadhi) and mindfulness (sati) in order to clear his/her mind of distracting thoughts. Like the meditator, the actor seeks a high awareness of his own body and thoughts. Like the meditator, the actor seeks to distance his atta (self-centered ego) from all actions created by worldly desires (kilesa or tanha), thus developing intellectual and spiritual insights into human nature. Therefore, when an actor is trained with such awareness, based on Kamron’s belief, he can be liberated from the illusory views about life. With contemplation, he might also be able to identify root-cause for each instance of suffering. In this sense, Kamron’s Theatre of Consciousness holds the potential to be developed into a meditation practice.

The concept of spiritual practice within a performance process has been explored by many different theatre practitioners (e.g., Jerzy Grotowski’s “Para-theatre Experiment”, Philip Zarilli’s “Psychophysical Theatre,” Ota Shogo’s “Silence Theatre,” Gao Xingjian’s Zen theatre and Liu Ching Ming’s Buddhist-Taoist theatre [U Theatre]). Gao Xingjian’s Zen theatre, which uses theatre as a vehicle to “lead the audience to a kind of self-illumination,” seems to share the most common goal with Kamron when it comes to his desire for the audience to be awakened politically and
spiritually (qtd. in Zhao 170). While Kamron emphasizes the physical aspect of the theatre creation process, Gao focuses more on the text and the mode of presentation than on acting as the key vehicle for provoking “self-illumination” (ibid). Nevertheless, Kamron’s thought on Theatre of Consciousness has not been seriously developed into a theory. The following section is only a preliminary attempt to expand on his initial concept.

**Theatre of Consciousness: Implication of an Independent Theatre Theory**

Growing up in a country and in a region with a long cultural history of mystical training, rituals, and Buddhist mediation techniques, it was natural for Kamron to develop ideas about intuitive and spiritual awakening. Although he never produced any empirical evidence, and he never claimed to have a clear systematic method to prove a new theory, his belief in the meditative mode of human consciousness has led him to a dualistic belief of both intellectual-based and spiritual-based actor-training. Kamron has eclectically applied the theatre theories of Wolfram

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6 Gao Xingjian (1940 - ), a Chinese playwright, novelist, poet, painter who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000. He wrote several controversial plays during the time he was in China and has continued to write since relocating to France. See Henry Y.H. Zhao’s *Towards a Modern Zen Theatre*.

7 Henry Y.H. Zhao, the author of *Towards a Modern Zen Theatre* claims that Gao’s plays are evidence of a modern mode of xieyi theatre, a kind of theatre that is not a subjective expression of emotion, but a vehicle to lead the audience to a kind of self-illumination (170). Zhao expands the notion of xieyi much further than its primary proponents. By studying Gao’s works, Zhao sees that Gao’s mode of expression, although employs many of the anti-representational styles, is meant for a spiritual experience, or something beyond the established conventionality of jingju (171).
Mehring, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Gortowski, along with ideas and aesthetics drawn from Buddhist spiritual practice, and Thai folk performance’s improvisational and anti-representational principles. Among these influences, Mehring’s have proved invaluable to Kamron. Not only did Mehring’s notion of Body Expression become a central methodology for Kamron’s actor–training methodology, but Mehring’s interests in Eastern religion and philosophy have also become interests of Kamron’s in the later stage of his life (PI. July 29, 2007).

Calling Mehring’s theatre “spiritual Brechtian” due to its strong basis on the concept of connectedness between the actor’s body and his spirituality, Kamron has come to refer to the philosophy of his ideal theatre as “Theatre of Consciousness” (PI. July 29, 2007). While Brecht’s Marxist perspective is anti-mysticism and relies completely on rationalization, materialism, and social construction, Kamron deviates from Brecht by trying to bring a more holistic approach to his actor training and his productions. While his productions have often emphasized their intellectual implications by using “alienation effects,” he also wants his audiences to experience the elusive aesthetics and emotional (and possibly spiritual) impact of ritualized movement and form.

As a preliminary exploration of this theory, which is based on the Buddhist worldviews of laukika (worldly) and lokottara (supramundane, beyond worldly), I perceive the Theatre of Consciousness to be a key that aims to release the bondage between human attachment to a matrix of worldly-constructed conceptions (such as the attachment to power, fame, position, wealth, the body, and beauty) and the worldly-constructed conceptions that produce such attachments. The release from such attachment shall help the audience to see things as they really are, and to understand how all concepts and believes are products of human constructions which
are contingent upon one’s socio-political and cultural context. In order for the audience to obtain an awareness of a new matrix of conceptions (i.e. Buddhist worldviews), the theatre must illustrate the pitfalls of the old matrix and if possible, expose the root causes of these pitfalls. Based on the Buddhist cosmology, which describes thirty “planes of existence” ranging from sub-animal plane, to human plane, to space plane, to nothingness. The human plane is the only plane where dukkha can be experienced because human is a highly evolved form of organism, and it is in this plane that the worldly and beyond worldly experiences and learning can take place.\(^8\)

In Buddhism, once one comes to terms with how one’s perception of reality and concepts are constructed, one can start to seek solutions to the human dukkha. These root causes of dukkha involve human ignorance (e.g. ignorance of class struggle, social injustice, the inherent nature of all things, etc.), clinging to atta, attachment to one’s desires or cravings (tanha), all of this often leads to consequences that produce further complications and suffering. Theatre of Consciousness can be perceived through two different view points. The first is the audience viewpoint which aims to assert the audience’s cognitive awareness of the worldly problems as stemming from the mentioned root-causes. This viewpoint is communicated and presented through a selected form and content of the theatre. For example, for an audience to see a play such as *The Revolutionist*, which was done in a minimalistic form of Brechtian theatre presented with a Buddhist-Brechtian aesthetics that gave a dialectic content of historical events, he should become more aware of the repressed historical narratives, the power struggles in the political events, and the Buddhist concept of impermanence (*annicca*) (as analyzed in Chapter 4). To be effective, *The Revolutionist* should make the audience desire for social and political justice, and

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\(^8\) See further details about the Buddhist cosmology in Palmo, 67-68.
perhaps also desire for a “revolution” based on Buddhist doctrines (e.g. those of “non-violence” [as emphasized by the play], compassion, and egoless self [anattā or Chit-Wang]). In other words, the Theatre of Consciousness should implicitly make audiences feel that the power of change is in its own hand that can be expanded to society at large.

Even if the audience’s consciousness is awoken cognitively or politically, it is still questionable whether the awakening can be extended into the esoteric transcendental awakening. It is believed in the Theravada meditation that, the transcendental awakening will make the audience understand how chit manipulates the psychology of “desires (kilesa).” The Theravada’s Pāli cannon explains a very extensive analysis of human’s “desires” (as having both constructive and destructive consequences). Whereas Foucault thinks of power as being perpetually productive, Buddhists see power as a consequence of human desires that can be trained, guided and controlled. Moreover, Buddhists distinguish between the egotistic desires (with atta) and egoless desires (with anattā). To desire social well-being without any attachment to one’s atta is equivalent to Buddhadasa’s concept of the role of humans within Buddhist socialism (which is founded on chit-wang [emptied/non-attached-to-self mind]), and which is perhaps the most idealistic solution for social change. At a metaphysical level, the Theatre of Consciousness should try to bring the audience to experience not just the cognitive but also the spiritual realization of the Three Characteristics of all phenomena. The doctrine of Three Characteristics (impermanence [anicca], suffering [dukkha], and no-self[anattā]) is essential to the Buddhist’s believe in quenching the dukkha because it suggests the transient nature of

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all worldly things and conceptions, and the impossibility to count on any of them as being “fixed” or “absolute.” With the realization of the Three Characteristics, one will be able to understand the why logic of Buddha’s fundamental teachings of Four Noble Truths, and Noble Eightfold Path are essential to human happiness.\(^\text{10}\)

Regardless of its degree of efficacy, the Theatre of Consciousness should help the audience to arrive at an awareness of the old matrix of seeing while stimulating the new matrix of seeing.

The second viewpoint about the Theatre of Consciousness is taken from the actor’s point of view where the Theatre of Consciousness deals more directly with how an actor uses his acting to understand both the play as well as his own art. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 provide examples of how Buddhadasa’s theory of \textit{chit-wang} is a practical concept for the analysis of Kamron’s usage of \textit{anattā} in actor training. I choose to refer to Buddhadasa’s \textit{chit-wang} in the application of theatre and acting because the \textit{chit-wang} concept emphasizes the ego-less ability for people to use \textit{dhamma} in their ordinary lives without having to engage in the traditional lives of Buddhist ascetics. In the case of theatre, “people” refer to the theatre practitioners, and the audience. Therefore, in the Theatre of Consciousness, an actor can use the condition of \textit{chit-wang} in the acting process to transform into characters.

Although \textit{chit-wang} can be applied to acting, it does not mean that the actors will automatically be on the path to experience \textit{suññata} and therefore be able to obtain \textit{nibbāna} (skt. \textit{nirvana})(enlightenment) like those who strictly practice Theravada’s meditation. In the Theravada meditation practice, (also known as the “\textit{jhānic}-related meditation”) to obtain different states of meditation including \textit{nibbāna} takes a concerted effort that is usually based on a very specific operational system of

\(^{10}\) See explanations in Chapter 1, Background on Buddhism.
living (such as how monks practice).\textsuperscript{11} It is within these different meditative states that transcendental experiences of the \textit{lokottara} level of knowing can be obtained.

For an actor to operate with \textit{chit-wang} is therefore very different from a monk who trains his mind to reach complicated meditative states. Although Kamron believes that it is possible that an actor will train himself to be in a specific meditative state and even reach \textit{nibbāna}, this belief has not been empirically tested. In his actor-training process in \textit{MNP}, the actors were able to reach great dynamism with a certain level of alert stillness close to the Buddhist concept of “motion and tranquility” as described in Chapter 5, but none of the actors interviewed during my research indicated spiritual liberation or any experience of \textit{suññata}. As a practitioner of Theravada meditation myself, I would hypothesize that an actor can only reach the state of \textit{chit-wang} as the maximum level of the body-mind operation. I base this on the notion that for a meditator to reach any progression of \textit{jhāna}, he needs to be operating in an appropriate setting (such as living with a certain ethical code, and with a secluded life style in order to be independent of all kinds of mental and emotional distractions and defilements), and therefore it is unlikely for an actor to obtain \textit{jhāna} on the stage. Ultimately, in the system of Theatre of Consciousness, it is possible for both the audience and the actors to gain a cognitive and spiritual awareness that releases them from the attachments to social, psychological, and cultural constructions, and consequently feel liberated to use their lives to benefit others.

This dissertation concludes that the theatre of Kamron is exceptional in the context of Thailand, because it establishes ideological, philosophical, and political

\textsuperscript{11} See elaborate details about the \textit{jhānic}-related meditation in King, Winston L. \textit{Theravada Meditation} (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1980).
relationships between aesthetic concepts and theatrical representation. By using
theatre as a subversive device in the “War of Position,” Kamron’s theatre
productions not only critique and deconstruct the existing meta-narratives and
dominant ideology, they also demystify the *sakdina*-rooted cultural ideals.

Acknowledging that the *avant-garde* theatre of the West and of some Asian countries
(e.g., China, Japan, and India) long pre-dated Kamron’s productions in Thailand, I
argue that Kamron’s theatre asserts itself as a unique phenomenon of dissent within
its particular context. Based on Brechtian, Artaudian, and postmodern and Theravada
Buddhist-based theatre ideas and practices, and drawing upon liberal-socialist
political ideals, Kamron’s work is unwavering in its dissent messages, and it broadens
boundaries of theatre innovations, while remaining steadfastly committed to altruistic
social goals.
### APPENDIX A

**Timeline of Context, Modern Theatre including the CMTG Development in Thailand**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.D.</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Theatre-related Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13th – 18th C.</td>
<td>Prior to the establishment of Siam as a nation state, the clusters of autonomous cities spread across the Indochina peninsular were under the sakdina (feudal) socio-economic system. (--local nobles controlling forced labor and surplus values).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>King Rama IV (1851-1868) signed the Bowring Treaty to open the country to the world, using “Siam” as the name of the nation-state.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19th C.</td>
<td>King Rama V (1868-1910) re-structured the sakdina system into a new form of centralized system of the absolute monarchy. Nevertheless, the sakdina’s style of hierarchical power became the pyramidal civil-service bureaucracy. King Rama V: emancipation of slaves, waged labor, economy boom, westernized the country in law, government, healthcare, education, science, and technology. King Rama V: used diplomatic relations to save the country from being colonized by Britain and France (who colonized most of SEA at that time).</td>
<td>Nobilities who had been to Europe tried to ‘modernize’ Thai theatre by borrowing certain conventions such as ‘having the performers sing in their own dances (lakhon dukdamban). New Thai theatre forms influenced by western opera: lakhon panthang, lakhon rong, and likay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1925</td>
<td>King Rama VI (1910-1925) – a graduate of Law School from Christ Church, Oxford University; a poet, playwright, theatre practitioner. Instilled “nationalism” via literary works and songs. Imprinted the three foci of Thai consciousness: ‘nation’, ‘religion’, and</td>
<td>King Rama VI was named “the Father of Spoken drama in Siam” who composed more than 100 new plays and played an active role in acting, directing, and producing many of them. Some of his plays were translations or adaptations of western plays written by master playwrights such as Shakespeare,</td>
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<td>A.D.</td>
<td>Context</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘monarchy’</td>
<td>Continued to modernize the country.1911, failed coup attempt to change the country into constitutional monarchy.</td>
<td>Sheridan, Moliere, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914-1918</td>
<td>WWI. King Rama VI joined the Allies and announced war against Germany and Austria in 1917.</td>
<td>King Rama VI also wrote plays with nationalistic theme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Siam allied with GB in WWI during King Rama VI, helping Siam to earn a high status among other Allies nations.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1925-1935</td>
<td>King Rama VII (1925-1935) faced a changing global context.</td>
<td>Lakhon pleng (Thai Musicals), born out of the desire to modernize the existing Thai classical songs and music by using western music arrangement techniques, flourished.</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>Bloodless coup d’état, led by the People’s Party (with Pridi Banomyong as a leading member), overthrew the monarchy; established Constitutional Monarchy with Parliamentary Government.</td>
<td>As a result of the 1932 revolution, entities of traditional theatre in the royal palace such as khon and lakhon artists and objects were transferred to Department of Fine Arts (established 1933).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWII</td>
<td>The dichotomy of power after the revolution was changed from monarchy v.s. commoners to centralized power v.s. folk/peripheral power. Fractionalized government due to the power struggles among the revolutionists, military personnel, and the royalists. This fractionalization will last until the present day. PM Plaek Phibunsongkram (1938-1944), Phibun’s policy was anti-monarchy, nationalistic and pro-western standards. Created cultural nationalism via his ‘ratthaniyom’ policy that dictates cultural</td>
<td>Luang Wichit as Head of the Department of Fine Art. Luang Wichit was assigned to modernize traditional Thai arts and using the arts, especially theatre, to disseminate nationalism. He created a hybrid form that was a mixture of the popular dance-drama, singing-drama, and spoken-drama, with quasi realistic acting style, and the use of westernized music and scenic techniques. 1942, Royal Decree Prescribing Culture Concerning Theatrical Performances using western classification and aesthetics. Thai traditional theatre forms became classified by the western</td>
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<td>A.D.</td>
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| 1949 | behaviors, including behaviors on performing stage.  

WWII: Phibun allied with the Japanese and expelled Pridi from the cabinet.  

Pridi formed a resistance called the ‘Free Thai’ (*Seri Thai*) movement. This movement helped Thailand to be released from being the enemy state to the Allies after the war. Pridi was appointed by King Rama VIII as Senior Statesman.  

Pridi’s group ousted Phibun government in 1944, and allowed revision of constitution, freedom of expression, formation of new political parties.  

Democrat Party was formed and it suspected Pridi of being a communist.  

PMs: Khuang Apaiwong (1944-1945), Tawee Boonyaket (1945), Seni Pramoj (Sept 1945 –Jan 1946).  

After WWII, PM Pridi Banomyong (or Luang Pradit Manutham (March 24-Aug.21 1946),  

1946, sudden death of King Rama VIII.  

King Rama IX is proclaimed as a new king.  

Pridi fled to Singapore and returned to stage a coup against Kwang Apaiwong, but the coup known as ‘Kabot Wang Luang’ failed.  

Phibun staged a coup in 1948.  

Feb. General election, Khuang is re-elected by the National Assembly as PM.  

April. Khuang is forced by the army to resign and Phibun becomes PM in 1949.  

The victory of the Communist Party of China over the KMT gave many Thai intellectuals a preference for socialist standards, while folk theatre forms were prohibited due to their ‘common’ nature.  

1946, the 1942 decree was repealed.  

During 1936-1950, Luang Wichit wrote 24 full-length plays and more than 20 scripts for TV and radio programs, all of which to demonstrate a new type of nationalism ideology (based on the idea of nation state and the people in place of the king and his subjects).  

During 1948-1953, brief period of *lakhon chai jing ying tae* (authentic male and authentic female) performances.  

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<td>1951</td>
<td>On June 29th, In order to challenge the political power of the army and to regain influence over the national affairs, a group of Navy officers kidnap the PM (Phibun) while he attends a ceremony to receive from the US a dredger called Manhattan as a part of their military assistant to Thailand. The coup (known as The Manhattan Coup กบฎแมนฮัตตัน) was crushed by the government-loyal soldiers but this causes change of power silently to Sarit Thanarat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948-1953</td>
<td>Years of prosperity in Thailand due to high yields in rice.</td>
<td>1949-1954, Suwat Woradilok, a forerunner of people’s theatre, wrote four modern plays that contained socialist themes, and became interrogated by the police.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1953</td>
<td>PM Phibunsongkhram (or Phibun) (April 8, 1948 – Sept 17, 1957), First mass demonstration, known as the ‘Peace Rebels’ against Phibun’s sending Thai troupes to aid the US force in the Korean War; over 1,000 arrested and 37 leaders imprisoned (including Kularb). Last year for the Communist Party of Thailand to be a legal political party (it was founded since 1942).</td>
<td>Decline of live theatre popularity in Bangkok.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>US allied with Phibun’s government to tackle communism and announced Thailand as ‘anti-communist bastion’ in SEA.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phibun eased press censorship, supported traditional arts and Buddhism, legalized labor unions, and scheduled a general election in 1957.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phibun was re-elected as a PM resulting in a mass protest.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Plaek Phibunsongkhram rules for the second time from April 8 1948-Sept 17, 1957 (8 years 3 months), and December 26, 1938 – Aug.1, 1944 (5 years 7 months). Phibun totally ruled 13 years 10 months.</td>
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<td>Sarit Thanarat staged a coup against Phibun.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PM Pote Sarasin (Sept-Dec. 1957).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PM Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963): dictator government using totalitarian system to rule, banned mass gathering, and prosecuted dissenters without trials.</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>Feb., A general election is held but it was marred by massive cheating. Phibun won again and became PM again.</td>
<td>Suwat Woradilok, secretly took a group of 48 Thai singers and dancers to perform a cultural show as a friendship tour to major cities in China, and he was charged by the Phibun government as a communist.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sept. Sarit Thanarat led a coup and Phibun fled to Japan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarit’s</td>
<td>Jan, a general election Thanom became PM for 10 months.</td>
<td>Dark age for live theatre. Film and TV became popular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime</td>
<td>Oct. 20, Sarit led a coup again allegedly because Thanom failed to solve economic problems.</td>
<td>1953-1963, a short and last period for popular Thai musicals, where Suwat Woradilok, produced 5 productions of sentimental musicals.</td>
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<td>1958-1963</td>
<td>PM Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata (or Sarit) (October 20, 1958-December 8, 1963) (was an acting PM till 10 Feb 1959)</td>
<td>1958, Suwat wrote and produced The Might of the People, as a play about the rights of the commoners, and was charged with the lese majeste case. He was</td>
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<td>“Wind and Sunshine” period</td>
<td>imprisoned for four years.</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Sarit: in power totally 5 years 2 months. His time was considered the ‘dark age’ for Thai democracy. However, it was also the time that Thailand was greatly under the US influences in terms of aids and security. After Sarit died, Thanom Kittikachorn ruled from December 9, 1963 – October 14, 1973. Totally 10 years including his first time in 1958. Total time under military regimes since Phibun was 28 years 10 months. Thailand embraced capitalism and market economy, under the supervision from the US.</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>CPT declared war with the Thai government, beginning of the ‘People’s War’ held in the jungle. The more relaxed Thanom’s regime (1963-1973) allowed the people’s movement for democracy to emerge, in the middle of the ‘Wind and Sunshine’ environment. Many intellectuals and artists in the 1960s-1970s were influenced by Chit Phumisak’s <em>Art for Life: Art for the People</em> (1957) calling for all artists to use their arts to serve the people and the society, prompted a ‘For Life’ movement in art, literature, and music.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam War</td>
<td>Thailand permits US to use military bases. Thai troops fight in South Vietnam. Thailand received many economic and educational aids from the US. Beginning of modern western theatre as a part of the university’s curriculum. Modern western plays were translated into Thai and performed by students at Chulalongkorn University and</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Many public universities were open.</td>
<td>Thammasat University.</td>
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<td>Some university’s students clubs were formed to discuss about social or political issues. Some publications based on social criticism emerged.</td>
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<td>1966, <em>Seven Institution</em> magazine emerged.</td>
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<td>1970s: out-reach programs to the countryside became very popular among university’s students. USCT (University Student Center of Thailand) was founded.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Many Thai students received scholarships to study in the US and Europe.</td>
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<td>Resistance groups against the military dictatorship formed: intellectuals, socialist party members, university students, political activists, proletariats.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phibun’s 1952 Anti-Communist Act persecuted many communists, toppled by the 1958 Article 17 of the Rule by Decree caused wide-spread persecutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963-</td>
<td>PM Thanom Kittikachorn declared a long overdue constitution in 1968 (10 years drafting) which led to a general election in 1969. Thanom became government again only to stage a coup against his own government in order to nullify the constitution and announced his own interim constitution that allowed his government absolute power. His accomplices were Field Marshal Praphat Jarusathien and Nanong Kittikachorn, his son.</td>
<td>Birth of the Crescent Moon group: Influenced by the context and rebel’s conscience, in 1966, the <em>Crescent Moon</em> literary group was formed to publish their own works known as <em>The Crescent Moon</em> magazine-book, and a series of ‘One Baht’ books. In 1970, some members started to write short one-act plays of the oppressed. During 1971-1973 members of the CM group search for their ideal paths. Kamron went to teach for the hill-tribe in Chiang Mai. (1972-1976, Kamron taught at CMU)</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>This was the period that the university students formed coalition with the public and started to hold protests against the military government.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Economy crashed.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Natural disasters causing wide spread</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>hardship and unemployment.</td>
<td>1973, 6 months before October 14. Kamron invited Gary Carkin to give a theatre workshop to his drama group in Chiang Mai. He was introduced to Grotowski’s Poor Theatre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>Series of protests against government policies, and against corrupted officials; students requested for a new constitution be drafted within 6 months.</td>
<td>The result was the CM group’s first People’s Theatre production, <em>The Rural I</em> (<em>Six Scenes from the Rural</em>) (1972), and followed by <em>The Rural II</em> (1973)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Boom 1973—1976</td>
<td>Emergence of political drama from university student’s drama groups. i.e. Tawan Plieng, Chak Dao, and Plaew Plueng groups.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student riots and mass rallies brought about the fall of the Thanom’s government on October 14, 1973. Thanom, Praphat, and Narong went into exile.</td>
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<td>1974, new constitution was promulgated.</td>
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<td>First time for freedom of expression in almost three decades.</td>
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<td>Leftist publications formerly banned now available.</td>
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<td>Wide spread Marxist socialist ideology.</td>
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<td>Socialist Party was revived as a legal political party.</td>
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<td>Wide spread labor/farmer strikes.</td>
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<td>College students actively involved in the ideology for social and political justice. “For Life” movement flourished.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>The Communist victories in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia led to another political coup in Thailand. This time an extreme conservative, anti communist, government prevailed. Rampant persecutions of anyone suspected of being communists. Government used media and propaganda</td>
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<td>A.D.</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Theatre-related Event</td>
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| 1976 | to destroy the student movement image and to accuse the movement as being pro-communist.  
The return of Thanom to Thailand prompted anger and mass protest.  
Two men were murdered for hanging protest posters.  
Thammasat’s drama club staged a mocked performance of the murder, this led to a media manipulation that accused the students of denouncing the Crown Prince of Thailand.  
The students who were protesting the return of the exiled dictator were suddenly being called ‘communists’.  
Brutal attacks on the unarmed students at Thammasat University resulting in hundreds of death and thousands of arrests. (also in BLUE) | 1973-1976, Chaek Dao Group performed many protest drama at demonstrations, Kamron’s students from CMU often joined with the Chakdao.  
1972 -1976, Kamron directed and toured his original productions about the rural life in his Rural series.  
In Bangkok, other CMTG members wrote and produced full-length plays for their main stage productions: Khan (The Vindictiveness แค้น) (written and directed by Veeraprawat Wongpuapan in 1974),  
1975:The Mother Before Dawn (ก่อน.OR จากวัน) (May 18- |
| October 6, 1976 | Royalist military government took over again.  
Most of the university’s groups were disbanded.  
Many of the protesters escape persecution by joining the CPT in the jungle and eventually had to join the People’s War.  
‘For Life’ movement boomed. | |
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<tr>
<th>A.D.</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Theatre-related Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>A navy group staged a coup against the right-winged government. General Kriangsak was appointed a PM.</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>New Constitution promulgated Arrestd October 6 activists were released.</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Kriangsak visited China and asked for the Chinese not to support the CPT. Oil crisis which caused inflation prompted mass rally which led to Kriangsak’s resignation.</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>A coalition government was formed that appointed Kriangsak’s Defense Minister, Army Commander, Prem Tinsulanonda, as PM. Prem ruled for another 8 years, never once running an election. Despite many coups, he retained power with strong support from the monarch.</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>General Chatichai Choonhaven replaces Prem after elections.</td>
<td>Kamron opened a multi-media company, Communication System Company, to produce slide multi-vision, short film, and a television program, Thursday Travel (พฤหัสสัญจร)</td>
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<td>1990</td>
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<td>Kamron won Danube Award from UNICEFF for his film about child prostitution, Samrueng (ส้ารี่จง).</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Military coup, the 17th since 1932. A civilian, Anand Panyarachun, is installed as prime minister for one month (March 7, 1991 – April 7, 1992). General Suchinda Kraprayoon (April 7- May 24, 1992), the coup leader, took over the PM position himself causing a mass protest.</td>
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<td>A.D.</td>
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| 1992 | The mass rally in May ended with armed attacks on civilian, eventually forcing Suchinda to resign. Anand is re-instated temporarily.  
The “Black May 1992” public uprising provoked public calls for a more accountable system of government  
The general election Chuan Leekpai, leader of the Democratic Party, a civilian chosen as prime minister. | |
| 1996 | -Banharn’s government resigned, accused of corruption. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh of the New Aspiration party won elections, and became PM.  
*Madam Mao’s Memories* (มาดามเหมา Madam Mao) (solo performance)(1996),  |
| 1997 | Asian financial crisis: The baht falls sharply against the dollar, leading to bankruptcies and unemployment. The IMF steps in. Chuan Leekpai becomes prime minister.  
*High Bank, Heavy Log* (ตลิ่งสูงซุงหนัก),  
*The Lighthouse* (กระโจมไฟ Grajome Fai)(solo performance) (13-23 Feb. 1997), Phra Malethaytai (พระมาลentities ไก),  
Mobile Theatre: *Women and Constitution* (ละครผู้หญิงกับรัฐธรรมนูญ), | |
| 1998 | Tens of thousands of migrant workers are sent back to their countries of origin. Chuan involves the opposition in his government in order to push through economic reforms.  
*The Jokjuang Village* (หมู่บ้านจำกจวjiang),  
*The War of Flowers* (สงครามบุปผชาติ). | |
<p>| 1999 | Economy begins to pick up again. Thai media highlight high cost of drug treatments for Aids and HIV. Thailand begins to pressurise drugs companies to | |</p>
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<th>A.D.</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Theatre-related Event</th>
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<td>find ways to make the drugs cheaper.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Matsee (มาที) (short film), The Rainbow Box (กล่องสีรุ้ง)</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>February - Controversial crackdown on drugs starts; more than 2,000 suspects are killed by late April. The government blames many killings on criminal gangs; rights groups say extra-judicial killings were encouraged by the authorities. Scandals around the Thaksin’s administration erupted quickly on the extra-judicial killings of thousands of drug-related suspects, the killings of the Islamic insurgent suspects in the south, and allegations on corruptions.</td>
<td>John A. Lone: The Light House Opera (2003-2006), John A. Lone: The Light House Opera (Part I) Venus Party (physical theatre), A Mid Summer Nightmare, Blind Date</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>In the three southern provinces, armed Muslim-insurgents attacking police stations, security stations, and military depots. Nearly 800 people have been killed in the attacks. The government blames Islamic militants. Martial law is imposed. December - More than five thousands people were killed from a Tsunami that hit the southern part of Thailand.</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>October - 85 Muslim protesters die, many from suffocation, while in army custody following violence at a rally in the south. An enquiry concludes that they were not killed deliberately.</td>
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<td>December - Thousands of people are killed when massive waves, caused by</td>
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<td>A.D.</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Theatre-related Event</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>March - Thaksin Shinawatra begins a second term as PM after his party wins February’s elections by a landslide. Thaksin won his second term as a PM, becoming the first elected prime minister to serve two consecutive terms. His Thai Rak Thai Party won in a landslide. July - As violent unrest continues in the south, Prime Minister Thaksin is given new powers to counter suspected Muslim militants in the region. Violence in the south became more frequent and more random. Hundreds of civilians were killed randomly and brutally by the Muslim insurgents on the streets, in schools, temples, and town markets. In November, the death toll was over one thousand.</td>
<td>John A. Lone: The Light House Opera (Part II)</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Thaksin faced intense criticism when he sold his family’s share of a communications company for nearly $2 billion without paying tax. About 60,000-100,000 demonstrators gathered in Bangkok for about six months and called for his resignation. 19 September - Military leaders stage a bloodless coup while Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is at the UN General Assembly. Retired General Surayud Chulanont is appointed as interim prime minister in October.</td>
<td>Antigone, A Mid Winter’s Dream (ความฝันกลางเดือนหนาว), Purgatory (ไฟล้างบาป)(BTF 2006), October’s Memorial Performance (30th Anniversary of October 6), 30th Anniversary of the Crescent Moon Theatre: Theatre for Life.</td>
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<td>2007-2010</td>
<td>Years of political uncertainty and power negotiation between the old Thaksin regime and the right-winged government. Violence in the south escalated with more daily terrorist attacks.</td>
<td>Whispers of the River (US production) directed by Kamron, about global warming. Purgatory (2006-2010).</td>
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APPENDIX B
Names and Chronology of the Prime Ministers of Thailand

Phya Manopakorn Nitithada

June 28, 1932 - December 10, 1932
December 10, 1932 - April 1, 1933
April 1, 1933 - June 20, 1933

General Phya Phahon Phonpayuhasena

June 21, 1933 - December 16, 1933
December 16, 1933 - September 22, 1934
September 22, 1934 - August 9, 1937
August 9, 1937 - December 21, 1937
December 21, 1937 - December 16, 1938

Colonel Plaeg Phibhulsongkram
(Phibunsongkram/Phibun)

December 16, 1938 - March 7, 1942
March 7, 1942 - August 1, 1944
April 8, 1948 - June 25, 1949
June 25, 1949 - November 29, 1951
November 29, 1951 - December 6, 1951
December 6, 1951 - March 24, 1952
March 24, 1952 - March 21, 1957
March 21, 1957 - September 16, 1957

Major Kuang Abhaiwongse

August 1, 1944 - August 31, 1945
January 31, 1946 - March 24, 1946
November 10, 1947 - February 21, 1948
February 21, 1948 - April 8, 1948

Mr. Tawee Punyaketu

August 31, 1945 - September 17, 1945

M.R. Seni Pramoj

September 17, 1945 - January 31, 1946
February 15, 1975 - March 14, 1975
April 20, 1976 - September 25, 1976
September 25, 1976 - October 6, 1976

Dr. Pridi Banomyong

March 24, 1946 - June 11, 1946
June 8, 1946 – June 9, 1946
June 11, 1946 - August 23, 1946

Rear Admiral Thawal Thamrongnavaswadhi

August 23, 1946 - May 30, 1947
May 30, 1947 - November 8, 1947

Mr. Pote Sarasin

September 21, 1957 - January 1, 1958

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn

January 1, 1958 - October 20, 1958
December 9, 1963 - March 7, 1969
March 7, 1969 - November 17, 1971
November 18, 1971 - December 17, 1972

Head of coup d'état

December 18, 1972 - October 14, 1973

(Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn)

Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata

February 9, 1959 - December 8, 1963
Professor Sanya Dharmasakti October 14, 1973 - May 22, 1974
May 27, 1974 - February 15, 1975

Major General M.R. Kukrit Pramoj March 14, 1975 - April 20, 1976

Mr. Tanin Kraivixien October 8, 1976 - October 20, 1977

Head of coup d'état October 29, 1976 - November 10, 1976
(Admiral Sangad Chalawyoo)

General Kriangsak Chomanan November 11, 1977 - May 12, 1979
May 12, 1979 - March 3, 1980

General Prem Tinsulanonda March 3, 1980 - April 30, 1983
April 30, 1983 - August 5, 1986
August 5, 1986 - August 4, 1988

Major General Chatichai Choonhavan August 4, 1988 - December 9, 1990

General Chatichai Choonhavan December 9, 1990 - February 23, 1991

Head of coup d'état February 24, 1991 - March 1, 1991
(General Sundara Kongsomphong)
Mr. Anand Panyarachun March 2, 1991 - April 7, 1992

General Suchinda Kraprayoon April 7, 1992 - June 10, 1992

Mr. Anand Panyarachun June 10, 1992 - September 23, 1992

Mr. Chuan Leekpai September 23, 1992 - July 13, 1995

Mr. Banharn Silapa-Archa July 13, 1995 - November 25, 1996

General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh November 25, 1996 – November 9, 1997

Mr. Chuan Leekpai November 9, 1997 - February 17, 2001

Police Lieutenant-General Thaksin Shinawatra February 9, 2001 - March 11, 2005
March 11, 2005 - September 19, 2006

Head of coup d'état September 19, 2006 - October 1, 2006
(General Sonti Boonyaratglna)
General Surayud Chulanont October 1, 2006 - February 6, 2008

Mr. Samak Sundaravej February 6, 2008 - September 8, 2008

Mr. Somchai Wongsawat September 18, 2008 - December 2, 2008

Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva December 20, 2008 –
APPENDIX C

List and Chronology of Kings of Siam and Thailand in the Chakri Dynasty

1. Phra Phutthayodfa (Rama I)  April 6, 1782 – September 7, 1809
2. Phra Phutthaloetla (Rama II)  September 7, 1809 – July 21, 1824
3. Phra Nangklao (Rama III)  July 21, 1824 – April 3, 1851
4. Mongkut (Rama IV)  April 3, 1851 - October 1, 1868
5. Chulalongkorn (Rama V)  October 1, 1868 – October 23, 1910
6. Vajiravudh (Rama VI)  October 23, 1910 – November 26, 1925
7. Prajadhipok (Rama VII)  November 26, 1925 – March 2, 1935
9. Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX)  June 9, 1949 - present
APPENDIX D

Plot Synopsis

Crescent Moon Theatre Group’s Major Productions in Chronology

Picnic on the Battle Field (ตากอากาศกลางสนามรบ Tak aghat glang sanam rob; 1971)

About the play: Fernando Arrabal, a Spanish poet, wrote this play (Pique-nique en Campagne) in 1961 at the age of 20. Arrabal has directed seven full-length feature films. He has published over one hundred plays, fourteen novels, seven poetry collections, and many essays. In 1971, CMLG member Tanya Ponanan (ธัญญา ผลอนันต์) translated the play into Thai.

Synopsis: Zapo Tépan, a young female soldier is fighting at a battlefield all by herself. Zapo takes toy cars out of a canvas workbag and starts playing with them as she answers a phone call from her captain. She complains of boredom and loneliness. Soon, her parents enter and set up a picnic with her. Then Zépo, an enemy soldier, enters and is arrested by Zapo. The Tépans try to find ways to torture the enemy but everything they do seems like child’s play. The father discusses what it was like to make war in the past. In their satirical conversation, war is compared to the games of children, but games that actually result in lost lives. In the end, there are sounds of exploding bombs and machine guns. All four characters are shot to death. The play reflects the absurdity of war.

The Typist (เสมียนพิมพ์ดีด Samien pim deed) (1972)

About the play: The Typist, written by Murray Schisgal, premiered on the London stage in 1961 and opened at the Orpheum Theatre in New York in 1963. Laphaphan Punpipat (ลภาพรรณ พันธุ์พิพัฒน์) translated this play for Kamron to direct in 1971. The translation premiered on November 17–19, 1972, with cast members Chookeit Punpipat and Laphaphan Punpilpat, and was subsequently produced at Thammasat University from February 8–11, 1973, directed by Yutthana Mukdasanit.

Synopsis: At a telemarketing office where routine work reflects the mundane absurdity of life, Paul Cunningham and Sylvia Payton are colleagues whose lives are built on vague dreams about life and relationships. While Sylvia hopes to find love and that Paul will leave his wife and children to marry her, Paul is faced with the what he perceives as the meaninglessness of his work and family life, and therefore finds Sylvia’s flirting and sexual desire appealing. Nevertheless, as the play ends, both characters are trapped in their own situations and find no way out.

The Rural I (Six Scenes from the Rural) (ชนบทหมายเลข 1 / หกฉากจากชนบท Chonabit mailek nung; 1972)

About the play: This play grew out of a month-long workshop led by Garry Carkin for the Drama Club at Chiang Mai University. The May 1972 production was commissioned by the Family Planning Association. Cast members included Kamron Gunatilaka (คิรรัณ คุณาธิลก), Thodsaporn Nagathon (ทอดสปอร์น นาฎธิดิ), Somphong Junlasap (สมพงษ์ จุลละทรัพย์), Angun Malik (องุณ มาลิก), Danai Songsangjun (ดานัย ส่งแสงจันทร์), Rattana Thepain (รัตน์ ทะพาย), Ubonwan (อุดมวรรณ), and etc. The production also toured to villages in Chiang Mai such as Thawang Prao (ท่าหวังพร้าว) and Wiang Pakpao (เวียงปากเป้า).

Synopsis: The play opens with a chorus singing a farmer’s song (Perb kao เปริก้าว) to evoke an atmosphere of rural life. The rural village reveals the lives of the poverty-stricken farmers who search to improve their economic situations via gambling. The gambling men, who are also alcoholics, have no understanding of family planning. A wife tells her husband that she is pregnant with their eleventh child, and it upsets him so much that it leads to a big quarrel. She ultimately dies while having an abortion.
The Rural II (ชนบทหมายเลข 2 Chonnabot mailek song; 1973)

About the play: This play is a sequel to Rural I. It was performed at Chiang Mai University in December of 1973.

Synopsis: The play demonstrates the collapse of Thailand’s agricultural sector under the modern development and the catastrophic results of natural disasters. Greedy merchants exploit poor and uneducated farmers by selling them toxic chemicals for their crops; a major mining company exploits the use of land and water; and farmers enter a cycle of debt after mortgaging their land under an unprotected deal. A young man who had gone to the city to work but ended up being exploited finally decides to go back to his rural village and to form a peasant union to fight back for justice.

The Rural III (ชนบทหมายเลข 3) (Chonnabot Mailek Sam)/ เสียงเรียกจากรURAL Chonnabot (The Call from the Rural) (1974)

About the play: This play resulted from a workshop with Dr. Nobert Myer, who introduced Brechtian theatre to Thai theatre groups.

Synopsis: When poor peasants lose their crops to polluted water and their land to the landlord, and became indebted, they go to the big city to find jobs, only to be abused and taken advantage of. A group of laborers who work in a fish-sauce factory unite to demand justice.

The Vindictiveness (แคํน Khan) (1974)

About the play: The play, written by Veeraprawat Wongpaupun (วีระประวัติ วงศพัวพันธุ), was commissioned by the Komol Kheemthong Foundation (มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง), at the suggestion of Sulak Sivaraksa, an important Thai thinker and social critic. It was the first full-length Thai theatre-for-life written in a naturalistic style. The production, directed by Yuthana Mukdasanit (ยุทธนา มุกดาสมิต) with the assistance of Nida Rutchaiboon (นิดา รัชไชยบุญ), premiered from February 11–15, 1974 at Thailand’s National Theatre (Small Auditorium) with the following cast members: Im (Saowanee Wothurakiet) (เสาวณี โวฑูรเกียรติ), Gaew (Sumart Phupugdee) (สุมาตร ภูภักดี), Sak (Suraphan Laongmanee) (สุรพันธุละอองมณี), Choed (Punpong Thatchapramuk พันธุพง ธัชประมุข), Tim (Orapin Visitsophon) (อรพินทวิศิษฏ_SOC), Oi (Pritsada Sasiprapha) (ปริฤษดา ศศิประภา), etc.

Synopsis: Im, a food vendor and mother of four, lives in a slum in Bangkok with her teenage daughter, Tim. One day, Im’s son, Sak, is released from jail after serving a thirty sentence for a wrongful conviction. Sak discovers that his family is in crisis: his drug-addicted younger brother Gaew, has also come home, but only to beg his mother for money; Tim has been staying out late at night, partying with a prostitute; his mother is in trouble with a loan shark; and his older brother, Han, is a soldier fighting with the communists in Laos. The family suffers more economic pressure when they discover that they will be evicted from their home in a few days and they need to find a new place to live. Meanwhile, some students came into the community and encourage the people to rise up against their landlord. To find money, Sak decides to become a laborer, and Tim becomes a prostitute. Later, Sak and Gaew decide to rob a man and Sak accidentally kills the victim. Sak is convicted of murder and sentenced to death.

The Mother (แม Mae) (12-21 September,1975)

About the play: Adapted from Maxim Gorky’s novel (1905) by Kamron Kunatilaka, this play was directed by Kamron Gunatilaka (คํารณ คุณาดิลก), Nida (Ratchaibun) Sudasana. (นิดา รัชไชยบุญ), and Todsaporn Nagathon (ทศพร นาคธน), at Silapakorn University with the following cast: Mother (Pelagneya Nilovna Vlasov (Sawuanee Saowaphab เสาวณี เสววะภพ), Pavel Vlasov (Sumart Phupugdee สุมาตรภูภักดี), Sasha (Marichat Sirisawat มาริฉัตร ศิริสวสัดิ์), Andrey Nahkodha (Dhirapat Foongdej ทศพร ฟูงเดช), Nicolai (Jorayut Sawichart จอริยุต ศวิชชาต), Natasha (Rumphai Booraphat มาริชัต บูรพัฒ), Rybin (Thanongsak Wikul ทรงชัย วิฤทธิ์), Marya Palegys (Sasithorn Tungkanobol ศศิธร ตุงกานอบ), Ivanovich (Phantong Thatpramuk พันธุธง ธัชประมุข), etc.
Context for this play: The play takes place in Russia, on the verge of the 1905 Revolution, the first time in Russian history that liberal and socialist groups rose up in a major mass protest, the result of more than a century of discontent with the Czarist autocratic government. This would eventually lead to the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, when the Czar’s government was overthrown for good, marking the beginning of the Soviet Union.

Synopsis: A band of young revolutionaries meets at the home of Pavel, a factory worker, and his widowed mother. The house serves as shelter and a place for the revolutionaries to exchange news. The group consists of educated young men and women, who secretly print their revolutionary materials at an underground shop and distribute them to workers in order to foment a revolutionary movement. Pavel and his coworker Rybin often give speeches calling on the workers to unite and rise up against the bourgeois factory owner. Under the surveillance of the Czarist authority, they risk arrested and imprisonment, or worse. Not only does the group produce “illegal” materials such as pamphlets and posters, but they also possess many “government-censored” books, mostly about Marxism and Democracy. There is some disagreement among the group when Rybin wants to reach out to farmers while Pavel insists that the revolutionary leadership needs be made up of intellectuals. Another revolutionary, Andre, thinks that Rybin is right to mobilize and agitate the poor. The night before the May Day march, Sasha begs Pavel not to hold the revolutionary flag leading the March because she knows he will be arrested. Upon his rational rejection of her request, he also tells her that he loves her but he has to have courage to lead the march. When his mother begs him not to jeopardize his life, Pavel coldly tells her that she should smile and show signs of happiness that her son is willing to sacrifice his life for the people. On May Day, Pavel is arrested and sent to a labor camp in Siberia. With love and concern for her son, the Mother decides to join in the revolutionary mission to fulfill an assignment in Siberia. She is assigned to find a list of revolutionary farmers in Siberia and to deliver the revolutionary newspaper to them. After fulfilling this mission, she is trusted to distribute more underground materials to different places in Russia, and is ultimately arrested.

Before Dawn (ก่อนอรุณจะรุ่ง Gawn aroon cha rung; May 18-23, 1976)

About the play: This play is the best example of the work of the CMTG before the October 6 event. It is another naturalistic play about the socio-political pressures on a family’s life. Kamron created the outline of the plot, and the script was derived from the group’s efforts. They production was directed by Nida Ratchaibun, Rattana Thepain (รัตนา เทพไณ) and Todsaporn Nagathon (ทศพร นาขอน), with the following cast members: Suebphong Tangtrongmitr (สืบพงษ์ ตั้งตรงมิตร), Sumart Poopukdee (สมาร์ต พูภักดี), Sasithorn Tangkanobol (ศศิธร ตั้งคโนบล), and Ruengchai Manomun (เริงชัย มโนมัน).

Synopsis: The play centers around a family who live in a slum. The Father, a low-ranking policeman, goes through his daily routine ticketing and fining street vendors. True to his duty, he fines his own wife, who is also a food vendor on the street. At home, the couple quarrel about the fine. Their youngest son, Phol, who has just returned from a volunteer trip to build a school in a rural area, has brought a folk-banjo as a gift for his elder brother (Dej) who is in a wheel-chair. Dej can no longer talk so he is always in a state of reminiscence and nostalgia. A neighbor comes by to inform the family that she is was proud of Phol, who worked tirelessly at the protest site where poor were protesting against an increase in the price of rice. Phol often confides with Dej about his empathy towards the poor and the oppressed, and about his desire to help others. The Mother warns her son that she has never seen an activist end on a good note. She begs him not to get involved with political activities. But whenever Phol has a flashback about the village he visited, he is reminded of how the farmers had to give their landlord half of their produce as compensation for the land rental instead of one-third as specified in the law. He also learns that anyone who challenges the rice buyers is murdered. In the city, he sets out to join a farmer rally calling for land reform from the government. To attend the rally, thousands of poor farmers have walked bare-foot from the countryside to the capital city. His mother comes home, overwhelmed with sympathy for the plight of the poor. Dej overhears on the radio that a bomb has exploded in the rally. The Father who, as a police officer, tries to take control of the street at the rally, discovers that the dead body of a young man, who was killed by the bomb, is actually his son, Phol.
The Exception and the Rule (นี่แหละโลก Nee lae lok; June 29, 1976)

About the play: This is one of Bertolt Brecht’s Lehrstücke plays, which were intended to educate the audience about Marxist ideology. In this Thai version, directed by Nobert Myer and with music arranged by Bruce Gaston with Thai musicians from Phayup University in Chiang Mai, the cast members were Dhirapat Foongdej (ธีรภัทร ฟุงเดช) as the Merchant, Krisanaphong Nagathon (กฤษณพงศ นาคธน) as Coolie, Winlert Phawavet (วินเลิศ ภวะเวช) as Guide, and on the Thailand side: Somphong Junlasup (สมปอง จุลละทรัพย) as Srithanonchai (ศรีธนญชัย), Todsporn Nagathon (ทองพร นาคธน) as Chanthakhorob (จันทโครพ), Viladda Vanadurongwan (วิลัดดา วานวดีวรรม) as a prostitute and Nang Laweng (นางละเวง), with other actors portraying either ruling class or working class characters (Thodsaporn Nagathon, Kamron Gutilaka, Orapin Dararut, Pornpit Junlasup, Thongkauw Taveeprungsenukul, etc.). Nida Ratchaibun (นิดา รัชไชยบุญ) served as Assistant Director to Myer.

Synopsis: This play presents the plight of the underprivileged under capitalistic development, where exceptions are always to rules always favor the privileged class. This theme is explored via a plot about a rich merchant who hires a Guide and a Coolie (or Porter) to take him to Yahi desert to take part in an oil deal. During the journey, the merchant fires the guide, abuses the coolie, and eventually kills the coolie because he mistakens the coolie’s handing him the water bottle as a stone, and thus he defends himself by shooting the Coolie. In court, the merchant is acquitted because it is supposedly justified for the merchant to defend for his life in fearing threats from the coolie.


About the play: In 1986, the Thammasat Student Union and Kamron Gunatilaka launched an acting program to train aspiring actors for an upcoming new play. Initially, about one hundred enthusiasts participated in a series of workshop which lasted for one year. Eventually, there were only fifteen left, and the casting process finally resulted in a group of six actors and six actresses. The initial run of performances were on June 27, July 3,5,10,11,and 12, 1987 at the Small Hall, Thammasat University. A second run took place on October 30–31 and November 6–8, 1987 at Bhirasri Art Gallery, Bangkok. The original cast members were such as Nititorn Yiamsombat (นิติธร เยี่ยมสมบัติ)(Pridi), Trirat Thienkachat (ไตรรัตน เทียนชาติ)(Song), Nimit Piphitkul (แปลก)(Plaek), Nantarit Pattanasuwarana (นันทฤทธิ์ พัฒนาสวารนา)(Prayoon, Sai Sima), Wanlapa Imjaiphong (วัลลภา อิ่มใจพงษ)(Ploy), Suwannee Gullayanasan (สุวรรณี กัลยาณสันต)(Poonsuk), and Pimpha Toweera (พิมพภา โตวีระ)(Narrator). In 1995, the play was staged for a third time on the occasion of the opening of the Pridi Banomyong Institute on June 24–25, then toured to the Saeng Arun Arts Center’s Theatre Festival on June 28–29, July 5–6, with an almost entirely new cast except for Nimit, who became assistant director. This time, it took only three months of rehearsal, with the exact same style and blocking. Some of the ten cast members were Apisak Sonjod (อภิศักดิ์ สนจด)(Pridi), Sarawut Songsri (ศราวุต สongsri)(Song), Nimit (Plaek), Kobchai Chooto (โคบชัย ชูโต)(Pahon), Rachanee Visitwarodom (รัชนี วิทิตวรodom)(Poonsuk), and Theeranan Nagathong (ธีรนันท นาคทอง)(Ploy). In 1999, the fourth production of the play was presented at the Pridi Banomyong Institute on February 26–28, and March 5–7 as a part of the National Celebration on the Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of Pridi Banomyong which would take place in 2000. The name of the play was changed to “The 1932 Revolutionist (คือผูอภิวัฒน 2475)” with new direction by Nimit Pipithkul. After that, the production was toured to many cities around the world including Paris, Amsterdam, and Stockholm: after returning to Thailand, the production toured to various Thai cities until May, 2000. The cast members were Nimit Pipithkul(นิมิตร พิพิธกุล)(Pridi), Suntorn Meesri(สุนทร มีศรี)(Mano), Pintip Satprepry (พิณทิพย สัตยเพริศพราย)(Poonsuk), Sineenadh Keitpaprai (สินีนาฏ เกษประไพ)(Ploy), Teerawat Mulvilai (ธีระวัฒน สุรภัทร)(Plaek, Sai Seema), Phuunam Chalermymat (พิณานะ เฉลิมญาติ)(Narrator), Farida Jirapan (ฟาไรด้า จีราพันธ)(Narrator), Wonlop Saengjoy (วัลลภ แสงจอย)(Song), Pakorn Rungsitsathien (ปกรณ์ รัตนสิทธิ์)(Pahon), Chartchai Ketnust (ชาตชัย คตณุสิต)
Synopsis: Chronology of collaged action: The play opens with a chorus humming the song, “Creators,” with lyrics about forgotten individuals from a buried history. A woman recites a soliloquy from Büchner’s *Woyzeck*, about a little boy, winged with Promethean hope and faith, who flew to the sun and moon only to discover a shriveled sunflower and an old tin can. Narrators enter and recite events that introduce the main characters, a group of Thai students in Paris who will become key members of the revolution. The main characters enter in costume: close friends Prayoon and Pridi vow to politically and democratically transform Siam by inciting a revolution. In the process, they earn support from a young lieutenant named Plaek Kittasanga (who will later be called Phibunsongkram or Phibun). Pridi recites a monologue about his dream for Siam to have liberty, equality, and fraternity. He talks about his childhood, how he grew up in a farming family and witnessed the plight of the farmers, and how the government not only neglects the poor but also abuses them through the tax system. The scene changes from France to Siam. Narrators describe the events that led to the Pridi-inspired “People’s Party” (คณะราษฎร) coup d’état. Performers distribute the declaration of the revolution to spectators while the it is played over the loudspeaker. The revolutionary document declares the king’s failure to reign benevolently and judiciously. Prayoon reads the final part of the declaration, which announces the major principles of the party: promises to promote education, security, economic well-being, liberty and freedom to all the people. The king is invited to preside over the country as a constitutional monarch. Pridi talks in a soliloquy about how the fear of change has stirred malicious lies about the Party’s plan to abolish all aristocrats, as in France’s Reign of Terror. But Pridi insists that he has no desire to shift the concentration of power to his group. What he wants to abolish are the inequalities in society. He has never thought about killing anyone. The play is interrupted by a scene from a famous Thai novel, *Four Reigns* (สี่แผ่นดิน), in which a royalist character, Mae Ploy (mother) receives news about the revolution and about one of her sons being an accomplice to the Party. She reacts with confusion and shock, a typical reaction for Siamese people of the time, who had very little understanding of democracy. As a gesture of sincerity, the Party appoints an aristocrat, Mano, as the first prime minister. Narrators describe the establishment of the constitutional drafting committee, but Pridi and Mano have a heated disagreement. Pridi wants a draft that will empower the people while Mano wants to maintain the power of the king. Pridi declares that the point of the first constitution is to promote socio-political changes that will contribute to the betterment of the masses. Pridi disagrees with Mano’s proposal of a government budget which limits the spending of the royal family but includes no other tax reform measures. With Pridi’s insistence on the reform of unfair taxes, many taxes levied unfairly against farmers are abolished. Yet, Mano and Pridi continue to clash over economic planning. Because 85% of farmers rent their land, and are continuously exploited by middlemen, Pridi calls for an economics restructuring via land reform, creating a network of cooperatives and social-welfare. His economic plan is perceived as communist and impractical, despite his insistence that his plan would never destroy the rich in order to confiscate their land and wealth, and that the assets would be bought by the government and then distributed to the poor. Mano is against Pridi’s economic plan, and the new constitution issued by the cabinet is full of compromises with the conservative members. The play is interrupted by a short scene from a popular novel-for-life, *The Devil Sai* (an educated but lower-class man) enters a celebration party at a rich man’s house only to be treated with scorn; Sai declares himself the “ghost of tomorrow,” haunting and frightening those from the old world who are hold antiquated beliefs. This is followed by a scene of commotion as chorus members recite developments in the power politics of the parliament. Mano orders all members of the parliament to resign from the People’s Party, leading to weakening of support for Pridi’s plan, and Mano’s fear has further led him to dissolve the parliament. Pridi asks “why the infant Siamese democracy had to be strangled in its crib.” Pahol, a former member of the Party, explains that news of the economic plan has leaked out and created such fear among the rich that it has caused a massive exodus of capital and destabilization of the economy. A narrator announces that Pridi and his wife have been exiled to France. The couple exchange a brief conversation about back-stabbing by friends and enemies. The next scene demonstrates how Pridi’s name was tarnished by his opposition, and by accusations that ideas are similar to those of Stalinist’s Russia. Soon, all of Pridi’s supporters resign from their positions, which
leads Phibun and Pahol to stage a coup d'état and form a new government. They invite Pridi back and appoint him a cabinet minister, which leads the overthrown side to use Pridi as an excuse to tarnish the government. The next scene presents a clash between Boworadej rebels and Phahol’s government. After the failed coup attempt, the government has a conference to clear Pridi of accusations of communism. After applause, Pridi gives a long speech accepting his post as Interior Minister, warning, “Power corrupts, gradually reducing and ultimately estranging a leader from the tiger’s back.” On June 27, 1934, Pridi founds the University of Moral and Political Science (Thammasat University). The chorus sings the songs of Thammasat. While Phibun gains more and more power via his military-style leadership, a schism develops between Pridi and Phibun. It is announced that King Rama VII has abdicated the throne. Narrators announce that ten-year-old Prince Ananda Mahidol, nephew of King Rama VII, has been enthroned with a Council of Regents that will work on his behalf. Then, Pridi is appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and successfully renegotiates inequitable treaties with Western countries. As WWII is erupting, Franco-Siamese border disputes erupt into an open war between Siam and France. The Japanese, who are trying to expand their empire into Southeast Asia, intervene in the conflict and support the Thai forces. Japan demands the right to deploy troops into Southeast Asia via Thailand. On Jan. 25, 1941, Thailand declares war on the US and Great Britain. Pridi states in a soliloquy that there is only one way to save Thailand from accompanying Japan into destruction of other countries, and that is to create a secret organization: the Seri Thai, or Free Thai Movement. This movement on one hand will cooperate with the Allied powers in defeating the Japanese, and on the other hand, will work to convince the Allies that, despite the country’s present policy, the vast majority of Thais are anti-Axis. Pridi is removed from his post as a Minister of Finance and appointed to the Council of Regents. In 1945, Seri Thai activities are expanded. When the Axis lose the war, Pridi as the regent of the king announces to the world that the Thai government’s declaration of war with the Allied did not reflect the true feelings of the Thai people. With the support of the US, Thailand is able to negotiate their postwar independence. Pridi is made Senior Stateman and advisor of state affairs to the king. While the political atmosphere of the country is very lively, and Pridi is elected Prime Minister, there is an undercurrent of resentment toward civilian rule from the military, who have lost power. Another scene from the Four Reigns, “Mae Ploy” is interpolated into the action. Mae Ploy reflects on her confusion about the political chaos. Pridi tells her that “everything is impermanent,” and when Mae Ploy, as a conservative housewife, does not know how to exist in a master-less society, Kukrit, an extreme royalist, tells her that he will not leave the revolutionists be happy. The narrator announces that King Ananda Mahidol has been found dead on his bed with a bullet in his head. Rumors swirl that Pridi has been accused of the assassination. Pridi declares the rumour a lie. Kukrit announces, by reading a passage from Siam Rath newspaper, that his group had incorrectly accused Pridi of regicide, and that Pridi had to fled the country because of a coup d'état. A skit depicts the army’s attack on the residence of Pridi, where his wife Poonsuk declares, “Hold your fire. Please do not shoot. There are only women and children here”. Pridi secretly returns to Thailand to stage a coup against the military government, but his side loses. He sets sail for China. A government official announces a warrant to arrest Pridi. Poonsuk delivers a soliloquay about her desperate time being regarded as a traitor’s wife, but states that she has never regretted having been a wife to Pridi. A monologue from Pridi follows, about how his heart is heavy with grief and pain, and he tells his wife to take care of their children and to look up high ahead. Pridi resides in China for twenty-one years, until moving to France in 1970. The Thai political merry-go-around, with its succession of military governments, continues and is depicted by the chorus playing Ree-Ree Khao Sarn, a traditional Thai game. The two “Octobers” scene of October 14, 1973 and October 6, 1976, follows. Through a loudspeaker, someone utters the truth about time, and how the same law of impermanence governs all social organizations and systems, just like life itself. In the final scene, Pridi is seen writing at his desk, Pridi’s voice is heard saying that he has left it to those who cherish truth to decide what the truths really are. A narrator announces the May 2, 1983 death of Pridi. Another Narrator recites a poem about a candle that consumes itself completely to enlighten the world.

*My Name is Phaya Phann (กูชื่อพญาพาน Goo chue Phaya Phan) (June 13 – July 14, 1996)*
**About the play:** Premiered as the first production of the new generation of CMTG at SAAC. The cast members were as follows: Apisak Sonjod, Mulliga Tangsangob, Nimit Pipithkul, Sunthorn Meesri, Pintip Satprepry, Sineenadh Keitprapai, Teerawat Mulvilai, Phunam Chalermyat, Pornpat Cheewewat, Ganchanee Semathong.

**Synopsis:** An old blind man talks to the audience about how solitude and darkness have helped him to see the truth of the past: how he had been full of desire and ego. The rest of the play is made up of his flashbacks to the events that led to his present condition as a blind wanderer in the wilderness. Set in a pre-historical period, the flashbacks start when Phaya Phan (Lord Phan) and his troupe invade many towns until they reach Phupha Lad (ภูผาลาด), Phaya Gong (พญากง)’s kingdom. Phaya Phan beheads Phaya Gong and declares victory. During his celebration ceremony, a sacred pillar is struck down by thunder and an earthquake. Prophets Lua Ta Phi (หลัวตาผี) and Ai Aan Fah (อายอานฟา) interpret the omens as indicating that an evil person who has committed hideous crimes is in the kingdom. Phan declares that he will find this person and punish him with blindness and exile. In the midst of the celebration of his victory, Phan claims Mae Lah (แมหลา) as his wife. In their bed, both have the same nightmare of being drowned in a sea of blood and bound by a giant snake. When Mae Lah wakes up in the morning, she tells Phan that she wants a son because she had lost one in the past. As Phan unwraps his headband, Mae Lah sees the scar on his forehead and realizes that he is the she had lost. She recalls that, when the baby was born, there was a prophecy that the boy would kill his own father and marry his own mother, and Phaya Gong, her husband and the boy’s father, had ordered the baby killed. Before she can say anything, the servant Ai Aan Fah is shocked by the sight of the scar and confesses that he should have had killed the baby, revealing the truth to Phan. Phan is furious and strangles Aan Fah to death, only to discover that his real mother, Mae Lah, has just hung herself. Desiring to find the truth, Phan returns home to see the mother whom he raised as his wife, Mae Hom (แมหอม) whom he forces to tell the truth. She tells him that she rescued him from being neglected in the woods and that she has loved him like her own child. After he tells her what has happened, she has a breakdown and blames herself for making him suffer. Not wanting Mae Hom to suffer any longer, Phan stabs her to death out of pity. Realizing how sinful he is, he stabs his own eyes, blinding himself. The last scene returns to the old blind man, revealed to be Phaya Phan who had exiled himself and gradually let go of his own atta (อัตตา) or ego, and had a spiritual rebirth by liberating his soul into the hands of Mother Nature. He has “killed” the old Phaya Phan via his spiritual liberation.


**About the play:** The premiere production opened in 1996 at Sang Arun Arts Center. It received mixed reviews from critics due to its complex plays-within-a-play structure, elaborate pastiche of symbols, and innovative style of presentation. In 2006, a revised version was performed at the Pridi Banomyong Institute on October 20-22, 27-29, for 8 performances.

**Synopsis:** A madman in a mental hospital has a recurring nightmare. Visions of an idealistic theatre group rehearsing and performing four major plays keep coming back to him, including vivid images of the actors and bits and pieces of their performances. He is also haunted by images from the October uprising incidents, in which he took part when he was young. Memories from the historical past are depicted through the projection of documentary film images on an upstage screen, while on stage the idealistic actors and their director try to rehearse some serious plays (i.e. *Man of La Mancha*, *Les Justes*, *The Crucible*, and *Death and the Maiden*). See more details concerning the plot in Chapter 6.

**Madame Mao’s Memories (Madam Mao มาดามเหมา) (solo performance)(December 12–23, 1996)**

**About the play:** Translated from English by Sineenadh Keitprapai. Kamron directed this Thai version from an American play, *Madam Mao’s Memories*, written by Henry Ong. It was presented as a solo-performance by Mallika Tangsangob (มัลลิกา ตั้งสงบ), with two performances by Sumontha Suamonrat (สุมณฑา สวนผลรัตน์) at the Saeng Arun Art Center.

**Synopsis:** The play opens with Jiang Qing (Madame Mao)’s monologue during her imprisonment. She introduces herself as the wife of Mao Zedong, and explains that her love for him had inspired her
to take revolutionary action for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). She reminisces about her thirty-eight years with Mao and about her struggles for power. We learn that she met Mao Zedong when she was a twenty-four year-old actress, and he was a forty-five year-old communist party leader. She tells stories about her wretched childhood, her ambition to become well-known and accepted, her pursuit of the Madame Mao position, which included getting herself pregnant with his child, her battle against those who opposed her relationship with Mao due to her scandalous past, her strong belief in the Maoist ideology and her thirst for power, which resulted in her establishment of the Red Guard system and the Cultural Revolution, her active involvement with the revolutionary model plays, her promiscuous behavior, her heartless orders to have her opponents tortured and killed, and her eventual arrest and imprisonment after Mao’s death.

**High Bank, Heavy Log (ตั้งสูงซุงหนัก Taling soong sung nak; Februar 8–9, 1997)**

**About the play:** The play was adapted from Nikom Rayawa (นิคม รายยาว)’s novel of the same title. Nikom is a SEA Write award winner and is also a former member of the Crescent Moon group. This is a solo performance, and was performed alternately by Apisak Sonjod and Teerawat Moonvilai.  
**Synopsis:** Kamngai (ค้างาย), born into a family of elephant caretaker, is particularly closed to an elephant named Plai Sud (พลายสุด), as they grew up together. After his father falls ill and sells Plai Sud to a rich logger, Kamngai decides to go to the logger, hoping to be able to be close to Plai Sud but he is put to work making stuffed animals instead. There, he learns about elephant carving and wishes to make a carved elephant from a big piece of log in order to sell it for money. His ultimate aim is to buy back Plai Sud. As he tries to carve an elephant from a piece of log wood, he has a flashback of an encounter with the elephant Plai Sud. One day, his son drowns in an accident but Kamngai still wants to carve an elephant for his son. Later, Kamngai is assigned to work with the loggers and sees Plaisud being tortured. He is also assigned to ride on Plai Sud and make him pull a huge piece of log from the river onto a very high and soft river bank. When another mahoc hits Plaisud with a sharp hook, the elephant goes wild and falls from the high bank back into the river. No one can save the life of the elephant, who is worth less than a carving of himself.

**The Lighthouse (กระโจมไฟ Grajome Fai; February 12–13 1997)**

**About the play:** This is an original monodrama, written by Nimit Pipitkul and Piewnam Chalermyat, based on an original idea of Kamron Guntilaka. The play was performed and directed by Nimit himself.  
**Synopsis:** An old sailor whose duty it is to stay at a light house and gave signals to approaching vessels lives with immense loneliness. He talked to himself, alone with the sea gulls and his own memories. One day, as his sanity slipping, he receives a radio signal from an approaching ship but he refuses to rescue anyone. The next morning, a corpse is found on the shore and the sailor treats the corpse like a special guest. He confesses to the guest his past mistakes, and realizes that it is his duty to give light to those who in danger.

**Phra Malethaytai (พระมเหลเถไถ) (October 4 -5, 1997) (4 performances)**

**About the play:** This is the last play performed by the CMTG at Sang Arun Art Center in 1997 before the center was closed down due to the national financial crisis. Inspired by a well-known free-verse story of the same name, written by Khun Suwan (คุณสุวรรณ), this version was a totally new play in terms of plot and structure. The classical verse tells an unfinished story of Prince Malethaytai, who leaves his palace to find adventure in the woods. He encounters a great many fantastic animals and plants. God Indra sends a beautiful woman named Upsorn for him. They become husband and wife. On their journey back to the palace, Upsorn is abducted by a demon. The cast members were Teerawat Moonvilai (Prince Malethaytai) (ธีรวัฒน มุลวิไล), Soonthorn Meesri(สุนทร มีศรี), Sineenart Klaigaew (สินีนาฏ คลิ้งแก้ว), Pintip Satproedprai (พินทิพ ศักดิ์พรพราย), Piewnam Chalermyart (ผิวน้ํา ชลธรรมารท), Ratchaneey Visitharodom (รัชฉี วิสิทธิ์โรดม), Pornpat Cheeveewat (พรภัฏ ชีวีวัฒน), and Somsak Siripan (สมศักดิ์ ศิริพันธุ).
Synopsis: After seeing an apocalyptic world filled beset by the destruction of all things, Prince Malethaytai decides to wander off to find a new world. He arrives at a new world filled with mechanical animals and plants that are made from trash. A surgeon gives performs brain surgery on the prince in order to program his brain to perceive the junk world as beautiful. The prince is bombarded by more and more material entertainment from the junk mechanisms and he starts to believe that the mechanical things are alive. He falls in love with a mannequin and makes love to her. After a while, he realizes his mistake and discovers that the whole new world is only a junk yard. No matter how hard he tries to visualize an authentic natural world, all he can feel is emptiness. The ideal natural world no longer exists.

*Women and the Constitution* (ผู้หญิงกับรัฐธรรมนูญ, 1997)

About the play: This production had the characteristics of story theatre or mobile traveling theatre. There are actually four short plays in this production. The first two plays use characters from well-known folk literature, Phra Apaimanee (พระอภัยมณี) but put them in contemporary situations. The characters used are Phra Apaimanee as Mr. Apaimanee, Pheesue Samut (Sea Ogre) as Miss Ogre, Sinsamut (their son) as a clever young boy, Nang Nguek (Mermaid) as Mrs. Mermaid, and Phrajap Ta (พระเจ้าตา) as a school headmaster. The second two plays use contemporary characters to portray women situations in a factory, and in a business office.

Synopsis: The first play, Miss Sea Ogre, opens with a group of narrators singing a story about a single mother named Pheesue Samut who wants her intelligent son to attend a school but has been rejected because she is a “Miss,” not a “Mrs.” She is told to get married in order to enroll her son. A “Mr.” enters the scene with an unintelligent son but is easily able to enroll his son. Miss Sea Ogre goes to see her human husband, Mr. Apaimanee, who has abandoned her for a young and beautiful mermaid, and asks him to marry. He refuses and uses his magical flute to put Miss Ogre to sleep. The second play, Mrs. Mermaid, opens with a chorus singing about how a married Mrs. Mermaid, who wants to purchase a piece of land. Mrs. Mermaid goes to the Land Authority and is told that a married woman needs a husband’s signature of permission to purchase a piece of land. She asks Mr. Apaimanee to sign for her and he agrees. When he wants to purchase a piece of land, he is able to do so easily, without asking permission of his wife. The third play, The Factory Women, opens with a female worker who has secretly brought her infant with her to work because there was no one to help her take care of the baby. She has to hide him away from the factory owner who would not allow any baby in the factory. Another pregnant woman, while trying to help her conceal the baby, delivers another baby who is accidentally tossed to his death while being hidden. The fourth play, The Office Girls, deals with a male business owner who hires two under-qualified but beautiful women for public relations positions while a third, more qualified but plain-looking, woman is hired to do office paperwork. When the first two women tell their boss that they are married and one is pregnant, they are both fired. A new male worker gets promoted while the capable office woman is left behind.

*Jokjuang Village* (หมู่บ้านจกจ้วงMoo ban Jokjuang; 1998)

About the play: This play was performed literally on the street in the First EU Theatre Festival in Thailand, held at Tha Prachan Road and Tha Pra Athit Road. It was adapted from a northeastern folktale into a story-theatre by Nimit Pipitkul.

Synopsis: A mythical, ancient village named Jokjuang has preserved a traditional way of life for a long time. The villagers worship the god of all frogs. A narrator tells the audience about an old winter tradition when all the villages travel to the “Land of Faith” in order to bury themselves underneath the earth and breath through a tube. They lived sufficiently with what they had. One day, a foreigner comes to the village, and starts to exchange the village’s natural resources for money. The villagers become addicted more and more to the money and finally start to sell frogs to the foreigner. In the end, the villagers lose everything precious to them, including their own land.

*Muang Nimitra* (เมืองนิมิตร)(August 3-31, 2001)

About the play: Premiered at the Pridi Banomyong Institute, this was the last play directed by Nimit Pipithkul before he left the CMTG to lead his own performing arts company. The play was adapted
from a novel by Malai Choopinit (มาลัย ชูพินิจ). The music was composed by Nob Pratheeppasane (นบ ประธีปะเสน) and Kasemsan Promsupha (เกษมสันต์ พรหมสุชา). Some of the cast members were Pon Tantasathien (พณ ตันศักดิ์ยศ), Bismilla Nana (บิสมิลล่า นานา), Krawee Iamsakulrat (กระวี เอียมสกุลรัตน์), Worapat Witthayopat (วรภัทร วิทโยภาส), Panwat Apicho (ปานวาด อภิโช), Panyapraween Boonprasart (ปัญญประวีณ บุญประสาท), etc.

**Synopsis:** During World War II, Thailand is under siege by the Japanese military while a group of the Thai patriots form an underground insurgent anti-Japanese movement known as “Free Thai” (เสรีไทย). Near well-known canal in Bangkok, San-Saeb, is the main transportation and logistical base for the Japanese troops. The play follows the lives of various people whose paths cross each along this canal: a fiction writer, a journalist, a food vendor, passer-by, couples, a widow, a police chief, an orphan, a prisoner of war, a teacher and soldiers. They often meet at a street-side food stand, where they exchange news or information. A fifteen-year-old female orphan named Runjuan, who has had a wretched life, living as a homeless under a bridge, works as a street cleaner and knows everybody in the area. A fiction writer keeps telling everyone that he wants to write a novel named the Nimitra City to depict a utopian city, using the characters along the canal as his inspiration. Nevertheless, the reality of the canal does not always live up to his fantasy. While there are a few light moments of humor and romance among his real-life characters, the rest of these characters live in fear and uncertainty. Violence, including shooting and killing, can erupt at any time if anyone is accused of betraying the Japanese. An escaped war prisoner living among the Thais is almost killed by the Japanese soldiers but is rescued in time by a young soldier named uriya, who is of mixed Japanese-Thai descent. Although loyal to his Japanese father’s land, Suriya decides to side with his mother’s land by becoming a member of the Seri Thai, and plots to explode a train carrying a group of Japanese soldiers. Prior to Suriya’s secret mission, a bombing attack of civilian areas causes great damage to the San Seab community along the canal. Everyone has to flee for their lives. On a train where Runjuan secretly receives an order to return to her hometown in Chiang Mai, she runs into Suriya. At a stop, he tells her to get off at a station with him. There, he pushes a bomb-detonating button and the train explodes. Suriya and Runjuan are almost caught by a few Japanese soldiers but Runjuan kills one of the soldiers with a knife. The following day, while Runjuan is being hailed as a heroine, she cries out how much she despises killing and the war. She feels that war is senseless and leaves nothing but ruin, as well as orphans such as herself. After fulfilling his mission for the mother’s land, Suriya commits seppuku (suicide) to serve his father’s land. Other characters talk about how war cannot end as long as there is hatred in the world. They call for a new world where people will use love rather than hatred to bring peace.

**John A. Lone: The Lighthouse Opera (2003-2006)**

**About the play:** This play was based on the Thai version of the Lighthouse, a solo-performance by Nimit, but this version follows an American marine character who stays on an island near Manhattan. It was performed in English by Soontorn Meesri.

**Synopsis:** John A. Lone, a former US Marine, has written a best-selling book, The Lighthouse reflecting on his experience as a lighthouse operator on an island near New York, where many old artifacts from the past have washed ashore. Upon his arrival in Thailand, he is granted an interview with a reporter; he gives accounts of his memories of being stationed in Thailand during the Vietnam War, and how absurd he found the reasons for killing during that time. Suddenly, he stops the interview and leaves to look for his wife and child whom he had deserted thirty years ago.

**Antigone (August 4-6, 2006)**

About the play: This adaptation of Sophocles’s Antigone by Bertolt Brecht was translated into Thai from Judith Malina’s English version (1984) by Sarawanee Sukhumwat (ศรวณีย์ สุขุมวาท), and directed by Sineenadh Keitprapai. The play was performed at the Pridi Banomyong Institute with cast members such as Fareeda Jirapan (Antigone), Kringkrai Fookasem (Creon), Apisak Sonjod (Narrator), and Teerawat Moonvilai (Prophet), and Oranong Thaisriwong (Ismene).
Synopsis: Antigone is putting sand into a jar to use during her brother’s burial when Ismene enters and learns that their brother, Eteocles, who died during the war at Argos, has been given a proper burial by Creon but that their other brother, Polynices, who decided to withdraw from war upon seeing his brother’s death, was killed by Creon for not fighting in the war. Polynices’ action is considered a defiance of Creon’s order; therefore his body will be left in the open air for the wild animals. Despite Ismene’s warning about punishment, Antigone decides that she will defy King Creon’s order by burying Polynices. Creon and his troops enter Thebes with a caravan of confiscated treasures from Argos. A messenger enters and tells Creon that someone has buried Polynices, and this makes Creon very angry. He orders that the person who has defied his command be found. Soon, the guards bring in Antigone and tell Creon that she was found performing burial rites for Polinices. When Creon asks why she dared to defy him, she answers that his order was only a human’s order but the burial of her brother was a sacred duty. When asked why she is stubborn, she insists that she has no fear of death and that her actions will inspire others to do the same thing. She warns Creon that his continuous killing of dissenters would result in his downfall. She blames him for sending the young men of Thebes to seek war with the peaceful Argos, resulting in many Theban deaths. Ismene enters and warns Creon that he is about to sentence his son’s bride to death. Creon sends Antigone to be imprisoned in a cave. Her fiancé, Haemon, enters to tell Creon, his father, that many of the dissenters, who have heard of how he killed Polynices and ordered a death sentence to Antigone, are now afraid that Creon will use more brutality on them. A blind prophet enters and tells Creon that there will be a catastrophe. The elderly council tells Creon that Haemon, who is supposed to be his representative in the city, has now turned against him. They also tell Creon that his other son has been killed in Argos, and they ask Creon to call the troops home before they are all killed by the mighty army of Argos. The council suggests that Creon release Antigone in order to regain the support of Haemon. Creon leaves in a hurry. Soon, a messenger enters and reports that as Creon approached the cave, he heard a scream from his son. When he looked inside the cave, he found the dead body of Antigone, who had hung herself. Upon seeing this, Haemon had taken out a knife and killed himself. Creon realizes that he has lost everything and that he is about to lose Thebes and his own life.
GLOSSARIES
# GLOSSARY A

**Thai Names/Thai Terms**

| A | Angkarn Kanlayanaphong | อังคาร กัลยาณพงศ์ |
|   | Ananda Panyarachun | อาโนนท ปัญยาชุน |
|   | Anuphong Phongsuwan | อุนพงษ์ ฟองสวรรค์ |
|   | Aussanee Pholachan | อสสิณี พละจาหร์ หรือ นายที |
|   | Ayutthaya | อโยธยา (กรุงศรีอยุธยา) |

| B | Banham Silpa-Archa | บรรหาร ศิลปาอาชา |
|   | Banjong, Banjoedsil | บรรจง บรรจิตรศิลป์ |
|   | Bhumibol Adulyadej | อดิลภพบรมราชาอยุธยา |
|   | Boonsanong Boonyothayan | บุญสนอง บุณโยทยาน |

| C | Chamlong Srimueng | จัOUSEย ศรีเมือง |
|   | Chan Chao Kha | จันทรเจ้าขา |
|   | Chanthakorob | จันทรโคโรบ |
|   | Chantharophat | จันทรโอภาส |
|   | Chakdao (Star-Ray) | จัOUSEกดาว |
|   | Charoen Suebsang (M.D.) | จัOUSEนทร สืบแสง (นายแพทย์) |
|   | Chartchai Choonhawan | จัOUSEตชัย ชุณหะวัณ (พลเอก) |
|   | Charnvit Kasetsiri | จัOUSEนทร เกษตรศิริ |
|   | Chavalit Yongchaiyudh | จัOUSEวลิต ยงใจยุทธ |
|   | Chiranan Pritpreecha | จัOUSEนานนท์ ปริทรัพยา |
|   | Chit Phumisak | จัOUSEร ภูมิศักดิ์ |
|   | Chatthip Nartsupha | จัOUSEตทิพย์ นาถสุภา |
|   | Chuan Leekpai | จูน หลีกภัย |

| D | Damrong Rachanuphab (Prince) | กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ |
|   | Dhirapat Foongdej | จิรภัทร ผ่องเดช |

| E-F |
| G | Grom Silapakorn | กรมศิลปากร (Department of Fine Arts) |

| H |

| I | Intha Sriboonrueng | ผ่องหลวงอินทราคริบุณฑริยา |
|   | Issara Amantakul | อิศรา อัมณีตุภัณ|

| J |
Ji Giles Ungpakorn ใจ อังกากรน
King Chulalongkorn พระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว
jit sam nuk kabot จิตสันติภักดี
Joungjun Jankhana จวงจันทร์ จันทร์คณา
Jiraporn Witayasakpan จิรพร วิทยศักดิ์พันธุ์

K
Kwan Jai Joan ขวัญใจไธสง
kam-khan-rub คามัฆนรับ
khon (masked dance theatre), โขน
Kamron Gunatilaka คัมรอน คุณะติลก
Kwang Aphaiwong คง อภัยวงศ์
Kirkkiet Punpipat เกรียงศักดิ์ พันธุ์พิพัฒน์
Kittiwutto คิตติวัตโต
Krisanaphong Nagathon ภราดาวัฒน์ นาคธณ
Krating Daeng กระติงแดง
Kriangsak Chomanand ภราดาภิรมย์ ชมานนท์
Kularb Saipradit ภราดาบ สายประดิษฐ์

L
lamtad ลำตัด
lakhon Chatri (folk musical) ละครชาตรี
lakhon chai jing ying tae ละครชายจริงหญิงแท้
lakhon dukdamban ละครดึกด่ำบรรพ
lakhon nok (folk dance theatre) ละครนอก
lakhon nai (inner court theatre since 18thC.) ละครใน
lakhon phanthang (hybrid traditional theatre) ละครพันทาง
lakhon pud (spoken theatre) ละครพูด
lakhon pleng (musical) ละครเพลง
lakhon ram (dance theatre) ละครรำ
lakhon rong (sung theatre) ละครร้อง
lakay (folk musical) ลิเก
Luang Wichit Wathakan พลตรี วิชิตวาทการ

M
Mattani Mojdara Rutnin A250 มัทธานี โมจดารา รตศิน
Mae Luen แม่เลื่อน
molam (folk musical of the northeast region) หมอลำ
Manas Siensing มานัส เศียรสิงห์
King Vajiravudh พระบาทสมเด็จพระมงกุฎเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว
M.L. Phantawanop Tayvakul ม.ล. พันธุ์เทวบท เทวกุล

N
Nang Laweng นางละเวง
เสรีนิยม

รายชื่อผู้เข้าร่วมงาน:

Narisaranuwattiwong (Prince) Narong Kittikhachon

nangyai (giant shadow puppets) Nawapon

Nida Rutchaiubun Nidhi Eoseewong

Nisit Nuksuksa Pattana Chonnabot Nora (dance theatre of the southern region)

Nora Chatri Nun Bangnara

Noomnao Saosowei

O Orapin Dararat

P Petcharut Phra-Chan Siew Po Chang

Plack Phibun Songkhram Plaew Plueng

Promotenakorn Praman Adireksarn

Phranbun Prasert Chandam

Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn Praphat Charusathian

Prem Tinnasulanond Pridi Phanomyong

Praphat Charusathian

Q Rebel’s Conscience

R Rattanakosin Rattha Suksa Ratthaniyom

S Sak Suphakasem Sakdina

Sarawanee Sukhumwat Sangkhomsat Parithat

Sarawanee Sukhumwat Seri Thai

Sangad Chaloyoo
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GLOSSARY B

Traditional Theatre in Siam
(the name of Siam is changed to Thailand in 1939)

Sources: Brandon [1993], Upparamai [B.E.2526], Virulrak [2000], Wongthet [1989].

Historical periods of the Siamese kingdom:
Sukhothai Period (1249-1438) (189 years)
Ayutthaya Period (1350-1767) (117 years)
Thonburi Period (1767 – 1782) (15 years)
The Rattanakosin Period (1782 -Present )

Khon Siamese Court form of masked-dance drama performed by almost all male dancers. There are about 300 different masks used in performing the entire Ramakien play. There are many theories about the origin of Khon. One theory was that the Siamese adopted the form from the Cambodian in 1431 (or even before that). According to James Brandon, Khon was supposedly first presented in the Thai court in 1515, and the original dancers were said to be the puppet manipulators from NangYai form. The dancers were traditionally considered as the subjects of the king and queen. Other nobilities were allowed to emulate the royal tradition. It was speculated that Khon followed the Nang Yai’s style of performance due to its tendency to use the flat stance and poses. The Khon scripts are divided into “chut” or “set” like the Nang Yai’s set (237). Khon performers do not speak but they danced to accompany the narration and music. Scripts were taken from different sections of the Ramakien which had many different versions composed by King Rama I, Rama II, and Rama VI. Initially, the all-male characters wore masks but that was changed in the 20th century when female dancers were allowed to perform female roles without masks. Role types in Khon are based on the characters from Ramakien: Phra (male), Nang (female), Yak (ogre) and Ling (monkey). Dancers danced in stylized Thai pantomime corresponding to the narration chanted or sung by solo chanter or chorus, with the piphath orchestra as accompaniment.

Lakhon Dukdamban European opera inspired operatic-dance drama created in 1899 during King Rama V (1868-1910). Inspired by the European opera, Chaophraya Thevet who saw the European opera during his trip to Europe in the late 19th c. asked Prince Narissara Nuwattiwong to direct a new form of Siamese dance-drama. The first Lakhon Dukdamban production was in 1899 and it was used to entertain foreign dignitaries and Thai noble families for one decade. Prince Narissara Nuwattiwong, an important poet and playwrights of King Rama V (1868-1910), composed many verse plays inspired by Jataka, Ramayana, and other legends. His well-known plays are Sangthong, Kawi, Sangsilchai, Unnarut, Manipichai, Inao. Prince Gromkhun Petchabun also composed plays inspired from Jataka such as Jan Ginnari, Song Korn Warrawick. Unlike other traditional court theatre, Lakhon Dukdamban used scenery and curtain. The performers sand and danced in the style of Lakhon Nai but omitting the sections that described scenery or character’s action. Unlike other court theatre, Singing takes prominence over dancing. Singers use some dance gestures only to enhance the singing. No narrator or chanter was needed to help explain the action. This was the first time that Thai audience was put in a situation that a performance was for the plot and the conflict in the plot. The character’s action advances the story.

Lakhon Nai/Lakhon Fai Nai Court danced drama which is believed by many international scholars to be a transplant from the Khmer dance in the 15th c. but evolved into
the Siamese female-only court dance-drama. There are some scholarly debates today about whether Lakhon Nai is truly an all female-only form, or all males, or mixed form. It is considered the most significant creation of the Siamese court. The plays of Lakhon Nai are based on episodic scenes composed by the leading court ladies or court poets. Example of performed scenes are taken from the Siamese court literature such as Ramakien, Inao (Prince Panji), and Unnarut. Since almost all the play texts were destroyed during the siege of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767. Later, many kings of the Rattanakosin period spent a lot of time compiled and composed long episodes of complicated love affairs of Inao (Prince Panji), and the other major plays. Female dancers dance/mime to the narration of the side-stage chorus and piphat music. The Lakhon Nai is known for its very slow refined dance. Sometimes, the dancers deliver dialogue. Traditionally, only the clown characters are male and they serve as the comic relief and the elaborator of the plot. The main goal is to reach the highest aesthetics of dance art. Highlights are in the intricately executed movement. Lakhon Nai has a much more serious tone than Lakhon Nok of the commoners. It is often praised by the Siamese elites as being extremely refined, and it is also honored for its exquisite costumes embroidered with gold and silver linings, and colorful beads and glitters. Lakhon Nai does not give prominence to plot or theme in the story. Therefore, Lakhon Nai aims more at the aesthetics tastes from the dancing, singing, music, and costume.

Lakhon Nok A traditional song and dance form of entertainment where singing, action and dialogue took prominence over dance and music. Initially all performers were all males, but the custom changed around the mid 19th when females were allowed in the public. There are many different theories concerning the origin of Lakhon Nok. Lakhon Nok existed since Ayutthaya era as a public dance drama that held different conventions from the Lakhon Nai. During Ayutthaya era, only males performers performed Lakhon Nok. Being prohibited to perform similar stories as Lakhon Nai, majorities of Lakhon Nok’s plays are adaptation of the Jataka, local histories, and legends such as Khun Chang Khun Pan. Some scholars believe that Lakhon Nok evolved out of Lakhon Chatri which is a descendant of the southern folk dance-drama, Nora, during the 17th -18th c.. Lakhon Nok was meant to be an entertainment for commoners therefore it emphasized faster pace, action, and comic interludes. The language used is colloquial and a lot of farce and sexual jokes. It had a narrator and chorus who sang in a faster pace than the Lakhon Nai.

Lakhon Pleng Inspired by the western musicals, Lakhon Pleng was the Thai version of musical theatre. Major troupe was “Chantarophat” with a permanent playwright known as “Phran Boon.” Phra Boon modernized Thai traditional songs as well as the way to sing them. We can almost say that Phra Boon gave birth to a new genre of Thai song and music known as “Plen Thai Sakol” (westernized Thai songs) where traditional melodies exist in the new arrangements. Phra Boon first play was premiered around 1925. The most popular play was “Jun Jao Kha” which performed for 49 times. There was a famous Lakhon Rong , “Sao Khrua Fa”, a musical play written by Grom Phra Naratip Prapanpong, later was adapted by Phra Boon and was called “Jo Jo San”

Lakhon Pud Spoken drama originated at the beginning of the 20th c. by Crown Prince Vajiravudh (King Rama VI) during the reign of King Rama V. King Rama VI reigned from 1910-1925 and wrote more than 100 plays with various styles from didactic domestic plays, melodramas, historical drama, western-play adaptations and original verse plays. He also translated a great number of western plays including Shakespeare’s.
**Lakhon Rong** A commercial public entertainment created by Prince Narathippraphanpong, a poet during King Rama V. Inspired by western operetta, Prince Narathippraphanpong adapted the western form into the existing Lakhon Phantang and turned it into Lakhon Rong (Singing Drama). While Lakhon Pantang’s performers carry dialogues on stage, Lakhon Rong’s performers sing all the way through, with chorus members singing the choral parts. The singing and dancing are based on Thai styles accompanied by traditional Thai pipat orchestra. Two court ladies (Jaojom Manda Khien and Mom Tuan) are the most well-known choreographers and song writers. PN wrote and directed the plays. The troupe is known as Preedalai Troupe. During the reign of King Rama V, many private theatres sprung-up. One famous play was *Sawittree*.

**Likay** A folk or popular traditional form of Siamese melodramatic musical theatre known for its ostentatiously ornamented costume and eclectic elements of Thai classical dance, Thai classical singing and music mixing with modern western music and improvisational acting. It was speculated that Likay began at the beginning of the Rattanakosin period. Likay in the late 20th century showcased the elements of flashy costumes, comedic scenes, improvisational scenes, and stock characters, and emphasized popular folk songs with modern tunes.

**Nang Yai** A court form of large shadow puppet theatre. The nang (leather puppets) are flat and carved to the large size (about 4x5 feet). The shadow puppets are manipulated by dancing puppeteers. Traditionally, there are dancers both in the front and back of the screen. The form is very similar to Nang Sbek Thom of Cambodia, which might have been derived from Wayang Kulit of Java. Similarities between Nang Yai and Wayang are: the musical prelude, the offerings to the Hindu gods, the uses of the clown or servant characters as key narrator and explainer of the story and the function of the orchestra accompanying the singers and the puppeteers. However, there are also many differences. Thai & Cambodian puppets are very large when compared with the Wayang Kulit. In addition, many of the Thai & Cambodian puppets depicts more than one character on a single figure. Most of all, there are many puppeteers manipulating many puppets instead of using only one *dalang* (Indonesian term for the puppet master). The Thai puppeteers stand up right and dance as they manipulate the puppets, accompanied by all males puppeteers. Accompanied by a piphat orchestra, narrator(s) sing or speak (pak) or recite melodic verses from the Siamese *Ramakien* story. King Rama I, Rama II, Rama IV all were credited for composing many of the Siamese version of the *Ramakien* play episodes.

**Nang Talung** A folk form of small shadow puppet theatre. Each puppet represents one single character. The puppets are translucent. The puppet iconography takes after the classical dance drama (or it could also be vice versa) with headdress, and refined costume. Stories derived from *Ramakien*, local histories, legends. Today, modern Nang Talung presents modern characters and stories and also propagandas.

**Nora** Ritual entertainment song and dance theatre of the villagers of southern Thailand. Songs and music take prominence over drama, telling stories from folk legends. Before the mid 20th century, Nora acting troupe consisted only 3 males who portrayed the roles of prince, princess, and clown who also played various other deviant parts such as servants and animals. The clown is the only actor that wears masks. Since 1970s, the form of Nora has already gone through changes such as more female dancers, and modern plots and dialogue in the short skits performed after their initial dance sequence. Nora is usually commissioned for village celebration, ancestral worships, weddings cultural showcases. At present, the Nora
dancer also acts out different short improvised skits from different well-known popular Thai stories as seen from television. Nora was originated in the Malay peninular around 14th c, around provinces of Nakhon Srithammarat, Songkhla, Pattalung, and Pattani.
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